

CREATIVITY

Unleashing the Talents of Mountain Women

Candra Day, President of Vista 360°

PO Box 4772

Jackson, WY 83001 USA

(307) 733-3082 phone and fax

canday@wyoming.com

www.vista360.org

John Frohnmayer, former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts in the U.S., once said, “Creativity is the currency of the 21st century.” He meant that creativity is replacing extraction of natural resources as the greatest source of wealth in the world. But the word “currency” also has another relevant meaning. “Currency” is the “medium of exchange”. I would like to talk about creativity as the medium of exchange for the 21st century.

As we explore the subject of creativity, I would like to draw your attention to the equalizing effect of creative exchange. In a creative exchange, we can all contribute and we can all benefit. Everyone has creative energy, talent and fresh ideas to give. Everyone benefits from an atmosphere enlivened by creativity. Creativity is abundant. It is by no means a scarce resource and it cannot be easily controlled. It flows all around us. Creativity often transcends the distinctions between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, men and women. For these reasons, creativity is an excellent medium for delivering mutual benefit. I will return to this idea as we explore the creativity of mountain women.

By “creativity”, I simply mean the practice of the arts and crafts in all forms and the process of making something new, including coming up with new ideas and new ways of doing something. It’s a great, big, all-encompassing word.

I would like to begin by reciting a litany of what we all know about creativity, a kind of “call-and-response”, yes yes yes -- just to get us into the spirit of the thing. Then I’ll tell the story about what Vista 360° is seeking through mountain-to-mountain creative exchange and close with a few ideas about what might be possible in this arena, especially with women acting as creative entrepreneurs.

Creativity is a way of learning. The creative process is a way of exploring ideas, knowledge and experience.

Creativity is a way of remembering and a way of continuing. The arts and crafts are memory cells for every culture.

Creativity is a way of teaching children about values and also about such advanced skills such as design, problem-solving and discipline.

Creativity is a way of expressing self.

Creativity is a way of expressing heritage.

Creativity is a way of expressing feelings of devotion, love, anger, hope.

Creativity is a way of speaking truth.

The writer, painter and art critic, John Berger, captured this when he wrote, “*I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that often art has judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past suffered, so that it has never been forgotten. Art, when it functions like this, becomes a meeting-place of the invisible, the irreducible, the enduring, guts, and honor.*” Creativity has given many oppressed people a voice that carries.

Creativity is a way of communicating with others. One American example is the use of the song, *We Shall Overcome*, in the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Anyone who participated in that movement knows how that simple tune was able to bind diverse people together.

Creativity is a way of achieving economic independence. For entrepreneurs, it is the source of bread-and-butter. Innovation is considered key to economic development in our times.

Creativity is a way of celebrating, spreading joy and uplifting ourselves.

Creativity is linked to happy homes and healthy communities in more ways than we can count. People singing, dancing and music-making, storytelling, making quilts, making tools of the trade with skill and care... these are just a few examples.

Finally, creativity is one of the easiest ways to connect people. Listen to music. Touch a hand-made object and you will feel a bond with its maker. From eye to heart. From ear to mind.

The fruits of creativity are everywhere around us – in art, music, design, business, scholarship and in all the innovations that enrich our lives. Considering this impressive list of the benefits, it is clear that creativity is an enormous asset. Encouraging creativity is capacity-building in a profound and versatile sense.

That is our starting point, then. We believe that creativity is critical for women's development and for meeting the challenges in mountain regions that are being brought about by globalization.

So how can we encourage creativity to flourish? And how can we harness the power of creativity to help us solve urgent problems? We call this “putting the arts to work.” No lollygagging around.

Encouraging Creativity through Cooperation, Mountain to Mountain

I would like to tell the story of Vista 360's work as an example of the visible and invisible results of meetings of this type, meetings such as this conference, *Women of the Mountains*. The Vista 360 program is an outcome – one of many -- of the United Nations Year of the Mountains and, specifically, of the First Global Mountain Summit held in Bishkek in October, 2002. Vista is an example of a small organization, operating on the grassroots “trans-local” level, but with

larger policy goals in mind. We use the term “trans-local” to denote international activity that connects people on the local level, community-to-community.

