

III. Information Building and Sharing

CACSARC-kg, within its activities over the past twelve years, has implemented several projects related to the cultural heritage of Kyrgyz people. Brief descriptions of these projects follow.

1. Empowerment of Entrepreneurship through the Development of Handicrafts in Fergana Valley

The project was implemented in collaboration with partners from Tajikistan (NGO Fatkh) and Uzbekistan (Center of Crafts Development and Protection of Craftspeople's Rights "Hamsa") in 2005 and 2006.

Project Background

At present in Central Asian countries, producing traditional handicrafts is largely for generating income in rural areas and cities. National and regional craft markets are growing. Craft producers have an opportunity to enter into sizeable and increasingly sophisticated international markets.

People from Fergana Valley, which is divided by borders between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, produce wonderful items using old and unique handicraft technologies. But mostly their production does not meet contemporary market demands. The main reason is lack of knowledge of craft producers in terms of innovations in design (for example, wrong size or not suitable colour combination), assortments of craft production, quality of raw materials, ways of promotion and trading, etc.

With tourism expecting to grow in Central Asia, the production and sale of handicrafts has been identified as a potential income stream within the region, and local artisans' skills can also be used in the building trades and as interior decoration for guesthouses as well as in direct sales to the growing numbers of visitors.

But as a rule, there is very limited information about producers of the traditional crafts that are part of the cultural heritage of local people.

Project Goal

The goal is to help develop private entrepreneurship based on the traditional handicrafts in Fergana Valley by providing Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek artisans support in informative, educational, and organisational directions.

Project Activities

A regional team of researchers interviewed the artisans of Fergana Valley and collected material (interviews, photos, and samples of the craft products) for the further use as a data.

Training workshops for the craftspeople of Fergana Valley were organised on craft producing business management, assortment of the craft products, and quality control.

A round table was organised with the goal of marking the main problems of craftspeople and handicraft development in the region and to attract local authorities to the need of solving the problems.

A regional directory of the craftspeople of Fergana Valley was created based on the research. The directory is to be used by governmental structures, NGOs, international organisations, and private business. It includes information concerning over five hundred craftspeople and twenty-six craft communities from the three countries. The directory, which was published in Russian and English, can help distribute more detailed information among interested people and organisations all over the world and to establish direct contacts between craft producers and consumers of craft products.

A craft map was published in Russian and English. It demonstrates geographical disposition of different types of crafts (by special marks) as well as the number of craft producers in the Fergana Valley.

Project Procedures

- Research
- Database creation
- Publication activities
- Promotion activities (in collaboration with Media)
- Organisation of training on new product development, management, and marketing of handicraft production
- Organisation of exhibitions and project presentations

Outcomes/Effects

- Copies of the regional directory of the craftspeople of Fergana Valley, including hardcopy versions (600 copies), CDs (60 copies), and electronic versions, were distributed among potential partners (tourism agencies, traders, galleries, international organisations, etc.).
- A total of 285 craftspeople were trained in three countries. In the Osh, Batken, and Jalalabad districts of Kyrgyzstan, there were six organised training sessions (two in each district), sixty craftspeople were trained (every craftsperson participated in two sessions). In the villages and Hujand City, Sogd, Tajikistan, 144 craftspeople were trained. In Andijan, Kokand, and Margilan districts of Uzbekistan, 80 craftspeople were trained.
- At the regional round table in Osh, the needs for developing the craft sector brought together artisans and representatives of local authorities from three countries.
- Media were involved widely to publicise issues on craft development in Fergana Valley.
- Most (by the opinion of researchers) craftspeople were selected to be sent as participants to national and regional craft fairs.

As a result of the project, over five craftspeople in Fergana Valley obtained direct advantages, and over twelve thousand people (craftspeople's family members and relatives, business partners, raw materials' producers, customers etc.) received indirect advantages. One of the project results, new craft communities, appeared in the Batken district of Kyrgyzstan.

Publishing the craftspeople directory and craft map of Fergana Valley increased potential consumers' and partners' knowledge on craft products and producers.

The craftspeople's level of professional skills, knowledge on management and marketing, and income increased following the training and the craftspeople's participation in craft fairs.

