

## Rural Craft and Cultural Hub - Note

The partnership between UNESCO and the Government of West Bengal started in 2013 is a long-standing partnership which has over the years grown in stature due to the positive impacts of the project. The success of this co-operation is strongly rooted in the methodology, conception and execution of project. It has brought to the forefront, the economic viability and potential for sustainable development emerging from ICH and traditional artforms from the most rural and remote areas of West Bengal, India.

India is a treasure trove of cultural heritage and each state bears testimony of its own unique cultural bonanza. West Bengal situated in the eastern part of the country is diverse in its landscape having the Himalayas in the north, plateau in the west, lush Gangetic plains, and the Bay of Bengal and the largest delta, Sunderban in the south. The habitats of different rural and indigenous communities have resulted in unique performing art and handicrafts in each district of the state. There is a rich repertoire of performing art, visual art, handloom and a variety of handicraft traditions like metal work, wood work, clay work, natural fibre tradition etc. Understanding the importance of developing ICH based entrepreneurship, sustaining the art forms, strengthening the socio economic condition of the artisans and creating cultural destination hubs, the Department of Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) associated with UNESCO in 2013 to develop Rural Craft Hubs covering 10 craft forms and 3000 artists. The success led to partnership for developing Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs from 2016 – 2019, which covered 12000 artists beneficiaries across 15 art and craft forms. The success of these initiatives led to the present phase of the project covering 50000 artist beneficiaries. The partnership has supported the intergenerational transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and arts, fostered social inclusion of the tradition bearers, mostly from marginalized communities through improved recognition and identity and contributed towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The project components have been fully endorsed by the Government of West Bengal. Almost a decade since they initially began, the projects remain groundbreaking. The expertise, network, capacity building efforts, market exposures, heritage education and much more that has been brought to the projects by Contact Base and their methodology, ‘Art for Life’, has ensured the safeguarding and growing viability of ICH in West Bengal.

The interventions have led to safeguarding of more than 25 ICH elements. The crafts persons who were largely wage based artisans, having lack of design, access to technology, deficient market linkages, lack of training are now an energised community and all of the challenges were addressed. More than 50 craft enterprises are running successful ventures, having turnovers of Rs 5 lakhs (small clusters) to Rs 2 crores (large clusters)<sup>1</sup>. The monthly income of the craft artists have enhanced from Rs 3000/- on an average to Rs 8000/- on an average. The performing artists who hardly were getting paid from their performances have now not only performing at district and state level, but also travelling internationally. With youth pursuing their ICH, average age of the artists has gone down substantially, and unsafe migration has reduced. Around 10 community based institutions are formed and strengthened, enhancing production and profitability. The Government developed 14 folk art centres and community museums as places of practice, demonstration and exhibition. To create awareness on the ICH, annual fairs are held in the villages and this has led to development of cultural tourism. Regular tourists started to flow in which was practically nil before and direct sales from the village got established. Average tourist footfall in these village is around 5000. Local administration has improved infrastructure. The larger village community has also benefitted as income avenues

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<sup>1</sup>UNESCO Evaluation Report, Feb, 2020

have increased. Six unique craft traditions are accredited with the Geographical Indication. The artists are using social media to promote ICH and organise online heritage education programs.

### Safeguarding Art

- ICH Inventory
- Educational tools
- Community Museum

### Direct Market Linkages and Fair Business Practices

- Exhibitions, Festivals, Events
- Buying Houses
- Export
- E-commerce

### Creation of Rural Cultural Destinations

- Village festivals
- Heritage education
- Cultural tours

### Empowering Artists & Boosting Creative Entrepreneurship

- Enhanced Skill Repertoire
- Heritage sensitive innovation
- Business skill development
- Recognition & awards
- Digital capacity development

### Infrastructure

- Folk Art Centres
- Technology Innovation
- Improved process
- Tools , Equipments, Accessory support

### Branding and Promotion

- Brand Identity
- Print and Digital Tools
- IP tools protecting Artists' Rights

### Cultural Exchange & Collaborations

- International and national art and music residencies
- Co-creation & learning
- Partnerships and networks

### Institution Building

- Community Organisation
- Formalizing entrepreneurship

### Impact on SDGs:

SDG 8

SDG 5

SDG 11

Rise in income  
(Increase from :Rs 3000/- to Rs 8000)

Sustainable business run by enterprises  
Creative enterprises integrated with Government policies

Collectives running successful business enterprises

Improvement in land ownership  
(increase from : 10% to 55%)

Increase in bank linkage

(Increase from : 25% to 93%)

Electricity % increase : 70% to 99%

Household sanitation % increase : 55%

40% artists are female  
Women led enterprises formed  
Women digitally empowered

Development of ICH based tourism  
Footfall to the villages was nil and now regular tourists visit the village

SDG 12

Work conditions (e.g. furnace type) and processes have improved (e.g. use of Azo free dye).