Nazarbayev University Research Centre for Entrepreneurship
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TRAILBLAZERS OF THE STEPPE: INSPIRING NARRATIVES OF KAZAKH WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

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Foreword

A robust economy primarily hinges on a thriving entrepreneurial spirit.
In Kazakhstan, there is a consistent and growing commitment to supporting women in the realm of entrepreneurship. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations within the country are taking various measures to aid women who are eager to foster their businesses.

Official data reveals that women lead half of the small and medium-sized enterprises in the country, contributing no less than 40% to the GDP. Gender equality issues, including the support for female entrepreneurship, are considered a paramount focus of the national policy.

A vital component of this support involves facilitating the provision of financial resources and incentives for women entrepreneurs. Government programs offer access to loans, grants, and subsidies specifically tailored to women, aimed at invigorating the development and expansion of their businesses.

Furthermore, organizations and platforms have been established with the aim of educating and advising women entrepreneurs. The program “Development of Entrepreneurial Potential ‘Men kasipker’ in the Republic of Kazakhstan” represents an initiative implemented within the framework of the Small and Medium-Sized Business Development Concept until 2030.

“Trailblazers of the Steppe: Inspiring Narratives of Women Entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan” is an engaging guide to the extraordinary life paths of women in Kazakhstan. The book narrates the stories of bold women who have been able to challenge conventional notions of female entrepreneurship. They not only break into male-dominated fields but also overcome barriers, inspiring others with their examples.

Their stories embody the unwavering strength and determination of Kazakh women entrepreneurs. The book not only exposes the challenges they face but also highlights ways to break down social barriers that hinder entrepreneurial development.

Through their unwavering determination, these women have attained remarkable success and serve as a wellspring of inspiration for others. They exemplify that gender should never be an obstacle to achieving success and that with self-confidence, one can surmount any adversity.

“Trailblazers of the Steppe” inspire the women of Kazakhstan to engage in entrepreneurial endeavors, highlighting their fervent commitment to self-improvement and growth. This book serves as a well of inspiration, motivating individuals to embark on audacious ventures and unlock their full potential.

Aizhan Bizhanova

First Deputy Minister of Trade and Integration of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Preface

A remarkable transformation is underway in Kazakhstan. Women are challenging societal norms and shattering stereotypes as they pave the way for a new era of innovation and success. Their stories are the driving force behind "Trailblazers of the Steppe: Inspiring Narratives of Women Entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan" a collection that celebrates the remarkable achievements and journeys of these trailblazing women.

Within the pages of this book, you will embark on a journey through the lives of extraordinary women entrepreneurs who have defied the odds and carved their own paths in diverse industries. From technology to construction, from cultural entrepreneurship to the fuel and energy sector, these women have fearlessly entered male-dominated domains, overcame obstacles and reshaped their industries along the way.

The narratives in this book are powerful testaments to the indomitable spirit and tenacity of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan. They illuminate the challenges faced by these visionary leaders, the societal barriers they have shattered, and the transformative impact they have made in their communities. These stories reveal the resilience and courage required to pursue dreams, challenge conventions, and leave an enduring mark on the business landscape.

Through their determination, these women have not only achieved remarkable success in their respective fields but have also become beacons of inspiration for others. Their stories inspire other women to embrace their inner strength, pursue

their passions, and overcome obstacles in the pursuit of their entrepreneurial dreams. These women prove that gender should never be a barrier to success and that with dedication, perseverance, and belief in oneself, anything is possible.

“Trailblazers of the Steppe” showcases the diversity and breadth of women’s entrepreneurial endeavors in Kazakhstan, highlighting their innovative ideas, leadership prowess, and commitment to excellence. It invites readers to witness firsthand the transformative power of women’s entrepreneurship in shaping industries, fostering economic growth, and driving positive change in society.

As you immerse yourself in the narratives of these remarkable women, prepare to be inspired, motivated, and empowered. Their stories will encourage you to challenge norms, embrace your own potential, and create a unique path in the entrepreneurial world.

Together, let us celebrate the remarkable resilience, innovation, and trailblazing spirit of these inspiring women who are shaping the future of Kazakhstan and beyond.

Dr. Shumaila Yousafzai

Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship and Director of NURCE, Graduate School of Business, Nazarbayev University

Introduction

“Trailblazers of the Steppe: Inspiring Narratives of Women Entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan” is a captivating book that delves into the remarkable journeys of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan. Spanning various sectors and industries, these narratives showcase the resilience, innovation, and transformative impact of these trailblazing women.

From the powerful circle of sisterhood in Section 1 to the redefinition of possibilities in Section 2, the book highlights the bonds of support and the tenacity of entrepreneurs with disabilities who have overcome societal barriers. Section 3 delves into the decolonization of entrepreneurship, where women draw upon the nomadic roots of their Kazakh culture to create sustainable businesses.

The narratives in Section 4 celebrate empowered innovators leading the circular economy revolution, while Section 5 shatters stereotypes as women thrive in traditionally male-dominated sectors. In Section 6, creative changemakers shape Kazakhstan’s contemporary cultural landscape through their artistic talents and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Section 7 highlights tech trailblazers redefining Kazakhstan's digital landscape, while Section 8 showcases women entrepreneurs who drive social impact and positive change in their communities.

"Trailblazers of the Steppe" paints a vivid portrait of Kazakhstan's diverse and dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem, where women entrepreneurs challenge norms, create innovative solutions, and inspire others to pursue their dreams. Their stories serve as a testament to the transformative power of entrepreneurship and the integral role women play in shaping a prosperous and inclusive society.

These Kazakhstan women entrepreneurs are leaving an indelible mark on their industries, communities, and the next generation of aspiring entrepreneurs. "Trailblazers of the Steppe" is a testament to their journeys and a source of inspiration for anyone seeking to overcome barriers, embrace their passion, and make a lasting impact.





Section 1

THE POWERFUL CIRCLE OF SISTERHOOD: BONDS THAT IGNITE BRILLIANCE

In the heartland of Kazakhstan, amidst the vast steppe and towering mountains, a special bond thrives – one that transcends blood ties and societal expectations. It is the powerful circle of sisterhood, a web of connections woven by Kazakhstani women entrepreneurs, providing support, inspiration, and strength. Welcome to the opening section of our book, where we explore the transformative narratives that celebrate the essence of this extraordinary sisterhood.

Throughout history, women have understood the intrinsic power of connections, the strength that emerges when they unite and lift each other up. In Kazakhstan, this spirit of collaboration, camaraderie, and collective success is deeply ingrained in the fabric of society. The women entrepreneurs featured in this section exemplify the essence of this sisterhood, as they have navigated their entrepreneurial journeys together, empowering one another to reach new heights.

Within these pages, we invite you to explore the remarkable stories of women who have harnessed the power of sisterhood to overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and create a lasting impact. You will witness how their interconnectedness, collaboration, and shared experiences have fueled their individual growth and propelled them towards collective success.

The narratives contained within this section shed light on the unique bond these women share – an unbreakable bond that transcends competition, envy, and self–interest. Instead, they choose solidarity, mutual respect, and genuine support as the cornerstones of their journey. Through their experiences, they challenge the notion of a solitary entrepreneurial path and reveal the immense strength that arises from a network of empowering relationships.

These stories will introduce you to sisters-in-arms who have forged alliances, formed partnerships, and built communities that thrive on trust, encouragement, and mentorship. You will encounter tales of bold entrepreneurs who uplift each other's voices, share resources, and collaborate to tackle shared obstacles. They understand that their collective success is not only a testament to their individual capabilities but also a triumph of their sisterhood.

Sisterhood is shown to be a catalyst for change. From the creation of platforms that amplify women's voices to the establishment of networks that foster innovation and collaboration. Their stories serve as a beacon of inspiration, urging us to celebrate, emulate, and foster the power of sisterhood within our own lives and communities.

This section highlights the significance of sisterhood as a vehicle for transformation and empowerment. These women understand that by lifting each other up, they are simultaneously uplifting their families, their communities, and the entire nation. They recognize that their achievements are not isolated triumphs but powerful waves of change that can reshape the entrepreneurial landscape of Kazakhstan and beyond.

As you embark on this journey through the powerful circle of sisterhood, let the stories within these pages ignite your own brilliance, awaken your belief in the strength of connection, and inspire you to forge deeper bonds with the women in your own life. Together, we can embrace the power of sisterhood, overcome barriers, and create a world where the success of one becomes the success of all.

So, immerse yourself in the narratives that illuminate the profound impact of sisterhood on the lives and achievements of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan. Through their experiences, we uncover the transformative force that lies within the connections we forge, and we will be reminded that when women support each other, there are no limits to what can be accomplished.

BAYAN MAKSATKYZY'S JOURNEY TOWARDS AUTONOMY IN THE REALM OF SHOW BUSINESS

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova
Photographer: Andrey Nikolsky

Bayan Maxatkyzy, born in 1974 in Uralsk, Kazakhstan, is a remarkable figure in the entertainment industry. Hailing from a creative family background, her talents as an actor, TV presenter, and producer have made her a prominent name in Kazakhstan show business. Bayan has achieved significant success and made a lasting impact in the industry.

Being an ambitious individual, Bayan set herself the goal of becoming popular. To achieve this, she would daily board a bus that passed by the "Qazaqfilm" film studio. One day, she managed to capture the attention of a renowned director, which ultimately helped her secure one of the leading roles in Talgat Temenov's 1993 film "Love Station," turning her into a star. This success laid the foundation for her future endeavors.



As she pursued her education in journalism, Bayan began working with different TV channels, gaining valuable experience in the industry. She later took the initiative to create her own projects, including her production company, Shine Production, allowing her to explore her creative vision and bring unique stories to life.

NURTURING TALENT AND SHAPING THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Bayan Maxatkyzy is a prominent figure in Kazakhstan show business, known for her role as a producer and the founder of a successful production company. With a focus on creating high-quality films and developing young talent, Bayan's contributions have had a transformative impact on the entertainment industry in Kazakhstan.

One of Bayan's notable achievements is forming the girl band "KeshYOU" in 2006. Collaborating with her sister, the famous vocalist Bagym Mukhitdenova, KeshYOU quickly became one of the most popular girl bands in the country. This project proved immensely successful, with an annual income of around $500,000. The group's talent and popularity were recognized internationally when they reached the semifinals of the prestigious Turkvision-2013 song contest and received numerous awards in the category of "Best Female Group."

Bayan Maksatkyzy's dedication to nurturing talent extends beyond music. She actively involves the singers from "KeshYOU" in various film and TV series productions, providing them with diverse opportunities to showcase their skills. Through her production center, Bayan has created a platform for several notable proteges who have achieved remarkable success in their respective fields.

Among her protégés, Erke Esmakhan has become a mega-influencer with millions of followers on Instagram, solidifying her status as one of the top social-media influencers in Kazakhstan. Zhanar Dugalova's victory in the Turkvision-2014 music competition propelled her career to new heights. Kamshat Zholdybaeva and Moldir Auelbekova have also gained substantial followings and received prestigious honors. These success stories exemplify Bayan's commitment to nurturing talent and providing opportunities for growth.

Bayan continues to play the role of a mentor in the lives of young, talented stars such as Zhuldyz Omirgali, Balzhan Bidash, Akbota Nur, Gulnaz Zholanova – recognized actresses, singers, and TV presenters. Bayan has established herself as a powerful force through her production company, creating top-rated films and transforming young talents into household names.

Bayan Maxatkyzy has shaped the entertainment industry in Kazakhstan. From the formation of "KeshYOU" to the success stories of her proteges, she has left an indelible mark on the country's entertainment landscape. Through her visionary approach and support, Bayan continues to elevate the industry by discovering and fostering exceptional talents, ultimately contributing to its growth and success.

TRANSFORMING TRAUMA INTO ART

Bayan's personal experience of surviving domestic violence in 2016 became a pivotal moment that not only transformed her life but also sparked a national conversation

about this important issue. She became a victim of domestic violence, enduring multiple knife wounds inflicted by her husband of 21 years. This traumatic incident highlighted the prevalence of domestic violence and the urgent need for awareness and support in Kazakhstan. With the legal system ensuring justice, Bayan's ex-husband, Bakhytbek Esentaev, was sentenced to nine years of imprisonment in a maximum-security penal colony. The case put a spotlight on the importance of addressing domestic violence and the need for societal change.

Bayan's personal experience of surviving domestic violence served as the inspiration for the powerful film "Baqyt" ("Happiness"). The film shed light on the sensitive topic of domestic violence and garnered widespread acclaim. Its profound impact was recognized internationally when "Baqyt" received the Audience Award at the 72nd Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) in 2022. This prestigious recognition further cemented Bayan's reputation as a talented producer and storyteller. By using her platform to bring attention to the issue of domestic violence, she became an advocate for survivors and a catalyst for societal change.

Bayan Maxatkyzy's journey from victim to advocate showcases her efforts to address the issue of domestic violence. Through her film "Baqyt" and her commitment, she has not only raised awareness but also empowered survivors and initiated conversations that can lead to lasting change in Kazakhstan. Bayan's impact extends beyond the entertainment industry, demonstrating the transformative power of art in addressing social issues.

Bayan Maxatkyzy's influence reaches far beyond her individual achievements. Collaborating with her sister Bagym Mukhitdenova, she has cultivated a powerful circle of sisterhood, creating an environment that nurtures and empowers women in the entertainment industry. Their joint efforts have had a transformative impact on aspiring artists, leading to remarkable success stories.

Bayan's dedication to empowering and bolstering women shines through her establishment of the national beauty pageant "Kazakh Aruy." This initiative emphasizes the significance of knowledge, culture, and language in defining true Kazakh beauty. By creating platforms that celebrate women's achievements and talents, Bayan promotes inclusivity and empowerment within the industry.

Bayan uses her influential social media presence to project an image of an independent, strong, and modern woman who fearlessly expresses her opinions. She regularly addresses political, social, and cultural issues, with a particular focus on promoting gender equality.

Bayan diverges from conventional forms of feminist activism and instead focuses on promoting equal opportunities in education for women. She advocates for a 50% representation of women in Parliament, believing that this gender balance would drive comprehensive social change. Bayan envisions a society with cleaner streets, innovative teaching methods, and transformed childcare facilities and schools. "This is an exclusively female privilege, and women, driven by their instinct for self-preservation due to their role in bearing children, remain free from corruption. When this phenomenon becomes widespread in the world, it will bring about a sense of balance." Bayan's vision embraces gender-balanced transformations that will restore equilibrium in society.

Bayan Maxatkyzy's journey in the entertainment industry is one of resilience, talent, and empowerment. From her early beginnings to her achievements as a producer, mentor, and influencer, she has made a lasting impact on the Kazakhstan show business scene. Her commitment to promoting gender equality, nurturing new talents, and addressing domestic violence exemplifies her passion for making a difference. With her creative endeavors, inspiring leadership, and personal strength, Bayan continues to shape the future of the entertainment industry in Kazakhstan.


COFFEE DAY

Section 1

DINARA SATZHAN: FORGING SOLIDARITY, INSPIRING CHANGE, AND PIONEERING IN BUSINESS LEADERSHIP

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova

Dinara Satzhan is a multifaceted personality: a journalist, TV host, entrepreneur, fashion producer, blogger, and much more.

BROADCASTING BEGINNINGS

Dinara first captured national attention as a news anchor on the “Khabar” channel. Her dynamic presence and passion for storytelling earned her respect from the public. Her dedication to media extended beyond the newsroom; she is the writer and host of “Status QUO” and “Sky Studio” videos on YouTube. In 2017, during her tenure as an advisor to the Chairman of the Board of TRK “Kazakhstan”, she played an instrumental role in the rebranding of the National TV channel “Qazaqstan.”


LATE NIGHT
SHOW
DINARA SAFIULINA

CHILDHOOD FOUNDATIONS

From her childhood, the seeds of Dinars dynamism were evident. According to her parents, young Dinara was not the type to be spoiled, but she had an innate sense of leadership. She would gather neighborhood kids for trips to museums or conduct games and concerts. Her natural inclination towards performance and organization shone bright as she led cultural events in school and recitals at home. These early signs of her charisma and leadership set the foundation for her eventual foray into media.

Her parents keenly observed Dinara's communication skills and believed journalism was her true calling. In a leap of faith, Dinara embarked on her media journey during her first year in college, joining the TV channel "Shahar." Her father recalls advising her to prioritize experience over salary, even promising to pay her himself. He wanted her to be so good that she had eventually host her own TV program, at which point he had gift her the sports car she had always wanted. Dinara's dedication was evident when she worked without a salary for two years. Still, she surprised her parents by bringing home her first earnings, emphasizing the value of hard work.

ENTREPRENEURIAL ENDEAVORS

Beyond her achievements in media, Dinara's entrepreneurial spirit is awe-inspiring. She always harbored ambitions to establish her own ventures. Over the years, she launched a magazine, newspaper, and even a production studio. Through her ventures' highs and lows, her parents remained her rock, providing both moral and financial support. They stressed the importance of experience, integrity, and assured her of forthcoming success.

Her pivot into fashion was spurred by her dissatisfaction with her TV salary and a desire to find a business niche she truly loved. Dinara's epiphany came in 2009 when she fell in love with designer clothes by Aida Kaumenova (@aidakaumenova_official). Recognizing the potential of designer clothes #madeinkz, she collaborated with Aida to open the "Aida KaumeNOVA" store in Keruen shopping center. Driven by passion and an acute business sense, she later launched the "Red Carpet" store, collaborated with designers including Naiyl Baikuchukov, and eventually in 2017, unveiled her own clothing brand, Dinara Satzhan.

ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN AND UNDISCOVERED TALENTS

Dinara Satzhan has identified a pressing issue in the way women in Kazakhstan support each other, noting a distinct difference compared to the strong bonds between men. Based on her experiences, she found that women, often, become the most stringent critics of their own gender, especially evident during political elections.

Yet, Dinara envisions a different path. She champions the idea of women uniting in support, moving beyond envy or rivalry. By celebrating and bolstering one another, women can create lasting positive impacts for future generations. Dinara's admiration for proactive women, who 'seize the reins of their destiny rather than waiting for change' is profound.

In her journey, Dinara has consistently backed women entrepreneurs and creators. Her support is not contingent on gratitude; she truly believes that by bolstering strong women, she indirectly strengthens herself and her community. Her dedication to lifting others is not restricted to women; she's open to aiding anyone who seeks her out. One such individual was Rufinat, a Kazakh woman



who crafts homemade slippers. Dinara supported her, and today, these slippers are a loved product in her store.

Dinara's fashion store has become a haven for over 30 Kazakhstani designers, many of whom began their journey unknown to the world. Leveraging her popularity, Dinara shines a spotlight on these talents, ensuring their hard work receives the recognition it deserves. A poignant example of this is Aygerim Bolatova, a wheelchair-bound designer. Their chance meeting in 2017 led to Dinara promoting her knitwear, which culminated in Aygerim winning a significant prize from the Damu Fund and establishing her brand, Ayka Bolatova.

In 2009, Dinara's collaboration with Aida Kaumenova resulted in a breakthrough: a Kazakh designer's store in a mall amidst elite international brands. This success was emblematic of the power of female collaboration, a motif present throughout Dinara's professional life, whether with fellow TV hosts like Bayan Maxatkyzy and Oksana Peters or supportive friends such as Aigul Mukey and Lyazzat Tanysbay. Dinara believes that genuine appreciation and respect form the foundation of such partnerships. Women, she asserts, need to be raised to view other women as allies, not competitors.

'Women have a unique, innate understanding of one another'. This soft power, as Dinara describes it, is underpinned by an ability to negotiate conflicts, be flexible, and exercise gentle force. The true potential of this power remains untapped due to a prevalent culture where women, at times, impede one another's progress. This dynamic is counterproductive, especially in a world predominantly steered by men, whether in governance, business, or technology sectors.

Dinara attributes her strong advocacy for women to the support she has received from them. The resilience, ambition, and problem-solving abilities of women have always inspired her. She encourages aspiring female entrepreneurs to seek advice, continuously learn, and engage in productive communities. By immersing oneself in an environment of like-minded businesswomen, individuals can adapt their mindset, becoming more disciplined and accountable.

Dinara emphasizes the importance of nurturing the values of friendship, giving, and sharing in young girls. Childhood signs of possessiveness or competitiveness should be red flags for parents. Instead, instilling admiration for others' achievements and encouraging camaraderie should be prioritized. For Dinara, coming across a successful woman is not about competition but inspiration. Admiring such individuals and seeking connections rather than being envious embodies the essence of female solidarity.

"These are homemade slippers made in Kazakhstan. She is a Kazakh. Did I have the right to say no to her? I think I had no right to deny her. And now, everyone gladly wears her slippers."


BROOKLYN



Section 1

RUFINAT ORYNBAYEVA AND UNBREAKABLE SISTERHOOD TIES

Authors: Dana Sailaukhanova and Nurlan Kulbatyrov

"As a mom on maternity leave with a second child, I decided to diversify my everyday life with an interesting hobby," Rufinat Orynbaeva recalled. "As a little girl next to my grandmother, I learned how to hold needles and hooks and knit different small things."

Amidst the chaos of caring for her young children, Rufinat noticed a growing trend – coarse yarn made from sliced knitwear. Intrigued by this new material, she delved into market research and sought inspiration from successful case studies. House slippers caught her eye as an interesting venture to explore, and she embarked on her knitting journey.



“My friend and I were knitting together, purely for inspiration, there were no special sales,” Rufinat shared. She longed to share her slippers with a wider audience, and it took her some time to gather the courage to approach Dinara Satzhan. “And one evening I wrote to her, and she turned out to be very friendly and .... open.”

The first meeting between Rufinat and Dinara, a renowned journalist, broadcaster, and entrepreneur with a large social media platform, exceeded Rufinat’s expectations. “She even offered not only to advertise them, but even to sell them in her boutique,” Rufinat recalled with excitement. Dinara’s genuine support and approachability left an indelible impression on Rufinat.

Their collaboration took flight, and the sale of Rufinat’s slippers in Dinara Satzhan’s store became a reality. “We set about preparing the first batch, and that’s how we launched the sale of slippers at Dinara Satzhan’s store without even planning it,” Rufinat recounted gratefully. Dinara’s support became instrumental in introducing Rufinat’s hand-knit slippers to a wider audience, catapulting her business to new heights.

This remarkable tale showcases the power of sisterhood – the support, mentorship, and collaboration that can drive women entrepreneurs to achieve greatness. Dinara Satzhan’s willingness to extend a helping hand to a fellow woman in business is a testament to the extraordinary bonds that Kazakhstani women forge. Despite Dinara’s fame and success, she remained approachable and friendly, embracing the spirit of unity that defines the sisterhood.

Rufinat’s journey reflects the broader experience of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan. It is a story of seizing opportunities, breaking free from societal norms, and finding personal fulfillment through entrepreneurship. Rufinat’s desire for more freedom, financial stability, and personal growth led her to embark on this path, and she stands as an inspiration to others who yearn for a similar journey.

Rufinat’s journey highlights the interconnectedness and supportive nature of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan. Through her encounter with Dinara Satzhan, Rufinat not only gained exposure and sales but also discovered the transformative power of solidarity and mutual encouragement. Dinara’s support opened doors to new clients and amplified Rufinat’s impact, proving that together, women can accomplish far more than they ever could alone.

As Rufinat reflects on her own journey, she emphasizes the qualities of women entrepreneurs – superhumans with strong personalities, who are proactive, with boundless energy, and the ability to harmoniously balance various aspects of life. Her aspirations extend beyond her own success; she wants to help others achieve their entrepreneurial dreams, providing guidance and support based on her own expertise and experiences.

Rufinat’s commitment to empowering others extends to her family as well. Recognizing her niece’s interest in psychology and nail art, she encouraged her to offer sessions and teach others. Rufinat’s mentorship and encouragement fueled her niece’s confidence, enabling her to take courses, teach her friends, and expand her clientele. This ripple effect of support exemplifies the profound impact that women can have on each other’s lives, creating a cycle of empowerment and growth.

In sharing her story, Rufinat yearns for individuals to break free from the constraints imposed by society. She explained that in Kazakhstan, there is often a prescribed path to success, involving prestigious degrees and well-paying jobs in established institutions. However, Rufinat encourages others to embrace their unique journeys and stay true to themselves, even if it means deviating from society's expectations. Living authentically and pursuing one's passions and dreams, she believes, is the ultimate path to fulfillment and happiness.

Rufinat's narrative epitomizes the spirit of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan and their commitment to supporting and uplifting one another. Through the unbreakable thread of sisterhood, they weave a tapestry of inspiration, resilience, and collective success, redefining the entrepreneurial landscape of Kazakhstan and beyond. Rufinat's journey is just the beginning—a testament to the limitless possibilities that unfold when women empower each other to dream, create, and thrive.





Section 1

MEREY MUSTAFINA AND TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF SOCIAL BONDS

Authors: Madina Nurguzhina and Dana Sailaukhanova

Merey Mustafina, a producer and founder of Umay Global, has emerged as a trailblazer in the realm of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. Armed with an MA degree in Development Management from Westminster University and an alumnus of the Executive Leadership Programme THNK School of Creative Leadership, Merey is an entrepreneur and networking expert whose journey is deeply intertwined with the power of connections.

As a co-founder of Umay Global, a networking and mentoring support company, Merey's path to leadership in women's entrepreneurship was unexpected for her yet she embraced it wholeheartedly. Her extensive experience in networking and organizing events paved the way for her remarkable journey, long before networking became a buzzword in Kazakhstan.



Merey's involvement in the women's community 'Astana Ladies Club', and her role as an ambassador for Women Entrepreneurship Day in Kazakhstan brought her face-to-face with specific misconceptions and misunderstandings surrounding women's communities. Contrary to popular belief, Merey emphasizes that pure women's communities are not about feminism or opposition to men. Instead, they provide a unique space where women find support, sincere emotions, and a sense of belonging.

Merey explained that in many cases, men also need support, but societal expectations often prevent them from showing vulnerability. Masculinity is often associated with setting examples at work, at home, and among friends. Consequently, men's communities tend to prioritize business networking and activities. In contrast, women's communities focus on nurturing "soul-to-soul" connections that allow women to open up and be vulnerable.

Merey explains that while every woman has her own micro-community comprising sisters, friends, mothers, and aunts, joining a women's business community provides a deeper level of understanding and support for women entrepreneurs. As more women venture into entrepreneurship, it becomes crucial to provide them with resources and connections to thrive. Merey's journey exemplifies the significance of building communities that empower women through the strength of "sisterhood."

Merey firmly believes that women are the greatest creative force. She recognizes their potential to achieve remarkable things when united. Consequently, Merey has always emphasized the need to create platforms that effectively unify and enable women entrepreneurs to interact.

Women face unique challenges in entrepreneurship, such as the "work-family" dilemma and the need to balance personal and professional responsibilities. Business communities predominantly consisting of men often fail to fully comprehend these issues, leaving women unheard and misunderstood. Merey's experiences have fostered a deep understanding of the importance of women-only spaces. These spaces allow women to share the joys and struggles of entrepreneurship, while finding the support, empathy, and understanding they need from fellow women entrepreneurs.

Initially skeptical about the necessity of such spaces, Merey's involvement in the "Umay" project helped her realize the immense value of women-only networking and the pivotal role such communities play in the lives of women entrepreneurs. These communities provide safe spaces where women can freely express their emotions without fear of judgment or rejection. The support and understanding found within these communities are invaluable, creating a nurturing environment to overcome the challenges of business. The value of "sisterhood" cannot be underestimated, and Merey encourages women everywhere to seek out and participate in these supportive communities.

"We have different women in our community: singles, married, mothers, and we have different interests, however, helping others is the one thing that all of us have in common."