In the past, mountain regions were protected, to a point, by geographic isolation. As you know, this isolation is melting away all around the world. Mountain regions worldwide are more and more accessible to the global society for a wide variety of use and misuse. This has been true for a very short period of time in many regions. (In our own community of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, many visitor-serving businesses began to stay open during the winter months only in the 1980’s.) As documented by the International Year of the Mountains, many mountain regions are at risk of rapid and irreversible environmental degradation, economic exploitation and social deterioration. Unique and beautiful cultural traditions are at risk of being permanently lost. Our program is designed to provide a framework for trans-local international cooperation and shared learning to help prepare mountain people to respond constructively and creatively to these new circumstances.

Our goal is to replace isolation with cooperation as a conscious strategy for protection of mountain regions. In this way, we can make use of the infrastructure and resources of globalization to develop more autonomy for mountain people. This is a long-term goal, which will require much learning – and creativity – to accomplish. We know that building effective partnerships will be a long, slow, gradual process.

The core concept of Vista 360° is that cooperation among mountain people is vital for the future, as a strategic response to pressures from globalization, and that the arts and creative exchange are powerful tools for building the relationships needed to support long-term cooperation. We call this concept “putting the arts to work”.

The mission of Vista 360° is to help mountain communities preserve their cultural identity and environmental integrity while enjoying full participation in the global society of the 21st century.

Below, this paper will describe five projects, which have grown out of this core concept. But before presenting these details, I’d like to provide a bit more conceptual context.

Organizational Background

By way of background, Vista 360° was founded in 2002 in Jackson Hole, Wyoming as an international festival of mountain cultures. Our original idea was to develop an arts festival that would be unique to Jackson Hole and one that would help catalyze cultural development in our small Rocky Mountain town. Our vision was to develop a festival of national and international stature which would celebrate mountain traditions (including our own), inspire and educate our local artists, expand our audience’s opportunities and contribute to cultural tourism, etc. In other words, the initial vision was self-centered. We wanted to develop a festival to improve our own community.

Our first festival, held in 2003, celebrated the traditional nomadic culture of Kyrgyzstan. In the process of planning for this event, we learned about the First Global Mountain Summit and I was fortunate enough to be able to attend. If you are an American, you will know how serendipitous

it was for us to hear about the Summit since these peaceful United Nations activities are not well- publicized in the States. We only learned about it because we were building new relationships with artists in Kyrgyzstan.

I attended the Summit and was overwhelmed by the scope and sophistication of the worldwide effort to protect mountain places and strengthen mountain communities. Realizing that our community had so much to learn from organizations around the world, we began to shift away from a self-centered mission and became more open to new ideas and new possibilities. As an arts worker, I also noticed that cultural issues were included in the priority goals of the Summit, but that few organizations were focusing on arts and culture as a primary activity. I thought there was a gap that we could try to address.

We learned that there is significant work being done by well-established organizations in the area of preservation of heritage sites and artifacts so we decided to focus on living artists and artisans exclusively, and on generating support for culture as a living and evolving force. We also learned that there is much excellent work being done in the area of community development, which includes cultural preservation as a vital strand in the complex weave of development work. We decided to make arts and culture our central focus and thereby began our journey of discovery.

At Vista 360°, we see ourselves as next-generation innovators because we are taking advantage of infrastructure, training and community development already in place as a result of years of hard work and investment by many people directly involved in the UN Year of the Mountains. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, we are working with several women's handicraft cooperatives, which were begun almost fifteen years ago with the help of Helvetas and the World Bank. We have the pleasure to work with the talented, experienced and well-trained people who run these organizations. Without these people and this infrastructure, we could not do our handicraft initiatives. For example, we look toward the Banff Centre for Mountain Culture for inspiration and knowledge accrued over many years and we carefully study what they've done with their conferences, their festival and their book fair. For example, we draw upon the excellent work done by the Mountain Institute and study their "sacred mountains" program as we plan our next festival about Mt. Fuji. So, as newcomers, we are direct and grateful beneficiaries of all this work.

Another concept we have borrowed and embraced is the idea of *biocultural diversity*, which has been beautifully articulated by the Christensen Fund. We are working to strengthen the vitality and adaptability of mountain *biocultures*: the complex interplay of place, culture, history, economics and ecology. We are jumping on the bandwagon and want to learn how to cultivate our own bioculture in Jackson Hole and how to cooperate with others.

As innovators, we have a core idea, but we also try to be highly opportunistic. We are always on the look-out for openings. We know that when Bill Gates was asked for the secret of his success, he said, "I didn't pick up on every random thing." We try to remember that golden rule, but we are definitely open to suggestion.