2. Beauty in Harmony with Nature: Kyrgyz Traditional Craft Technologies and Ornaments

This project, which started in August 2009 and finished in August 2011, was implemented by CACSARC-kg in partnership with National Museum of Fine Arts.

Project Background

Kyrgyz traditional culture is mainly represented by traditional crafts, ornaments, folk music, and oral folklore. Traditional crafts are an essential part of the traditional nomadic culture of the Kyrgyz people who lived in close connection with nature, which was an inexhaustible source of both raw materials and inspiration for creating beautiful handicrafts.

From ancient times, Kyrgyz masters created items matching their nomadic lifestyle. To create handicraft products, craftspeople used materials related to nomadic household cattle-breeding (wool, skins, horns, and hooves of domestic and wild animals) as well as natural materials (wood of local trees and shrubbery, straw, clay, plants, etc.). To young generations, craftspeople transferred knowledge, skills, and experience not only in getting and using natural resources but also in recycling.

Ornaments were the main media of artistic expression by Kyrgyz masters. Ornamental forms take their roots in ancient times and reflect their creators' aesthetic perception of the surrounding nature and social environment as well as their cosmology views of the universe. Many ornamental motifs had a sacral protecting function, as was common with ornaments on headwear, clothing, and dowry items. In addition to being decorative, the ornaments once functioned as informational pieces, but nowadays, very few artisans can 'read' the ornaments.

Today, this unique traditional skills and knowledge, which had been orally transferred from generation to generation for centuries and was never fixed or recorded, is on the verge of being lost. Artisans infrequently know about or can use traditional craft technologies, and they are ignorant of the rich range of Kyrgyz ornaments. Most artisans use synthetic raw materials, ignoring natural materials, and they copy ornamental motifs from each other without understanding the meaning.

Custodians of traditional knowledge, which as a rule belong to the older generations, can be still found in communities where traditional ways of life have been maintained, and they have kept continuous ties between generations. But they gradually leave this world, and they take away with them their precious experience and knowledge that has not been recorded anywhere and is not in demanded by modern society. It often happens that custodians have no one to whom they can transfer their knowledge.

Traditional craft technologies, the types of natural raw materials as well as

extraction methods, the history of Kyrgyz ornaments, ways of creating and using the ornaments, and the symbolism of the ornamental motifs have never before been purposely studied. There are also no serious and popular publications on this theme. There is an existing need urging us to fix and collect all the mentioned materials for present and future generations of Kyrgyz people and generally for humanity.

Kyrgyzstan and other countries in the Central Asian region are facing the challenge of preserving and regenerating natural resources that are often used with barbarity and vandalism. The database created as a result of the project will provide the initial material for various informational and educational programmes on safeguarding bio-cultural diversity and increasing awareness on environment protection to educate young generations in the spirit of respectful attitude to their cultural heritage, traditions, and natural environment.

Kyrgyz society needs to learn more about its traditional culture, including diverse diasporas. Scientists, ethnographers, craftspeople, art critics, students, and specialists related to arts, culture, and development of handicrafts are in need of materials concerning cultural heritage.

Programmes in secondary public schools need to be completed by subjects, based on the project results, such as 'Kyrgyz ornament', 'Traditional relations with environment', and others. School teachers need to be trained first. Specialised educational institutions, such as art and crafts colleges as well as the Academy of Arts, need to improve their programs and project materials on traditional skills and knowledge of crafts technologies and ornaments.

Due to the development of tourism in the region, craftpersonship is becoming a good business for many families in Kyrgyzstan. Competitiveness of handicraft products depends directly on the level of traditional crafts knowledge and skills of artisans. Artisans don't know about craft technologies (for example, proper processing of natural raw materials) and existing ornamental motifs, as well as description of their symbols. Beginners in crafts production should be trained, and they need manuals that cover the topics mentioned.

The negative effects of globalisation, such as the tendency towards monoculture and the levelling of cultural diversity, threatens the small Kyrgyz nation (just over 5 million people) with the danger of losing its cultural identity and cultural values. Most youth are exposed to mass media, which

focuses on pop-cultural products oriented towards modern international brands, and so the younger generations show no interest in developing their own traditional culture. The voice of the cultural elite on the need for the state to develop relevant cultural policies is hardly heard.