ABOUT FEMALE ENERGY IN BUSINESS

The role of women in business has often been overshadowed by the male-dominated industry. However, Merey firmly believes that success in business is not exclusive to men, suggesting that women possess the ability to achieve success in their unique feminine way. While men may prioritize goals without finding inspiration or joy in their businesses, Merey says that women are more emotionally connected to their work. Merey stresses the importance of increasing women's feminine energy, striking a balance between feminine and masculine energies in a ratio of approximately 80/20.

In Merey's opinion women's emotional intelligence is often more developed than that of men. However, societal expectations sometimes lead women to neglect their emotional side, living predominantly in a "male" manifestation. This excess of masculine energy can lead to emotional exhaustion. Thus, Merey advocates for women to increase their feminine energy, infusing their businesses with softer approaches and strategies. A woman's business should be a source of inspiration and nourishment, allowing her to truly enjoy the journey.

"WHEN YOU CHANGE A WOMAN, YOU CHANGE THE WORLD!"

Merey holds a firm belief in the transformative power of women. She asserts that women possess inherent creativity, and a positive change in the life of even one woman can have profound and far-reaching effects. When a woman finds happiness and success, she naturally shares her knowledge and experiences, inspiring and motivating other women, whether they be sisters, colleagues, or relatives. This ripple effect continues, spreading to families, friends, colleagues, and beyond, resulting in exponential improvement within society.

Empowering women constitutes a significant part of Merey's life mission. She is dedicated to investing in women's development, providing them with the resources and tools they need to unlock their full potential. Merey firmly believes that by supporting and empowering women, we can create a better world for everyone. Her ideas hold particular relevance in a world where women are assuming more leadership roles in business and society. By fostering support and empowerment, we unlock the full potential of women and create a world that benefits us all.

Merey's perspective on Kazakh identity and compassionate networking stems from her conviction that our cultural heritage and values play a pivotal role in shaping our interactions. Kazakhstan's unique history, religious diversity, and cultural amalgamation have created a distinct Kazakh identity, blending Eastern wisdom, Western values, and Nomadic influences. This identity is deeply embedded in the mentality of Kazakh women, who embody strength, wisdom, pride, and intriguing personalities.

While Merey recognizes the importance of networking, she emphasizes the need to establish connections based on shared values and mutual respect. For Merey, networking is not merely a means to achieve personal goals; it is an opportunity to help individuals connect with others who share similar values. Acting as a "catalyst" in people's lives, Merey brings the right people together, allowing them to recognize each other's unique strengths.

Central to Merey's approach is the belief that every person possesses

intrinsic values that warrant respect. When individuals understand and respect their own values, they are more likely to recognize and appreciate the values of others, forming connections built on mutual support and understanding. Through this lens, networking takes on a more human-to-human, heart-to-heart, soul-to-soul format, transcending superficial transactions.

Merey's vision for compassionate networking is deeply rooted in Kazakh sacred wisdom, which emphasizes humanistic principles and mutual support. She believes that the cultural heritage of Kazakhstan can serve as a beacon of example in how we interact with one another. Ultimately, Merey's message revolves around understanding and respecting one another, regardless of gender, age, or nationality. By embracing these values, we can create a more connected and supportive world.

Merey's networking journey emphasizes the power of networking and the significance of creating inclusive spaces for women entrepreneurs. Her story illuminates the transformative potential of compassionate networking and the profound impact it can have on personal growth, professional success, and the betterment of society as a whole.



Section 1

DANA ASKAR AND GAUKHAR ASKAR'S SISTERLY BOND: FROM VISION TO FRUITION

Author: Alua Nurbayeva

Dana Askar and Gauhar Askar, the eldest of four sisters hailing from Almaty, embarked on an extraordinary venture at the dawn of 2020 – the establishment of their very own kindergarten, named "Da Vinci Kids." Their story unfolds against a backdrop of a caring and financially secure family, a foundation that provides them with the opportunity to attend the best schools and pursue university degrees.

Their parents, particularly their father, served as pillars of support, instilling in them a sense of self-belief and determination. Dana reminisced, "He always used to say that we can do anything we want, we are capable of achieving anything we wish for, and that we are strong individuals. We just need to learn how to use our brain." In their democratic upbringing, the sisters were encouraged to express their opinions fearlessly, fostering the seeds of responsibility within them.



Dana proudly identifies as a feminist, crediting her parents, especially her father, for imparting the confidence and self-belief necessary to build a business. The lessons he taught them continue to shape their entrepreneurial journey, for which Dana holds immense gratitude.

However, tragedy struck when Dana was just 18 years old. Her father's sudden death from a heart attack left a void that seemed insurmountable. Yet, his legacy endured, as he bequeathed the family a grand house in the heart of the city. For years, they rented this property as an office space, but life took a serendipitous turn when both sisters married and became mothers themselves.

The search for a suitable kindergarten for their own children proved challenging. Dana yearned for a place where her children would be nurtured with the same love and care she would provide. Furthermore, her eldest son's allergies necessitated a specialized diet that existing kindergartens in the city could not accommodate. Motivated by these needs and armed with their childhood house, the sisters decided to transform it into a haven of early education and care.

With the permission of their mother, Dana and Gauhar embarked on a renovation journey, officially commencing their business. Their husbands rallied behind them, investing in the refurbishment, though the financial burden remained manageable. The idea of a family-owned kindergarten garnered support, particularly from the women within their family. Their younger sisters stepped up to assist with advertising, leveraging the power of Instagram to spread the word. And their mother, demonstrating profound belief in their mission, provided them with rent-free use of the property for the pivotal first year.

The sisters' determination bore fruit as they secured additional support from the government. Through a financial grant and registration in the "Balapan" government program, they aligned their kindergarten with a national initiative aimed at resolving the shortage of kindergarten spaces. Championed by Head of State Nursultan Nazarbayev, the program aimed to create new opportunities in preschool education and training centers. "Balapan" became the largest budget program in the field of education, with substantial allocations dedicated to its implementation. The state's contribution of 18,000 tenge per month for each child, with parents covering the cost of food, propelled their cause forward.

The two sisters, Dana and Gauhar, assumed distinct responsibilities, orchestrating the development of the kindergarten. Gauhar, the elder sister, shouldered the financial and administrative aspects, engaging with government bodies such as the Ministry of Education and Health and Safety officials. Dana, on the other hand, devoted her attention to food quality, design needs, staff and parent relationships, and the meticulous management of the toy inventory. By dividing these responsibilities, they achieved optimal results and ensured the seamless operation of their kindergarten.

Remarkably, their dedication remained despite the demands of their full-time jobs. Gauhar, as the financial director of a construction company, brought her financial acumen and strategic prowess to Garten's operations. Meanwhile, Dana, a multifaceted entrepreneur running her own tourist agency and striving to establish a clothing brand, "TheCult.kz," infused the venture with her boundless creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.

As Dana reflects on their journey, she attributes their success to the trust they share as sisters. Rather than interfering in each other's domains, they wholeheartedly support and uplift one another – a valuable lesson their father imparted. Dana asserts that their accomplishments would have been impossible without this bond of sisterhood and collaboration.

Today, the sisters dedicate 100% of their time to the kindergarten they built from the ground up. Their commitment and vision have led them to erect a new building, expanding the capacity of their beloved establishment.





Section 1

KURALAY YESMURZAYEVA'S CHRONICLES OF PROSPEROUS GROWTH AND MENTORSHIP IN THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY

Authors: Nurlan Kulbatyrov
and Assel Abdrakhmanova

Kuralay Yesmurzayeva's entrepreneurial journey in the beauty industry showcases the power of determination, feminist solidarity, and the spirit of a trailblazing woman. As the founder of the renowned brand "My Epil," Kuralay has not only revolutionized the concept of sugar waxing but also paved the way for aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly women, in Kazakhstan.

Kuralay's venture began during her maternity leave in 2010 when she recognized an opportunity to combine her love for caring for her newborn with her passion for a new job. What started as a small sugar waxing studio called "Sweet Epil" soon transformed into a modern research and production enterprise known as the "My Epil" brand. Kuralay's dedication and hard work led to the brand's success, with participation in prestigious beauty industry exhibitions and a reputation for excellence.

However, Kuralay's entrepreneurial expedition did not stop at the success of her brand. She had a bigger vision – to empower and uplift other women in the beauty industry. This led to the establishment of the "Academy of Sugaring," a training center aimed at providing comprehensive courses and master classes to aspiring professionals, especially women. Kuralay became a mentor and role model for countless women who wanted to enter the beauty industry and start their own businesses. She nurtured a sense of feminist solidarity by sharing her knowledge, expertise, and empowering them to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams.

Through her Academy, Kuralay traveled to various cities in Kazakhstan and other former – Soviet countries, conducting master classes and sharing her unique techniques. She also developed online lessons that reached international audiences, further expanding her impact and promoting the concept of feminist solidarity on a global scale. Kuralay's approach went beyond business training – she created a supportive environment where women could connect, collaborate, and learn from each other, forming a powerful circle of sisters in the industry.

In addition to her role as an educator and mentor, Kuralay ventured into the distribution of professional depilation products for beauty salons, which further fueled her ambition to create her own brand. The "My Epil" products gained popularity not only within Kazakhstan but also found success in neighboring countries like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia. Kuralay's determination to provide high-quality products while supporting her fellow women entrepreneurs exemplifies the essence of feminist solidarity and the strength that can be derived from uplifting and empowering one another.

Despite the challenges she faced along the way, Kuralay's commitment to quality, combined with her support for other women in the industry, enabled her to overcome obstacles and thrive as a successful entrepreneur.

Kuralay Yesmurzayeva's journey not only exemplifies the potential of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan but also highlights the transformative power of feminist solidarity. Through her leadership, mentorship, and dedication, Kuralay has created a ripple effect of empowerment, opening doors for other women to succeed in the beauty industry. Kuralay's story is a testament to the strength and resilience of women in Kazakhstan, and a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when women unite, support one another, and shatter the glass ceiling together.




MY EPIL
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PROFESSIONAL
myepil_global



Section 1

IRA KHVAN'S INSPIRATIONAL SOJOURN AMIDST THE CREATIVE CURRENTS

Author: Eva Lennartz

Ira Khvan, a talented designer, illustrator, and visual media specialist from Almaty, embodies the power of women supporting each other in their personal and professional development. Her remarkable story is interwoven with the strength and inspiration of different women who have uplifted and guided her. Today, Ira's impact can be seen across Kazakhstan, from designing iconic water bottles to championing social causes through her art.

Education played a pivotal role in shaping Ira's path. With a background in Design of architectural environment, she honed her skills in composition, colors, and the rich history of art and architecture. As a student, Ira's journey took an unexpected turn when she connected with Svetlana, an experienced director who recognized

her potential. Svetlana's belief in Ira's talent and her valuable guidance provided the much-needed push for Ira to explore her creativity and believe in herself. Through this mentorship, Ira learned not only the technical aspects of her craft but also the importance of valuing her work and pricing it accordingly.

Another powerful example of women supporting each other unfolds in Ira's friendship with Nargiza. At the early stages of her career, Nargiza's trust and generosity opened doors for Ira, introducing her to opportunities that would shape her future success. During the challenging times of the pandemic, their collaboration deepened, leading to joint projects and a growing client base. This beautiful synergy exemplifies how mutual support and collaboration among women can pave the way for remarkable achievements.

For Ira, design serves as a powerful instrument that bridges businesses with their audiences, making it visible everywhere in society. Her creative contributions extend beyond aesthetics, sparking conversations on important issues. From designing the striking Shymbulak water bottle labels that celebrate Almaty's iconic landmarks to creating impactful posters that shed light on sexual harassment in public transportation, Ira's work carries a powerful message and challenges societal norms.

But Ira's influence reaches far beyond her professional accomplishments. As a role model and educator, she shares her expertise and inspires the next generation. Through her involvement with the ITeacher Academy, Ira empowers schoolteachers and underprivileged children by teaching them how to create designs independently using simple smartphone applications. By fostering interest and nurturing creativity, she ignites the potential within young minds and proves that a future as a designer, artist, or illustrator is within reach for aspiring girls.

When asked about her advice for young women starting their own businesses, Ira emphasizes the importance of recognizing the value in what they offer, both to themselves and to others. She acknowledges the challenges of accepting help but highlights the transformative power of support from friends and customers who can guide and inspire along the way. Witnessing the growth of women, she has assisted, like Gaukhar, a successful fashion designer, fills Ira with immense joy. These stories reinforce the idea that every journey begins with small steps, and with role models and a strong support network, incredible achievements are possible.

Recognizing the need for a community of women in the creative industries, Ira envisions a future where networking and collaboration among female professionals flourish in Kazakhstan. As she gathers with her girlfriends and connects with individuals from diverse spheres, a vibrant network emerges, fostering innovation and fresh ideas. While acknowledging the existing progress in supporting female entrepreneurs, Ira believes that an even brighter future awaits as more women join forces, sharing experiences and nurturing the next generation. Together, they will close the circle of sisterhood, paving the way for countless success stories and empowering women across Kazakhstan to thrive.




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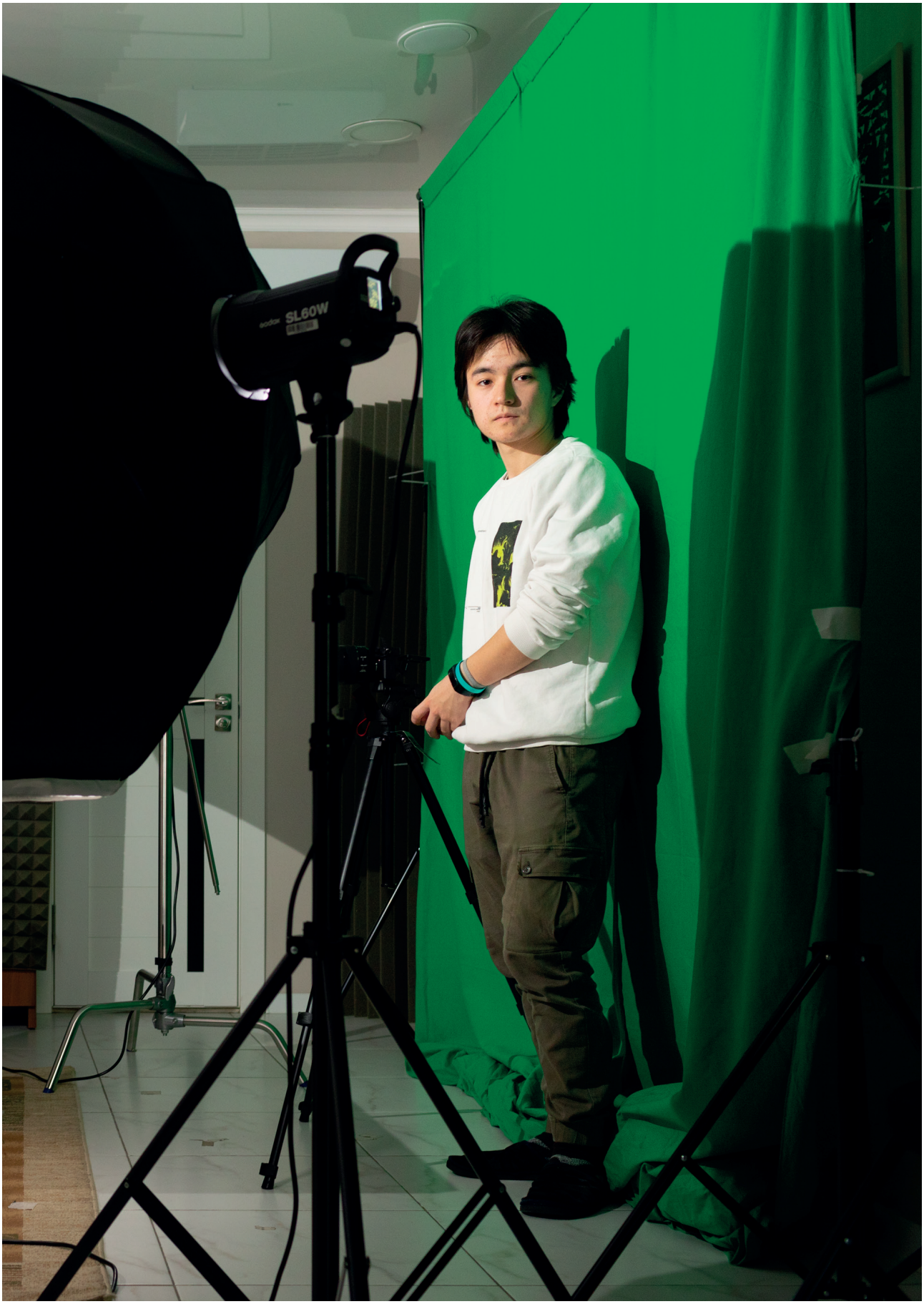
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Section 2

REDEFINING POSSIBILITIES: ENTREPRENEURS WITH DISABILITY PIONEERING CHANGE IN KAZAKHSTAN

In every corner of the world, entrepreneurs strive to turn their dreams into reality, overcoming challenges and obstacles along the way. Yet, for those with disabilities in Kazakhstan, the journey toward entrepreneurship is uniquely arduous. In a country where infrastructure and support for those with disabilities remains limited, many individuals defy societal norms, carving a path toward success. In this section, we shed light on the narratives of entrepreneurs with disabilities in Kazakhstan.

Before delving into their inspiring stories, it is important to understand the context in which disabled entrepreneurs operate. Kazakhstan, like many countries, faces significant challenges when it comes to providing comprehensive support and infrastructure for those with disabilities. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 12% of the Kazakhstan population lives with some form of disability. This translates to more than 2 million individuals who face daily obstacles in various aspects of their lives, including employment and entrepreneurship.

Despite efforts by the Government of Kazakhstan to promote inclusivity and improve the quality of life for disabled individuals, the existing infrastructure and accessibility measures often fall short. Inadequate transportation, limited accessibility in public spaces, and a lack of specialized services make it difficult for disabled entrepreneurs to navigate the business landscape. Additionally, societal stigma and misconceptions further compound the challenges they face.

Amidst these difficulties, disabled entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan have risen above adversity, defying the odds and carving out their own paths to success. Each narrative in this section showcases the journey of an entrepreneur with a disability, offering a glimpse into their triumphs, struggles, and the innovative solutions they have devised to navigate the unique obstacles they face. From creating inclusive businesses that employ and empower those with disabilities to pioneering technological advancements that enhance accessibility, these entrepreneurs have become beacons of inspiration within their communities and beyond.

Their journeys reflect not only the personal achievements of these remarkable individuals but also highlight the urgent need for greater support, infrastructure, and societal change to create a more inclusive and accessible environment for entrepreneurs with disabilities in Kazakhstan. Through their endeavors, they challenge societal perceptions, break down barriers, and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future.

These narratives challenge our preconceptions, ignite our empathy, and illuminate the incredible achievements of entrepreneurs with disabilities in Kazakhstan. By sharing their stories, we hope to spark conversations, foster understanding, and ignite change, ultimately working towards a more inclusive and supportive environment for disabled entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan and beyond.



Section 2

ZAHIRA BEGALIEVA: EMPOWERING ENTREPRENEURS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH ITEACHME

Author: Assel Abdrakhmanova

Zahira Begalieva's journey from a boarding school for people with disabilities to becoming a transformative force in the world of entrepreneurship is remarkable. Her story is an example of her efforts to challenge societal norms and create a more inclusive and empowering environment for disabled individuals in Kazakhstan.

As a young girl, Zahira experienced firsthand the limitations imposed by society on people with disabilities. But rather than succumbing to the confines of these limitations, she developed a belief in her own abilities and a fierce determination to prove that disability should never be a barrier to success.

Zahira's journey into entrepreneurship was not without its obstacles. After working for various organizations, she began to realize that her vision for people with disabilities differed from the institutional contexts in which she grew up. Zahira saw beyond the traditional notions of fighting for rights or protection. She wanted more for her-

self and other people living with disabilities. “Their vision was fighting or protecting your rights. I am living in my own country. Why must I protect or fight?” she boldly questioned.

Recognizing the need for change, Zahira took matters into her own hands. Armed with an MBA degree and a passionate desire to make a difference, she founded IteachMe, a groundbreaking development training center focused on educating and training Kazakhstani youth with disabilities in the field of information technology.

“IteachMe creates equal opportunities and supports people to become the best version of themselves,” Zahira passionately declared, determined to break down the barriers that hindered disabled individuals from pursuing their dreams.

Zahira’s impact extended far beyond the walls of her training center. She recognized that changing the perception of people with disabilities required transforming society. Consequently, IteachMe began providing vital social services to banks, training their employees on how to work with those with disabilities. By equipping bank employees with the necessary knowledge and sensitivity, Zahira aimed to foster a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Over 90% of IteachMe participants found employment or embarked on their own entrepreneurial journeys after completing the program. Zahira’s teachings instilled self-confidence and a desire for equal living in each student, empowering them to defy societal expectations and reach for the stars.

“Do not let limitations define your journey. Break barriers, shatter expectations, and leave your mark on the world”

Zahira’s powerful voice resounds, encouraging disabled individuals to embrace their potential and defy the odds. Zahira inspires others to embrace inclusivity, celebrate the unique talents of every individual, and create a future where disabilities are not seen as limitations but as catalysts for extraordinary achievements. Her journey serves as a testament to the incredible impact entrepreneurs with disabilities can have, igniting a fire within others to break free from societal constraints and forge their own path towards success.

Zahira’s legacy will continue to inspire generations to come, reminding us all that true strength lies not in physical abilities but in the power of the human spirit. Her story is a powerful reminder that disability is not a hindrance but a source of limitless potential.

As Zahira herself once said, “Believe in your abilities and embrace the power within you. You have the strength to redefine what’s possible.” With those words echoing in our hearts, let us embark on a journey of empowerment, inclusivity, and boundless possibilities, driven by the spirit of Zahira Begalieva and all those entrepreneurs with disabilities who dare to dream big and defy the odds.



Section 2

ANARA ABZHANOVA: PAINTING WITH SILENCE

Author: Alua Nurbayeva

Anara Abzhanova's story is a testament to the transformative power of art and the indomitable spirit of a woman who refuses to be defined by her disability. As a professional artist living in Almaty, Anara has overcome numerous challenges to pursue her passion and carve a path of creativity.

Anara's journey began at a young age when she lost her hearing, which also led to speech difficulties. Despite these obstacles, she never allowed her disability to hinder her dreams. Supported by her husband, a professional sign language translator who understands the challenges she faces, Anara embarked on a journey to build a thriving art business and create a platform to showcase her remarkable talent.

While preparing a new landscape painting, Anara discussed her aspirations to expand her artistic reach by incorporating her art into various commercial products. However, her true focus lies in selling her art and creating an online gallery, with plans to open

a physical art gallery in the near future. Determined to turn her dreams into reality, Anara sought the assistance of business school students from Kazakh British Technical University, who prepared a comprehensive business plan and provided valuable insights into marketing strategies. With these tools in hand, Anara now aims to participate in government grants to further fuel her artistic endeavors.

Anara's paintings capture the essence of her surroundings, from the vibrant light of the city to the blossoming beauty of Kazakh nature. Within the genre of romantic realism, she masterfully weaves art, nature, flowers, and the city of Almaty into captivating works that evoke emotion and ignite the imagination. Her artistic expressions transcend barriers, connecting with audiences on a profound level.

Growing up in a challenging environment, raised by a single mother, Anara's journey to becoming an accomplished artist was not without its hurdles. However, she credits her mother's love and support, as well as her own determination, for shaping her into the resilient woman she is today. With her mother's encouragement and the opportunity to attend an art studio for deaf children, Anara's artistic talent flourished under the mentorship of Alexei Utkin.

Throughout her artistic journey, Anara has garnered recognition and accolades for her exceptional talent. Awards such as the Grand Prize at the Republican Festival of Children's Creativity "Zhuldyzai" and the Grand Prix of the XI International Festival of Youth Creativity "Shabyt" in Kazakhstan have affirmed her dedication and skill. Despite facing difficulties during her time at Zhurgenov College of Art and later at the Kazakh National Academy of Arts, where she also became a lecturer, Anara never allowed her disability to hinder her pursuit of knowledge and artistic growth.

As a unique business woman in the art world, Anara encounters additional challenges that arise from within her industry. She has experienced deliberate exclusion and barriers from fellow artists, some of whom also have disabilities. Nevertheless, Anara remains undeterred, recognizing that true success lies in her determination and the impact her art has on those who experience it.

Anara's journey is a testament to the power of art to transcend boundaries, defy societal limitations, and inspire change. She continues to find ways to communicate with a diverse audience, both within Kazakhstan and internationally, leveraging the power of social media to showcase her art and connect with art enthusiasts worldwide. While she acknowledges the importance of online platforms, Anara also cherishes the value of real-world interactions and endeavors to balance her digital presence with meaningful connections offline.

Despite the hurdles she faces, Anara's hope for a brighter future remains steadfast. She understands that the art business can be demanding, especially for someone who is different, but she refuses to let adversity dim her light. Anara Abzhanova serves as a shining inspiration, illuminating a path of possibility and empowering others to embrace their unique gifts and forge their own destinies.

As Anara once said, "Art has no boundaries, and neither do I. I am here to challenge perceptions, break barriers, and create a world where art unites us all." With each stroke of her brush, Anara continues to create a world where artistic expression knows no limits and where the extraordinary is born from the depths of resilience.


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Section 2

NAZIRA KURMASHEVA AND DYNAMICS OF CHESSBOARD INCLUSIVITY

Author: Assel Abdrakhmanova

In the intricate game of life, Nazira Kurmasheva, a remarkable entrepreneur from Almaty, has defied the odds and championed the cause of inclusivity through the realm of chess. Born into a large family in the town of Tulkibas, Nazira's journey has been marked by the interplay of light and darkness, reminiscent of the contrasting squares on a chessboard.

Nazira's indomitable spirit shone through even in her early years, despite the challenges she faced with her vision. As a young girl, she discovered her love for chess, finding solace and inspiration within the strategic movements of the pieces. However, life's adversities struck her path, and she encountered dishonesty, crises, and profound challenges. At one point, her clothing business faltered due to the deceitful actions of those closest to her, leaving her with no choice but to return to her parents' home with her children and no financial security.


QAZAQSTAN

But Nazira's spirit could not be extinguished and she sought opportunities for personal and professional growth. While working at the National Library of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty and pursuing a degree in jurisprudence, she realized the need to forge her own path. Learning about grants available for aspiring entrepreneurs, Nazira reflected deeply on her circumstances. Despite being in her forties, with her own disability and a lack of stable housing, she held onto a resolute belief in herself and her ability to bring her vision to fruition.

Nazira embarked on a transformative journey of self-discovery and business development, centering her efforts around chess and the traditional Kazakh board game, togyzkumalak. Faced with skepticism and doubts from those around her, Nazira remained steadfast in her determination, stating, "Everyone around me told me that nothing would work out, but I felt that I would complete this project. If I start, then I go to the end." With a two-day training program, she honed her entrepreneurial skills, defended her project, and secured the funding needed to purchase the necessary equipment.

