



Artisans & Culture in the Darhad Valley Northern Mongolia

Purpose

The Artisans and Culture Program seeks to sustain culture and community through preserving, encouraging, and expanding the local economy and its fundamental constituents: artisans and skilled craftsmen.

Why Artisans?

People of the Darhad Valley are a contemporary, literate people. They live remotely and simply, a life rich with tradition and yet increasingly linked with the modern world.

By supporting local artisans whose traditional skills serve the needs of the Darhad community, this program reinforces the value of traditional skills and arts at a critical juncture. It also helps strengthen and diversify the local economy. During the socialist era, parts of the cultural heritage of Mongolia were suppressed as the few urban centers industrialized. Now, over a decade after Mongolians initiated democracy and a market economy, many countryside people still lack stable jobs, income, and cultural identity. Globalization introduces the growing availability of mass-produced products, and further threatens to marginalize traditional skills and local economies.



Accomplishments & Ongoing Projects

The Artisans & Culture program works with local people, seeking ways to effectively support the rich traditions of the Darhad Valley as their way of life evolves. In our experience, discussion with local people stimulates both enthusiasm and ideas – people in the Darhad Valley care deeply about their way of life. They want to keep traditions alive. Below are a variety of projects initiated with the help of local people.

BIOREGIONS INTERNATIONAL

MISSION

BioRegions International works to empower the nomadic cultures of Mongolia to survive in a rapidly-changing world. We support holistic, locally-based projects promoting public health, education, environmental preservation, and economic development.

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- I. Support for a few local musicians sparked the formation of a traditional performance group. The Darhad Traditional Performance Group has become a successful small enterprise, and performs for local people throughout the valley. Ongoing support allows them to improve their traditional performance clothes, acquire traditional instruments, and receive training from a local blacksmith who makes horse-head fiddles.
- II. Micro-grants encourage apprenticeships and mentorships that preserve local production of goods such as boots, saddles, tools, lodging and clothing for local consumption. This helps to keep capital resources in the valley, gives herding families additional sources of income, helps to prevent a “brain drain” of young people out of the valley and in the long run helps to develop a more diverse and viable long-term economy.
- III. The People of the Blue Valley Award, initiated with local support in 2005, is designed to honor the exceptional skill and talents of the Darhad Culture. Cash awards will support students, artists and musicians who best use their talents to capture the life and traditions of the Darhad Valley.

IV. Support for art and literature in the local school enables young people to pursue skills and crafts directly linked to their cultural heritage and provides a venue for children to articulate local stories. In 2005, the senior painting teacher told us that because of the BioRegions’ support for annual art contests in the school, the students’ painting – quality and content – has improved dramatically. “They notice details that weren’t in their paintings, before.”

Future Objectives

- I. Cultural Center: Help the local government refurbish and update the Renchinlhumbe Cultural Center, an impressive log structure in the valley’s main village.
- II. History of Darhad Valley: Translate, publish, and initiate distribution of both English and Mongolian versions of three history and ethnography books written by respected scholars, one of whom is Darhad-born historian Professor Purev.
- III. Darhad Migration: The 2003 National Geographic article, *Mongolian Crossing*, provides an overview of the fall migration. We would like to expand on this, providing more thorough documentation of the migration. As funding allows, this multi-faceted project involves:
 - Spring trip to complete the documentation of the cultural techniques which allow Darhad people to make successful migrations year after year.
 - National Veterinary Laboratory and Darhad citizens would like to cooperate with MSU to document (a) the physiological effects of special training given the load carrying oxen, and (b) the techniques of making and using special equipment and supplies for the migration.



Budget

Priority Projects 2006	
People of the Blue Valley Award	\$500
Traditional Performance Group	\$500
Darhad Artisans: teaching apprentices and young adults	\$1,000
2006 Critical Projects Total	\$2,000
Implementation: core, fixed costs of 2006 trip to Mongolia: travel for one person, translation, Darhad logistics, Mongolia coordination	\$7,175
Full Underwriting of 2006 Implementation	\$9,175
Future Objectives	
Darhad Valley Ethnography and History Books, 2-year project	\$15,000
Migration Documentation	\$25,000
Renchinlhumbe Cultural Center	tbd
Program Development need	\$40,000