Besides Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Kyrgyz live in diaspora communities in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, and China. The way of life and culture of the Kyrgyz living in different natural conditions and being surrounded by different ethnic groups demonstrate a wide range of cultural diversity. For a deeper understanding of traditional Kyrgyz culture, it is important to represent handicraft heritage to all ethnic Kyrgyz people, including those living in diaspora communities that have their own distinctive features.

Although it is good that Kyrgyz cultural heritage is preserved abroad in diaspora communities, it is unfortunate that Kyrgyz societies do not have access to it. Kyrgyz diaspora communities are not represented in museum collections and exhibitions. It is important to link the scattered clusters of Kyrgyz cultures surviving abroad with that surviving in Kyrgyzstan to mutually enrich and bring more cohesion and diversity into Kyrgyz identity.

The two main museums of Kyrgyzstan—the State History Museum and the National Museum of Fine Arts—have only about twelve thousand handicraft exhibits. There is an urgent need to increase the museum funding to preserve cultural treasures.

Today, over 1.5 million Kyrgyz labourers have moved outside the country. Young generations of labour migrants, separated from their original environment and cultural roots, are not familiar with their own culture and traditions. Traditional attitudes of ancient Kyrgyz people towards nature and the careful treatment of natural sources as well as the meaning of ornaments are vital to Kyrgyz culture, yet these attributes remain totally unfamiliar to the young generation. Educational programs created on the basis of project materials and distributed among general public in Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz Diasporas, including labour migrants, are very important for new generations of Kyrgyz people.

Project Goal

To prevent the disappearance of and give a second birth to the traditional skills and knowledge of crafts, demonstrating the harmonious combination of creative activities with wise and farsighted approaches to the use of natural resources.

Project Values

- Nature and biodiversity as the basis of all life on the Earth
- Creative human activities interacting with the environment
- Traditional knowledge and skills (crafts technologies and ornaments) embodying the experience of previous generations
- Custodians of traditional knowledge and skills
- Cultural products created with a respectful attitude to the use of natural resources and cultural heritage.

However, there exists also an ultimate and challenging goal—to affect and change public consciousness. Addressing the experience of our ancestors, we have to convey to the modern consciousness of contemporary people the understanding of naturalness and the continuity of interconnectedness and interdependence of cultural values created by people and the natural environment.

Kyrgyz people's traditional knowledge, their centuries-old experience and ability to live in harmony with their natural environment, their experience extracting and using natural raw materials, and their eco-friendly and almost wasteless craft technologies—all these contribute to the human experience.

Project Activities

The project activities included two components.

Component 1. Field Research and Database Formation

Field research was conducted in seven provinces of Kyrgyzstan as well as in Kyrgyz ethnic diaspora communities in Tajikistan, Turkey, and China. The main goal of the research was to identify custodians of Kyrgyz traditional skills and knowledge on unique handicraft technologies who were also competent using natural resources and had knowledge of the folk ornamental patterns and motifs.

Component 1 included doing preparatory work and field research in Kyrgyzstan and abroad; linking with local communities and administrations; selecting volunteers; and providing the research group with instructions, programmes, schedules, and all necessary information.

The research group consisted of a leader, an ethnographer, an expert on handicrafts, two researchers, a photographer, and local volunteers. Local consultants/partners and volunteers who provided technical assistance during the field research were selected among teachers and students of

relevant educational institutions and indigenous communities (based on interviews and recommendations).

Researchers interviewed local people and collected the information on crafts technologies and ornaments as well as natural raw materials gathered by local craftspeople from the environment and used for making handicrafts.

In Kyrgyzstan, the field research was carried out from August 2009 to March 2010 in eight cities and ninety-five villages of Talas, Jalalabat, Osh, Batken, Issyk-Kul, Naryn, and Chui provinces. The researchers spent five days in each province.

The field research among Kyrgyz ethnic diaspora communities was carried out in total in twenty-six villages in Tajikistan (Murgab, Jirgital, Kanibadam and Isfara districts), Turkey (Van province), and China (Xinjiang Autonomous province). The researchers spent five days in each country between June 2010 and June 2011.