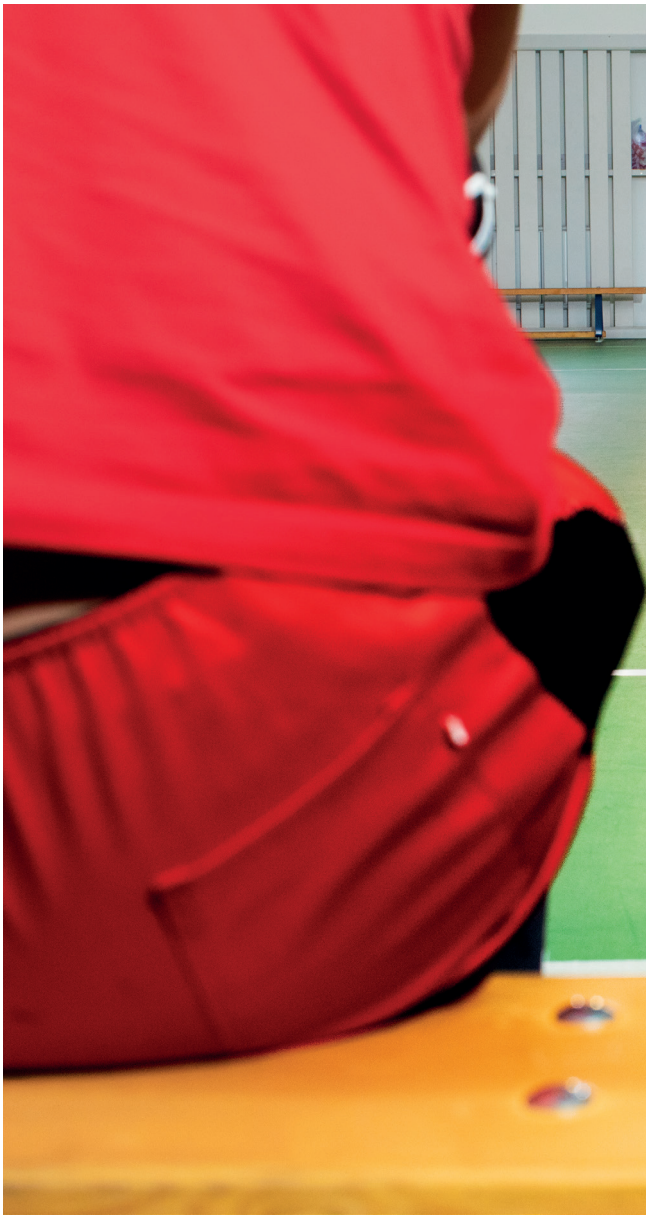
Together with her husband, Nazira established the "Meirimdi El" society for the disabled, dedicated to the development of intellectual games. Their business expanded beyond chess boards to include chess watches, talking watches for the blind, and walking sticks for the visually impaired, sourced from Russia and China. They engaged in public procurement, utilized the power of Instagram for sales, and even exported their products to China, Mongolia, and the Altai Territory.

The renowned German disability organization, Deutsches Blindenhilfswerk paid the attention to "Meirimdi El" community on one of the togyzkumalak tournaments. Intrigued by the concept and potential impact of the community, the Deutsches Blindenhilfswerk presented balls for the game "Goalball" to develop the game among blind people in Kazakhstan. Step by step, rule by rule, "Meirimdi El" led by Nazira started implementation of Goalball among the Kazakhstani community with disabilities.

Nazira acknowledged that Goalball was not a familiar game for her. Despite all financial and organizational challenges, together with her husband, they created the Kazakhstan Goalball Federation. Later, the first Goalball teams emerged in Almaty, Shymkent, Karaganda, and Astana. Now, Goalball championships become a regular sport event, and various teams from Taraz, Shymkent, Semey, Atyrau, Karaganda, East and West Kazakhstan, Almaty and Almaty region demonstrates their willing to participate on Goalballl championship.

Through the game of chess, Nazira Kurmasheva has dismantled barriers, shattered misconceptions, and paved the way for inclusive entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. With each move she makes, Nazira continues to shape a world where every individual, regardless of their abilities, is given a chance to shine and contribute to the rich tapestry of human potential.

In the realm of chess, where each piece holds its unique value and significance, Nazira reminds us that our differences are our greatest strengths. Nazira Kurmasheva's journey teaches us that inclusivity is the ultimate game-changer in entrepreneurship. Embrace diversity, empower others, and together, let us checkmate barriers.





Section 2

ULPAN SAPAK: EXTENDING THE NORMATIVE LIMITS OF ABILITY AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Author: Assel Abdrakhmanova

Hailing from Almaty, Ulpan Sapak is a tenacious entrepreneur who has defied societal limitations to create her own path, empowering herself and inspiring others along the way.

Ulpan's journey began in the serene village of Karazhota, nestled in the Almaty region. From a young age, she faced adversity, born with a cleft lip she was subjected to taunts from her peers. But the love and support of her mother became her guiding light, fostering a spirit of confidence within her. However, fate dealt her an unexpected blow in the seventh grade when she fell ill with the flu. The illness left her with limited mobility, confined to a wheelchair. Amidst the challenges that followed, Ulpan's indomitable spirit remained unyielding.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Determined to rewrite her narrative, Ulpan sought opportunities for growth and connection. It was during this search that she encountered the transformative power of IteachMe, a social enterprise that empowers individuals with disabilities to pursue education and employment. Enrolling in the program, Ulpan became one of its first graduates in Motion Design. Through IteachMe, she not only honed her technical skills but also found a supportive community that fueled her self-esteem and confidence. Buoyed by her newfound belief in herself, Ulpan ventured forth to establish her own printing house.

Ulpan's journey highlights the profound impact of self-esteem on both individuals with disabilities and women entrepreneurs. In a society that often undermines their worth, many face a lack of self-confidence that hinders their progress. Ulpan, however, defied these limitations, embracing personal growth and transformation. As she aptly declares, "Let's not skip life, let's move forward!" Her journey serves as an inspiration for all those who have been held back by self-doubt, encouraging them to embrace their potential and strive for greatness.

Ulpan's path was not without its share of challenges and prejudices. Some of her relatives responded with indifference, while others displayed an overprotective attitude, underestimating her capabilities. Despite these obstacles, Ulpan remained resolute, refusing to let societal perceptions define her worth. She firmly believes that those with disabilities should not be objects of pity but rather champions of their own destinies.

With her own printing company now established, Ulpan has emerged as a beacon of empowerment. Equipped with the necessary tools and equipment, she offers a range of products, from wedding invitations to intricately designed candy boxes for Kazakh celebrations. Her entrepreneurial spirit is matched only by her vision for the future. Ulpan aims to expand her printing center and increase production capabilities, leaving an indelible mark on the business landscape.

In her quest to uplift others, Ulpan has returned to IteachMe, leveraging her wealth of experience, knowledge, and understanding to support individuals with disabilities in their journey toward greater self-esteem. Through her own life, she strives to break the barriers that hinder inclusivity, proving that those with disabilities have the power to change lives and be valuable contributors to society. Her compassionate goals revolve around enabling social integration and fostering a sense of belonging for all.


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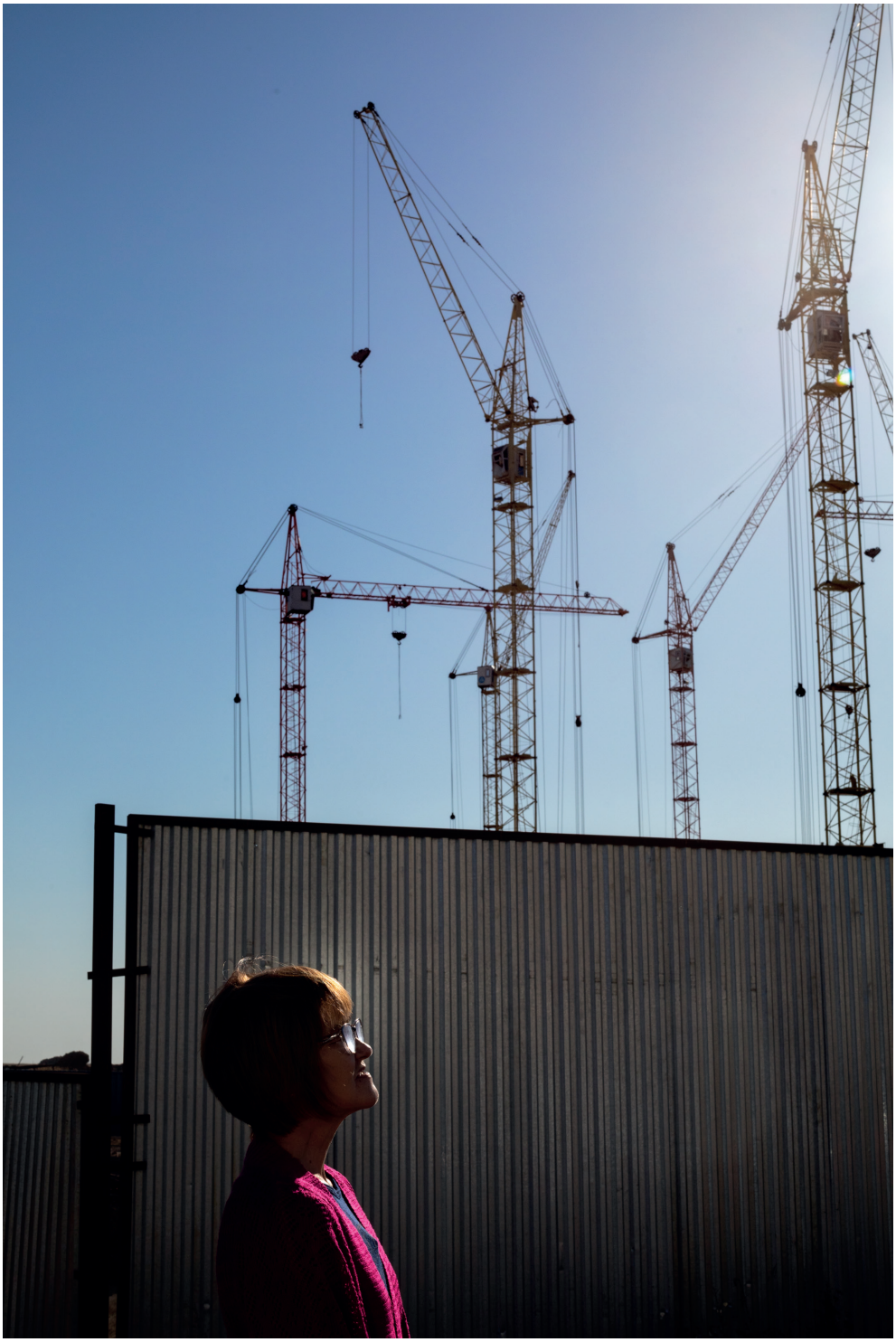

Section 2

AYAQOZ SCHNEIDER: PIONEERING NEW HORIZONS IN KAZAKHSTAN'S GARMENT INDUSTRY

Authors: Nurlan Kulbatyrov and Amina Chaia

Entrepreneurship is a challenging endeavor, and for those with disabilities, the path to success often includes hidden barriers and obstacles. Ayakoz Schneider, a remarkable entrepreneur based in Astana, has not only overcome these challenges but has also created opportunities for herself and others through her social enterprise. Ayakoz's story is an inspiring testament to the transformative power of entrepreneurship, demonstrating how those with disabilities can thrive in the business world.

Ayakoz's journey began amidst profound personal loss and health complications. After the sudden death of her husband, she found herself raising six children on her own. Adversity struck further when Ayakoz suffered a stroke, leading to her official disability status. Despite her higher education and impressive work experience, finding meaningful employment proved difficult due to the constraints imposed by her disability. Determined to provide for her family, Ayakoz enrolled in the "Bastau" training scheme, equipping herself with the skills needed to start her own business.

With the help of a grant, Ayakoz opened her sewing shop, "Jibek," named after her beloved grandmother. Ayakoz's entrepreneurial journey not only sustains her family but also creates employment opportunities for people with disabilities. She firmly believes that it is not the disability itself that limits individuals but rather the barriers imposed by society. Ayakoz's venture highlights the challenges faced by entrepreneurs with disabilities in Kazakhstan and emphasizes the need to address these barriers.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with Ayakoz's rehabilitation period after her stroke. Undeterred, she seized the opportunity to contribute to her community's well-being by sewing face masks. Together with her children, Ayakoz tirelessly stitched masks, fulfilling orders from medical clinics, pharmacies, and sponsors distributing masks for free. Despite the demanding workload and medical advice to rest, Ayakoz persevered, working through sleepless nights to meet the growing demand. Her dedication during this challenging time exemplifies the entrepreneurial spirit that drives her forward.

Ayakoz's vision extends beyond her personal success. Having witnessed the impact of disability in her own life, she aims to build a community that supports those with disabilities. Ayakoz prioritizes hiring people with disabilities in her sewing shop recognizing the responsibility and dedication they bring to their work. For Ayakoz, work is not solely about income but also a source of distraction and a sense of belonging for individuals facing hardships. She understands the transformative power of providing a supportive community where people with disabilities can thrive and find solace.

Inspired by the positive effects of knitting on her eldest son, who also has a disability, Ayakoz plans to organize free knitting courses for children with cerebral palsy and autism. She recognizes knitting as a powerful tool for developing fine motor skills, perseverance, and a sense of focus, offering solace from illness and other challenges. Through her entrepreneurial endeavors, Ayakoz aims to empower those with disabilities, fostering their personal growth and providing them with opportunities for self-expression and development.

Despite her remarkable journey, Ayakoz acknowledges the multiple forms of discrimination that disabled individuals, especially women and the elderly, face in employment. She highlights the complexities of accessing financial support and the high interest rates on loans, particularly for socially-oriented entrepreneurs like herself. Ayakoz advocates for tailored education, mentoring, and acceleration programs to support socially-oriented entrepreneurs, emphasizing the need for increased opportunities and a level playing field.

Ayakoz Schneider's journey exemplifies the transformative potential of disability entrepreneurship. Through her efforts, she not only defies the barriers that society imposes but also paves the way for a more inclusive and accessible entrepreneurial landscape. Ayakoz Schneider is a trailblazer, illuminating the path for entrepreneurs with disabilities and igniting hope for a more equitable and empowering future.


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Section 3

DECOLONIZING ENTREPRENEURSHIP: EMBRACING ROOTS AND NOMADIC CULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION

In the vast landscapes of Kazakhstan, a transformative movement is taking place as entrepreneurs delve into their rich cultural roots, challenging colonial legacies and embracing sustainable practices. This section delves into the narratives of visionary individuals who are harnessing the power of their local heritage and nomadic traditions to shape a decolonized entrepreneurial landscape. By fusing sustainable entrepreneurship with the spirit of decolonization, these changemakers are reshaping the way business is conducted and paving the way for a more equitable and inclusive future.

The entrepreneurs in this section recognize that decolonization is not only a political or historical process but also a mindset that informs their business practices. They draw inspiration from the ancestral wisdom and nomadic culture deeply embedded in Kazakhstan's history, seeking to reclaim and revitalize their traditions while addressing the environmental and social challenges of the present. Embracing their roots,

these entrepreneurs prioritize sustainable and ethical business models that challenge the dominant narratives imposed by colonial systems. They strive to decolonize their relationships with the land, communities, and resources, recognizing the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. By rejecting exploitative practices and fostering meaningful connections, they empower local communities, promote cultural preservation, and create avenues for economic growth that respects indigenous knowledge and values.

Through their ventures, these entrepreneurs emphasize responsible stewardship of the land and resources, advocating for sustainable agriculture, eco-friendly production methods, and fair trade practices. They weave the principles of circular economy, reducing waste, and promoting conscious consumption into the fabric of their businesses. Moreover, they actively engage with local communities, collaborating with artisans, farmers, and traditional craftsmen, amplifying their voices and ensuring their fair representation in the economic landscape.

By centering decolonization in their entrepreneurship journey, these visionary individuals are challenging dominant power structures and dismantling the legacies of colonialism. They recognize that true sustainability cannot be achieved without addressing the historical injustices that have marginalized indigenous communities and eroded their cultural heritage. Join us as we embark on a transformative journey through the narratives of these inspiring entrepreneurs, who are decolonizing entrepreneurship through their embrace of roots and nomadic culture. Through their innovative approaches, they demonstrate that sustainability and decolonization are intertwined, offering a blueprint for a more just and harmonious future. Together, they illuminate the path towards a truly equitable and regenerative entrepreneurial landscape, where cultural diversity and ecological wisdom flourish hand in hand.

Section 3

AIGERIM AKENOVA: REINVIGORATING CULTURAL TRADITIONS THROUGH THE PRISM OF AIKEN'S FASHION BRAND

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova

Aigerim's passion for fashion began in the early stages of her life. Even as a young girl, she possessed an innate love for craftsmanship, spending hours perfecting intricate beadwork, embroidery, knitting, and origami. Interestingly, she did not initially find joy in drawing, but rather in the world of crafts. Reflecting on her childhood, Aigerim reminisced, "One of my brightest memories was when my grandfather would transit through Karaganda airport, my hometown, on his business trips. He always brought me gifts, and one time, he brought my first children's sewing machine. My mother and I made a dark green drapery coat with a Karakul lambskin collar and cuffs for my Barbie doll. I was just five years old at the time." Little did she know that this early foray into fashion would ignite a lifelong pursuit of her dreams.

Aigerim set her sights on the European Institute of Design in Milan, Italy. Despite societal expectations that discouraged women from venturing far, her family recognized her burning desire to follow her dreams and supported her unconditionally. Aigerim's

time in Milan became a transformative chapter in her life, where she discovered the power of merging her Kazakhstani heritage with contemporary design aesthetics. It was during this period that she reflected, “In our family, my admission abroad was a phenomenon. Girls were usually not allowed to go far. Through my aspirations, I have shown that this was my dream. As a result, my family supported me and let me go abroad to follow these dreams.”

Building on her experience in Milan, Aigerim applied for an exchange student program and was selected among European Institute of Design students to go to Los Angeles for a summer quarter at the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising (FIDM). Learning the business side of fashion from the American fashion industry leaders and creative conceptual approach to design from Italian maestros, she strengthened her vision and skills to build her own brand one day.

Recalling her time in Milan after graduation, Aigerim shared: “I had the opportunity to work as an assistant at Carta e Costura, a small but daring Italian fashion brand, which also was designing for MaxMara Group and BVLGARI. Through professional connections made during my studies and internships with the textile industry I quickly advanced in my international career as a fashion designer.”

Following her experiences in Italy and the United States, Aigerim found herself in Bahrain, entrusted with the task of introducing a brand to the international market. Recognizing the fierce competition in the fashion industry, she understood the need for something truly unique. Embracing the theme of identity, Aigerim decided to work with ‘identity’ and made collections with that theme: including an Arab-Bedouin collection and a second dialogue between Japanese and Arabic cultures. Reflecting on this period, Aigerim expressed her thoughts, “Living and traveling in different countries made me reflect on how Kazakhstan stands out. I found myself explaining the unique qualities of Kazakhstanis that are authentic to our cultural intricacies that shape our identity.”

It was during these moments of introspection that Aigerim’s experimentation with Kazakh handbook and accessories resurfaced in her mind. The idea took hold, fusing her design prowess with her passion for her homeland’s cultural heritage. However, she encountered challenges in communicating these because of people’s lack of knowledge and understanding of Kazakhstan and it’s culture.
She explained,

“I needed to explain to some people for nearly half an hour, trying to help them understand why we look like this, that we are located between China and Russia and why we are muslims. These thoughts arose from my experiences living and traveling abroad, and they reflected my understanding of our distinctive qualities as Kazakhstani people, qualities that make us unique.”

Motivated by a deep-rooted desire to celebrate and preserve Kazakhstan’s cultural legacy, Aigerim’s start-up company, AIKEN, began to take shape. Each creation carried a profound meaning, interweaving her designs with the essence of

nomadic heritage and a yearning to reconnect with lost roots.

One of her first collections, “Horizons,” paid homage to the nomadic roots of the Kazakh people – a fictional story of nomads reaching Baikonur and embarking on a quest to explore new vertical horizons. Aigerim’s designs effortlessly blended authenticity with contemporary sophistication, capturing the spirit of the nomadic lifestyle and infusing it into modern fashion.

Continuing her artistic exploration, Aigerim embarked on a dialogue between steppe nomads and Polynesian nomads in her second collection. Expanding the scope of nomadism far beyond the Kazakh steppes, she embraced the sea nomadism of Polynesian islands. Using noble jacquard fabrics and high-tech materials, her designs encapsulated the hues of the ocean, the golden expanses of the steppe, and the vibrant reds of exotic hibiscus and local poppies, constructing a rich tapestry of cultural interconnectedness.

In her third collection, “Essence of a Woman,” Aigerim draws a parallel between the earth and the female essence, channeling her focus on environmental consciousness. This collection paid homage to Umai, the earth goddess and patron of children in Tengrism, as it explored the study of female nature through clothing and imagery. Aigerim’s designs became a celebration of femininity, an ode to the interconnectedness between women and the environment that sustains us all.

Aigerim reflects her cultural heritage and identity in all her creations. In 2022 she introduced the AIKEN homeware line. The dining collection “Tactile Living” expresses the nomadic culture of hospitality and the idea that every guest is treated as a ‘messenger from the heavens. “Yurt – house of the nomads, was full of highly tactile natural materials, and that is my inspiration for the choices of materials in my collection.” It was an honour for her to debut with this collection at the Kârvân Journey at Milan Design Week where the essence of Central Asian heritage came to life at Alcova. Aigerim masterfully showcased a modern and innovative interpretation of Kazakh rich culture and exquisite artisanal skills.

Throughout her journey, Aigerim fostered a collaborative spirit among her team members, empowering them to contribute their creativity to the AIKEN brand. She believed that her work served as a platform for engagement, where ideas flowed freely, and each team member had the opportunity to bring forth their unique inspiration. Together, they embarked on a mission to elevate people’s understanding of Kazakhstan’s rich heritage and contemporary arts through the world of fashion.

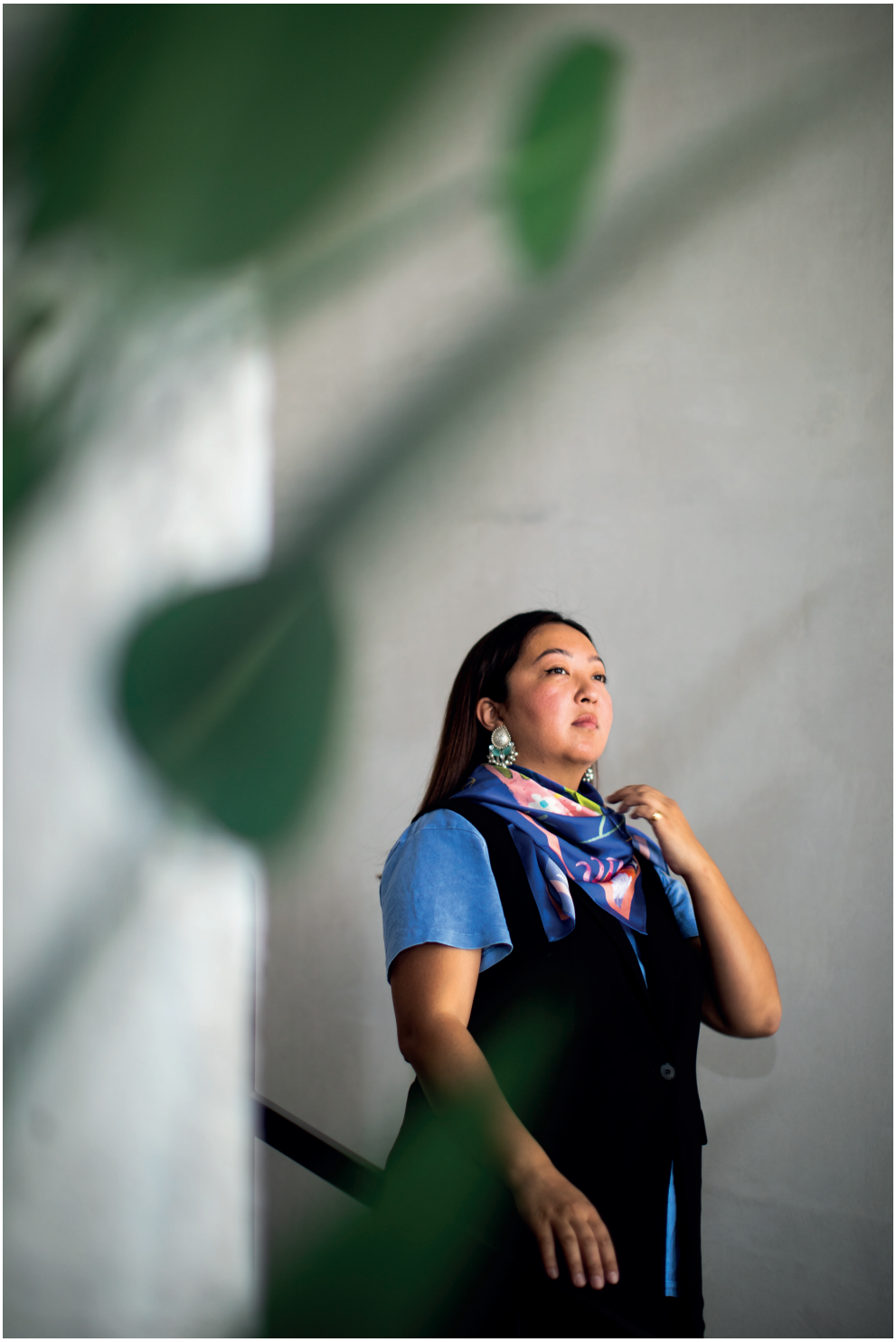
Though Aigerim initially aspired to conquer the international fashion market, her mentor – a seasoned industry veteran from Japan – wisely advised her to begin by conquering her local market. By focusing on the local scene and becoming a leader in her homeland, Aigerim assumed the role of coordinator for the Fashion Revolution movement in Kazakhstan. With this initiative, she strives to advocate for conscious consumption and production, nurturing local artisans, designers and preserving traditional craftsmanship. Her success has become a testament to her commitment to decolonize the fashion

industry and empower her fellow creative entrepreneurs to illuminate the world with the vibrant spirit of Kazakhstan's cultural heritage and the transformative power of sustainable fashion.

In Aigerim Akenova's remarkable journey with AIKEN, she has seamlessly woven together the threads of decolonization, cultural resurgence, and sustainable entrepreneurship. Aigerim has not only become a visionary fashion designer but also a cultural ambassador, bridging the gap between the past and the present, and inspiring others to rediscover their roots and reimagine the future through creativity and sustainable practices.







Section 3

AIGERIM KARIBAYEVA AND THE SPIRIT OF KAZAKH HERITAGE

Authors: Dana Sailaukhanova and Nurlykhan Aljanova

In the sprawling city of Astana, a creative force named Aigerim Karibayeva, known by her artistic alias Art_Aika, embarked on an extraordinary journey of decolonization and ethno-creative entrepreneurship. At the age of 35, Aigerim is a proud owner of a vibrant art showroom and digital store, where her captivating paintings, posters, phone cases, shoppers, mugs, toys, stickers, and more breathed life into the spirit of her Kazakh heritage.

Aigerim's love for drawing blossomed from her earliest memories, fueling a passion that propelled her to enroll at the esteemed Zhurgenov Kazakh National Art Academy in 2005. While studying, she eagerly undertook independent projects, honing her skills and building a remarkable portfolio that would lay the foundation for her entrepreneurial journey. Aigerim fondly acknowledged the profound influence of her mother's encouragement, which ignited her artistic flame and guided her towards early success.

After spending years as a graphic designer, Aigerim embarked on a realization – her ambitions could not be confined within the boundaries of conventional employment. Drawing upon her experiences, she made the courageous leap from full-time work to freelance projects, armed with a strong work ethic, exceptional negotiation skills, and the ability to forge direct connections with clients. These skills, acquired during her previous endeavors, laid the groundwork for her future success as an entrepreneur.

The seed of entrepreneurship began to germinate during Aigerim's second maternity leave, where she transformed her thoughts into tangible actions. She sought out a local coffee shop that warmly embraced her vision, providing a space for her to exhibit her postcards, mugs, and posters. Simultaneously, she skillfully curated her Instagram page, pinning the location of the coffee shop for those interested in witnessing and acquiring her unique creations. The thrill of her first revenue – an awe-inspiring 40,000 tenge in the first month – made her determined to follow her own path.

As Aigerim's artistic journey flourished, so did the coffee shop that showcased her work. The mutual collaboration between artist and establishment blossomed, attracting a growing clientele who marveled at Aigerim's artistry and eagerly embraced her merchandise. Over time, her presence on the coffee shop's shelves became a steadfast fixture, accompanied by a steady increase in income that she wisely reinvested into her business.