Potential for Learning and Transformation: Putting the Arts to Work

Because a long-term working partnership is our goal, the arts and cultural exchange are our starting points. These “media of exchange” help to build the trust and respect upon which such relationships should be founded. Artists, craftsmen and cultural innovators (who YoYo Ma calls “venture culturalists”) are often leaders in the search for common ground and their specialized skills provide the communication links necessary to bring diverse people together. But it goes beyond this truism when we focus on mountain regions.

In rural areas, the arts are participatory, i.e. most art is created by community members rather than by professional artists. In the mountains, many people are art-makers and every community has its own talented masters. Almost every household boasts of at least one member who makes music or makes beautiful things or dances for the fun of it. This quality of rural arts, the homemade arts, leads to a high degree of receptivity to the arts. It is familiar, easy to understand and something “we do”.

Direct participation has another important characteristic. For most of us, it is the best way to learn. Direct participation is the key to transformative learning, especially – learning that changes our attitudes and behavior. So the arts and cultural traditions, because they are participatory in mountain regions, are also a powerful gateway into transformation.

Let me offer an example of this principle, which I think you will recognize in your own work. When we do cultural exchange programs, the people who benefit the most are the artists and presenters themselves. We learn the most. We are the most transformed. We bring an American Cowboy Show to villages in Kyrgyzstan to foster creative exchange between the American cowboy and the Kyrgyz shepherd. The people who are most benefited by this project are the American cowboys and cowboy musicians who put on the show. We are *transfixed* by the whole experience. In comparison, the audiences that come see the show are entertained, amused, educated – and then they go home and the experience takes its place in the memory bank.

Our logic syllogism is simple.

Premise: Transformation and learning is what we need.

Direct participation is the key to transformative learning.

In rural areas, the arts and cultural traditions are an open door to direct participation.

Therefore, encourage the arts and cultural traditions in new ways.

Given the powerful dynamics of globalization, we need to strengthen our autonomy and our capacity for self-determination in order to achieve our goals in mountain regions. In my opinion, mountain people are not doing this very successfully around the world, at least not in my hometown. And in Jackson Hole, we enjoy 94% protected land! To meet the challenges of globalization, we need to learn new ways of thinking and new ways of taking action. Mountain people, if you don't mind my saying so, don't like new ways. We like our old ways of doing things and we don't like to listen to outsiders. (In my town, we once presented a brilliant community planner who happened to have a New York accent. After he left, the audience

response was “What does he know about us? And, anyway, did you hear that accent?” Sound familiar?)

At Vista 360°, we believe that transformation and learning are needed in mountain communities. The arts and cultural practices can be crucial to transformation and learning, especially if they are part of a creative exchange with other mountain people.

Program Design: Putting the Arts to Work

Our program design has two phases.

Phase I is a two-year planning process to produce a cultural festival in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Each festival celebrates one of the world’s unique mountain cultures. The planning process enables us to build a “foundation” layer of cooperative relationships with the region’s artists and cultural leaders while learning enough about the region to present an exciting and authentic festival. This process also enables us to identify shared problems which could be most effectively addressed through cooperation. Phase I culminates in the festival.

Phase II builds upon the relationships generated through the process of presenting the festival to create an ongoing partnership with the region, facilitated by Vista 360° and including at least two mountain regions in two countries. This “foundation network” will include artists, cultural organizations, local and regional government, schools, businesses and other non-profit organizations and social enterprises. The purpose and goals of the Partnership will be specific to the needs and priorities of the partners. The method is to undertake clear and specific projects which will help to preserve cultural identity and environmental integrity for all partners involved. These projects will also serve to increase the capacity for local self-determination in mountain communities. These collaborative projects will be long-term, multi-disciplinary and self-sustaining.

If successful, these projects will also be mutually beneficial, creative exchange between equal partners through which we all contribute and we all benefit.

We have developed a pilot program following this model in northern Kyrgyzstan, including a festival in Jackson Hole in 2003 and an ongoing Phase II partnership between the Rocky Mountains and northern Kyrgyzstan. Below, this paper describes the Kyrgyz program in more detail.

