

Article title: **Preservation and transmission of artisan's traditional knowledge in Fergana Valley**

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Handicraft traditions of Central Asia have been formed thousand years ago. Trading platforms in Fergana Valley were preserved from the times of the Great Silk Road, still in function and shared handicraft product with difficulties on cross borders trade. People inhabited the Fergana Valley since ancient times can be divided into two main groups: the nomadic and sedentary. Kyrgyz people engaged in processing hides and wool of wild and domestic animals, producing textiles of wool and felt, leather and wooden bowls, horse equipment and silver jewelry. Tajik and settled Uzbek people had developed farming culture and trade traditions, grew cotton and bred silkworms, curly wool, cotton and silk fabrics.

RCE Kyrgyzstan has been implementing a handicraft project in Fergana Valley is focusing on transmissions of unique traditions of Central Asian handicrafts, many of which are in danger of extinction in partnership with public foundation CACSAR kg (Central Asia Crafts Support Association's Resource Centre in Kyrgyzstan). The focus group of the project is artisan's men and women who are represented local communities from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan; project started in October 2012 will end in March 2014. The project is implemented with financial support of the US State Department.

The project created a team of trainers with local experts conducting trainings on building capacity of artisans on reviving of old techniques, production of high quality handicraft goods, use of new technologies, creation of modern design with traditional elements, natural dying etc. Today, the craftsmen restored production of several types of national fabrics like Shokhi snipe, Adras, Bakhmal, Satin, Satin-Khan. Old traditional patterns are being revived, masters-weavers are producing an excellent handmade fabric, and special attention is paid to the restoration of natural dyes.

The RCE Kyrgyzstan project is providing an opportunity for women handicraftsman to generate income through producing and selling their products, that help to improve living standards of their families, reviving the traditional knowledge's and improves the quality of traditional crafts of the Fergana valley.

The RCE Kyrgyzstan project introduced to the beauty, diversity and fragility of handicraft traditions that have been in peril ever since Soviet's egalitarian cultural doctrine, but never more so than in today's struggle to compete with cheap low-quality mass products from China. The project focuses on appreciation of the unique traditions of Central Asian handicrafts, many of which are in danger of extinction. Uzbek textile and ceramics, Tajik embroidery, Kyrgyz felt - these and many other objects of daily life that survived throughout hundreds of years, are now being rapidly reduced to touristic souvenirs. At present, artisans are trying to revive national handicraft products but unfortunately some of them have already disappeared or are critically endangered. The striking example – the famous school of ceramics in Uzbekistan having existed since 9th century has unfortunately

disappeared.

Nowadays in Central Asian handicraftsmen could be classified to the following categories:

- Traditional masters belonging to the "family" schools of craftsmanship;
- Master practicing handicrafts after receiving professional trainings in art colleges, schools, institutes;
- People practicing in handicraft to satisfy market's demand, without special training, family or an institution.

Usually craft activities are practiced predominantly by women (80%), the handicraft sector is composed mainly of small and micro-businesses lead by women. Handicraft sector in Central Asia is described by various handicraft manufacturers in the region - large-scale productions, as well as small family-run businesses.

The importance of the craftsmanship in Fergana Valley is obviously recognized by everyone, however, in practice, the government is not providing proper attention to the development of national handicraft market and to the needs of the handicraftsmen.

Situation analysis finds the problems of maintaining their techniques and passing them to the next generation. We are also focusing on the markets salesmen and buyers in their daily life decision-making and choices to raise the right questions in order to preserve the rich and diverse national heritage of Central Asian crafts. There are many difficulties in promotion of handicraft products on the modern-day market: not many artisans could use computer and have technical communication skills, no knowledge's of using new marketing instruments, high cost of raw materials, there is no point of view about contemporary design and modern technology, unfavorable location (far from the center), lack of local markets, limited access for national and regional markets due to the lack of finance, difficulties to combine household and handicraft work, poor cooperation between regions and capitals, problems with cross-border trade. The project is partially trying to solve some of the issues, for example project involved international experts, who are teaching handicraftsmen new brands and design, modern color trends, how to improve quality of the products, how to combine old traditions techniques with modern design.

Today handicraft products have presence in modern fashion and interior designers finding its inspiration in traditional handicraft techniques. Local residents are showing the use of original handicraft goods in Central Asian day-to-day life, wherever still present. Though the project implementation we could understand the reasons causing it, we also take a close look into marketing and distribution of the handicraft goods and find the weakest links in the struggle to survive against globalized mass production and taste.

Within the frame of the project we initiated to develop a new brand "Fergana valley collection" that is presenting selected handicraft goods and will raise interest towards regional crafts and manufacturers as well as encourage people to appreciate and preserve their beauty.

The project is promoting the "Fergana Valley collection" on local, regional and international markets, during the study tour to Malaysia and Thailand the collection will be presented there. Handicraft products were presented during 2013 International Festival Oimo with participants from Central Asian states, Russia, Afghanistan and India. Permanent fair, festivals, competitions,

exhibitions and sales gave opportunity to handicraftsmen work together, learn from each other, sale their product and earn money. Our project is giving a chance to people to create networking, learn modern trends, use traditional techniques and create quality product which will be in demand in the markets.