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Bridging Craftsmanship, Collaboration and the Circular Economy

The second-annual Nest Convening spurred conversation in leveraging capital and creating collaboration for the handmaker economy.

By **Kaley Roshitsh** on November 13, 2018



 Jean-Yves Fillion, Rebecca van Bergen and Jim Brett.
Sara Otto

Last week, the second annual Nest New Handworker Economy Convening occurred at BNP Paribas to highlight the value of impact financing, data-driven transparency in the supply chain and **collaboration** in ensuring economic wealth and social health of the global handworker.

The global handworker economy is not simply “making baskets” — it’s the second largest employer of women in developing countries and a “lever of positive change” according to Jean-Yves Fillion, BNP Paribas USA chief executive officer and chairman of CIB Americas.

And it’s ripe for impact investment, or philanthropic investing, representing investment potential of 100 million across The Nest’s guild of more than 500 artisans.

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Collaborating with brands such as West Elm, Target, Hermès, Kering Group, The Nest aims to build a “bridge to fair trade” via craftsmanship and the hand-maker, in the words of Jim Brett, ceo of J. Crew and adviser to Nest who welcomed the first panel to the stage.

With five sessions stocked with panel members enhancing the visibility of the handworker through every silo: journalist, philanthropic investor, corporate social responsibility leader, data analyst, entrepreneur and consumer — the unifying theme was one of **collaboration**.

The underlying goal of the convening was not to discredit any one company’s model of transparency, but to move toward collaborative disclosure wherein “storytelling in the supply chain” is achieved through the handworker narrative. These stories may be exemplified in company initiatives such as West Elm’s “Local” artist collaborations spotlighting ceramics, wood and leather goods among other crafts.

Although companies cannot solve every issue and paint holistic perfection in the supply chain, Ivanka Mamic, senior director of responsible sourcing at Target believes democratization of artisanship occurs when “demonstrated and proven initiatives” are scaled through “partnerships and collaboration.”

While collaborative, such initiatives are also data-driven with a “clear and incomprehensible” disclosure mechanism, said Dan Viederman, Humanity United’s managing director.

As Nielsen's 2015 Global Corporate Sustainability Report indicates, this collaboration and "common will" is fruitful because consumers cherish the sentiment of the craft, welcoming circular economies with some 66 percent of consumers willing to pay more for sustainable brands.

Recently announcing \$700,000 in funding from Walt Disney Co., Nest's efforts to standardize labor compliance, supply chain transparency and recognition of this traditionally "invisible" sector of labor echo the consumer demand for greater authenticity, ethically and responsibly.

"The more we move toward automation, the stronger the craft movement," founder and ceo Rebecca van Bergen said to WWD. It's clear technology will continuously evolve every industry, and if The Nest Convening is any indication of consumer sentiment then the handworker economy is sure to withstand the tests of time.