This year and next (2007 and 2008), we are presenting a Phase I festival in Jackson which celebrates the culture of the Mt. Fuji region and the Japanese Alps. We are beginning to plan for a Phase II program with partners in the Mt. Fuji region and also look forward to a three-way partnership joining the northern Rockies, northern Kyrgyzstan and the Mt. Fuji region, working on the community level.

We have begun the planning process for the Jackson Hole festival in 2009-2010, which will celebrate the cultures of the southern Andes, focusing on Bolivia and northern Argentina.

A Closer Look at Five Creative Exchange Projects in the Kyrgyzstan Partnership

Now I would like to examine five projects, which have grown out of this core idea – using the arts and cultural traditions as connector-tools to foster cooperation as a strategy to meet the challenges of globalization.

All projects are grassroots and trans-local, linking community-to-community. If we are successful, all projects will foster direct participation and result in mutual benefit over the long term. All this work is in the beginning stages, inspired by the First Global Summit in 2002 – a report from the field. The variety of activities we have been able to launch in just two years, with a tiny amount of money, is presented as an indicator of the potential of creative exchange.

All of these projects are part of Phase II of our program design. All have flowed out of the relationships which were formed in the course of producing the Vista 360° festival in Jackson Hole in June, 2003. The Jackson festival, which was Phase I of the Kyrgyzstan Partnership, will be briefly described.

These five projects are:

1. Cultural Exchange Festivals
2. Support for women's cooperatives
3. Support for traditional folk artists
4. Support for mid-career artists and artisans
5. Support for new artists and designers

Phase I – Vista 360° Festival in Jackson Hole June, 2003

The first Vista 360° festival brought twenty-three Kyrgyz artists to Jackson for a celebration of Kyrgyz traditional nomadic culture and for East/West cultural exchange. Kyrgyz artists included: Ordo Sakhna, a traditional music ensemble and folk ethnographic theater; Mekenbek Osmonaliyev, yurt maker, felt artist, reed screen maker; and Dilbara, fashion designer. Mekenbek exhibited his museum-quality yurt, which received the prize as “most beautiful yurt in the world” at the Manas Festival in Bishkek in 1995 and is now part of the collection of the Mingei International Museum of World Folk Art and Crafts in San Diego. Dilbara presented a fashion show.

American artists included: Daryl Anger and the American Fiddle Ensemble, who performed in a double concert with Ordo Sakhna; Project Bandaloop, who presented a dance performance on a rock cliff, with performers using climbing gear; and Hermine Dreyfuss, who presented her photography of Kyrgyzstan and led a week-long children's program about feltmaking with her Kyrgyz colleagues.

Professor Baktybek Adrisaev, who was then Ambassador to the United State from Kyrgyzstan, also honored us by attending the festival with his family.

Our cultural guide for planning this festival was Ishen Obolbekov, co-owner of Shepherd's Way Trekking. Ishen made it possible for us to do this festival. He advised us about every aspect,

introduced us to artists, arranged auditions and organized a small demonstration of Kyrgyz culture with food, games and yurts.

All of these people were part of our first circle of relationships as we began to build a partnership with communities in Kyrgyzstan.

This was an extremely small festival, with approximately 1,200 people attending over a period of three days. We were off to a modest start and we had made friends with a number of creative people in Kyrgyzstan.

Phase II Projects

1. Festivals

The role of festivals in supporting cultural preservation and cultural continuity has been widely recognized. There are thousands of cultural festivals around the world. Some, like the Smithsonian Institute's Folklife Festival, present the traditions of world cultures. Others are part of their own local cultural tradition. These festivals demonstrate the huge appeal of festivals. Millions attend cultural festivals every year.

In addition, there are a great many programs that use festivals as one part of a year-long program. One superb example is the Silk Road Project, led by YoYo Ma, which helped to produce the Smithsonian's legendary Silk Road Festival in 2002 and now carries out an evolving and growing cultural exchange / cultural education program around the world.

Vista 360° has been especially inspired by the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, which celebrates rural life in the American west, "featuring the contemporary and traditional arts that arise from lives lived caring for the land and livestock." The Cowboy Gathering also features music from horse-centered traditions all around the world each year.

The Gathering is a cultural phenomenon in the rural west. Since the first Gathering was held in Elko, Nevada in 1985, more than 250 new cowboy gatherings have been launched in communities all around the West to celebrate cowboy and ranching culture, all sparked by the Gathering in Elko. The Gathering has been responsible for a revival of interest in cowboy culture and for renewed hope for the future of this cultural tradition. It is an example of the role a festival can play in preserving traditions. It is also an example of a year-long program devoted to this aim.

