

# Art for Life

*An opportunity for investment*



banglanatak dot com

## Culture and Development – A Story from Bengal

Culture is a great enabler. Cultural capital in the form of oral and performing art traditions is an asset for developing rural enterprise. In 'Art for Livelihood' (AFL) initiative of banglanatak dot com, cultural heritage is revitalized through training, exposure and promotion. New markets are created and new brands are developed to promote traditional performing and visual arts and crafts. Heritage becomes a means of livelihood and empowerment. Our motto is 'To preserve art, let the artists survive'. The vision is preserving and revitalising subaltern heritage to address social exclusion, poverty and marginalization.

AFL, started in 2004, has led to socio-economic development of 3200 folk artists performing Chau, Jhumur, Baul/Fakiri, Patachitra, Gambhira & Domni. The artists live in 150 villages across 38 blocks in the districts of Malda, Purulia, Bankura, West Medinipur, East Medinipur and Nadia of West Bengal.

Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC)/Ministry of Rural Development supported this unique and innovative initiative between 2005 and 2009. The European Union provided funding support between 2009 and 2011 to facilitate multi cultural exchange, collaboration and partnerships and raise awareness on the role of culture in social inclusion and economic empowerment. Project partners were the International Institute for Culture, Tourism and Development(IICTD), London Met University, for providing support in researching on ethno tourism and Planet Art Exchange, Liverpool, for facilitating cross cultural interaction. Project Associate UNESCO, New Delhi Office, supported networking and dissemination.



## About the Art Forms:

We worked with

**Chau**-vigorous and acrobatic tribal masked dance with martial art imbibed from Purulia



**Jhumur** - lifestyle music and dance of indigenous people in Purulia and Bankura



**Baul and Fakiri**-Sufi music of the wandering minstrels from Nadia



**Patachitra** painting on long scrolls with natural colour & storytelling through singing, from East and West Medinipur

**Gambhira and Domni** social satirical folk theatre forms from Malda



# Road Map for AFL

## Phase I

**Cultural Mapping (Year 1)**  
Mapping artist communities  
Baseline study  
Knowledge-Attitude- Practice (KAP) Study  
Organising artists into Common Interest Groups / Self Help Groups



## Phase II

**Capacity building (Year 1-2)**  
Art skills training (3-4 months)  
Specialised skill training of folk artists  
Product diversification and innovation  
Develop new productions/repertoires  
Financial literacy  
Equipping with instrument/costume/mask  
Health Insurance

**Preserving Oral Heritage (Year 1-3)**  
Document /record art forms  
Publish books & audio visual products  
Develop resource centres



## Phase III

**Marketing & Promotion (Year 1-3)**  
Publish Brochures, Catalogues, Website  
Disseminate Audio Visual products  
Direct market linkage  
Media partnerships  
Organize Festivals

**Exchange & Interaction (Year 2-3)**  
Collaborative art workshops  
Cross cultural exchange  
Research

**Linkages and Partnerships (Year 2-3)**  
Media partnership  
Dovetailing with Govt. Schemes  
Linkage with art promoters  
Academic partnerships



## Phase IV

**Ethno tourism (Year 2-3)**  
Infrastructure development  
Capacity building for tourism  
Village festivals  
Publicity & linkage with Travel & Tourism organisations

**Develop Creative Industries (Year 2-3)**  
Creation of Business entities (Clusters/Federations)  
Infrastructure  
Credit linkage  
Market linkage



## Cultural Mapping

It is critical to draw up an inventory of the art forms and artists to prepare a road map to develop creative industries based on intangible cultural heritage. Lack of data and information deter drawing up effective plans for revival and revitalisation. Lack of comprehensive information on the geographical spread of folk artists, their number and their level of skills leads to lack of support. Objectives of diagnostic study and cultural mapping

- To map the artist communities
- To identify the leaders, change makers and process owners from the artists.
- To evolve a pragmatic and realistic work plan.
- To identify benchmarks for monitoring the project outcomes.



### Outline of approach

Design study tools like survey questions, interview plans, participatory diagramming tools etc.

Preparation of location map of artists

Ground research and secondary data collection

Sample selection

Pilot test and fine tune study tools

Participatory appraisal of situation of art form and artists

Observational study to understand life style, living condition, cultural practices etc.

Knowledge-attitude-practices study

Consultations for debriefing the participants and finalising action plan

## Building Community Led Creative Industry

Revitalising and reviving heritage skills as means of livelihood necessitates mobilizing changes in mindset and attitudes as the folk artists become 'cultural service providers'. It is important to develop community based structures for operating the grass root cultural enterprise. In order to initiate collective action, Self Help Groups (SHG) or Common Interest Groups (CIG) are formed based on the art traditions. After formation of SHGs, bank linkages are facilitated. These groups are the building blocks for micro enterprise development. Activity Clusters are then formed to create professionally managed and self reliant community enterprises. The approach strengthens community participation and facilitates dovetailing with opportunities for micro and small enterprise development.