Aigerim's art transcended mere aesthetic beauty; it became a vehicle for decolonization, an unyielding expression of her Kazakh heritage and a celebration of her nomadic roots. Her unique artistic style, often described as ethno-modernism, masterfully blended contemporary elements with traditional Kazakh motifs. The vibrant colors, symbolic imagery, and rich cultural tapestry that flowed from her brushstrokes rekindled a sense of pride and belonging among her fellow Kazakhs.

With each stroke of her brush, Aigerim breathed life into the essence of Kazakh culture, reviving its distinct identity in a world often permeated by globalization and cultural assimilation. Her art resonated not only with her compatriots at home but also with the Kazakh diaspora living abroad. Her creations found homes in distant lands, adorning walls and serving as cherished apparel and accessories that boldly proclaimed their Kazakh heritage. Aigerim understood the deep-rooted need for self-expression and the power of art to bridge the gap between distance and belonging.

Even amidst the challenging times of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Aigerim's entrepreneurial spirit shone through. Driven by her commitment to support her ailing mother, she channeled her fears and uncertainties into elevating her business to new heights. The launch of her online store became a resounding success, offering solace and connection to those yearning for a tangible expression of their identity. Aigerim's art not only adorned walls but became a powerful tool for unity, reminding Kazakhs worldwide that their cultural heritage was alive, vibrant, and worthy of celebration.

Encouraged by the resounding praise and growing demand, Aigerim courageously embraced the next chapter of her artistic journey. People yearned to experience her creations in person, prompting her to establish a physical gallery in the heart of Astana. Within those sacred walls, visitors immersed themselves in the symphony of colors and

symbolism, experiencing the profound beauty of Kazakh culture firsthand. Aigerim's husband, equally inspired by their shared heritage, joined her in this artistic endeavor, amplifying the sense of community and the power of their combined creative expression.

Aigerim Karibayeva transformed her passion for art into a catalyst for reclaiming Kazakh identity. With each stroke of her brush, she celebrates the nomadic heritage and cultural richness of her people. Her entrepreneurial spirit blazed a trail for fellow Kazakhs, encouraging them to embrace their roots and express their unique narratives. In Aigerim's art, the echoes of the past intertwined with the dreams of the future, forging a vibrant path towards cultural revitalization and a celebration of the Kazakh soul.

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Section 3

BULBUL KAPKYZY: INTERWEAVING THREADS OF CULTURE IN DECORATIVE AND APPLIED ARTS

Author: Nurzat Mukan

Bulbul Kapkyzy, a native of the Bayan Olgii province in Mongolia, carries with her a deep connection to the Kazakh ethnic group and their cultural traditions. Growing up in a yurt and witnessing the intricate craftsmanship involved in its creation, Bulbul developed a profound passion for needlework, a skill that would shape her life's journey. Today, as the head of the Alasha Art Center, she dedicates her talents to crafting yurts, creation of the interior decorations of arts (baskur, zhelbau), traditional weaving of carpets in the Kazakh style (alasha).

Raised by parents who were not only teachers but also held a keen interest in needlework, Bulbul inherited their knowledge and learned various techniques from her grandmother. Fueled by a desire to bring more beauty into homes and create unique, handmade items that were hard to find elsewhere, Bulbul began sewing, knitting, and designing her own creations. The beauty and craftsmanship of her work caught the attention of guests, who expressed their admiration and desire to own similar pieces.

Encouraged by this response, Bulbul embarked on her entrepreneurial journey, turning her passion into a thriving business.

Through her dedication to preserving traditional arts and crafts, Bulbul not only meets a demand for exquisite handmade items but also plays a crucial role in keeping Kazakh cultural heritage alive. Her work is testament to the value of craftsmanship, the importance of passing down traditional skills from one generation to the next, and the appreciation for beauty that resonates with both locals and visitors alike.

Bulbul's artistic journey began in her early years, with a love for embroidery and carpet-weaving. After completing her studies in Accounting at a university in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, she found little satisfaction in the field and instead dedicated her free time to practicing her beloved crafts. However, it was in Kazakhstan where Bulbul truly found her calling.

Relocating to Kazakhstan posed challenges, with a new culture and language to adapt to. While working as a taxi driver for twelve years, she seized the opportunity to generate additional income by creating and selling her unique handmade carpets. Her sons also joined her artistic journey, learning the craft of carpet weaving and becoming essential members of her dedicated team.

With her expertise in traditional Kazakh weaving techniques, Bulbul not only found personal fulfillment but also became a prominent advocate for Kazakh crafts, especially among the younger generation. Her remarkable talents earned her recognition and admiration from her peers, leading to her participation in various festivals and winning several contests among artisans.

In 2018, Bulbul received the prestigious UNESCO Award of Excellence, a testament to the exceptional quality of her work and her commitment to preserving and promoting Kazakh cultural heritage. She has also been honored with the National Nauryz award and a badge medal for "Excellence in Culture," recognizing her significant contribution to the development of national culture. Her involvement in exhibitions, contests, and festivals not only showcases her remarkable skills but also serves as an inspiration to others, encouraging them to embrace their artistic aspirations and celebrate traditional crafts. Bulbul enrolled in the Kazakh National Women's Pedagogical University, specializing in Arts and Management.

In 2019, Bulbul took a significant step in preserving and reviving the art of carpet weaving by opening the Alasha Art Centre. Recognizing that the techniques of this traditional craft were at risk of being lost between generations, Bulbul established the center to teach young people the art of carpet weaving.

Operating within the Sarkyt Spiritual-Cultural Museum, Bulbul's art center provides a space for master classes, where she demonstrates the traditional hand-weaving techniques used in carpet making. With her knowledge and skills, Bulbul ensures that the artistry of carpet weaving remains alive. For Bulbul, embroidery and weaving are not mere hobbies but a part of her daily life, stating, "I sleep and wake up with embroidery."

Bulbul actively engages with the local community by teaching weekly art classes for schoolgirls at the Bilim Innovation School, located within the Sarqyt Museum. Beyond

teaching artistic techniques, she incorporates lessons on kazakh traditional values. By being a role model and always wearing traditional clothing, which she sews herself, Bulbul prepares young people to preserve Kazakh cultural heritage. The schoolgirls show great interest in the world of handmade crafts, inspired by Bulbul's passion and dedication.

While proud of the ongoing revival of Kazakh culture and traditions in Kazakhstan, Bulbul also recognizes the need for accurate representation. She emphasizes the importance of using proper Kazakh terms. As she states, "I know all types of Kazakh art, and I am a high-level master. My mission is to convey all my knowledge and skills to the young generation." Bulbul Kapkyzy's journey from a taxi driver to a revered figure in the world of carpet weaving is evidence of her perseverance, dedication, and pursuit of her passion. Through her art, she not only supports her family but also contributes to the preservation and promotion of Kazakh cultural heritage. Bulbul's story is testament to the transformative power of following an artistic calling and the profound impact it can have on personal fulfillment and the appreciation of cultural heritage.



AINURA KAPAROVA: WEAVING NOMADIC ELEGANCE INTO CONTEMPORARY FASHION

Author: Alua Nurbayeva

In the bustling city of Almaty, where the echoes of nomadic traditions blend with the rhythms of urban life, Ainura embarked on a journey to bring the beauty of Kazakh culture to the forefront of fashion. Married and a mother of three, Ainura's dreams were fueled by her children and the support of her husband, who stood by her side both financially and operationally.

In 2016, Ainura Kaparova and her husband opened "Tomiris," an atelier where their shared passion for design and craftsmanship would find its expression. The business was a true partnership, with each spouse assuming specific roles. Ainura took charge of designing, sewing dresses, selecting materials, and managing the atelier's operations and customer relations, while her husband handled financial matters, logistics, and product delivery alongside his other full-time job.



At the heart of Ainura's business lies the creation of beautiful dresses, with a particular focus on the "mother and daughter look" that embraces the fashionable trend of an ethnic Kazakh national style. The atelier brings to life matching dresses for mothers and daughters, a charming concept sought after for special occasions like family celebrations, birthdays, and memorable photoshoots. While also offering clothing for boys and providing restoration and tailoring services, Ainura's main emphasis remains on evening gowns and shapan (long jackets) for women, all meticulously crafted in a traditional Kazakh style with exquisite ornamentation.

The driving force behind Ainura's business is her deep love for the traditional Kazakh style, a childhood dream to create a brand that reflects the essence of a nomadic heritage. Initially, her focus was on designing evening gowns and summer dresses for young women. However, as time went on, Ainura ventured into family sportswear and expanded her creations to include children's clothing, ranging from baby summer outfits to sportswear, jumpers, and dresses. Her vision evolved, blending a "nomad style" with modern elements for kids, an innovative approach that captured the spirit of the times.

Ainura keenly observed a growing trend among people striving to revive Kazakh traditional culture and reconnect with their roots. The resurgence of interest in Kazakh traditional clothing and the emergence of a new generation embracing their cultural identity became evident. In the past three years, there has been a surge in popularity among youngsters for donning the traditional head cap called "tubeteika," the "beshmet" robe, and other handmade national garments. These shifts signify a powerful movement, a collective yearning to reclaim forgotten aspects of Kazakh heritage. Ainura proudly notes that the "nomadic style" has become a fashionable statement, and a societal demand for cultural authenticity is taking shape.

Reflecting on her own childhood, Ainura acknowledges that she grew up during a time of transition, just after the collapse of the USSR. Imported clothes, especially those influenced by European fashion and Italian brands, tempted the younger generation. Local designers struggled to compete with these trends, and traditional attire was perceived as outdated. Ainura's generation sought to embrace global fashion, leaving the heritage of their ancestors behind.

But Ainura's passion for her cultural heritage proved unyielding. Her artistic vision and entrepreneurial spirit converged, inspiring her to carve a different path. By blending the allure of nomadic aesthetics with modern influences, Ainura breathes new life into Kazakh fashion, captivating the hearts of locals and fostering a sense of pride in their cultural identity.

Ainura Kaparova's journey exemplifies the power of embracing heritage and reviving traditional crafts in a rapidly evolving world. Her atelier, Tomiris, stands as a testament to the enduring beauty of Kazakh culture and the transformative potential of blending tradition with contemporary artistry. Through her creations, Ainura weaves the threads of the past into the tapestry of the present, igniting a renewed appreciation for the nomadic roots that run deep within Kazakh people.



Section 3

MEIRAMGUL ZHAKSYLYKOVA: UNVEILING THE SACRAL AESTHETICS OF KAZAKH CERAMIC

Author: Nurzat Mukan

In the vibrant city of Atyrau, Meiramgul Zhaksylykova embarked on a journey to breathe life back into the art of ceramics. In 2018, she founded the creative studio "Qypchaq Qyz," a sanctuary where clay and creativity converge to honor the Kazakh nomadic heritage and revive an ancestral art form.

Meiramgul's affinity for ceramics dates back to her childhood. Growing up in a small village with ten siblings, she discovered her passion for molding clay from the very earth beneath her feet. Amidst the rugged landscapes she found solace in shap-



ing clay into various forms, a pastime that ignited her imagination. It was at school that Meiramgul's artistic ambitions took root. Although her academic performance may have fallen short in the eyes of her teacher, her father saw a flicker of determination in her eyes.

"Do you want to study? Who do you want to become?" her father asked. Meiramgul responded with a resolute voice, "I want to become an artist; I like to sculpt." And with those words, her father gave her the green light to pursue her dreams. Amidst the trials of raising a large family alone after her mother's untimely passing, her father's support ignited a flame of hope within Meiramgul's heart.

Equipped with her father's blessing, Meiramgul pursued her studies at Atyrau State University, delving deep into the world of fine arts and drawing. Seeking to refine her craft, she sought training from master ceramist Rustam Usmanov in Uzbekistan, a country renowned for its stunning ceramics that span centuries of craftsmanship. Further honing her skills, Meiramgul embarked on a journey to the renowned Saint Petersburg Stieglitz State Academy of Art and Design in Russia. There she learnt about the intricate chemistry behind ceramics, exploring the science that brings clay to life.

Meiramgul named her studio "Qypchaq Qyz" in honor of her mother's memory and the significance it held in Kazakh history. The Qypchaqs, a prominent tribe that ruled vast territories across Central Asia and Eastern Europe in the 11th and 12th centuries, embody the shared heritage of Uzbek, Turkmen, Kazakh, and Tatar peoples, transcending borders and regions.
Meiramgul's journey went beyond artistic expression and entrepreneurial endeavors. As she opened her studio, she discovered the transformative power of clay in working with children with disabilities. Clay became a medium of healing, a tool that nurtured fine and gross motor skills, alleviated fear, and provided relief from stress for both children and adults. Equipped with a specific course in working with individuals with disabilities, Meiramgul ventured into uncharted territory, finding purpose and joy in making a positive impact on young lives.

Embracing her role as a social entrepreneur, Meiramgul participated in the "Zharkyra" (Shine) Program, an initiative that supports innovative social enterprises in addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges within Atyrau communities. Through this program, Meiramgul secured a grant to conduct masterclasses at the Atyrau residential home for children with learning difficulties, where her patience and determination became pillars of support for these children.

In her art, Meiramgul strives to capture the essence of the Kazakh steppe, employing traditional symbolic ornamentation that harks back to the ingenious patterns created by her ancestors. Her dream is to see Kazakh ceramics recognized and revered on a global scale, a testament to the rich cultural heritage and artistic prowess of her people. Meiramgul embraces the rekindling of religious and cultural practices, as some clients request ceramic bowls adorned with Arabic script, embracing a de-secularization phenomenon that intertwines spirituality with the secular aspects of public life.

Amidst her artistic pursuits, Meiramgul also indulges in amateur archaeological excavations, venturing to the medieval settlement of Saraishyk, a treasure trove of historical remnants. As she unearths fragments of ceramics and

animal bones, she leaves behind a jar inscribed with a heartfelt message, a testament to her reverence for the past and her relentless quest to discover the stories of her ancestors. Meiramgul Zhaksylykova's journey is more than a tale of artistic passion and entrepreneurship. It is a story of cultural revival, a quest to honor the nomadic roots and ancestral traditions of Kazakh people.

GULSUM BAIZAKOVA: UNVEILING KAZAKH CULTURAL MOTIFS THROUGH TEXTILE CANVASES

Author: Alua Nurbayeva

In the heart of Almaty, at the age of 52, Gulsum Baizakova sits in her bustling atelier called “Asyl Oner.” As we begin our conversation, she shares insights about the clothing industry in Kazakhstan. It is a field predominantly dominated by women, with only a few male designers in the country. Gulsum’s atelier stands as a testament to the creativity of these female artisans who make their living through their craft.

Gulsum’s venture into this business was born out of her deep-rooted desire to recreate and celebrate Kazakh traditional style. For her, it is not merely about making money; it is about preserving and promoting the traditional garments that hold immense cultural significance.

She traces her passion back to her childhood, growing up in a culturally rich family. Immersed in the warmth of her grandmother’s presence, she witnessed the intricate artistry of handmade textiles, particularly woolen fabrics. Her mother, too, was a tai-





lor who skillfully created her own clothes as well as those of her children. Through her family, Gulsum inherited not only the technical skills but also a profound understanding of the meaning behind different decorative ornaments and patterns. These symbols were not just decorative elements; they carried the history and identity of Kazakh tribes. They were woven with the wishes of good fortune, protection from the evil eye, and blessings. Each ornament told a story, and by studying them, one could discern a person's heritage. This knowledge, passed down through generations, flowed through the matrilineal line, connecting mothers and daughters in a tapestry of tradition.

Gulsum's pursuit of this business is also fueled by memories of a time when Kazakhstan was part of the USSR, and traditions faced immense pressure. She vividly recalls how her mother would face criticism even from her own friends for donning traditional Kazakh clothing. Religion, too, was suppressed, and practicing one's faith was confined to the privacy of one's home. Wearing traditional attire or embracing traditional cultural practices was often seen as regressive and uneducated by society at large. Yet, despite these societal pressures, Gulsum's mother's love for traditional clothing left an indelible mark on her. It ignited a flame within her, a yearning to honor and preserve the cultural heritage that was being stifled. It was a challenging era where the people of the USSR were discouraged from embracing their traditional cultural identities. But winds of change are now sweeping across the material culture of Kazakh society. Guslum observes a growing interest among both the older and younger generations to reconnect with their roots, to rediscover their traditional culture and identity.

Gulsum firmly believes that as an independent nation, Kazakhstan should embrace and promote its rich traditions, passing them on to the younger generation. She has witnessed a resurgence in the popularity of traditional clothing, not just within Kazakhstan but also among Kazakh diaspora in other countries. Even abroad, people are now proudly celebrating their roots and seeking to don their traditional garments. And it is not just women who are showing this renewed interest; Gulsum has noticed a rising curiosity among men as well. The latest fashion trend among the youth is to wear the traditional head cap called "takiya." This wave of enthusiasm signifies the emergence of a new generation ready to reclaim forgotten cultural aspects and celebrate their heritage.

For Gulsum, this resurgence and the growing appreciation for traditional clothing are what inspire her every day. It is a testament to the enduring power of culture, a reminder that our roots hold a profound significance in shaping our identities. As she tirelessly works in her atelier, Gulsum is driven by a sense of duty, a passion to preserve and promote the beauty of her nation's traditional garments. Through her craftsmanship, she weaves together threads of history, identity, and pride, ensuring that the rich tapestry of Kazakh culture remains vibrant and alive for generations to come.

SALTANAT KUMANOVA: SYMBIOSIS OF KAZAKH CULTURE AND CONTEMPORARY TATTOO ARTISTRY

Author: Eva Lennartz

In the heart of the vibrant city of Almaty, a young and talented tattoo artist named Saltanat Kuanova is making waves in the world of body art. At just 22 years old, she specializes in tattoos that incorporate traditional Kazakh design elements, combining the ancient symbols of her culture with the modern medium of tattoos.

Stepping into Saltanat's studio, you are greeted by a warm ambiance adorned with soothing colors and a hanging dream catcher. As she prepares her workspace, searching for tattoo templates and setting up the treatment couch, you can sense her dedication and passion for her craft. Today, she awaits the arrival of one of her students, eager to impart her knowledge and skills.

Saltanat's journey into tattoo artistry began as a summer job when she was only 14 years old. Seeking an outlet for her creative talents, she took up henna tattooing and face painting in one of Almaty's parks. It was hard work under the scorching summer


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sun, but it was the first time she experienced financial independence. It was during this time that her friends introduced her to the world of tattoo art, a realm she had never explored before. Intrigued, she delved into research, immersing herself in the subject. Her passion ignited, but her mother regarded it as a passing interest, unaware of the transformative path it would set Saltanat on.

When Saltanat turned 16, she approached her mother, seeking financial support to enroll in a professional tattoo art course. Despite the substantial cost of the program, her mother, recognizing Saltanat's determination, trusted her judgment and provided the necessary backing. However, her mother also had one condition – Saltanat had to complete her education before fully pursuing a career in tattoo art. Respecting her mother's wishes, Saltanat studied management while simultaneously attending tattoo courses. It was a testament to her commitment and her mother's belief in her potential.

Saltanat's artistic journey took her to the renowned tattoo studio "Zabey" in Almaty, where she honed her skills under the guidance of seasoned artists. Starting with mini tattoos, she gained invaluable practical experience and grew as an artist. After three and a half years, tragedy struck when a fire ravaged her first tattoo shop. Undeterred, she swiftly found a new studio just across the street, determined to continue her artistic endeavors.

Two years ago, Saltanat embarked on a new artistic direction, incorporating Kazakh symbols and ornaments into her tattoo designs. Motivated by her deep love for Kazakh culture and a desire to promote it among the younger generation, Saltanat saw an opportunity to infuse her art with a sense of cultural resurgence. She recognized that traditional Kazakh culture had been suppressed during the Soviet era, with attempts to erase its language and traditions. However, a recent cultural reawakening, fostered by initiatives like the "Qazaq Republic," breathed new life into Kazakh arts, music, and cinema. Saltanat embraced this atmosphere, recommending Kazakh-style tattoos to her clients as a unique and meaningful expression of their heritage.

Yet, Saltanat encountered initial resistance to Kazakh-inspired tattoos. Many associated Kazakh culture with outdated notions, viewing it as something of the past. Saltanat saw a dissonance between the traditional symbols and the modernity of tattoos. However, she persisted, understanding that her art was a bridge between the old and the new, a testament to the enduring spirit of Kazakh culture. Today, she witnesses a shift in perception as more artists embrace Kazakh elements, signaling a new era of cultural appreciation.

As a solo entrepreneur, Saltanat manages her business primarily through Instagram, a popular platform for small businesses in Kazakhstan. Clients reach out to her to make appointments, and she carefully schedules her sessions to provide personalized attention to each client. Her reputation has grown beyond borders, attracting clients from the United States and Europe, many of whom are Kazakhs living abroad. Saltanat dreams of opening a larger studio in the future and participating in international tattoo conventions, expanding her horizons and sharing her artistic vision with the world.

Saltanat Kuanova's journey exemplifies the power of entrepreneurship in reclaiming cultural heritage. Through her tattoos, she weaves a narrative of Kazakh identity, blending the tra-

ditional with the contemporary. Saltanat stands as an inspiration to young Kazakhs in Almaty and beyond, encouraging them to embrace their roots, celebrate their heritage, and reimagine their culture in the vibrant tapestry of art and entrepreneurship.


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Section 3

ZHANSAYA PAK AND GULIM ALZHANOVA: TUBETEIKA AS CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC HERITAGE

Author: Eva Lennartz

Zhansaya Pak and Gulim Alzhanova, both friends from university, embarked on a remarkable journey that intertwines their ethnic heritage, pride in their nomadic past, and a deep connection to the cultural roots of Kazakhstan. Together, they founded the brand “Kuae bol” and embarked on a mission to design and create tubeteikas, the traditional Kazakh caps, in the vibrant city of Almaty.

Their story began when Gulim, after completing her degree in biology, delved into various creative pursuits such as embroidery, photography, and makeup. During one of her captivating photoshoots, Gulim found herself in need of an assistant. Zhansaya, having recently left her position at the university where she had worked for eight years, seized the opportunity to collaborate with her friend. This serendipitous encounter marked the inception of their creative partnership.

Driven by their shared passion for their cultural heritage, Zhansaya and Gulim sought to expand their creative horizons. They eagerly enrolled in fashion design and sewing courses, embracing the opportunity to learn new skills and express their artistic vision. Through their journey, they discovered a remarkable talent for crafting tubeteikas, the iconic caps that hold profound significance in the traditional Kazakh wardrobe.

For Zhansaya, the tubeteika symbolizes more than just a fashion accessory. It represents a profound connection to their ethnic heritage and a source of immense pride in their nomadic roots. It is a tangible embodiment of the rich cultural legacy passed down through generations of Kazakh people. Zhansaya and Gulim recognized the power of this traditional headwear in reclaiming their cultural identity and preserving the customs and traditions of their ancestors.

The name “Kuae bol” holds a significant meaning for the brand, reflecting their commitment to their vision. It derives from a traditional Kazakh song that celebrates the mesmerizing beauty of nature and the majestic mountains that grace the landscape of Almaty. Translated as “witness,” the name embodies their heartfelt desire to awaken people’s senses to the extraordinary natural wonders that often go unnoticed amidst the hustle and bustle of daily routines and the challenges of modern life. Through their artistic creations, Zhansaya and Gulim strive to serve as witnesses to the breathtaking beauty that surrounds them, inviting others to pause, appreciate, and reconnect with the splendor of their surroundings.

Their creative journey goes beyond fashion and craftsmanship and is a deliberate effort to reclaim and revitalize Kazakh cultural heritage. The tubeteika, with its intricate patterns and designs, serves as a vessel for cultural resurgence, reminding people of the enduring traditions, customs, and values that have shaped the Kazakh identity throughout history. It is a symbol of resilience, pride, and a deep-rooted connection to the nomadic spirit that runs through the veins of the Kazakh people.

With every stitch, Zhansaya and Gulim weave together the threads of their ethnic heritage, pride in their nomadic past, and a profound respect for the natural beauty that surrounds them. “Kuae bol” is more than just a brand; it is a testament to the power of entrepreneurship in fostering decolonization, preserving cultural identity, and igniting a sense of belonging and reverence for one’s roots. Through their artistry, Zhansaya and Gulim aim to inspire others to embrace their own cultural heritage and embark on a journey of self-discovery, reconnecting with the timeless traditions that have shaped them. Together, they stand as ambassadors of their culture, ensuring that the legacy of their nomadic ancestors lives on, thriving and evolving in the modern world.



Section 3

AYGERIM SABDENOVA AND RAUSHAN SADYKULOVA: ADVOCATING TRADITIONAL APPLIED CREATIVITY IN "QAZAQ QORPE"

Author: Eva Lennartz

In a remarkable mother-daughter partnership, Aigerim Sabdenova and her mother embarked on a transformative journey that revived Kazakhstan's nomadic heritage. Aigerim, an architect and designer, joined forces with her architect mother to create a unique brand, fusing their passion for design with a deep connection to their Kazakh identity.

"It all started with my mother buying a sewing machine and reworking the blankets we had at home," Aigerim recounted. The impact of her mother's creative endeavor was profound, leading close relatives to place orders for these transformed blankets. Encouraged by the resounding feedback, Aigerim and her mother saw an opportunity to create something extraordinary.

“Since she received such positive feedback, my mother thought: why not buy professional equipment and produce blankets for selling?”

Aigerim shared, reflecting on the pivotal moment that sparked their entrepreneurial journey. Their brand, named “Qazaq Qorpe,” became a symbol of their commitment to promoting the nomadic heritage of Kazakhstan. Through the production of blankets made from natural cloth, they captured the essence of their cultural roots and celebrated the skills passed down through generations. The appreciative comments from their clients reinforced their sense of purpose. “Thank you for promoting something that ‘the whole life the Kazakhs did,’ that there is a ray of hope in our Kazakh production,” expressed a grateful customer, testifying to the profound impact of their work.

While building their brand, Aigerim and her mother encountered the familiar hurdles faced by many entrepreneurs, including limited resources and financial constraints. They expanded their product range to include pillows and integrated minimalist designs with traditional Kazakh elements. “We are coming back to our roots, inspired by the past,” Aigerim explained, highlighting their mission to honor Kazakh traditions and reconnect with their cultural heritage.

Aigerim’s expertise in project management and her mother’s impeccable craftsmanship laid the foundation for their business, where Aigerim took charge of material selection, visuals, marketing, and sales. Their journey extended beyond local markets as they recognized the importance of connecting with a global audience. “For the Western market, we named our brand ‘Great Steppe’ to cater to a wider audience,” Aigerim shared, acknowledging the need to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps. In 2023, they decided to merge the brand under the name ‘Great Steppe’ for the local and the Western markets.

The creative process behind their brand was not limited to Aigerim and her mother alone. They formed a team of talented women, including a skillful tailor and dedicated helpers, who shared their vision and contributed to the realization of their designs. This collaborative effort further strengthened their connection to the local community and emphasized the importance of collective empowerment. “We are a team of passionate women who bring our creativity and expertise to each piece we create,” Aigerim proudly stated.

In navigating the challenges of entrepreneurship, Aigerim emphasized the significance of independence and personal development. “Live your own life and make a plan. Do not live someone else’s life, but your own,” she advised, urging young women to break free from societal expectations.

As Aigerim and her mother continue to pave the way for a Nomadic Revival, they inspire others to embrace their cultural heritage, dare to be different, and seize opportunities amidst adversity. Their journey serves as a powerful reminder that entrepreneurship can be a tool that enables individuals to reclaim their narratives and create a future deeply rooted in their traditions.