In our partnership with Kyrgyzstan, we've participated in two kinds of festivals. Both are still new, small, fragile endeavors, but we hope they will both grow like weeds – as the Cowboy Gatherings have grown.

The first is the **At Chabysh** festival, which is organized by the Kyrgyz Ate Institute and is held in the village of Barsko'on on the south shore of Lake Issyk-Kul each October. The purpose of the At Chabysh festival is to build support for the revival of the Old Kyrgyz Horse, a vanishing breed that is native to the mountains and well adapted to the Kyrgyz terrain. The At Chabysh

festival includes long-distance horse races (open only to Old Kyrgyz horses), traditional horse games, handicraft exhibitions, musical and theater performances and guest artists from other horse-centered traditions. In 2005 and 2006, Vista 360° presented American cowboy music and rodeo games at At Chabysh. In the future, they plan to present horse traditions from all around the world. Only two years old, the At Chabysh festival is already well-known in Kyrgyzstan and has the potential to have the same kind of broad impact demonstrated by the Cowboy Gathering in the U.S.



At Chabysh,
Copyright Hal Cannon

The second festival project is the **American Cowboy Show**, which is a ranch rodeo show produced by Vista 360° which we tour to towns and villages in Kyrgyzstan. The Cowboy Show includes music, Western dance, exhibits of traditional gear, horse games and horsemen exchange (horse training clinics, etc.). The rodeo riders in the games are members of the audience who compete for prizes, just as they do at a ranch rodeo in the U.S.

The first goal of the American Cowboy Show is to highlight the many similarities between Kyrgyz rural culture and American rural culture in the West. The second goal is to meet people and begin to build relationships on the community level.

For example, our sponsor in the village of Karasuu, Naryn Oblast, has now become our liaison and manager for a handicraft project in her home village and is helping us develop new sources of high-quality handicrafts through **At Bashi Altyn Kol**.



Rodeo,

Copyright, Adam Jahiel

Another example: at the At Chabysh festival, we met a musical group called **KUT**, which we are now bringing to the U.S. for a four-state tour to introduce Kyrgyz traditional music to rural audiences in the Rocky Mountain region. One of KUT's members is devoted to re-creating some of the ancient music of Kyrgyzstan, which now survives only in fragments. The tour is designed to give KUT musicians as much opportunity as possible to play with American musicians and to explore a variety of musical styles. They will also be recording their first CD with the help of the Western Folklife Center, including some of these ancient songs.

Another example: the American Cowboy Show performers have been inspired by their experience in Kryrgyzstan to establish a new center for traditional culture here in Jackson Hole, which will include an ongoing program for international cultural exchange with other horse-centered rural cultures.