In total, there were 348 craftspeople interviewed (211 in Kyrgyzstan and 137 outside the country). Among them there were 54 craftspeople recognised as bearers of unique traditional knowledge of crafts (40 in Kyrgyzstan and 14 outside).

During the field research thirty-two types of craft technologies were described and fixed, including eight unique technologies in danger of disappearing.

All respondents received certificates for participating. Leaflets with information in the Kyrgyz language about the project goals and activities were distributed among local population.

During the field research, the custodians, handicrafts, and natural raw materials were fixed through photos and videos. In accordance with the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Traditional Knowledge, the researchers were obligated to ask for the local people's consent to use the knowledge on the traditional crafts techniques. Ornaments refer to the Law on Folklore, which is currently being developed and has not been yet ratified by the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The collected materials (stories, descriptions, pictures, photos, and videos) were processed by the researchers, and a database of Kyrgyz traditional craft technologies, natural raw materials, and ornaments was created as a result of

the project activities. Editing of the field research materials was done by an ethnographer and expert on handicrafts under the supervision of the coordinator of the field research. The ethnographer supervised the work of researchers and edited the database. Proper conditions were created at the National Fine Arts Museum to store the collection, and collection's safety and accessibility for specialists who work with archives was also considered. An expert on handicrafts selected craft samples and coordinated and guided researchers and photographer during the field trip. Expert was sent to the Russian Museum of Anthropology in Saint-Petersburg to work in its Archive.

Over two hundred pieces of craft items were purchased for the Fine Art Museum during the research trips. Restoration was done by museum specialists. About 80 per cent of the purchased items are planned to go on permanent display for the general public.

Component 2. Traditional Handicraft Skills and Knowledge Transmitting

Component 2 included promotional activities as well as preparation and further processing of the database. The materials collected during the field research were processed, edited, and translated into Kyrgyz, Russian, and English for further use.

To promote traditional crafts and Kyrgyz cultural heritage, to transmit the traditional craft skills and knowledge, and to educate young generations domestically and in diaspora communities, materials are partly prepared for various publications, radio and TV programmes, training programmes, and other needs. When publishing printed materials based on the results of the field studies, issues related to the copyrights of the traditional knowledge custodians should be stipulated and fixed in the form of an agreement.

Based on the collected materials:

- 'Symbols of the Kyrgyz Ornament', a seminar for young animators, was held on 17 and 18 February 2011.
- Master classes on traditional technologies were held for OIMO International Festival participants by invited bearers in July 2010 and July 2011.
- A list of potential trainers was created, consisting of seventy-one craftspeople between the ages of 35 and 75, from all the districts of Kyrgyzstan.
- Nineteen programs and guidelines were prepared for further training in areas such as producing traditional felt hats, natural dyeing, wool processing, etc.

Project Procedures

- Research
- Purchase craft samples for the Fine Arts Museum funds
- Work in museum's archives
- Create a database
- Publication activities
- Create TV and radio programmes and video clips
- Promote activities in collaboration with the media
- Organise exhibitions and project presentations
- Prepare programmes for future training on traditional craft technologies

Outcomes/Effects

The following people and structures of the Kyrgyz society benefited from the project activities: craftspeople, custodians of traditional knowledge, designers, artists, art critics, art teachers, museum employees, anthropologists, ecologists, students of different educational institutions, collectors, NGOs working in the sphere of cultural development and ecology, Ministry of Culture and Information of KR, Ministry of Education and Science of KR, Ministry of Tourism of KR, craft sector of Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, and Kyrgyz diaspora communities.

For the first time in the last twenty years, the Fine Art Museum's collections were fulfilled by artefacts. Regionally and globally, results of the project filled up the shortage of data concerning Kyrgyz traditional culture and enriched the cultural heritage data of mankind.

In March 2011, CACSARC-kg in collaboration with UNESCO National Committee in Kyrgyz Republic completed the application form for including Kyrgyz traditional felt rugs—Alakiyiz and Shyrdak—into the Urgent Safeguarding List.