Section 4

EMPOWERED INNOVATORS: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS LEADING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY REVOLUTION

In this section of the book, we delve into the inspiring narratives of women entrepreneurs who are at the forefront of the circular economy movement. These remarkable women have not only established successful businesses but have also embraced a deep sense of ethics and care for the world around them. Their innate feminine capital, driven by compassion and a commitment to sustainable practices, propels them to create businesses that prioritize environmental and social well-being.

The circular economy represents a paradigm shift, challenging the traditional linear model of production and consumption. Instead of the wasteful "take-make-dispose" approach, these women entrepreneurs are pioneers in designing regenerative systems that minimize waste, extend product lifecycles, and promote resource efficiency. They understand that true success lies not only in financial gain but also in making a positive impact on the planet and society.

What sets these women apart is their belief that business can be a force for good. They recognize the interconnectedness of environmental issues, social justice, and economic prosperity. Their ventures embody a holistic approach, where every decision is guided by a deep sense of responsibility and a commitment to leaving a positive legacy for future generations.

In this section, we will explore the diverse stories of these women entrepreneurs. From sustainable fashion to eco-friendly packaging, from innovative recycling solutions to ethical supply chains, their businesses span various industries, but they share a common thread – a dedication to ethical and environmental business practices.

The women's journeys are filled with challenges, sacrifices, and triumphs. They have navigated through uncharted territory, debunking myths and breaking barriers along the way. Through their businesses, these women are rewriting the narrative of traditional business models – redefining success by incorporating ethical considerations, nurturing communities, and healing the planet. Their initiatives not only reduce waste but also empower individuals and communities, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

The women's stories are inspiring and ignite a sense of hope for a future where business thrives hand in hand with sustainability, compassion, and care for the world around us. Together, we will discover how these extraordinary women are leading the charge towards a circular economy, demonstrating that profit and purpose can coexist harmoniously.



Section 4

KARLYGASH OMAROVA: RECYCLABILITY AND HEADWEAR BRAND "TAICARA"

Author: Eva Lennartz

In the vibrant city of Almaty, a remarkable narrative unfolds as Karlygash Omarova intertwines sustainability, circularity, and the revitalization of Kazakh traditions through her headwear brand, "Taicara." Her entrepreneurial journey is a testament to the transformative power of the circular economy, where sustainable practices are seamlessly interwoven with cultural heritage.

Since February 2021, Karlygash Omarova has embarked on a mission to breathe new life into traditional Kazakh headwear through her brand, "Taicara." For Karlygash, this venture is a testament to the enduring wisdom of her ancestors, a celebration of their legacy in a world yearning for mindful practices.

Drawing inspiration from Taicara, the daughter of a Kazakh Khan who elegantly merged Kazakh and European styles, Karlygash honors her heritage by infusing her hat designs with elements from both cultures. Rooted in tradition yet embracing innovation, her creations embody the essence of circularity, where sustainability becomes intertwined with the fabric of Kazakh identity.

Driven by a deep commitment to the planet, Karlygash has meticulously redesigned her manufacturing process, ensuring it adheres to the principles of the circular economy. Guided by ecological consciousness, she has replaced disposable materials with reusable plastic forms.

Karlygash's journey as a sustainable entrepreneur began with a moment of realization during the pandemic-induced quarantine of 2020. Reflecting on her childhood experiences working with wool alongside her grandmother, and inspired by the advanced craftmanship she witnessed abroad, she recognized the untapped potential of traditional Kazakh practices. Karlygash embarked on a path of self-learning, seeking guidance from international specialists and consulting material suppliers. In 2021, she fearlessly established her own workshop, supported wholeheartedly by her loved ones, including her husband.

The impact of Karlygash's sustainable entrepreneurship has not gone unnoticed. In March 2022, she triumphed in a competition for local brands, securing a grant from Jusan Bank and Almaty Pop Up Store. The grant, totaling one million tenge, served as a catalyst for Taicara's growth, enabling Karlygash to acquire sustainable materials for her new collection. This recognition affirms the power of circularity and reinforces Karlygash's dedication to sustainable practices within the fashion industry.

As she continues her journey, Karlygash envisions a future where talented Kazakh designers receive the necessary support to gain global recognition. Advocating for financial assistance, international exhibition opportunities, and the establishment of creative clusters, she strives to nurture a flourishing ecosystem that encourages collaboration and innovation. Through her brand, Karlygash showcases how sustainable entrepreneurship rooted in Kazakh traditions can flourish, resonating globally and inspiring others to embrace the circular economy.

Karlygash Omarova's story weaves together the threads of sustainability and Kazakh traditions. As she stitches the past and present together, she leaves her mark on the fashion industry, reminding us that sustainable entrepreneurship is not just a business model – it is a transformative pathway towards a future where traditions thrive, nature is protected, and circularity becomes normal practice.



Section 4

ANDZHILA TEN AND FASHION UPCYCLING
Author: Amina Chaia

In the city of Almaty, the fashion landscape is undergoing a remarkable transformation led by Andzhila Ten, a visionary young designer. Through her brand, "Andzhidesign," Andzhila is spearheading a fashion revolution that blends traditional Kazakh design influences with the principles of circularity and sustainability. Her journey of cultural resurgence encompasses a deep connection to her roots, a commitment to conscious fashion, and a passion for upcycled creations that breathe new life into traditional aesthetics.

Andzhila's creative path began with a childhood love for the arts. While she initially envisioned herself as a stylist or makeup artist, her destiny took an unexpected turn when she was introduced to the art of sewing by her friend's mother. Guided by this mentor, Andzhila discovered a passion for the craft, and with her first sewing machine as a precious gift, she set out on a transformative journey.

Yet, Andzhila's journey goes beyond her artistic pursuits. It is interwoven with a rich historical tapestry, one that echoes the displacement of Koreans during the USSR. Her great grandfather's harrowing experience during this dark chapter resonates deeply within her. Amidst the hardships endured by the displaced, Andzhila's great grandfather recounted the kindness and support extended by Kazakh people. It is a narrative that is often overlooked, but one that fuels Andzhila's gratitude and inspires her commitment to honor her heritage.

Immersed in Kazakh culture and inspired by the stories shared by her family, Andzhila's designs pay homage to her neighbor, Karlygash. Karlygash became a guide, introducing her to the wonders of Kazakh traditions, including traditional games and the significance of qurt (a dried milk curd), a symbol of sustenance that had once saved her great grandfather from hunger. Through her designs, Andzhila seeks to capture the spirit of Karlygash and the profound cultural symbolism it represents.

Andzhila's journey also intersects with a societal awakening, an "ethno boom" that has emerged in recent years. It marks a significant shift from a time when speaking the Kazakh language was stigmatized, to a resurgence of Kazakh cultural pride and identity. Andzhila celebrates this resurgence, witnessing the adornment of Kazakh jewelry and accessories among the youth and the growing popularity of the Kazakh language even among friends whose first language is Russian. It is a revival that breathes new life into traditions and fosters a sense of collective heritage.

At the heart of Andzhila's creative vision lies her commitment to sustainability and the circular economy. She views upcycling as the future of the fashion industry, drawing inspiration from second-hand and vintage stores that offer a wealth of creative possibilities. The pandemic served as a catalyst, firing her imagination through online platforms like Pinterest, where she discovered the art of upcycled corsets and blazers. Guided by her passion, Andzhila scours platforms like OLX and second-hand stores, sourcing affordable clothing items to transform into unique, upcycled creations. With every stitch, she reduces waste, embraces conscious choices, and redefines the essence of fashion.

Andzhila Ten's journey exemplifies the transformative power of creativity, cultural appreciation, and sustainable fashion. Through her brand, Andzhidesign, she breathes new life into Kazakh heritage, intertwining tradition and innovation. With upcycled creations that honor the past while embracing a more sustainable future, Andzhila inspires others to rediscover their roots and contribute to a vibrant and circular tapestry of cultural revival.





Section 4

DANA SOLTANOVA: PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION THROUGH "HELLOECO"

Author: Nurlyaiym Zhaksybayeva

With the intention to promote sustainable behavior among consumers and address the root causes of waste management, Dana Soltanova embarked on a remarkable journey by opening the zero-waste store "HelloEco" in Almaty. Together with her business partners, Dana aimed to minimize waste and promote sustainability by offering products without excessive packaging or single-use plastics. The concept of "Hello Eco" revolves around the principles of the circular economy, focusing on reducing waste throughout the entire consumption cycle to create a more environmentally friendly and sustainable shopping experience. Helloeco also engages in the collection of various types of waste, which are subsequently sent for recycling purposes.



"We wanted to provide a space where people can make conscious choices and actively participate in reducing waste. By offering products without excessive packaging, we aim to inspire consumers to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle," Dana explains.

By leading with circular principles, Dana sets high standards for the goods sold in "HelloEco." Suppliers who cooperate with the store undergo a transformation in their production cycles, withdrawing unnecessary packaging and utilizing special containers. Furthermore, Dana carefully selects products that meet the environmental standards set by the European Union, Russia, and Kazakhstan. This ensures that the items offered in the zero-waste shop have undergone certification processes, minimizing the negative impact of certain ingredients on the environment. Dana's goal is to further reduce the adverse effects of these products on the planet and encourage sustainable consumption practices.

In addition to prioritizing waste reduction, "HelloEco" places a strong emphasis on collaborating with local producers. By sourcing products from nearby suppliers, the store minimizes the environmental impact associated with long-distance transportation and fosters a sense of economic empowerment within the local community.

This approach aligns with their commitment to sustainability and their desire to create positive social and economic outcomes at the grassroots level.

"We believe in the importance of supporting local businesses and reducing the carbon footprint associated with logistics. By collaborating with nearby producers, we not only minimize environmental impact but also contribute to the growth of local economies," Dana highlights.

Beyond their role as a retail store, Dana and her partners actively engage with the community by organizing and supporting various eco-events in Almaty. These events, which include exhibitions and garage sales, serve as platforms to raise awareness about environmentally friendly practices. Through these initiatives, individuals are encouraged to adopt sustainable behaviors and contribute to the preservation of the environment. Dana and her partners actively participate in these events, fostering a sense of community and inspiring others to embrace eco-conscious practices.

The success of "HelloEco" has not only demonstrated the profitability of sustainable ventures but has also inspired followers from various cities in Kazakhstan to replicate Dana's model and establish similar stores. By leading the way, Dana has not only shown that sustainable businesses can be financially viable but has also empowered others to join the movement and contribute to the growth of eco-friendly practices in their own communities.

Looking to the future, Dana envisions expanding her business by offering ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) consulting services to assist other companies in incorporating environmental values into their operations. Additionally, due to the growing demand for online orders, she is considering opening a new store in Astana. This expansion aims to cater to the increased interest in sustainable products and further extend the reach of her business, both in terms of consultancy services and physical store locations.

In conclusion, Dana Soltanova's zero-waste store, "HelloEco," stands as a shining example of sustainable business practices and a catalyst for positive change. Through her commitment

to waste reduction, promotion of sustainable behavior, and collaboration with local producers, Dana has created a shopping experience that not only minimizes environmental impact but also supports the local economy. Her dedication to high standards ensures that customers can make environmentally conscious choices while reducing harm to the planet.


zero waste shop



SANIYA ARINOVA: ECOSAN'S REVOLUTION IN HYGIENE PRODUCTS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Author: Nurlyaiym Zhaksybayeva

Driven by the principles of the circular economy, which aims to minimize waste, maximize resource efficiency, and promote sustainable production and consumption, Saniya Arinova embarked on a mission to revolutionize menstrual health practices in Kazakhstan. In January 2022, she founded "EcoSan", the first company in the country dedicated to producing reusable sanitary pads for women and nappies for children. This pioneering venture aligns with the growing trend of sustainable and zero-waste businesses, while making a significant contribution to Kazakhstan's entrepreneurial landscape.

Saniya's journey towards eco-consciousness began with her personal commitment to an environmentally friendly lifestyle. As an experienced eco-consultant, she advised businesses on transitioning to sustainable practices, spreading awareness about the importance of waste reduction and resource conservation. Through her initiatives,



she organized cleanup events in Almaty, earning recognition and the prestigious 'Certificate of Merit' from President Tokayev for her exceptional dedication to environmental conservation.

EcoSan's primary focus is on developing high-quality reusable pads for women, and nappies for children offering an eco-friendly alternative to disposable products. Saniya's vision extends beyond the production of pads, as she plans to expand the company's product line to include eco-shoppers and eco-bags made from recycled materials. By continuously innovating and diversifying their offerings, EcoSan aims to promote sustainable consumption patterns and foster a circular economy mindset among consumers.

Throughout her entrepreneurial journey, Saniya encountered various challenges, particularly in terms of mindset and personal development. However, she persevered, learning valuable lessons through hands-on experience, embracing challenges, and assuming leadership responsibilities. Her dedication to personal growth has not only shaped her role as a businesswoman but also as a mentor to her team, guiding them towards sustainability-driven practices and instilling a sense of accountability.

At EcoSan, ethical obligations and social impact are deeply ingrained in the company's ethos. Saniya actively seeks to empower individuals from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds by offering employment opportunities within her company. Additionally, she is committed to achieving complete localization of production, utilizing local resources and materials in the company's operations in Almaty. By embracing these principles, EcoSan not only manufactures sustainable goods but also integrates environmentally friendly practices throughout the production cycle, effectively reducing its carbon footprint.

Beyond the environmental benefits, EcoSan contributes to the social aspect of the circular economy by fostering community engagement and empowerment. Saniya places great emphasis on consumer education regarding sustainability, the environmental impact of disposable pads, and the advantages of reusable alternatives. By promoting reusable pads designed for long-term use, lasting from 2 to 5 years, EcoSan significantly reduces the waste generated by non-recyclable disposable pads. This knowledge sharing empowers individuals to make informed choices, leading to a more sustainable and conscious approach to menstruation.

In alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, EcoSan actively contributes to the achievement of multiple goals, including Gender Equality (Goal 5), Clean Water and Sanitation (Goal 6), Responsible Consumption and Production (Goal 12), Climate Action (Goal 13), and Life on Land (Goal 15). By addressing these critical sustainability goals, Saniya's entrepreneurial endeavor demonstrates the transformative potential of circular economy practices and their positive impact on society and the environment.

Saniya's commitment to reducing waste, empowering individuals, and championing sustainable alternatives, paves the way for a more inclusive and environmentally conscious future. Through her visionary leadership, Saniya Arinova is not only redefining menstrual health in Kazakhstan but also inspiring others to embrace circularity.







Section 4

MARZHAN KURMANGALIEVA: RECYCLING STYLE SOLUTION AT FASHION FREEDOM RENT

Author: Nurlyaiym Zhaksybayeva

Driven by her passion for the fashion industry and a deep concern for its environmental effects, Marzhan Kurmangaliyeva has emerged as a pioneer in the circular economy in Almaty. Through her store, "Fashion Freedom Rent," Marzhan offers a diverse selection of preowned dresses and accessories for customers to rent, revolutionizing the way people consume fashion and contributing to a more sustainable economy in Kazakhstan.

Marzhan's journey in the circular economy began while participating in an eco-startup incubator. Troubled by the issues of waste and limited clothing recycling options, she sought guidance from her mentors. Inspired by their suggestion to explore the rental business model, Marzhan saw an opportunity to align her passion for fashion with a sustainable and collaborative approach. This led to the establishment of "Fashion Freedom Rent," where individuals can enjoy the experience of wearing stylish garments without the burden of long-term ownership. Marzhan explained,

"I wanted to create a solution that combines fashion and sustainability. Renting allows people to access a wide range of clothing options without contributing to the overconsumption and waste that plagues the fashion industry."

Despite challenges in shifting the prevailing culture of ownership among consumers in Kazakhstan, Marzhan's dedication and effective communication strategies have allowed "Fashion Freedom Rent" to thrive. In its first year, the business achieved profitability and developed a loyal client base, primarily consisting of students and women seeking affordable options for special occasions. Over time, the customer base expanded to include practical women who value the convenience of renting and share a concern for the environmental impacts of fast fashion. Marzhan emphasizes,

"Through renting, we can change the perception of fashion and encourage people to embrace a more sustainable lifestyle. It's about making conscious choices and rethinking our relationship with clothing."

Through targeted marketing efforts and educational initiatives, Marzhan successfully communicates the benefits of renting and the positive environmental impact it can have. By providing a sustainable fashion solution, "Fashion Freedom Rent" taps into a growing community of individuals who recognize the value of reducing waste and embracing eco-friendly practices.

Marzhan believes that "Fashion Freedom Rent" is not just a business but a platform for change. She states, "Our goal is to empower people to make conscious fashion choices. By renting preowned dresses, they can enjoy new styles while reducing their environmental footprint."

Continuing to push the boundaries of innovation, Marzhan introduced a new co-renting business model. Customers now have the option to co-rent their own dresses, sharing both the profits and risks with the store. This unique approach expands the dress supply without significant investments, tapping into the existing resources and wardrobes of customers. It creates a collaborative and sustainable ecosystem where individuals can monetize their dresses while contributing to the circular fashion economy.

Marzhan proudly states, “Co-renting not only allows customers to earn money from their dresses but also promotes sustainability by maximizing the use of existing resources. It’s a win-win situation that fosters a sense of community and encourages active participation in the circular economy.”

Marzhan’s business stands as a shining example of circular thinking, community engagement, and adaptability in the fashion industry. Through her perseverance and effective communication strategies, Marzhan has successfully conveyed her business and environmental values, attracting a growing base of customers who embrace the concept of renting and its positive impact on the environment.






KWR
Kazakhstan Waste Recycling

Section 4

KAMILA AKIMBEKOVA: BUILDING A GREEN FUTURE THROUGH THE "DAPMAPKA" (DARMARKA) PROJECT

Author: Nurlyaiym Zhaksybayeva

In the heart of Almaty, Kamila Akimbekova leads an ecological initiative called "Darmarka" (from the Russian word "дарить" – to give), a remarkable project aimed at promoting reuse and sharing goods to minimize waste. With a passionate commitment to sustainable living, Kamila has created an environment, in the form of a public fair, where unwanted possessions find new homes, prolonging their lifespan and reducing the strain on landfills.

Driven by a deep sense of social responsibility, Kamila organizes Darmarka as a non-profit project, relying on the dedicated efforts of volunteers. Through this initiative, she raises awareness about sustainable lifestyles and establishes Darmarka as a recognizable brand, uniting individuals who share the vision of a more sustainable future. Kamila's diligent work ensures the fair takes place in popular and suitable locations, where willing owners voluntarily contribute their items.

One of the most significant impacts of Darmarka is the reflection it inspires among participants about their consumption habits and the value of goods. By encouraging people to bring their own items to the fair, Kamila sparks introspection and prompts individuals to reconsider their relationship with material possessions. This shift in mindset has the potential to shape long-term behavior, encouraging a shift towards conscious and sustainable consumption practices.

Kamila's dedication extends beyond the fair itself. She actively invites experts and enthusiasts from the local eco-activist community to conduct workshops during Darmarka. These educational sessions cover essential topics such as recycling, waste management, and waste separation, equipping participants with practical knowledge to embrace sustainable practices in their daily lives. Kamila's collaborative approach ensures that Darmarka serves as a platform for learning and exchange, nurturing a community of individuals dedicated to promoting sustainability and the principles of the circular economy.

Recognizing the value of her experience, Kamila offers consultation and guidance to organizers of similar fairs in different cities across Kazakhstan. By sharing her expertise and experiences, she empowers others to establish their own ecological initiatives and amplify the impact of the circular economy movement.

Kamila Akimbekova's leadership in organizing the Darmarka ecological initiative underscores her commitment to sustainable living and social responsibility. Through Darmarka, she not only prolongs the lifespan of products but also sparks meaningful reflection on consumption habits and the value of goods.

With her remarkable efforts and willingness to share expertise, Kamila actively cultivates a network of ecological initiatives across Kazakhstan. She inspires individuals to adopt more sustainable practices, fostering a collective commitment to a greener and more environmentally conscious future.


Purposes of
the purifier system
DRINKING
COFFEE
PLANTING
AQUARIUM
FEEDING
COOKING





Section 4

VENERA TAILAKBAYEVA: NATURE'S ENDOWMENTS IN A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

Author: Nurzat Mukan

Venera Tailakbayeva's entrepreneurial journey embodies the principles of sustainable business and the circular economy. Through the establishment of "Asia Kamysh" LLP in the village of Kaukey, Kazaly District, Venera not only created job opportunities but also harnessed the potential of a local natural resource in a sustainable and environmentally conscious manner.

In 2021, Venera's discovery of products made from reed in the Netherlands sparked her realization of the abundance of this natural resource in her own village. With a strong desire to seize this opportunity and promote sustainable practices, she reached out to foreign contacts to inform them about the availability of raw reed materials in her region.

Motivated by the potential economic benefits and guided by her commitment to sustainability, Venera embarked on a journey of negotiations and correspondence with





interested parties from Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belarus, and Poland. Her passion for sustainable entrepreneurship attracted a German investor who personally visited the Kazaly District. After inspecting the reed cutting areas and recognizing its suitability for construction purposes, the investor placed a substantial order, appreciating the sustainable value of the product.

With the newfound demand, Venera wasted no time in mobilizing her community's resources. Establishing "Asia Kamysh" LLP as a limited liability company focused on reed procurement and export, she engaged local residents from Kaukei, creating job opportunities and fostering economic growth in a sustainable manner.

The reed cutting process, which takes place from autumn to the end of winter, provided employment for many unemployed villagers during that period. Venera organized and led a team of 30 individuals, paying them fair wages for their labor. This not only stimulated the local economy but also empowered the community members, instilling them with a sense of pride and purpose.

Under Venera's guidance, the villagers worked diligently, cutting reeds on their own plots. Venera collected their harvest, arranged for transportation, and collaborated with logistics companies from Almaty to ensure the sustainable and efficient delivery of the raw material to customers abroad. Through this collaborative effort, Venera not only created economic opportunities but also demonstrated a commitment to sustainable sourcing and responsible supply chain practices.

As the success of "Asia Kamysh" LLP spread, Venera's connections and reputation grew. Her tenacity in establishing relationships led to partnerships with European customers in Denmark, Germany, and Belarus. By contacting the respective embassies and engaging in negotiations, Venera further expanded her sustainable business network and brought valuable funds from Europe into the district's budget, promoting economic sustainability.

While exporting raw reed was a significant achievement, Venera's vision extended beyond that. Recognizing the true prosperity lay in value-added manufacturing, she aimed to establish a production cluster within her village. With the support of investors, Venera envisioned the transformation of reeds into value-added construction materials and roofing products. This shift towards manufacturing would not only maximize the economic potential of the reed resource but also create even more job opportunities, driving the circular economy and fostering local economic resilience.

Venera's journey in sustainable business and circular economy exemplifies the transformative power of entrepreneurship rooted in an environmentally consciousness business model. By harnessing a local natural resource and creating sustainable employment opportunities, she has shown that economic growth and environmental stewardship can go hand in hand.

As Venera Tailakbayeva's journey continues, her dedication to sustainable business practices and her vision for a thriving circular economy serve as a testament to the potential of local resources, community-driven entrepreneurship, and the power of sustainable business to create lasting social and environmental impact.


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Section 5

SHATTERING STEREOTYPES: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS THRIVING IN MALE-DOMINATED SECTORS

In a world where certain industries have long been dominated by men, a remarkable movement is taking place. Women are defying societal norms, overcoming barriers, and making their mark in sectors traditionally considered the domain of men. Kazakhstan is witnessing the rise of a new generation of fearless female entrepreneurs who are breaking boundaries and reshaping the business landscape.

In this section, we delve into the narratives of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan who have chosen to venture into male-dominated sectors. These exceptional individuals have not only shattered stereotypes but have also carved out successful businesses, proving that gender should never be a limitation to pursuing one's passion and achieving remarkable feats.

These women have faced unique challenges and societal expectations, yet they have persevered and flourished in industries where their presence was once deemed unconventional. Through their remarkable journeys, they serve as beacons of inspiration for aspiring entrepreneurs, proving that with vision, dedication, and self-belief, anything is possible.

From technology and construction to finance and engineering, these trailblazing women have harnessed their skills, knowledge, and determination to excel in sectors traditionally dominated by men. Their contributions have not only transformed their own lives but have also paved the way for future generations of women to pursue their passions and achieve success in any field they choose.

As we explore the narratives of these extraordinary women, we witness the power of resilience, innovation, and the indomitable spirit of female entrepreneurship. They challenge preconceived notions, break through glass ceilings, and are creating a cultural shift that embraces diversity and inclusivity in the business world.

Through their stories, we are reminded that gender should never define one's capabilities or limit their ambitions. These women have shattered barriers, defied expectations, and redefined the landscape of their respective industries. Their achievements serve as a testament to the boundless potential of women in Kazakhstan and around the world.

It is time to celebrate the women who are not just breaking boundaries but redefining what it means to be successful. Their stories are a testament to the power of ambition, perseverance, and the unyielding spirit of female entrepreneurship. Let us be inspired by their remarkable achievements as we embark on this transformative journey together.

Section 5

DINARA SHUKIZHANOVA: BROADENING THE HORIZONS OF WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN MECHANICAL ENGINEERING BUSINESS

Authors: Nurlan Kulbatyrov and Amina Chaia

In the heart of Northern Kazakhstan, Dinara Shukizhanova stands tall as a beacon of inspiration for women entrepreneurs breaking stereotypes in traditionally male-dominated sectors. In 2022, she made history as the President of Agromash Holding KZ JSC, the largest manufacturer of agricultural machines in the country.

Dinara's path to leadership was not an easy one. Growing up in Kostanay, she had dreams of becoming a journalist or teacher. However, her parents guided her towards an economics course, emphasizing the importance of securing a stable future. Little did Dinara know that her chosen path would lead her to challenge societal norms and redefine the role of women in the agricultural industry.





Joining Agromash as a young professional, Dinara faced numerous challenges, especially as a woman entering uncharted territory. Dinara dived headfirst into learning every aspect of the business, from production to the intricacies of the agricultural machinery market. Despite moments of doubt and obstacles along the way, Dinara persevered, gaining invaluable experience and gradually ascending the ranks within the company.

Throughout her journey, Dinara exemplifies the transformative power of personal development. Alongside her professional responsibilities, she pursued further education, obtaining an MBA degree from a technical university. This dedication to continuous growth and learning propelled her forward, enabling her to make informed decisions and lead with confidence.

Under Dinara's leadership, Agromash experienced a remarkable transformation. She spearheaded initiatives to expand production capacity, invest in modern equipment, and strengthen the company's market position. Through strategic localization efforts and collaboration with educational institutions, Dinara championed the development of a new class of engineers, ensuring a sustainable future for the company and fostering human resources growth in Kazakhstan.

Dinara's ascent to leadership in the agricultural industry was not without its share of challenges. Stereotypes and skepticism surrounded her, with some questioning her ability to thrive in a traditionally male-dominated sector. However, Dinara's actions paved the way for other women to follow in her footsteps.

As she reflects on her journey, Dinara recognizes the changing perceptions of women in the agricultural business. What was once seen as a male-dominated domain has evolved, with women now occupying diverse roles within the industry. Dinara's steadfast commitment to meritocracy and professionalism has resulted in a workforce where 20% are women, working alongside their male counterparts in machine shops, foundries, and on conveyors.

It is Dinara's opinion that emotional intelligence sets women apart, enabling them to navigate negotiations and decision-making with finesse. Her ability to understand and adapt to various situations has been a driving force in her success. Yet, even as she excels in her professional role, Dinara remains grounded in her personal life, fulfilling her duties as a wife, mother, and daughter, balancing the crown of leadership with the warmth of family.

Looking ahead, Dinara sees a world of opportunity for aspiring women entrepreneurs. The 21st century rewards those who take action, embracing challenges and turning dreams into reality. With readily available information and countless examples to draw inspiration from, the path to success is paved with possibilities. Dinara's journey serves as a testament to the qualities of concentration, decisiveness, and time management required in the agricultural machinery industry. While she has grown tougher and more focused over the years, her honesty and humanity remain as steadfast as ever.