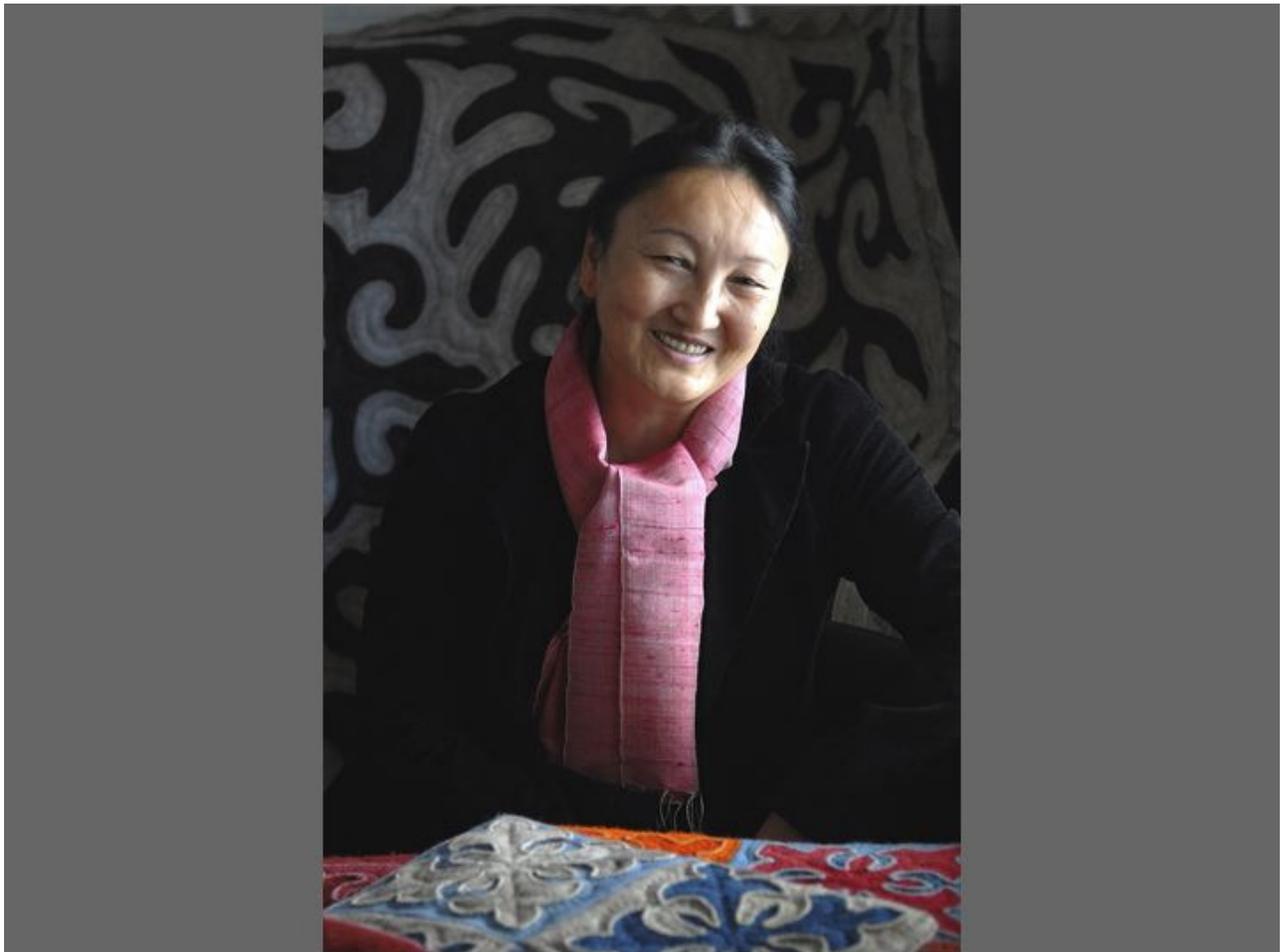
Another example: alumni of the American Cowboy Show now host an annual event to raise money for Pamir's Bridges, a small Swiss NGO which repairs pedestrian bridges in the high country of Kyrgyzstan. These bridges allow shepherds to bring their herds to higher pastures and thereby reduce overgrazing at lower elevations.

Another example: the American Cowboy Show was sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek as a way to introduce Kyrgyz citizens to American cultural diversity and to show good will, yet another benefit.

Our question is: how can we encourage creativity to flourish? And how can we harness the power of creativity to help us solve urgent problems. We think the most important outcome of festivals should be the flourishing of new relationships and new ideas, creative exchange and artistic development. This happens naturally and organically at every festival. It can also be encouraged and supported through mountain-to-mountain cooperation.

2. Support for women' cooperatives

This is a photograph of Mairam Omurzakova, founder and President of **Altyn Kol**, a women's handicraft cooperative based in Kochkor, Kyrgyzstan.



Mairam Omurzakova,
Copyright Adam Jahiel

Our focus for this project is to expand the American market for Kyrgyz art and handicrafts. We are fortunate that Kyrgyz handicrafts are new and fresh to the U.S. eye, and we are working to

take advantage of this “competitive edge”. In our first year, Vista 360° sold Kyrgyz handicrafts at twelve shows in six states in the West. Everything we were able to buy, we were able to sell at a profitable price. In one year, we became one of the largest volume customers of Altyn Kol, the women’s handicraft cooperative which serves over 500 women artisans.

Vista 360°’s next step in this project is to sponsor two craft leaders to attend the **Santa Fe International Folk Art Market** in July, 2007. Founded four years ago, the Santa Fe market has grown quickly to become the largest folk art market in the U.S. Altyn Kol founder, Mairam Omurzakova, and Kyrgyz Style founder, Anara Kerimbekova, will attend the Market to share ideas and knowledge with their peers from around the world and to learn first-hand about the preferences of the American customer.