3. Patterns of the Eastern Pamir

Project was organised by the Yak House (a Tajikistan NGO) in partnership with CACSARC-kg. Project Duration: April to May 2011.

Project Background

Tajikistan is going through economic reforms. Transitioning the country to a market economy has brought about a growth in poverty, especially in rural and remote mountain areas. Murgab district of Tajikistan, populated by Kyrgyz ethnic group (over 250 000 people), is located 4000 meters above sea

level. The main economic activity is in livestock—namely, the cultivation of yaks.

Traditional crafts are produced mostly by women. Embroidered pillows, woven carpets, and other items reflect the surrounding nature as well as legends and lifestyle of the Kyrgyz people. Craft items are produced for events related to rituals and customs related to decorating houses. Ancient and unique traditional craft technologies are still alive among the people, but knowledge of the symbols and the meaning of ornaments have nearly disappeared.

Project Goals

Research the history and meaning of patterns related to Kyrgyz people living in Eastern Pamir

Transmit knowledge on pattern creation and reading to the next generation through training

Safeguard and revive the unique Kyrgyz patterns in Eastern Pamir

Project Activities

Research in Murgab area went through the following villages Murgab, Kono-Korgon, Checheki, Besh-Kumbez, Karakol, Toktomush, and Shaimak. Researchers looked into the condition of the crafts in Murgab area through questioning and visiting craftspeople.

During the research, the researchers interviewed elderly people who produce handcrafted items. Over sixty houses were visited; fifty-five questionnaires were completed by respondents at their home; and eleven bearers of the history and meaning of the patterns were recognised. To complete the materials for the catalogue, craftspeople and their products were documented by photo and video cameras.

Women generally make handcrafted products for home use and as a dowry for their daughters. Ornaments and patterns decorate felt rugs, pillows, horse equipment, woven mats, jewellery, etc. Most craftspeople do not value the semantics of the patterns; instead, they just copy ancient patterns produced by their ancestors. They use zoomorphic and vegetation motifs, and geometrical ornaments are more often used in the patchwork technique. On jewels, it is possible to see zoomorphic and vegetation ornaments.

There were organised training programmes for young craftspeople in six districts of Gorno Badakhshan province of Tajikistan. The training

programmes were worked out based on the results of the research. In total, a hundred people were trained.

Objectives of Training

- Give the younger generation general information about the history and semantics of local patterns
- Provide participants an opportunity to adjust information interchange between generations
- Let training participants recode traditional patterns

Project Procedures

- Researching
- Documenting and creating a database
- Organising training for craftspeople community groups

Outcomes/Effects:

- Completed materials to publish the *Patterns of the Eastern Pamir* catalogue
- Forced younger generations to start using significant patterns intelligently in craft items produced for the market
- Increased interest in traditional culture among the younger generations
- Started to revive links between generations in terms of transmitting traditional knowledge

ICH-related Data Collected by CACSARC-kg:

Context of Data

CACSARC-kg has an offline ICH-related data. The database consists of several data related to craft types, craft technologies, craftspeople and their contact information, ornaments, bibliography, and ethnographical collections in Kyrgyz and Russian museums. The data is in the form of texts, sketches, photos, and videos.

Data includes information on craft bearers, custodians, and creators living in all provinces of Kyrgyzstan (Naryn, Chui, Issyk-Kul, Talas, Osh, Batken, and Jalalabad); in Jergital district and the Mountain-Badahshansky autonomous region of Tajikistan; in the Sintszjan-Uigur autonomous region of China; and the Van district of Turkey. Other data comes from the Kyrgyz State Historical Museum and the Russian Ethnographical Museum in Saint Petersburg. The data is being prepared for online usage.

Methods to Obtain Data or Archives

- Organising fieldwork to interview ICH subjects and document information received
- Collecting materials related to previous fieldwork from museum archives
- Employing specialists to work on different ICH and IP topics.

Owner of rights for the data is the CACSARC-kg Public Foundation. Since CACSARC-kg is sharing data management with the National Art Museum and since CACSARC-kg has not had previous experience with IP aspects of ICH, principles or a guideline for data management is still being developed.