Dinara Shukizhanova's achievements serve as an inspiration for women entrepreneurs across Kazakhstan and beyond. Her journey embodies the spirit of breaking boundaries, challenging norms, and redefining what is possible for women in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Dinara has paved the way for a more inclusive and empowering future, where gender is no longer a barrier to success. One of her notable achievements is her role as a Member of the Committee on Economic Reform and Regional Development of the Majilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, VIII convocation, which further underscores her dedication to shaping economic and regional policies for the betterment of her country.





Section 5

AINUR TLEUOVA: SHAPING NOVEL PROSPECTS IN THE EXPORT ADVISORY SERVICE

Authors: Nurlan Kulbatyrov and Assel Abdrakhmanova

In the male-dominated field of export goods, Ainur Tleuova stands tall as a trailblazer, challenging stereotypes and empowering women entrepreneurs to venture into new industries. Hailing from the city of Astana, Ainur's journey as an innovative self-employed business coach showcases her determination to succeed in an industry where credibility and recognition for women are hard-won.

Ainur's professional background in logistics and certification laid a strong foundation for her coaching career in the field of export goods. With over 12 years of experience in the freight forwarding industry and a comprehensive understanding of business processes, Ainur now dedicates herself to sharing her knowledge and developing the competitiveness of local businesses. Her coaching efforts are focused on unlocking the export potential of companies, empowering them to navigate international markets, and expanding their prospects for success.





The path to becoming a coach was not an easy one for Ainur. In 2020, she participated in a rigorous selection process for a coaching program developed by the International Trade Center and sponsored by the European Union. Through this program, Ainur honed her coaching skills and embarked on a journey of empowering more than 30 companies in Kazakhstan over the past two years.

Ainur's coaching success lies in her ability to guide small and medium-sized enterprises in adapting their products for international markets. With her support, these businesses have made significant strides in entering new markets, both regionally and internationally. From agricultural products to clothing and textiles, Ainur's clients have successfully expanded their reach, penetrating markets within the customs union and even as far as the United Arab Emirates and Sri Lanka. Moreover, she has facilitated their transition into internet trading platforms such as Kaspi and Wildberries, broadening their customer base and boosting their growth.

While Ainur has encountered challenges as a business coach, such as navigating uncharted markets and addressing misconceptions about the role of a coach, she remains steadfast in her commitment to empowering her clients. She firmly believes in the importance of teaching entrepreneurs to unlock their export potential themselves, embodying the adage, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish and he will eat for a lifetime." Through her guidance, Ainur instills confidence, knowledge, and essential tools in her clients, enabling them to reach new levels of success and expand their sales geography.

Ainur's work also focuses on empowering women entrepreneurs, who make up a significant portion of her clientele. Many of these women face insecurities and societal stereotypes about their roles and abilities. However, Ainur derives immense pleasure from empowering them, instilling confidence, and equipping them with the necessary skills to overcome challenges. Her coaching sessions become catalysts for personal and professional growth, enabling these women to break free from societal constraints and expand the horizons of their businesses.

Despite the challenges she faces, Ainur remains resolute in her commitment to finding balance between family, career, and gender equality. In Kazakhstani society, gender stereotypes persist, often relegating women to traditional domestic roles. However, Ainur's determination to break these stereotypes and contribute to Kazakhstan's economic growth drives her forward. As the country's policies increasingly focus on expanding manufacturing industries and integrating exports into global trade, Ainur recognizes the vital role she plays in guiding Kazakhstani products to broader markets.

Through Ainur Tleuova's coaching, she not only propels local businesses to new heights but also inspires a new generation of women entrepreneurs to step into male-dominated sectors, confident in their abilities.



Section 5

DINARA KUZHAGALIYEVA AND THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: ERODING BOUNDARIES AND FORGING FRESH FOUNDATIONS

Authors: Nurlan Kulbatyrov and Amina Chaia

In the vibrant city of Konaev, Kazakhstan, a remarkable story unfolded. Dinara Kuzhagaliyeva's personal life journey took an unexpected turn that would lead her to make a mark in the male-dominated construction sector.

Dinara's journey began with her husband, a visionary and the driving force behind Turksib LLP, a prominent construction company in the Almaty region. For years, Dinara stood beside him, supporting his ventures and dreams. However, tragedy struck when her beloved husband died from Covid-19 in 2021.

Left with the weight of unfinished projects and the dreams of countless homebuyers resting on her shoulders, Dinara found herself at a crossroads. The choice was clear: succumb to the overwhelming challenges or summon the courage to step into the construction world and carry her husband's legacy forward.

"Closing the company was never an option for me," Dinara recalls. "I knew that people were waiting for their homes, and they had invested all their savings. I couldn't let them down."

With resolve, Dinara immersed herself in the intricacies of the construction industry. She tirelessly sought knowledge, studying blueprints, delving into building codes, and familiarizing herself with the latest construction methodologies. From the foundations to the finishing touches, Dinara left no stone unturned in her quest to understand every aspect of the trade.

"I was determined to learn and master every aspect of the construction process," Dinara shares. "I wanted to honor my husband's legacy and prove that a woman can excel in this male-dominated field."

Yet, her journey was not without challenges. As a woman stepping into a domain predominantly occupied by men, Dinara faced deep-rooted stereotypes and biases. Many doubted her capabilities and questioned her authority, believing that construction was not a place for women. But Dinara remained undeterred. She understood that true progress required breaking down barriers and challenging societal norms.

"No one in the construction industry takes women seriously," Dinara reveals. "But I am here to change that perception. I want to show that women have a rightful place in this sector and can excel in every aspect of the construction process."

Armed with expertise, passion, and a strong work ethic, Dinara proved her worth on the construction sites. She became a fixture, donning a hard hat and steel-toed boots, leading by example. Through her meticulous attention to detail and hands-on approach, Dinara earned the respect and admiration of her colleagues and crew.

"Every morning, I come to the construction site first and plan the whole day with my team," Dinara states. "I want to show them that I am fully committed to the work and that together, we can achieve greatness."

Beyond the construction sites, Dinara's impact extended to the broader industry. She recognized the power of diversity and inclusion, and the need for fresh perspectives in shaping the future of construction.

"We need more women in the construction sector," Dinara emphasizes. "Women bring unique insights, attention to detail, and a caring approach that can enhance the quality of our projects. By embracing diversity, we can create better living spaces for everyone."

As Dinara continues to lead Turksib LLP, her legacy reverberates through the construction industry and beyond. She has become a symbol of empowerment and an advocate for gender equality in the workplace.

"I want to inspire other women to follow their dreams and overcome the obstacles in their path," Dinara affirms. "We have the power to shape industries, challenge stereotypes, and create a more inclusive future."





Section 5

BOTAGOZ ZEINULLA: TRACING THE FEMININE TRAJECTORY WITHIN THE TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS INDUSTRY

Authors: Nurlan Kulbatyrov
and Assel Abdrakhmanova

In the heart of Astana, Botagoz Zeinulla, an indomitable entrepreneur, has harnessed the power of determination and shattered gender stereotypes in the transport and forwarding sector. As the leader of metal product and structure production at the esteemed Transport and Forwarding Complex 'ARS-Vneshservice,' she has not only transformed her family business but also inspired countless women to pursue their dreams in male-dominated industries.

From humble beginnings, Botagoz's entrepreneurial journey began when she completed her education in budget and budget accounting at just 15 years old. Little did she know that this would pave the way for her future leadership role in her father's company. Following her father's passing, she courageously assumed the mantle of responsibility, steering the production of metal products and structures.



Transport and Forwarding Complex 'ARS-Vneshservice' underwent a remarkable metamorphosis under Botagoz's leadership. The company emerged as a trailblazer, offering comprehensive rail transportation services not only within Kazakhstan but also to non-CIS countries. From containers to covered wagons, gondola cars to platforms, and specialized rolling stock, they facilitated diverse transportation needs with efficiency.

Botagoz's ascent to success was not without its challenges. Building trust and establishing her reputation proved to be formidable tasks, especially in the context of a family business. However, Botagoz turned these obstacles into stepping stones. Drawing upon the wisdom of her parents and their experienced friends, she found support and invaluable guidance. Their words of wisdom resonated deeply within her, pushing her to constantly improve and prove her capabilities.

Reflecting on her journey, Botagoz shared her opinion that, "If you want to act and things don't go as planned, draw conclusions, take action again, and never stop learning and improving your competencies." These words encapsulate her commitment to personal and professional growth, serving as a testament to her unyielding spirit. As a woman in a male-dominated industry, Botagoz has confronted the prevailing gender stereotypes head-on. She challenges the notion that women are mere outliers in the forwarding business.

"The organization of transportation is predominantly driven by women. From freight forwarders to drivers, machinists to conductors, women hold a significant presence."

Her words inspire a new narrative, celebrating the increasing representation of women in traditionally male-dominated domains.

Botagoz believes that women bring a unique perspective to decision-making. She notes, "Women possess an innate intuition, akin to raising a child, which aids us in making well-rounded choices. On the other hand, men often think strategically and take calculated risks." With a balanced approach, she has been able to make astute decisions while minimizing potential risks.

Navigating the transport and forwarding sector has presented its own set of complexities for Botagoz. One persistent challenge she faces is the scarcity of highly skilled specialists in the field. Recognizing the significance of professionals in establishing efficient logistics and optimizing transportation processes, she asserts, "Professionals play a crucial role in constructing the right logistics and facilitating cost-effective cargo transport. Their expertise is invaluable." Botagoz remains dedicated to attracting and nurturing talent, bridging the gap in the industry and driving growth.


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ШТРАФЫ

Section 5

INDIRA AKHMETOVA: TRIUMPH AND UNYIELDING DETERMINATION IN THE SECURITY INDUSTRY

Authors: Nurlan Kulbatyrov and Amina Chaia

In a realm dominated by men, Indira Akhmetova emerges as a fearless force, breaking gender barriers and forging her path to success in the security sector of Kazakhstan. Her journey is a testament to unwavering determination, defying societal expectations, and inspiring women everywhere to challenge the status quo.



Indira's story is one of extraordinary transformation and resilience. Starting her career in the finance department of a bank, fate dealt her a challenging hand when personal circumstances demanded a new direction. Amidst her daughter's health struggles and the tumult of divorce, Indira found herself navigating uncharted territory. Braving uncertainty, she ventured into the world of security, working as a taxi driver and eventually finding her way to a monitoring station operator role in a security organization.

From the very beginning, Indira faced formidable hurdles. Her audacity to enter a male-dominated industry was met with open disapproval. Critics declared that security was no place for a woman. But Indira defied their expectations, knowing that women were just as capable and deserving of success. With steely determination, she advanced from operator to inspector, eventually ascending to the position of head of the security department. Each step forward solidified her belief in the power of resilience and shattered the illusion of limitations based on gender.

Indira's journey serves as a beacon of hope, inspiring women to embrace their inner strength and challenge the norms that hold them back. Her unwavering resolve and unwavering determination have defied expectations and shattered stereotypes. She declares, "Femininity is not weakness; it's a multifaceted strength that empowers us to bring a unique perspective and unwavering determination."

Indira's words resonate with a profound truth that women around the world can rally behind. Through her inspiring journey, she encourages women to recognize their inherent power and embrace their femininity as a source of strength. She defies the notion that women must conform to preconceived notions of masculinity to succeed in male-dominated industries. Instead, Indira urges women to tap into their unique perspective, leveraging their unwavering determination to carve their own paths and shatter glass ceilings.

In a society that often places limitations on women, Indira's story ignites a fire within women to challenge the norms and stand tall in their pursuit of success. She serves as a role model, demonstrating that by embracing their inner strength and breaking free from societal constraints, women can thrive in any field they choose.

Indira's unwavering resolve and unyielding spirit have shattered stereotypes, showing women everywhere that no industry is beyond their reach. She serves as a living testament to the power of resilience, determination, and unwavering self-belief. Her journey is a reminder that with unwavering resolve and unyielding determination, women can overcome any obstacle and thrive in the face of adversity.

Indira's story inspires women to be unapologetically themselves, embracing their femininity and using it as a source of strength and empowerment. Her words resonate as a rallying cry for women to break free from the shackles of societal expectations and embrace their unique qualities that make them powerful agents of change.

Indira Akhmetova's unwavering determination and fearless pursuit of success serve as a guiding light for women seeking to forge their paths in male-dominated industries. Her triumphant journey inspires women to rise above limitations, break through barriers, and claim their rightful place at the forefront of their chosen fields. Indira's story is a testament to the transformative power of embracing one's inner strength and rewriting the narrative


STOP

of what it means to be a successful woman in a male-dominated world. Indira's message to all the women entrepreneurs is:

"As women, we possess a strength that knows no bounds. Embrace your femininity, unleash your unwavering determination, and defy the limits imposed upon you. Together, let us shatter glass ceilings and illuminate the path for future generations."





Section 5

KYZZHIBEK RYZHANOVA: DRIVING TRANSFORMATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Author: Nurlan Kulbatyrov

Kyzzhibek Ryszhanova's journey into entrepreneurship in the construction industry began during her teenage years when she witnessed the process of building concrete structures while cooking for a construction crew. Inspired by her father's successful construction company, which has been operating in Kazakhstan for three decades, Kyzzhibek developed a personal interest in understanding the entire production chain of a product or service. Her entrepreneurial role model was her father, who instilled in her qualities such as enterprise, perseverance, and resistance to stress.

After completing her bachelor's degree in international economics, Kyzzhibek embarked on a career in the public service. Her passion for learning and exploring new horizons led her to become a scholarship holder of the prestigious international



program “Bolashak.” During her time in London, she pursued language courses and alongside a master’s degree in program and project management at the University of Warwick. The international exposure and knowledge she gained during this period shaped her entrepreneurial aspirations.

Following her studies, Kyzzhibek decided to apply her acquired knowledge and experiences to her family business, which focused on the construction and operation of Small Hydro Power Plants (HPP) in the southern region of Kazakhstan. Taking on the role of Project Manager, she successfully implemented two projects, contributing to the growth of renewable energy sources in the country.

However, being a female entrepreneur in a male-dominated industry came with its challenges. Kyzzhibek encountered stereotypes and faced difficulties during negotiations and communications. Despite these obstacles, Kyzzhibek remained resilient and gained valuable experience and negotiation skills through trial and error.

She also shared a real-life example of her management style, highlighting her attention to creating comfortable conditions for workers on a construction site. While hiring temporary employees, Kyzzhibek recognized the importance of providing basic human needs such as a kitchen and comfortable accommodations, which resulted in increased efficiency and productivity.

In 2020, Kyzzhibek founded her own company, Smart LLP ReEnergy, which offers engineering and consulting services in the field of renewable energy, with a specific focus on small hydro projects. With a second higher education degree in civil engineering, she fortified her technical knowledge, enabling her to tackle the complex challenges of the male-dominated construction industry.

Through her experiences, Kyzzhibek acknowledged that approaches to running and managing a business can differ between men and women. In her opinion, while men tend to be more action-oriented, women often analyze scenarios before making decisions. She highlighted that women excel as risk managers and emphasized the need for personal development and being in a circle of like-minded people who can positively influence success.

In her own words, Kyzzhibek offers advice to fellow businesswomen:

“See every problem or challenge as an opportunity for growth. Pay more attention to personal development and surround yourself with like-minded people who can positively influence your success.”








MC Cuba

Section 5

DIANA SADYKOVA'S PATH IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY
Author: Nurlan Kulbatyrov

Diana Sadykova found herself on an unexpected journey into the world of business. Her narrative unfolds with the inception of ADS Sapa LLP, a company born from a shared vision with her brother. Back in September 2012, they laid the foundation for their venture. While her brother brought an engineering background to the table, inspired by their father's legacy, Diana's economics education made her a natural collaborator in this endeavor.

The choice of the company's name held immense significance for Diana. She insisted on incorporating "SAPA" into the name, a decision rooted in her desire to stand out and create a distinctive identity within the engineering landscape. She was not merely interested in another run-of-the-mill business; she sought to fill a void by delivering exceptional service quality. Her aspiration was to bridge the gap between Contractors and Customers, guiding them through projects with dedication and expertise.

At the time, Diana found herself navigating the realm of entrepreneurship while balancing her responsibilities as a new mother. Her days were a juggling act between nurturing her newborn and nurturing a budding business. Learning the ropes on the fly became her norm – negotiating, hiring staff, attending meetings – all while striving to carve out a unique space for ADS Sapa LLP.

The turning point came with the addition of a commercial director to their team, leading to a surge in contract numbers. Diana reflected on the formula for success, acknowledging that while there is not a one-size-fits-all approach, integrity remained a constant variable. Honesty, from self-introspection to dealings with partners, was the bedrock upon which she built her company.

As Diana recounted her journey, the narrative took a detour into the challenges she had encountered and continues to grapple with. The construction industry, traditionally male-dominated, posed its own set of hurdles. However, Diana had managed to defy any gender-related biases or mistreatment, a testament to the evolving landscape of the business world.

Yet, her obstacles lay not just in societal norms but in the intricacies of her field. Establishing a harmonious rapport with employees accustomed to outdated practices and differing values presented its share of hurdles. The challenge of deciphering clients' ambiguous demands, coping with stubborn contractors, and grappling with flawed project designs echoed the industry's complexities. These intricacies frequently led to project delays, budget overruns, and incomplete constructions – a common woe in the construction domain.

Diana's voice shifted as she addressed the unique approaches of men and women in business. She perceived a difference in mindset, observing that men often leaned toward aggressive tactics and territorial battles. As a woman, her instincts steered her toward conflict resolution and fostering understanding, even if it meant yielding ground. Her gender seemed to amplify her inclination for diplomacy over confrontation.

Addressing aspiring businesswomen, especially those venturing into male-dominated sectors, Diana recommended considering partnerships, especially within family setups. The risks in such industries were high, demanding a strong support network. The driving force behind entering business should be well-defined, whether driven by ambition or necessity.

Reflecting on her reputation, Diana painted a vivid picture of its fluidity. In a mature market, reputation demanded constant nurturing, accumulation of knowledge, and gradual growth. She transitioned into discussing her role as a woman entrepreneur, asserting that any presumed biases no longer held her back. Embracing her unique perspective as a woman gave her the freedom to admit mistakes and cultivate a cooperative approach.

Diana's story concluded with her observations on the distinct challenges of being a woman entrepreneur. Her path in the construction industry had been laden with rigorous responsibilities, decisions, and coordination, given the multitude of stakeholders involved. While the creative realms might offer a more nurturing environment for women, the structured and rule-bound construction world required specialized knowledge, resources, and resilience.





Section 5

ULDAN ABDUKALYKOVA AND THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY: A GLOBAL IMPACT BEYOND KAZAKHSTAN

Authors: Nurlykhan Aljanova

Uldan Abdukalykova is a Medical Doctor and Business graduate with entrepreneurial skills. Her incredible journey began in her childhood, where she exhibited an strong work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit that would shape her future success. Born and raised in Kazakhstan, Uldan Abdykalykova grew up in a bustling household as one of eight children. From a young age, she felt a deep sense of responsibility towards her family's well-being, fueling her determination to make a meaningful impact on their lives.



Even as a schoolgirl, Uldan displayed a drive to help others. At the age of 13, she started working at a local maternity hospital, assisting doctors and nurses with various tasks. Uldan's dedication and genuine care for patients made her an invaluable asset to the medical team, and she quickly gained recognition for her hard work and willingness to go the extra mile. Her maternity work experience from her younger years inspired her to obtain a qualification as a Medical Doctor from Kazakhstan State Medical University, Almaty.

Driven by her desire to support her family and pursue her aspirations, Uldan expanded her ventures beyond the hospital. During school breaks and weekends, she embarked on a new business endeavor – selling clothes sourced from Tashkent and Almaty. Uldan's keen eye for fashion and her ability to connect with customers allowed her to build a loyal clientele. She would travel to neighboring towns and set up temporary stalls, showcasing the latest trends and offering personalized styling advice.

Uldan balanced her entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to her studies. Despite the demands of her work, she never compromised on her education, realizing that it was the key to opening doors to a brighter future. Uldan's time management skills and determination allowed her to excel academically while growing her enterprises.

Her experiences as a young entrepreneur and her belief in the power of education shaped Uldan's perspective on life. She developed her entrepreneurial skills further at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Karachi through the World Bank sponsored WomenX program for empowering women. She understood the importance of seizing opportunities and taking calculated risks. Uldan's willingness to step outside her comfort zone and explore new territories became the driving force behind her eventual success.

Following her entrepreneurial ventures and academic accomplishments, Uldan embarked on an exciting new chapter of her life with her marriage to a Pakistani businessman. Driven by a shared vision for a brighter future, Uldan and her husband made the decision to embark on an adventure that would lead them, together with their children, to the United States of America.

When Uldan moved to America, she faced a significant cultural shock and had to navigate the challenges of being a mother and a student in a foreign land. While studying for American exams, she also continued to care for her children, ensuring their well-being despite the emotional strain she endured.

Uldan's resilience led her to make the decision to return to Pakistan, where she could focus on her studies while receiving support from her husband's family. In Karachi, she immersed herself in her studies, spending long hours at the local library, diligently preparing for her exams. Tthe support of Uldan's husband's relatives enabled her to overcome language barriers and grasp the American curriculum.

Tragedy struck when her husband unexpectedly left her and their four children. This devastating turn of events left Uldan as the sole provider for her children. Undeterred, she sought employment opportunities and secured a position as a consultant for a Pakistani pharmaceutical company, Searle. She rose through the ranks and was eventually appointed in the International Business Division, where she looked over various Central Asian, East Asian and African countries. Uldan's

medical background, business acumen and proficiency in English allowed her to excel in her role, providing valuable insights and expertise for the company's expansion.

Uldan's success as a consultant opened new doors for her. She pursued further education, completing a Master's in Business Administration at the University of Karachi.

Armed with her extensive knowledge and experience, Uldan ventured into the pharmaceutical industry, working as a product manager for renowned companies. Her skills and expertise allowed her to travel extensively, establishing strong business relationships and conducting sales training across different countries.

Uldan's remarkable journey culminated in her role as a business consultant for Hilton Pharma, a prominent pharmaceutical company in Pakistan. Uldan has become an invaluable asset to the company. With her knowledge and keen insights, Uldan assumes the vital responsibility of overseeing projects in the CIS region, serving as the CIS Coordinator stationed in Uzbekistan.

In this role, Uldan showcases her ability to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of regulations and requirements. Her deep understanding of the industry, combined with her commitment to delivering excellence, has propelled her career to new heights.

Throughout her remarkable journey, Uldan remained grounded in her values and faith. She embraced the teachings of Islam, finding solace in the Quran and the principles it espoused. Uldan prioritized the well-being of her children, providing them with an Islamic education and encouraging them to embrace knowledge of different religions.

From her early days as a schoolgirl working at a maternity hospital to her success as a respected business consultant, Uldan's journey embodies the transformative impact of embracing opportunities, pursuing education, and never losing sight of one's dreams.









Section 6

CREATIVE CHANGEMAKERS: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS LEADING KAZAKHSTAN'S CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Kazakhstan is a land where ancient traditions and contemporary culture seamlessly intertwine, creating a vibrant and diverse tapestry of artistic expression. At the forefront of a recent cultural renaissance are visionary women entrepreneurs who are reshaping the landscape of contemporary culture in Kazakhstan.

In this section, we delve into the inspiring narratives of these Creative Changemakers, women who are fearlessly navigating the intersection of creativity, business acumen, and a passion to promote her culture. Through their innovative ventures, they are not only shaping the contemporary cultural scene of Kazakhstan but also influencing its trajectory on a global scale.

Each narrative illuminates the remarkable journey of a female entrepreneur who has ventured into different realms of contemporary culture. From art galleries and design studios to digital media platforms and cultural festivals, these women have boldly challenged the norms and conventions that have traditionally hindered women's progress in male-dominated industries.

Their stories exemplify their dedication to promoting and showcasing the diverse facets of Kazakhstan's contemporary culture. They are catalysts for change, bridging the gap between traditional art forms and modern innovation, and fostering a vibrant and inclusive creative ecosystem.

Through their entrepreneurial endeavors, these women have created platforms for emerging artists, facilitated cross-cultural collaborations, and amplified the voices of under-represented communities. They understand that cultural entrepreneurship is not only about economic success but also about the transformative power of art in society.

Join us as we celebrate the remarkable achievements of these Creative Changemakers and explore the captivating narratives of their entrepreneurial journeys. Their stories will inspire aspiring entrepreneurs, artists, and cultural enthusiasts to embrace the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary culture, follow their own creative endeavors, and contribute to the dynamic cultural fabric of Kazakhstan and beyond.

Section 6

KSENIYA DRACHUKOVA: REIMAGINING THE THEATRE SPACE AT THE "ART-SHELTER BUNKER"

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova

Kseniya Drachukova, the visionary founder of the Independent Experimental Theater Art Shelter BUNKER, has emerged as a beacon of creativity and transformation in Kazakhstan's contemporary cultural landscape. With her bold approach and passion, Kseniya challenges institutional norms, creating a new cultural experience that resonates deeply with society.

Kseniya's journey as a cultural entrepreneur is deeply intertwined with her personal story of triumph over adversity. Overcoming a stuttering condition that stemmed from a traumatic dog attack in her childhood, Kseniya found solace and self-expression through various art forms. Encouraged by her mother, she immersed herself in the world of theater, music, and visual arts, developing her artistic skills and nurturing her creative spirit. These experiences not only helped her overcome her own struggles but also ignited a lifelong passion for the transformative power of the arts.



In 2014, Kseniya embarked on a remarkable endeavor, founding the Independent Experimental Theater Art Shelter BUNKER. The theater found its unconventional home in a Soviet-era bomb shelter, repurposing the space to create an atmospheric and captivating venue for artistic expression. Kseniya and her team transformed the abandoned shelter into a cultural sanctuary, breathing new life into its walls and giving voice to contemporary art forms.

Kseniya's entrepreneurial spirit shines through her refusal to conform to traditional norms and seek government subsidies. Instead, she took on loans from individuals who believed in her vision, determined to maintain the theater's artistic integrity and financial autonomy. "We did not want to be limited by external influences or compromise our creative freedom," Kseniya asserts. This independence empowers Art Shelter BUNKER to push boundaries and create without limitations, fostering a truly unique and authentic artistic experience.

Art Shelter BUNKER stands apart with its open stage, inviting the audience to actively engage and participate in performances. It blurs the lines between performers and spectators, fostering a unique connection and shared experience. "In our theater, there are no passive spectators. Everyone becomes an active participant in the art," Kseniya emphasizes. This interactive approach challenges traditional notions of theater, creating a space where art and audience merge, amplifying the impact of the performances.

"Theater became my refuge, allowing me to express myself and find strength in vulnerability," Kseniya reflects. Her personal transformation inspired her to create a space where others could also find healing and self-expression.

