

Programa Nacional Cadenas Productivas en el Sector Artesanal
(National Program of Handicraft Production Chains)

Summary

Artesanías de Colombia carries out the “Programa Nacional Cadenas Productivas en el Sector Artesanal” (National Program of Handicraft Production Chains) in over 70 local municipalities. It coordinates 11 craftsmanship production chains that include jewelry, wicker and Iraca palm goods, ceramics and other artisan products.

The main objective of this program is to increase productivity and competitiveness of Colombian craftsmen by generating optimal business conditions. This is done by increasing their participation in national and international markets and by improving and strengthening overall conditions for provision of raw materials, product design, cost-efficient production and commercialization of these products.

More specifically, the program seeks to improve coordination between each link in the production chain; increase the use of technology to make each step in the productive chain more efficient; improve design and product development for national and international consumption in agreement with market tendencies; elaborate and implement strategic business plans; market goods through the Internet and printed media, and improve training of craftsmen, business managers and product designers.

While the development and consolidation of productive chains is generally a common practice, this is not so in craftsmanship. Interestingly, this program introduces this practice in the artisan world.

The model starts by making a diagnosis of the situation to determine problem areas: either in the provision of raw materials or in the quality and conditions for product development. Current conditions are evaluated and the final diagnosis is then discussed among potential community beneficiaries, acting public and private institutions, producers, suppliers, retailers and craftsmen, in order to reach a

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common work plan to overcome the problems and eventually come up with a competitive regional plan for each productive chain.

Some examples of problems affecting raw materials are, among others: inconsistency in provision, general lack of coordination with producers and deficiency in the quality of raw materials.

As to the production process, problems such as restricted access to credit to purchase raw materials, technical impairments and low production volumes-considering market potential- were detected. As to sales, the problem lies in the fact that craftsmen structure production based on supply and not on demand. Added to the above problems, there is a lack of coordination between each link of the production chain.

The program then initiates its corrective work with each link in the production chain. Raw material providers are trained to improve the quality of their products and to assure sufficient production to meet potential demand.

In terms of production, designs are "modernized" yet still maintain traditional artisan characteristics; new products are developed and craftsmen undergo technical training at the Colombian Institute of Technical Norms and Certification (ICONTEC) and learn about product quality. Additionally, association among artisans is encouraged and intensive training in business administration is provided.

To improve sales, craftsmen are trained to take part in national and international fairs; they are provided with information on packaging and labeling techniques and are invited to seminars on market trends.

All of the above is done in coordination with local, municipal and departmental authorities as well as other entities, such as financial organizations.

The most outstanding result, one which makes the program deserving of replication throughout the region, is the fact that 6,300 craftsmen, direct beneficiaries of this program, sell 100% of their production with a 15% utility margin.