Support for traditional folk artists and artisans is an accepted and widely-valued strategy for rural economic development and for sustainable agriculture. The work of creating viable cooperatives and producing high-quality products is the first step, from which we are the direct beneficiaries. Our primary role now is to develop expanding and high-priced markets for these goods in mountain regions around the world, starting with the American West. We are also partnering with women’s cooperatives in several villages in northern Kyrgyzstan to increase the supply of high-quality goods by guaranteeing purchase, working with established and experienced organizations such as the Rural Advisory Service in Naryn Oblast. We strive for collaboration to avoid duplication.

Our innovation is to develop a marketing strategy that is based on mountain-to-mountain cooperation. We focus on selling Kyrgyz art and handicrafts in mountain communities, where the beauty of warm wool felt products is instantly appreciated. We also sell to people who welcome the opportunity to support cultural vitality and sustainable agriculture in other mountain regions. We also involve our own local sheep growers and craftspeople in this creative exchange. Wyoming sheepgrowers will be visiting Kyrgyzstan to meet with artists and artisans, share artistic traditions and also, hopefully, create business partnerships, grower with grower.

A second, very important, aspect is that the sale of traditional arts and handicrafts in the United States is organized as a social enterprise, i.e. a Fair Trade business with a social mission. Profits from this business are used to support the other activities of Vista 360° in Kyrgyzstan, such as the cultural exchange programs described above. Based on results from the first year, we believe that this business will be able to fully-support our other activities in Kyrgyzstan within two years as a self-sustaining program, at the level of \$100,000-\$125,000/year.

With this structure, grants and other contributed income may be reserved for new initiatives and special projects. The ongoing creative exchange between the American West and Kyrgyzstan will be financially self-sufficient and sustainable on a modest, grassroots level. Economic cooperation and business partnerships, profitable to all parties, will be another outcome of creative exchange.

This is not a new idea, of course, but it is an idea whose time has certainly arrived, as evidenced by the success of the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, the Green Festivals and the hundreds of other “green” business ventures sprouting up around the world. Again, the

achievements of UNESCO and other pioneering organizations, such as Aid to Artisans, has made this recent market growth possible. Vista 360°'s innovation is that our marketing strategy is based on creative exchange, mountain-to-mountain. Vista's chances for success derive from being a very small part of this large, worldwide trend, a trend to which mountain women can make a contribution.

Our question is: how can we encourage creativity to flourish? And how can we harness the power of creativity to help us solve urgent problems? Our message is that the time is ripe for small endeavors, organized on the grassroots level, to ride the wave. Opportunities for women entrepreneurs engaged in social enterprise are growing: investor interest is growing, marketing venues are growing, consumer interest is growing, microfinance programs are growing. Even though social enterprise is still a minuscule percentage of business activity, it is more than enough to provide encouragement to very small, grassroots endeavors.

More and more multinational corporations are aligning themselves, at least in a small way, with the social enterprise movement, as shown in mass media advertisements that focus on their social contributions. This week, I saw an ad in the New Yorker magazine for Goldman Sachs, which described their commitment to providing financial tools to support worldwide vaccination. If Goldman Sachs (and many other multinationals) believes that social responsibility is a good sales message, then creative women in mountain communities should be able to find a way to join in.

3. Support for traditional folk artists

This is a photograph of Jangl, one of the masters of the craft of Kyrgyz rugmaking, called shyrdak.



Jangl,
Copyright Adam Jahiel

We are proud to offer her work to American customers. Jangl leads one of the best-known workshops in the country. By expanding the market, we are encouraging the teaching of the next generation of village-based artisans.

4. Support for mid-career artists and artisans



Photograph of Galina Turdyeva and Erkebjü Djumagulova.
Copyright Adam Jahiel

These women are accomplished textile artists and also have a workshop called Studio “Kiyiz” in Bishkek, which is renowned for their dollmaking. This year, we are piloting an **artists’ retreat program** under their sponsorship to provide an opportunity for creative development. The program is modeled on retreats in North America and Europe which are designed to provide artists with a protected time to pursue creative ideas. In this case, our pilot program includes a creative exchange component. We are bringing two felt artists -- one from the U.S. and one from Japan – to work with several Kyrgyz felt artists for two weeks. A traveling exhibition of their fine art textiles, including work by all participating artists, will be shown in Kyrgyzstan and also in the Rocky Mountain region of the U.S. The exhibition in the U.S. will be based in public libraries and will be accompanied by a photography exhibit depicting rural life in Kyrgyzstan and a talk by one of the American felt artists, Suzanne Morlock.