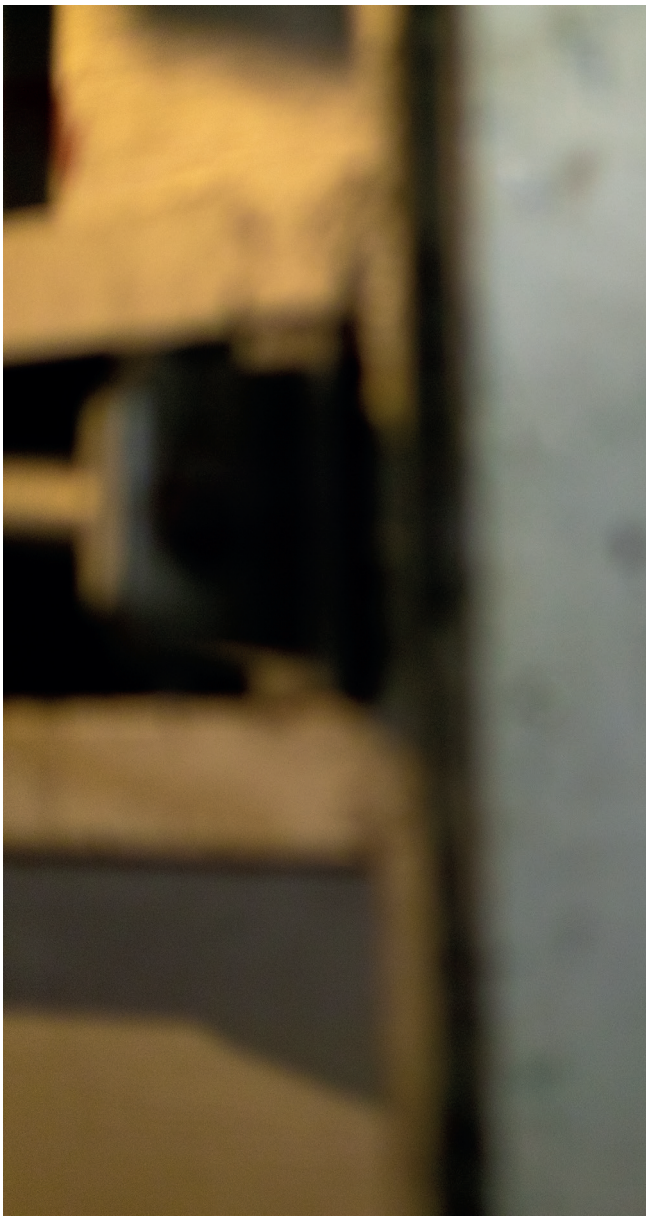
For Kseniya, Art Shelter BUNKER serves a larger purpose beyond entertainment. It is a platform for contemporary theater that confronts societal issues, provoking thought and inspiring dialogue. By addressing contemporary social ills through their productions, the theater acts as a catalyst for change and encourages a deeper understanding of the world around us.

"Art has the power to spark conversations, challenge the status quo, and inspire positive transformations," Kseniya affirms. Through their thought-provoking performances, Art Shelter BUNKER invites audiences to reflect, question, and engage with the pressing issues of our time.

Kseniya's commitment to fostering artistic growth extends beyond Art Shelter BUNKER. Through the sister venture, Bunker Teens, she empowers children and adults to develop openness, confidence, and non-standard thinking through acting

courses. By nurturing creative potential and challenging societal norms, Kseniya continues to shape Kazakhstan's cultural landscape and inspire future generations of artists and changemakers.

In Kseniya's own words, "Theater has no boundaries; it can be anything and anywhere with no limits." Her remarkable journey and the innovative spirit of Art Shelter BUNKER serve as a testament to the power of culture and the transformative potential of creative experimentation. Through her commitment to artistic expression and social reflection, Kseniya Drachukova and her theater are redefining the cultural landscape of Kazakhstan, inspiring change, and nurturing the creative potential within us all.





Section 6

IRINA SHVYGOVA: A NOVEL APPROACH TO SOCIAL INTERPLAY THROUGH COGNITIVE EXCITATION WITHIN THE GAME "GUESS IN 60 SECONDS"

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova

Step into the world of cultural entrepreneurship, where Irina Shvygova has embarked on a transformative journey through her renowned intellectual game, "Guess in 60 Seconds." As an entrepreneur driven by a desire to create unique social experiences, Irina has had an impact on Kazakhstan's cultural landscape. Her game not only promotes intellectual growth and knowledge but also fosters connections, stimulates engaging discussions, and redefines the concept of social engagement in an interactive and enjoyable way.

Irina's foray into cultural entrepreneurship began when she first participated in the game that would change her life. What started as a casual interest quickly evolved into a deep-rooted fascination for the game's blend of logic, knowledge, and camaraderie. Recognizing the potential to create something extraordinary, Irina transitioned from a participant to a producer and partner, transforming her pastime into a thriving venture.




11
GASTRODOM
ELEVEN

“Guess in 60 Seconds” is an intellectually stimulating quiz that challenges multiple teams of six individuals to respond to a series of questions. In the course of the game, the quizmaster poses 30 questions, granting each team a mere 60 seconds to deliver their answers.

In Irina’s opinion “Guess in 60 Seconds” is more than just a quiz; it represents a celebration of intellect and an avenue for personal growth. Building upon the esteemed Moscow game franchise, Irina adds her personal touch to create a truly unparalleled experience for participants. With a dedicated team of professionals, including a host, SMM assistant, photographer, and DJ, she organizes each event to ensure an atmosphere that fosters intellectual development, networking, and meaningful interactions.

The driving force behind Irina’s journey is the joy and satisfaction she witnesses in her guests. The positive feedback received after each game serves as a testament to the game’s success and the impact it has on participants. Irina firmly believes that genuine passion and love for one’s work are the keys to success, with financial gain naturally following. However, she acknowledges the challenges she faced along the way, investing her own money to revive the project and working diligently to make it popular and financially viable.

Throughout her entrepreneurial journey, Irina has learned valuable lessons. She recognizes the importance of appearance and professionalism, understanding that she represents a high-quality intellectual game and must match that level of excellence. Irina’s commitment to constant progress and incremental steps forward has been instrumental in overcoming obstacles. Embracing the power of teamwork, she surrounds herself with competent individuals, fostering a collaborative environment that propels the game to new heights.

“Guess in 60 Seconds” has become a revered and highly anticipated event in Kazakhstan, attracting a diverse audience of professionals aged 35 and above. Beyond the intellectual challenge it presents, the game’s true value lies in the immersive environment it creates. Through networking opportunities, engaging discussions, and a sense of belonging, Irina ensures that each participant experiences personal growth and enrichment.

Continually dedicated to her own growth, Irina actively participates in workshops, seminars, and training events. This commitment to learning and personal development allows her to refine her expertise and deliver an exceptional experience to participants. Irina recognizes the significance of personal branding, yet her primary concern goes beyond herself. She places a higher emphasis on enhancing and promoting the game’s development and reputation, establishing it as a symbol of top-notch intellectual engagement.

As a wife, mother, and entrepreneur, Irina embodies the values of family, respect, and a passion for personal and intellectual growth. Through “Guess in 60 Seconds,” she has redefined social engagement, bringing people together and fostering connections to be part of her extraordinary cultural entrepreneurship journey.



Section 6

AIKO TOKEN REVITALIZES THE NOMADIC HERITAGE OF THE SILK ROAD

Author: Nurzat Mukan

Aiko Token, through her cultural entrepreneurship, is working to preserve and promote the rich nomadic and Silk Route heritage of Kazakhstan. Her journey began when she embarked on the ambitious venture launching Visit Turkestan – a platform dedicated to showcasing the historical treasures and captivating spirit of the Turkestan city in the south of the country. This endeavor even encompasses the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site, emphasizing her dedication to heritage preservation.

Aiko Token's deep-rooted passion for her homeland and a profound connection to Turkestan drove her commitment to revive the city's cultural heritage. She recognized that Turkestan held within its walls a legacy of centuries of history, art, and spirituality. Inspired by this heritage, Aiko Token knew she had found her calling.

The vision for Visit Turkestan was clear from the outset – to resurrect the grandeur of Turkestan and revive its prominence as a cultural destination. Aiko Token firmly believed that by showcasing the city's historical sites, promoting cultural events, and developing tourism infrastructure, Turkestan could reclaim its rightful place on the global stage.

With meticulous planning Aiko Token assembled a team of passionate individuals who shared her vision. Together, they embarked on a quest, immersing themselves in research to unveil the hidden tales and untold wonders of Turkestan's past. This deep understanding formed the bedrock of their strategic roadmap, ensuring that every aspect of Visit Turkestan resonated with travelers who visit.

Preserving the historical cultural value of Turkestan while embracing modernity was a delicate task. Aiko understood the importance of striking a harmonious balance, enhancing the visitor experience without compromising the city's cultural integrity. With thoughtful infrastructure developments and meticulous attention to detail, Aiko Token has woven a blend of past and present, guiding visitors through a transformative journey into the heart of Turkestan's heritage.

To amplify the impact of Visit Turkestan, Aiko Token forged powerful alliances with local artisans, heritage preservation experts, and tourism stakeholders. Together, they curated immersive cultural experiences that celebrated the essence of Turkestan's traditions, breathing life into ancient tales and traditions. By empowering local communities and engaging them in the preservation of their heritage, Aiko Token instilled a profound sense of pride and ownership in the local community.

Aiko Token's journey was fueled by a belief in the transformative power of cultural wealth. She understood that Visit Turkestan was not solely about attracting tourists – it was about revitalizing local economies, creating sustainable livelihoods, and strengthening a sense of identity within the community. By embracing the digital realm, Aiko Token harnessed the power of social media and captivating storytelling to spread the allure of Turkestan far and wide. Her campaigns painted vivid portraits of Turkestan's historical grandeur, architectural marvels, and warm hospitality, beckoning travelers to embark on a transformative cultural odyssey.

Aiko Token's commitment to cultural heritage has breathed new life into this ancient city, weaving a narrative of strength, unity, and cultural pride. Through Visit Turkestan, the legacy of Turkestan will continue to shine, inspiring generations to come to embrace their roots, celebrate their heritage, and preserve the tapestry of their nomadic and Silk Route past.





Section 6

AINUR UMAYEVA: CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN PR AND COMMUNICATION

Author: Yelena Muzykina

"Why are you staying at home? There are so many opportunities around! Get out and use them!" Those words Ainura frequently heard from her parents tremendously influenced her worldview and life. Ainura Umaeva was born in Almaty into a very traditional Chechen family. Though the family had a good house and lived comfortably, the overall impression was A Home Among Strangers, a Stranger Among His Own (The title of a famous and profound Soviet movie directed by Nikita Mikhalkov). Ainura recalls the name unconsciously, trying to find a proper metaphor to describe her adolescence. "We always had a feeling that one day we would collect our things and go back to Chechnya," recalls Ainura.

Ainura's journey into the world of PR and communication began while studying at KIMEP, first as a Bachelor's student majoring in International Relations, and then pursuing an MBA in the Finance and Management program. Her passion for exploring new opportunities led her to work in various roles, including as a translator, an employee at an NGO, a coordinator in a school program, and an office manager/translator at a private company.

However, it was a fortuitous encounter during her Master's program that changed the course of Ainura's life. She met a woman who happened to be the director of a PR company and was invited to join the staff. Starting from the bottom of the career ladder, Ainura seized the opportunity to learn and grow. In just four years, she went from a junior manager to becoming the Agency Director, eventually becoming a business partner and, finally, the owner of Taynyy Sovetnik (Privy Councilor) communication agency. Ainura's journey mirrored an American dream realized in the heart of Kazakhstan.

Yet, Ainura's path was not without its challenges. Reflecting on her 15-year experience in the industry, she acknowledged that it took time for her to grow into an independent and robust leader. The evolving market landscape in Kazakhstan, particularly in PR and communication, played a significant role in her development. With the influx of renowned international brands entering the market, the demand for high-quality services and global standards increased. Ainura's agency, founded in 2004, caught the wave of these profound changes, positioning itself for success.

As Ainura's agency flourished, she faced an ongoing obstacle: a general misunderstanding of PR objectives among Kazakhstani clients. She identified two primary reasons for this. Firstly, many businesses in Kazakhstan have a short-term focus on immediate profit, neglecting the long-term reputation-building aspects of PR. Secondly, there is a lack of understanding about the value of paying for PR services and the accumulated experience and expertise they offer.

In line with her commitment to ethical practices, Ainura embraced the principles of the Islamic economy in her business. She refused to work with tobacco and alcohol producers or facilitate payments for such products through her agency accounts. This principled stance led to unexpected opportunities, as she secured contracts with major children's brands like P&G and Nestle, who sought a partner untethered to tobacco-related products.

Ainura firmly believes that genuine success in business stems from being at peace with oneself and cultivating an ethical and moral corporate culture. She emphasizes the importance of correct prioritizing and empowering others. "Nothing is an end in itself, neither your job nor your company," Ainura asserts.

"You have to remember that those are only means. Entrepreneurship is about bringing people together, delegating their duties, fostering their independence, and acting benevolently. You have to learn to teach others, not do everything yourself."

It is through this approach that businesses can find new opportunities for growth and prosperity.

As Ainura continues to navigate the ever-changing complexities of the modern world, she seamlessly combines her identities as a strong agency leader, a caring mother, a top-level professional, and a devoted Muslim. Her journey exemplifies the power of cultural transformation and the integration of personal values into business practices. Ainura's entrepreneurial journey in the field of PR and communication represents the spirit of creative changemakers in Kazakhstan's contemporary cultural landscape. Through her commitment to ethical practices, she has made a significant impact in the industry while staying true to her Chechen roots and personal principles. Ainura's story demonstrates the potential for cultural transformation through entrepreneurship.









Section 7

TECH TRAILBLAZERS: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS REDEFINING KAZAKHSTAN'S DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

In the fast-evolving landscape of technology and innovation, Kazakhstan's women entrepreneurs have emerged as influential catalysts, disrupting industries and propelling the nation into a new era of digital transformation. With a dynamic blend of tenacity, creativity, and technological prowess, these visionary women are shattering stereotypes and revolutionizing the tech sector.

In recent years, Kazakhstan has witnessed a remarkable surge in women-led tech startups and innovative ventures, marking a significant shift in the traditionally male-dominated industry. This wave of entrepreneurial spirit reflects a growing recognition of women's potential and their integral role in shaping the country's technological future.

These trailblazing women entrepreneurs have embraced emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, and data analytics, harnessing their power to develop groundbreaking solutions and disrupt conventional business models. Their ventures span diverse sectors, including e-commerce, fintech, healthtech, edtech, and more, addressing pressing societal challenges and unlocking new opportunities for economic growth.

The rise of women entrepreneurs in the Kazakhstani tech sector can be attributed to a combination of factors. The government's focus on digitalization and innovation, coupled with supportive policies and funding initiatives, has created an enabling environment for aspiring entrepreneurs to thrive. Furthermore, a growing ecosystem of incubators, accelerators, and networking platforms specifically tailored to women-led startups has provided crucial resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities, fostering a sense of community and collaboration.

These women are not merely riding the wave of technological advancements; they are driving it. With their visionary thinking, entrepreneurial acumen, and commitment to social impact, they are pushing the boundaries of what is possible, transforming industries, and positioning Kazakhstan as a regional hub for innovation.

The narratives of these women entrepreneurs in the tech sector are a testament to their resilience, adaptability, and belief in the power of technology to effect positive change. Their journeys inspire future generations of women to pursue careers in STEM fields, challenge gender norms, and seize opportunities in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.



Section 7

AZIZA SHUZHEYEVA'S EXPANSIVE ENDEAVORS: DIGITAL REVOLUTION PROSPECTS FOR WOMEN

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova

In the dynamic and ever-evolving realm of the digital world, Aziza Shuzheyeva stands tall as a powerful force, dedicating herself to empowering women in the field of information technology and supporting a wave of women entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan.

Aziza's impact traces back to the founding of TechnoWomen Central Asia, a non-profit organization that has become a cornerstone of women's empowerment in Kazakhstan's IT sector. With a crystal-clear vision of bridging the gender gap and equipping women with the skills and resources needed to thrive in the digital age, Aziza embarked on a mission to create a platform that would unleash the full potential of women in technology.

TechnoWomen offers workshops, training programs, and educational initiatives that enhance digital literacy among women. Aziza has nurtured a supportive ecosystem where women are not only encouraged to pursue careers in IT but are also equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate the industry with confidence and determination.

Aziza recognizes the critical importance of addressing gender equality in the workplace. She believes that progress can only be achieved when women have equal opportunities, fair pay, and representation in leadership positions. Through her advocacy and captivating public appearances, she raises awareness of existing disparities, challenges societal norms, and champions the creation of an inclusive IT industry.

Aziza's vision extends beyond Kazakhstan. She envisions a future where the nation becomes a global leader in the digital economy, attracting foreign investment, expanding export opportunities, and positioning itself at the forefront of technological advancements. With an emphasis on innovation and leveraging transformative technologies like artificial intelligence, Aziza aspires to transform Kazakhstan into a hub of digital excellence, fostering an environment where startups and entrepreneurs thrive.

In her support for women's entrepreneurship, Aziza serves as a catalyst for change, collaborating with stakeholders in the startup ecosystem–providing mentorship, facilitating networking opportunities, and working tirelessly to secure funding for aspiring women entrepreneurs. By fostering a supportive environment, she empowers women to transform their ideas into successful businesses.

Aziza's journey is defined by her recognition of the transformative power of the creative industry and emerging sectors like meta-industries, which encompass cutting-edge, cross-disciplinary fields that redefine traditional paradigms and open up new horizons for innovation and development. She believes that these sectors hold immense potential for women to excel and drive Kazakhstan's economic growth.

Beyond her organizational endeavors, Aziza has emerged as a prominent voice on national and international stages, influencing policy decisions, inspiring industry leaders, and collaborating with organizations dedicated to building an inclusive and progressive society.



Section 7

AKMARAL ESKENDIR: NURTURING INNOVATIVE PROSPECTS IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL SECTOR

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova



Akmaral Yeskendir, a trailblazing technowoman, who founded ADU24, a domestic e-commerce marketplace. Akmaral recalls,

"It all began in 2018 when I found myself frustrated with the process of ordering goods from foreign marketplaces. Long delivery times and the lack of exchange or return options became major obstacles in my online shopping experience. I realized there was a need for a domestic marketplace that could address these issues."

Despite her youth, limited experience, and resources, Akmaral delved into market analysis, determined to understand why a domestic e-commerce platform did not exist in her country. Reflecting on that time, she shares, "I temporarily postponed the idea, but I knew deep down that I would return to it in the future."

The turning point came in 2020 when the global pandemic and quarantine measures inspired Akmaral to take action. Seizing the opportunity, she dedicated two months to studying successful market giants like Alibaba, Amazon, and Ozon. Drawing inspiration from their journeys, she shares, "I learned from their experiences and mistakes, gaining valuable insights into what it takes to build a thriving marketplace."

The path to success has not been without setbacks. In 2020, when Akmaral was preparing for product development, the cybersecurity development team she collaborated with from Astana let her down, which was a major obstacle. Despite this setback she reflected that: "I did not let doubt define me. I knew that failure was part of the journey, and I had to keep moving forward."

Then, in 2021, Akmaral's fortunes began to turn around when she met an IT specialist who shared her vision. They formed a partnership, combining their expertise to propel ADU24 forward. Recounting the experience, she shares, "We worked together, each taking on specific roles in the development and operations of the business. Despite financial challenges, including pawning my own phone to pay my team's salaries, we pressed forward."

As a young entrepreneur in the tech industry, Akmaral encountered skepticism due to her age and gender. However, she refused to let these doubts hold her back. In August 2021, Akmaral found a female angel investor, a partnership that brought new hope and resources to ADU24. Thanks to their support, she reflects: "We were able to improve our product and prepare for the long-awaited market launch."

Akmaral's entrepreneurial journey became intertwined with her participation in the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO mentoring program in 2022. Reflecting on the transformative experience, she shares, "The mentoring sessions and training I received helped me navigate the challenges that came my way, refine my plans, and gain valuable insights into marketing and contemporary business practices."

Throughout her journey, Akmaral recognized the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing funding and financial support. Becoming an advocate for change, she emphasizes, "We need to simplify funding processes, reduce bureaucratic hurdles,

and develop support programs tailored specifically for startups. By creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for women's entrepreneurship, we can benefit society as a whole."

When asked about her advice for aspiring entrepreneurs, Akmaral stresses the importance of finding harmony and aligning personal principles with the mission of the company. She encourages entrepreneurs to be determined, overcome fears, and pursue their goals relentlessly, stating, "Have faith in your vision and prioritize it above all else. Continuous learning and seeking support whenever needed are also vital."

Looking ahead, Akmaral shares her plans to further grow ADU24, attract more investment, and increase sales. She expresses optimism about the startup ecosystem in Kazakhstan, predicting continued development and success. She firmly believes that supporting startups, especially those led by technowomen, will not only benefit society but also foster positive changes in the overall entrepreneurial landscape.

Section 7

LAURA TLEPINA'S ENDEAVOR IN IT ENTREPRENEURSHIP: UNPACKING BARRIERS WITH TARGET INFORMATION SECURITY

Author: Nurlan Kulbatyrov

In the dynamic world of technology entrepreneurship, women often face formidable challenges as they strive to make their mark in traditionally male-dominated sectors. The story of Laura Tlepina's journey not only sheds light on the hurdles encountered by women in this industry but also serves as an inspiring example of how they can overcome obstacles and succeed.

Hailing from Mangystau region, Kazakhstan, Laura Tlepina is a 36-year-old trailblazer who has made significant strides in the field of technology entrepreneurship. As the founder of 'Target Information Security,' a company specializing in cybersecurity, and an accomplished information security auditor, Laura has amassed an impressive 15 years of experience in the IT field. However, her path to success was not without its challenges.





Before venturing into entrepreneurship, Laura spent several years as an employee in the IT sector. However, unforeseen difficulties in her personal life compelled her to embrace a new path—one that would allow her to fully leverage her skills and regain control over her precious time. Laura took the bold step of establishing her own company, enabling her to effectively plan and manage her professional endeavors on her own terms.

Laura's company, Target Information Security, was founded in 2019 with a mission to provide consulting and practical services in the realm of information technology. One of the primary focuses of her business is to assist companies in successfully navigating the rigorous information security tests mandated by the state technical service of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan. Through her work, Laura and her team have successfully conducted information security assessments for prominent organizations such as the Accounts Committee, Kolesa, World Health Organization, and Chamber of Expert Organizations.

Laura has encountered diverse and complex cases during her three years in business, each serving as a valuable learning experience. Success in her line of work is not solely dependent on her own efforts, but rather requires coordination with various stakeholders, including specialized state bodies responsible for issuing necessary documents, certificates, and statements of conformity. Laura openly acknowledges the bureaucratic challenges that persist in such processes, as employees in these organizations often shift responsibilities or present various reasons that prolong the decision-making timeline. Navigating through these intricate dynamics, Laura's emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in building relationships, overcoming obstacles, and ultimately ensuring successful outcomes for her clients.

The gender biases and stereotypes deeply entrenched in the IT industry present additional hurdles for women entrepreneurs like Laura. The perception of technology as a male-dominated field remains prevalent, even though it no longer reflects the reality of a sector where men and women possess equal skills and capabilities. Nonetheless, Laura has demonstrated that gender does not determine competence or limit one's potential for success. Throughout her career, she has not only shattered stereotypes but has also embraced her role as a female entrepreneur with confidence and conviction.

Recognizing the importance of representation and empowerment, Laura has taken it upon herself to inspire and support other women seeking to enter the IT field. She has organized conferences where accomplished Kazakhstani women in IT, who have achieved remarkable careers, shared their experiences, thoughts, and motivations. By challenging preconceived notions and nurturing self-confidence in aspiring women entrepreneurs, Laura is actively fostering a more inclusive and diverse IT landscape.

Laura believes that women bring unique strengths to the field of technology entrepreneurship. In her opinion women are often more organized and possess excellent project management skills, making them highly adaptable and flexible. While recognizing the value of individual approaches for all employees, regardless of gender, Laura emphasizes the importance of empowering and supporting women in the IT sector.

Despite the numerous obstacles, Laura has thrived as a woman in technology

entrepreneurship. Her journey serves as an inspiration to countless others, demonstrating that with determination and the right support, women can break barriers, challenge norms, and succeed in male-dominated industries. Laura's accomplishments not only pave the way for future generations of women entrepreneurs but also contribute to creating a more inclusive and gender-equal tech ecosystem.





Section 7

NASGUL TURSUNALALINA'S EMERGENCE AS A LEADING FORCE IN THE GPS TECHNOLOGY ARENA

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova

In the fast-paced world of technological innovation, there are exceptional individuals who push boundaries, redefine possibilities, and inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs. Nazgul Tursunalina, the Director of LLP "NOMAD GPS" and the visionary founder of a domestic Kazakhstani GPS monitoring system, stands at the forefront of Kazakhstan's tech revolution. Through her dedication and groundbreaking innovations, she has become a driving force, empowering young Kazakhstani females to carve their paths as tech entrepreneurs and make a lasting impact on society.

From an early age, Nazgul's fascination with technology sparked a passion within her and a deep appreciation for its transformative potential. Growing up in an era of rapid digital advancements, she witnessed the remarkable impact GPS tracking and monitoring systems had on industries worldwide. This realization ignited her entrepreneurial spirit, compelling her to develop a homegrown solution tailored specifically to Kazakhstan's unique needs.

Establishing LLP "NOMAD GPS" was not without its challenges, as Nazgul faced skeptics questioning the feasibility of creating a domestic GPS monitoring system that could rival international giants. However, armed with a clear vision and a belief in her capabilities, she assembled a team of dedicated professionals who shared her passion. Together, they embarked on a journey to push the boundaries of technological innovation and redefine the possibilities in GPS technology.

Nazgul led the development of a cutting-edge GPS monitoring system. Leveraging her deep understanding of the local market, she ensured that the system addressed the specific challenges faced by businesses and individuals in Kazakhstan. This localization approach set her solution apart, offering unparalleled accuracy, reliability, and functionality tailored to the Kazakhstani context.

Under Nazgul's visionary leadership, LLP "NOMAD GPS" quickly emerged as a trailblazer in the field. The system gained recognition for its user-friendly interface, real-time tracking capabilities, and comprehensive reporting features. Nazgul's dedication to continuous improvement led to the integration of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, further solidifying the system's position as a technological frontrunner.

Beyond her technological achievements, Nazgul is a passionate advocate for diversity and inclusivity in the tech sector. She recognizes the underrepresentation of women and actively works to empower young Kazakhstani women to pursue careers in technology and entrepreneurship. Through mentorship programs, networking events, and initiatives fostering a supportive ecosystem, she encourages aspiring female tech entrepreneurs.

As Nazgul herself eloquently puts it,

"Technology is not bound by gender. It is our time to unleash our brilliance, drive innovation, and shape the future of the tech industry."

Her belief in the power of innovation, resilience, and collective support serves as an inspiration for aspiring female tech entrepreneurs across Kazakhstan.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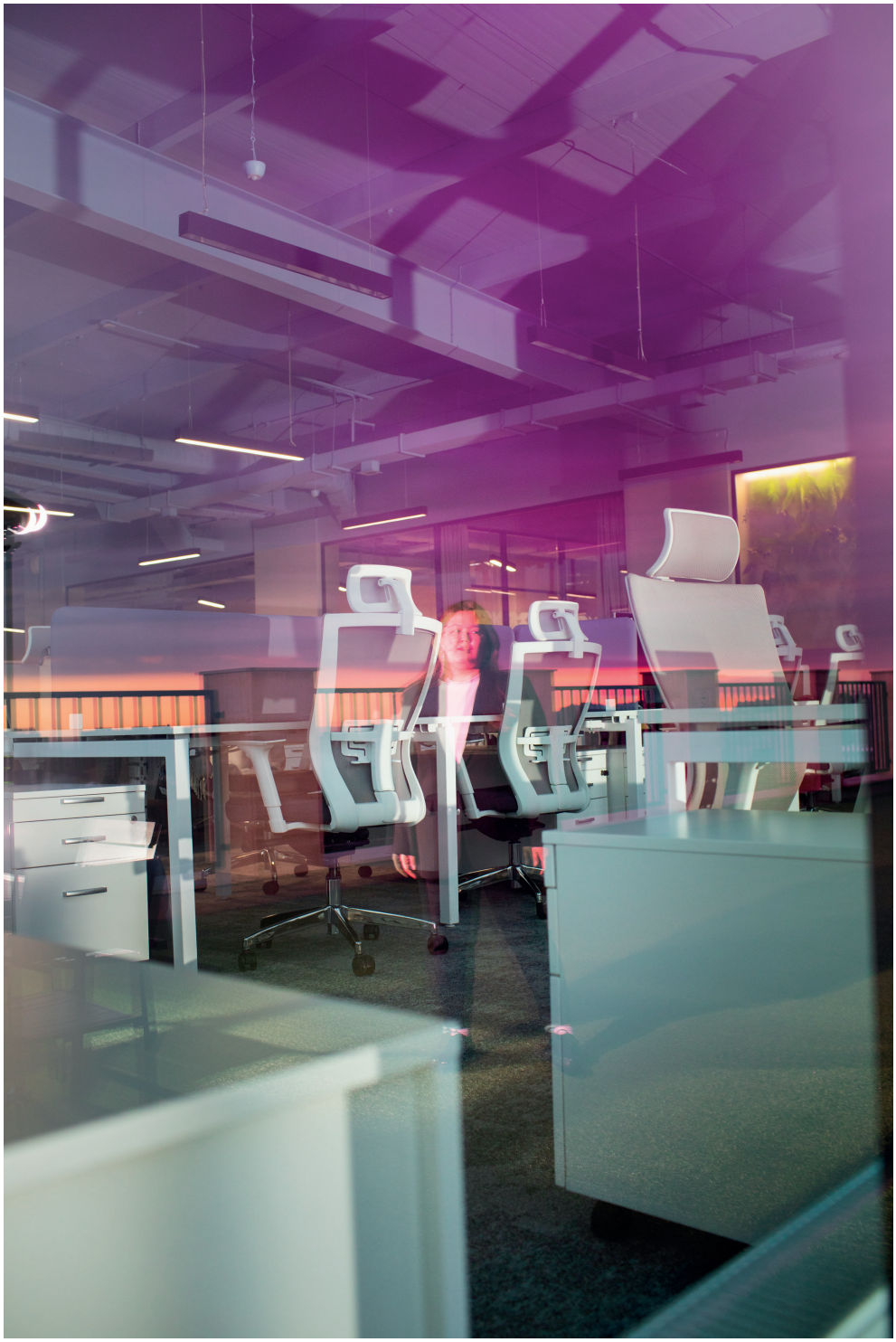
Section 7

ARUZHAN MEDE: PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATIONS SHAPING THE YOUTH OF TOMORROW

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova

Aruzhan Mede is a leader in the fields of EdTech and HRTech. She holds the position of CEO and co-founder at IMPRO. Her passion for empowering youth and revolutionizing education has fueled her journey to create innovative projects and programs that are reshaping Kazakhstan's educational landscape.

At the core of Aruzhan's endeavors is the online school platform "IMPRO". Through IMPRO, Aruzhan is on a mission to bridge the gap between education and industry demands by providing comprehensive training and preparing talented IT specialists for future employment in major companies. With a forward-thinking approach, she equips young professionals with the skills, knowledge, and real-world experience necessary to excel in the competitive IT sector.





"One of our core principles at IMPRO is to empower young individuals to embrace their potential and unleash their creativity. We believe in nurturing a growth mindset and providing a supportive learning environment that allows them to thrive and innovate," Aruzhan explains.

Another groundbreaking initiative Aruzhan had worked on is the "Atlas of New Professions," a consulting service that conducts extensive research across various regions of Kazakhstan. By analyzing emerging trends and labor market dynamics, Aruzhan and her team identify the professions that will be in high demand in the country over the next decade or so. This invaluable information helps individuals make informed decisions about their career paths, ensuring they can align their aspirations with the evolving needs of the job market.

Recognizing the critical importance of career guidance for school children, Aruzhan is highly experienced in this field. Using innovative assessment techniques, IMPRO help young individuals understand their strengths, interests, and aptitudes. By guiding students toward suitable educational directions that align with their talents, Aruzhan aims to break the conventional pattern of career choices driven solely by parental influence or availability of scholarships. Her aim is to empower students to embark on educational paths that are in line with their passions and skillsets, setting them up for success and fulfillment in the long run.

"Through career guidance for school children diagnostics, we aimed to guide young students towards paths that align with their passions, allowing them to build successful and fulfilling careers," Aruzhan emphasizes.

Beyond her accomplishments in the realm of educational technology, Aruzhan has reason to be proud of her achievements as a leader committed to making a positive global impact. During her college years, Aruzhan actively engaged in the "Change the World Model United Nations" (CWMUN) program. This conference, held annually in different countries, brings together students and schoolchildren from around the world to discuss pressing global issues and propose innovative solutions. Aruzhan's active participation in these conferences broadened her perspective on global challenges and nurtured her passion for creating meaningful change.

"As young individuals, we have the power to shape our future and create a positive impact in the world. It starts with embracing opportunities, taking initiative, and fostering meaningful connections with like-minded individuals who share our vision for change," Aruzhan tells.

Drawing from her own journey, Aruzhan encourages young Kazakhstani individuals to be proactive in seeking opportunities that enable them to make a difference. She emphasizes the significance of effective communication, building quality relationships, and developing essential networking skills to attract attention and create meaningful connections.

Reflecting on her involvement in the UN conference, Aruzhan envisions a future where more Kazakhstani youth actively participate in such initiatives. She believes that by exposing young individuals to global challenges and fostering innovative thinking from an early age, societal awareness can be raised, initiative can be nurtured, and a generation of future leaders andchange-makers can be shaped.

Aruzhan Mede's steadfast dedication to IMPRO, her transformative projects, and her involvement in the United Nations program are driving change within Kazakhstan's education landscape. Her visionary leadership, paired with her commitment to broadening the rights and prospects for the youth, foreshadow a shift in how education is perceived and the purposes it serves.

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Section 8

AGENTS OF CHANGE: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS DRIVING SOCIAL IMPACT IN KAZAKHSTAN

Across Kazakhstan, a wave of visionary women entrepreneurs has emerged, harnessing the power of entrepreneurship to create lasting social impact. These trailblazers are not only building successful businesses but also dedicating their efforts to addressing pressing societal challenges. With passion and a deep commitment to making a difference, these women have become catalysts for positive change in their communities.

This section on Social Impact highlights the remarkable stories of women entrepreneurs who have prioritized creating positive social change through their ventures. These women have identified pressing issues such as poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability and have taken bold steps to address them head-on. Their innovative solutions and tireless dedication serve as inspiration for the entire entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kazakhstan and beyond.

In a country where social challenges persist, these women have become beacons of hope, proving that entrepreneurship can be a powerful tool for driving positive change. Their ventures go beyond profit-making, placing social impact at the core of their business models. By aligning their entrepreneurial pursuits with their passion for social causes, they have transformed industries, improved lives, and paved the way for a more equitable and sustainable future.

Through their ventures, these women have demonstrated that economic prosperity and social progress can go hand in hand. By leveraging their entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, and resources, they have become agents of change, championing causes that benefit society as a whole.

Within these narratives, you will discover the stories of women entrepreneurs who have overcome challenges, embraced innovation, and harnessed the power of entrepreneurship to create a positive impact. Each story sheds light on their unique journey, the social issues they address, and the transformative outcomes they have achieved. From grassroots initiatives to groundbreaking ventures, their work serves as a testament to the transformative power of entrepreneurship and the incredible resilience of women leaders.


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Section 8

DOLORES PSHEMBAYEVA AND ALUA KORPEBAYEVA ARE EXPANDING E-COMMERCE OPPORTUNITIES WITH CLEVER MARKET

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova

During the coronavirus pandemic, two partners and entrepreneurs Dolores Pshembayeva and Alua Korpebayeva, both of whom have a background in business, decided to create an e-commerce platform. The story of Dolores and Alua, who are simultaneously mothers, wives and entrepreneurs, exemplifies the challenges faced with the intersection of different societal roles. Their entrepreneurial spirit and desire to improve the situation for women served as the foundation for a successful project.

Dolores Pshembayeva had the original idea of establishing the 'Clever' e-commerce platform and Alua Korpebayeva became responsible for implementing this idea. The main idea behind Clever Market is to provide a platform for local entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their products, bridging the gap between small businesses and

consumers. Dolores and Alua recognized that many talented individuals struggled to access wider markets due to limited resources, lack of visibility, and the dominance of major e-commerce platforms. They saw an opportunity to empower these entrepreneurs by creating a marketplace that would promote their products and connect them directly with customers.

One of the major obstacles Alua encountered was the lack of legislative support from the government for local players in the e-commerce sector. 'Kaspi' was an existing monopolistic player in this area, with a complete ecosystem already in place and there were no state-backed measures to support and nurture local entrepreneurs. Dolores and Alua knew that overcoming these barriers required strategic partnerships, advocacy efforts, and a clear vision for the future.

Undeterred by the hurdles, Alua focused on developing Clever Market's infrastructure and services. She recognized the importance of addressing key pain points faced by local businesses, such as data storage costs, development expenses, logistics, and other barriers to entry. Alua drew inspiration from successful international models like Alibaba–which thrived by initially closing the market to external players while subsidizing logistics for internal players. She believed that a similar approach could help Clever Market grow and create a level playing field for local entrepreneurs.

Over time, Clever Market began to make a significant impact. It provided a range of services, including a robust e-commerce platform, logistical support, and targeted marketing campaigns. Alua and her team worked tirelessly to attract diverse local players, from small micro-businesses to medium-sized enterprises. They encouraged entrepreneurship among women, recognizing the need to break gender stereotypes and empower female business owners.

One notable example of their success was a dedicated marketplace for pet products that experienced tremendous growth. This specialized platform gained popularity and even expanded to the United States, demonstrating how targeted marketplaces could flourish when supported by the right ecosystem.

Alua also recognized that competing with major platforms posed a significant challenge. The resources and reach of established players made it difficult for Clever Market to capture a significant market share. Nevertheless, Alua believed in the power of personalized service, local market understanding, and a carefully curated assortment of products. She understood that success lay in providing a unique and customer-centric experience.

Alua has actively championed social causes and utilized the platform to address critical issues. For example: she forged partnerships with organizations dedicated to animal welfare, such as the Volunteer Movement "Stop Hunting," which played a crucial role in rescuing animals from local pounds. They also supported talented artisan women by providing them with a marketplace to showcase and sell their handicrafts.

As a member of the Techno Woman community, Clever Market actively participated in fostering new opportunities for women entrepreneurs in the technology industry–contributing to the development of IT entrepreneurship.

Clever Market provides a ready-made online store, allowing partners to showcase their products without concerns


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about logistical challenges such as storage, product selection, packaging, and delivery. By handling the entire logistics cycle, entrepreneurs are able to focus on their core business activities.

In March of this year, the Clever Market team achieved a significant milestone by securing the prestigious TWIT Product Leader 2023 award at the Techno Woman Central Asia-2023 forum. They also received recognition for the development of an innovative IT product.

Alua firmly believed that businesses should have a broader purpose beyond pursuing profits. She emphasized the importance of making positive contributions to society. Through their commitment to social causes, Clever Market demonstrated how business success and societal impact can go hand in hand.

Clever Market has empowered local entrepreneurs, provided opportunities for growth, and challenged existing norms in the e-commerce sector. Dolores and Alua's story serves as an inspiration to aspiring entrepreneurs and showcases the transformative power of a clear vision, perseverance, and a commitment to making a difference.





Section 8

NAZGUL NASSIYEVA: ON THE PATH OF CHANGE WITH THE BRAND "TOLAGAI" (ТОЛАҒАЙ)

Author: Nurzat Mukan

Nazgul Nassiyeva's dedication to improving the lives of children with disabilities in Kazakhstan is a testament to her leadership capabilities and her commitment to making a lasting impact.

Nazgul's journey as a social entrepreneur began with a personal experience that ignited a fire within her. As a mother of a child living with a disability, she intimately understood the challenges faced by parents in finding affordable and high-quality diapers. Motivated by the desire to improve the lives of children like her own, Nazgul embarked on a mission to create a brand that would meet their unique needs. Partnering with her husband, Nurlan Imataev they delved into the world of diaper development. For nearly a year, they dedicated themselves to studying the technologies, selecting materials, and designing diapers that would provide maximum comfort





and absorbency. Their tireless efforts led them to a manufacturing plant in China that shared their commitment to quality and implemented cutting-edge Japanese technology.

The result of their endeavors was the birth of “Tolagai” diapers. Nazgul and Nurlan ensured that the diapers they created offered exceptional absorbency, up to 900 milliliters, ensuring dryness for extended periods. They prioritized the use of biodegradable materials, incorporating a Japanese superabsorbent and an antibacterial coating to prevent odor. Tolagai diapers were designed to be on par with imported counterparts in terms of quality while remaining affordable for families in need.

Nazgul’s journey extended beyond product development. She recognized the importance of providing emotional support to parents facing the challenges of raising children living with disabilities. Through a social media platform, she offers guidance and encouragement, drawing from her own experiences as a source of inspiration. She understands that sometimes, a supportive community can make all the difference in overcoming obstacles.

Taking her commitment to another level, Nazgul and a team of specialists are developing a mobile application to connect mothers of children living with disabilities. Through this initiative, she aims to empower women by equipping them with entrepreneurial skills, providing income generation opportunities, and offering training in marketing and finance. Nazgul’s vision is to not only provide quality products but also create a network of support and economic empowerment for mothers in similar situations.

Nazgul’s husband plays an integral role in supporting their business, as they balance the responsibilities of raising two children and continuing their son’s Alikhan’s treatment. Their personal journey has shown them the progress and achievements that can be attained through comprehensive rehabilitation and dedication. Their son has already defied expectations and learned to speak, thanks to the collective efforts of specialists and the support of his family.

In just a few months, Nazgul Nassiyeva’s social entrepreneurial venture has already made a significant impact on the lives of children with disabilities in Kazakhstan. Through the creation of the Tolagai brand, she has addressed a critical need and provided comfort and affordability to families. By sharing her personal journey, offering psychological support, and empowering mothers through entrepreneurship, Nazgul has become a beacon of hope and inspiration for those facing similar challenges.

Section 8

ZARINA SAMIGULLINA AND THE SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Author: Nurlykhan Aljanova

Zarina Samigullina's journey includes transformation and impactful ventures in the realms of ecology and society. Having spent a significant part of her career in the retail market creating shopping and entertainment centers, Zarina gained extensive experience and knowledge in management, project development, and sales.

A turning point in Zarina's career arrived when she realized her calling lay in eco-projects. Inspired by her deep love for her city, nature, and mountains, Zarina, a native of Almaty, Kazakhstan, embarked on a new path dedicated to environmental sustainability.

Zarina's venture into eco-projects was fueled by her core principles, one of which was ecological consciousness in all aspects of life. She strived to understand the perspectives of others, embracing empathy and rejecting bureaucracy. With a mindset of "do no harm," Zarina's aim is to positively contribute to the world.





Family has played an important role for Zarina. Zarina's mother, Elmira, played a crucial role in her journey, providing support and becoming a role model not only for her but also for countless other women. Additionally, Zarina's husband, Roman, an extraordinary individual and her best friend, brought immense inspiration and wisdom to her life. Zarina holds high hopes for her two sons, seeing them as the carriers of her dreams and aspirations.

Zarina recognized the synchronicity of life's moments, leading her to encounter the right people at the right time. Following her departure from her previous employment, she found herself involved in a project for women in business, where she met like-minded individuals who shared her vision and goals.

Zarina's eco-projects began to take shape as she embraced opportunities that initially seemed improbable. The journey began with a greenhouse complex created by her husband, where they cultivated organic salads and herbs in environmentally friendly GreenEco pots. Through this venture, they incorporated state-of-the-art technologies from different countries, ensuring sustainable and clean production. Driven by curiosity and the desire to enhance her green initiatives, Zarina sought out unique plant varieties from Europe to enrich the greenery of her surroundings. Inspired by her visits to plant nurseries and garden stores in Germany, she envisioned bringing a touch of creativity and style to her own city.

Zarina launched several of her own projects. The Lukomorie Garden Center became a hub for all things green, providing a diverse range of plants and horticultural products. Additionally, she embarked on developing a salad bar chain committed to offering healthy and sustainable food options. A further venture included a project dedicated to cultivating berries, adding to the variety and richness of local produce.

Zarina's projects were not solely focused on ecological but also social impact. By creating opportunities for employment and engaging with the community, she aimed to improve the quality of life for individuals. Her eco-projects became catalysts for change, inspiring others to adopt environmentally conscious practices and fostering a sense of unity and responsibility.

As Zarina continues her journey, her commitment to creating a better world through her eco-projects continues to inspire and uplift those around her, bringing us closer to a more sustainable and compassionate future. Her story serves as a reminder that when passion, purpose, and care converge, remarkable transformations can occur, paving the way for a greener and more harmonious world.

Section 8

DINARA AUELBEKOVA: GIRLS POWER FUND AND A NEW VISION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Author: Zhansaule Kimel

Dinara Auyelbekova describes herself as coming from an ordinary family in Kazakhstan. Renowned for her commitment to empowering girls and advancing gender equality, she has spearheaded an initiative known as the Girls Power Fund. This visionary project aims to equip girls with the resources and opportunities essential for overcoming societal constraints and reaching their full potential.

Growing up, Dinara experienced firsthand the power of education and the transformative impact it had on her life. She recognized the privileges she had enjoyed in terms of educational support and resources. However, as she matured, she became acutely





aware that not all girls had equal access to these opportunities. This realization deeply impacted Dinara and fueled her determination to address this disparity head-on.

The Girls Power Fund seeks to create an inclusive environment that nurtures the aspirations of girls. She firmly believes in the untapped potential within each girl and endeavors to provide them with the necessary tools, mentorship, and support to excel. Through comprehensive training programs in STEM fields such as science, programming, UI/UX design, and project management, she ignites their passions and cultivates their growth.

Dinara's efforts have already yielded remarkable success stories. One such example is a girl Kuralay who grew up in a conservative environment and then gained acceptance into a prestigious Tech Girls program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. This achievement was made possible through the girl's participation in programming courses and the development of her own project, all supported by the Girls Power Fund.

Dinara's journey has not been without challenges. Initially met with a lack of government support, she refused to be discouraged. Instead, she sought alternative avenues through partnerships with private organizations, NGOs, and international foundations that shared her vision of empowering girls. These collaborations provided the necessary funding, mentorship programs, and resources to propel the Girls Power Fund forward.

Dinara believes in the transformative power of education, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). She recognizes that education can break down societal barriers, challenge gender biases, and equip girls with the skills needed for success in various fields. By focusing on STEM disciplines, Dinara aims to empower girls with financial independence, reducing their vulnerability to destructive relationships and opening doors to diverse opportunities.

Her own educational journey played a pivotal role in shaping her vision and determination. Dinara holds the distinction of being the first person from the CIS region to be accepted into a prestigious program as an 'Obama Scholar'. Recently completing her studies at Columbia University, she brings a wealth of knowledge and experiences to her work, further fueling her commitment to gender equity and empowerment.

Dinara envisions an entrepreneurial landscape in Kazakhstan that empowers women. She aims to create a supportive ecosystem that provides women with essential resources, mentorship, and access to capital, enabling them to thrive as entrepreneurs and leaders across sectors. Her ultimate goal is to shape a future where women actively contribute to the country's economy and drive innovation.

While acknowledging the challenges women entrepreneurs face in Kazakhstan, Dinara remains optimistic. She emphasizes the need for ongoing efforts, such as those supported by the Girls Power Fund, to dismantle cultural stereotypes, improve access to funding, and establish supportive policies.


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Section 8

GULNAZ KORDANOVA AND INCLUSIVITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Author: Zhansaule Kimel
Photographer: Lendell Marshall

Gulnaz Kordanova, a native of the city of Shymkent, is a passionate advocate for equal access to quality education in the digital age. After completing her early education, Gulnaz's thirst for knowledge led her to pursue higher studies in Almaty at Abay pedagogical University. It was during her time at the university that she became acutely aware of the disparities in educational resources and opportunities between students from major cities and those from smaller towns and villages. This realization sparked a passion within her to address this inequality and provide every child with access to a high-quality education.

Gulnaz Kordanova's journey towards transforming education in Kazakhstan is grounded in her strong educational background. She continued her academic path at Nazarbayev University, a prestigious institution known for its focus on innovation and global standards of education. Further, with a strong desire to learn from the best, she pursued her graduate studies at Harvard University, renowned worldwide for its

academic excellence and rigorous programs. At Harvard, Gulnaz immersed herself in a diverse and intellectually stimulating environment, where she engaged with leading scholars and professionals in the field of education.

Gulnaz emphasizes the significance of providing every child with access to technology, recognizing the critical role it plays in education. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the disparities in technology access in Kazakhstani schools, leaving many children without the means to engage in remote learning. Gulnaz believes that access to technology, which was once considered a privilege, has now become a necessity. To bridge this digital divide, Gulnaz's mission involves ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, has the necessary tools such as computers or laptops to access educational opportunities.

Building on her experience with Teach for Kazakhstan, Gulnaz continues her mission through Connect-Ed, an innovative project she spearheaded. The primary goal of Teach For Kazakhstan NGO is to enhance the professional development of teachers working in rural schools, and Connect-Ed is a key part of achieving this objective. Connect-Ed focuses on using technology to empower children and enhance their educational experiences. Connect-Ed addresses two key areas: providing access to technology and fostering the development of digital skills. Gulnaz and her team are diligently delivering courses that prioritize the development of key digital literacy competencies. The goal is to make these courses widely accessible to all children, regardless of their background or location. Through these course programs, children are introduced to essential software applications, learn how to effectively use the internet, and understand the importance of digital communication. The aim is to empower children to become confident and responsible users of digital technology.

Gulnaz Kordanova is a strong proponent of the solidarity economy, a concept that emphasizes collective action and alternative solutions. She believes in the power of individuals coming together to create change and address societal challenges. In line with this belief, Gulnaz actively encourages individuals and organizations to donate their unused devices, such as laptops and computers, to provide technology access to underprivileged children. This culture of solidarity economy, where people unite for a common cause, enables Connect-Ed to expand its reach and impact.

Gulnaz's vision extends beyond providing access to technology and digital skills. She seeks to foster a holistic educational experience that empowers children to think critically, collaborate, and create. Through Connect-Ed, Gulnaz incorporates project-based learning and encourages children to explore their passions, develop their own digital projects, and share their knowledge with others. By nurturing these skills, Gulnaz is cultivating a technologically-fluent generation that is not only adept at using technology but also capable of leveraging it for innovation and social impact.

Now, recognizing the importance of governmental involvement, Gulnaz seeks to establish a partnership with the Ministry of Digital Development and the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan to further expand the reach and impact of Connect-Ed. Through this collaboration, Gulnaz aims to advocate for policies and initiatives that prioritize digital inclusion and equitable access to technology in education. Her vision is to create a brighter future for all children in Kazakhstan,

where access to technology and quality education are no longer privileges but fundamental rights.

Gulnaz Kordanova stands as a true champion for equal access to quality education in Kazakhstan. Her journey, fueled by her own experiences and the disparities she witnessed, has driven her to create meaningful change in the lives of children across the country. With the power of solidarity economy and collective action, Gulnaz inspires others to join her in fostering digital literacy for all and shaping a technologically-empowered future for Kazakhstan.

Afterword

In the rapidly evolving economy of Kazakhstan, the role of entrepreneurship has never been more pivotal. “Trailblazers of the Steppe: Inspiring Narratives of Women Entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan,” authored by the NURCE team under the guidance of Dr. Shumaila Yousafzai, provides a compelling look into the economic and societal shifts brought about by women innovators in a variety of sectors. As an economist, I appreciate the depth of analysis and insight into the economic implications of these entrepreneurial endeavours.

The impact of the women profiled in this book extends beyond the businesses they have created. Their ventures represent significant milestones in the diversification and growth of our national economy. Each narrative is a case study in overcoming market barriers, capitalizing on emerging trends, and contributing to economic resilience. These women are not just participating in the economy; they are actively shaping it with each strategic move and calculated risk.

This book offers a unique perspective on the multifaceted role of women entrepreneurs in advancing Kazakhstan’s economy. From harnessing technology to foster development to reinvigorating traditional industries with new business models, the economic narratives detailed here are as educational as they are inspirational. It further highlights how these entrepreneurs have overcome structural challenges, thus

offering lessons on adaptability and strategic thinking – crucial qualities for anyone in the field of economics.

Moreover, the text is a significant contribution to the literature on gender and economics, illustrating how breaking down societal barriers can lead to broader economic benefits. The stories encapsulate the empowerment of women and its ripple effect on community development, job creation, and inclusive growth.

As you delve into the pages of "Trailblazers of the Steppe," I encourage readers to consider the principles at play within these success stories. The entrepreneurial spirit captured here is a testament to the potential that lies within embracing diversity and fostering an inclusive business environment. It is a privilege to introduce a book that not only celebrates individual achievement but also contributes to our understanding of the modern economy's dynamism.

Jozef Koning,

Professor, Dean of the Graduate School of Business, Nazarbayev University

Afterword

"Trailblazers of the Steppe" is a landmark contribution to improve our understanding of female-driven entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. To begin with, we learn that ideas for new business ventures are intimately entwined with individual biographies, and often even emerge out of personal tragedy. Furthermore, the female enterprises captured in this book document intuitive, sensitive and practical solutions to real-life challenges. It is undeniable, at the same time, that they are about more than raw profit-making and monetization, but about family, emotions and identity.

The narratives assembled here are thus a testament to the power of those skills, approaches and worldviews that too commonly are referred to as "soft" and "informal". In that capacity, the book is another timely reminder to move beyond two fallacies: the one of not taking the "intagible aspects" of business-making seriously in academic research; and the other one of simplistically associating the soft and informal with female entrepreneurs in disparaging and belittling ways.

"Trailblazers of the Steppe" provides us with many entry-points to enlighten these blind spots. The narratives about Kazakhstani female entrepreneurs impressively reveal strategies and tactics, or at times maybe unconscious adjustments, for overcoming critical challenges. For example, this concerns social alliances, such as "sisters-in-arms" or "sisterhood", which pragmatically address the "work-family" or "time poverty" dilemmas that so many women are faced with. And even if female entrepreneurs rarely confront patriarchal and other constraints head-on and vocally, their stories of achievement exhibit a female agency that is smart and impactful in an entrepreneurial environment strongly characterized by male predominance.

The vigor of female entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan can thus not adequately be framed in James Scott's (1985) famous notion about the "weapons of the weak". "Trailblazers of the Steppe" does not evidence typical acts of a marginalized group vis-á-vis powerful others, such as foot-dragging, avoidance or subversion. Much more, it portrays forward-moving women who create and have become champions in their respective sectors, be that textile, education, construction or security.

What else becomes apparent is that women-led enterprises do not occur in isolation but are intersecting with notions of gender and public sector programs. This teaches us that chances for success increase, if male partners leave behind a toxic masculin-

ity and join forces with women to achieve a balanced labor-sharing arrangement; and if government initiatives, such as the "Women Entrepreneurship Development Centers", foster favorable conditions for women to realize their potential.

Beyond the academic angle, "Trailblazers of the Steppe" is an inspirational book. It tells us that social mobility and entrepreneurial success are attainable, if individual passion, skill and determination come together during a time when a society's structural obstacles of gender, generation or class are not insurmountably high. The female trailblazers celebrated in this book have utilized such favorable momentum in Kazakhstan, and we all should contribute to popularize their stories in order to shape tangible role models for a next generation of young women.

The task for academia is to push even further in terms of identifying the limiting biases and unjust distribution of opportunities that marginalize particular segments of a society. From there on, we must intensify the dialogue between researchers and practitioners of the private and public sector to inspire evidence-based interventions that are actionable and inclusive. "Trailblazers of the Steppe" serves as an excellent motivation to continue pursuing this essential endeavor.

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The cover ornament is based on a papercut by Aisha Jandosova. It recreates the ornament on a sırmaq dreamed up and made by Märiya Köjenova, in 1960s, in Almaty region.



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