5. Support for new designers and artists



This is a photograph of Aidai, a talented young fashion designer in Bishkek.
Copyright Adam Jahiel

We are carrying out a national campaign to introduce Aidai's work to a select number of American high-end department stores, mindful of the small number of beautiful items she is able to produce by hand.

Aidai, like many other mountain women, is dedicated to helping her community. She is working to start a handicraft museum and women's cooperative in her home village near Lake Issyk-Kul. Profits from the sale of her work in the United States will help her achieve this dream and, at the same time, help Vista 360° develop new sources for Kyrgyz art and handicrafts.

These photographs are portraits of five extremely talented women with whom we are developing a mutually beneficial partnership through creative exchange, mountain to mountain. At Vista 360°, we see an almost unlimited potential for these kinds of partnerships, based on cooperation between mountain people. We are now working to repeat this process with communities in

Japan and, soon, in the southern Andes. Eventually, we hope to facilitate a grassroots network of creative exchange linking mountain people around the world .

Mountain Women as Creative Entrepreneurs

What is most important about this example of Vista 360°s activities in Kyrgyzstan is that we are tapping into an abundant resource, one that is widely available, generous and 100% renewable. This resource is the creativity of mountain women.

What is most intriguing about what we've learned in the few short years since the Global Mountain Summit is how readily this resource can be "put to work" if we focus on building relationships, mountain to mountain, on the local level. No large investments are needed and the modest investments that *are* necessary can be repaid over time.

What is most exciting to me, personally, has been the discovery that these kinds of activities are part of a very energetic, worldwide movement that is a source of support, encouragement and knowledge and that is also an abundant resource, widely available, generous and renewable. If anyone of us decides to engage in this kind of creative exchange, we are immediately welcomed as a part of this network, which is exemplified by the Mountain Partnership, by the Global Mountain Summit , by Utah Valley State College, by the National Center for Development of Mountain Regions -- and by this conference.

Grassroots efforts such as Vista 360°, and their number is legion in various forms, draw strength and inspiration from the international leadership, knowing that although our projects are small and may touch only a few people, we are part of a larger movement toward peace and cooperation among mountain people.

So how can we encourage creativity to flourish? And how can we harness the power of creativity to help us solve urgent problems?

When we review these five projects – festivals, support for women's cooperatives, support for traditional folk artists and for teaching, support for artists' development and for new designers – we see that these are all direct investments in creativity. These are all focused investments in the creative life of mountain people -- in the arts, the crafts and in the celebration of cultural traditions. In four out of five examples, the primary partners are all women. In a very short period of time, less than two years, these investments are "paying off" in unanticipated ways, leading to cooperation between diverse players, always for mutual benefit. The At Chabysh horse festival, the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, the Altyn Kol Women's Handicraft Cooperative, the Jackson Hole Center for Western Culture, the KUT musical group, the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek, Studio "Kiyiz", individual artists such as Suzanne Morlock, the public libraries in the Rocky Mountain region, the department stores and their customers, the Green Festival, Rural Advisory Services/ Naryn, Aidai's village ... all of these are linked together in a cooperative network. Creativity as the "medium of exchange" is the currency which underwrites these links.

Can this cooperation be made to bear fruit with regard to addressing urgent problems? We can already see gains in economic self-sufficiency and in mutual understanding. We can see gains in

professional development and the artistic development of young and mid-career artists. We can see significant gains in nurturing the process of cultural continuity, both in Kyrgyzstan and in the U.S. We can see cooperation, on a small but sustainable scale, in the area of environmental protection with Pamir's Bridges.

If we invest directly in creativity, we can open avenues for creative exchange between mountain women, one-to-one and community-to-community, building toward a world-spanning support system for cooperation. The links in the chain may be very small, but the chain itself can grow literally without end. Through cooperation, we can develop genuine interdependence among mountain people and a stronger voice for our communities.

In the U.S., they say "a woman's work is never done." I'm afraid that they were talking about housework when this saying was coined, but I think it applies much more aptly to the building of this chain of interdependence and creative exchange. I believe women are often the leaders in harnessing the power of creativity to achieve community goals. And this rewarding work, thank goodness, is never done.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to describe our work.

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