Six Activity Clusters comprising of 233 Self Help groups are operational as professionally managed and self reliant enterprises. There are 2904 men and 329 women. SHGs have been provided with instruments, costumes, masks and other accessories. Health insurance has been provided to 9545 people.

Six Folk Art Resource Centres developed in land donated by community are hubs of ethnic culture. The Resource centres at Naya (West Medinipur), Gorbhanga (Nadia), Chelyama (Purulia) are facilitating village tourism. They embody and strengthen local community's identity and pride.



## Capacity Building

Comprehensive training and capacity building programme addresses training in basic skills as well as capacity building of the artists to innovate new ways of rendering the art forms.

Decentralized training at the village level is conducted under the aegis of the living legends - Guru (Teacher) of the art forms, for widening and strengthening the skill base to the Shishya (Disciple) to establish a Parampara (Tradition), where the knowledge and skills are passed on to the next generation.

The folk artists are required to be equipped with new skills for performance on stage and in studio environment. They are trained in the use of mike, use of light and space, painting on diverse media, spoken English, product pricing etc. The folk artists now develop short modern productions based on stories from Shakespeare and Tagore and use diverse art forms. New music created by way of fusion of the east and west has been hugely popular among the urban crowd, live music pubs and music channels.

Folk media is an excellent tool for Communication for Development (C4D). The artists are sensitized on gender and child rights, health and environment. Use of local art form creates involved contact, sustainable model of grass root communication and local participation.

The challenge in developing creative industries based on heritage is to create new markets for traditional heritage. A key risk is loss of authenticity in attempts to cater to market demands. We use the strategy of facilitating exchange between the practitioners of folk art and contemporary art and theatre directors, musicians, composers, new media artists and designers. These workshops facilitate an understanding of the dynamics of culture, place and society in different environments. The folk artists gain confidence and improved ability to understand their own cultural context and to further innovate.



Documentation of oral tradition is the key to safeguarding ICH. The aging artists are the living repositories of knowledge and skills. With their demise styles and techniques of the art forms, knowledge on history and evolution of the art forms are lost forever.

Audio visual recordings are carried out to safeguard heritage traditions and restoring cultural memory as well as for dissemination. Books and CDs are published and widely circulated. Dissemination helps to build awareness among potential consumers. These products may also be commoditized from where the artists may earn an income.

Brochures & catalogues provide information on the art form, its attributes, and historical context along with contact details of artist groups.

Website ([www.folklibrary.com](http://www.folklibrary.com)) provides information on the history and evolution of the art form, with visual snapshots of the work and practices of leading artists. This channel of information dissemination enables the art forms to reach out to international audience.





## Developing New Markets

Folk festivals organised at local, state, regional, national and international levels create new markets, and attract new customers for ethnic art. Such festivals also facilitate interaction with musicians, art lovers, art critics, researchers and academicians opening up new avenues. 1200 artists have performed in 25 national festivals. 42 folk artists have traveled to 70 international events in UK, France, Switzerland, Tunisia, China, Japan and Bangladesh and earned Rs. 1.6 million.



The youth has been losing on traditional values with the onslaught of external influence and lack of exposure, interest, belief in traditions and general lack of awareness. Folk performances in schools and colleges and in youth festivals create new audiences.



Village festivals planned in and around the villages of the artists encourage visitors to seats of traditional culture. Folk art hubs evolve as tourism destinations. Culture becomes a capital attracting investment. Art for Livelihood project has established models for developing responsible tourism offering authentic experience of indigenous life.

With lots of visitors coming over to the villages to stay and experience folk art, the artists' pride has increased and they have even taken initiatives in 'home stay' based tourism development process. Approximately 3000 tourists from Kolkata and abroad have attended six village festivals organized around the resource centres. Village tourism has benefitted the larger folk artists community. Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal is sharing information on cultural heritage tourism in its website. Tour operators have come forward to promote heritage tourism. UNWTO is documenting the model as a best practice.

*Arman Fakir, the guru from Gorbhanga, Nadia enthuses “we were in a remote village of Bengal striving to save our tradition; the project has helped to take Fakiri music to national and international audience.”*

## Advocacy for Culture & Development

banglanatak dot com organized an international seminar on Heritage and Development between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2011. The seminar created an effective platform for advocacy, discussion and debate with participation of 150 people representing UN and Intergovernmental agencies (EU, UNWTO, UNIDO, UNESCO, SEAMEO-SPAFA), Government, Corporate, NGOs, academics, tourism experts, art & craft promoters and media. There were participants from all across India and also UK, Spain, Netherlands, Japan, Thailand, Bangladesh, Kenya and Ethiopia.

The AFL model has been shared in international forums supported by UNWTO, I<sup>T</sup> Tourism-Contact-Culture-Research Network, UNESCO, Tropen Museum, University College of London, SOAS, SEAMEO-SPAFA, ICOMOS and WOMEX in Lisbon, Kisii, Berlin, Paris, Bali, Bangkok, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Nairobi, and London. Papers have been published in journals like International Journal of Intangible Heritage, UNWTO and UNESCO are documenting the models as best practices in developing creative industries and responsible cultural heritage tourism.

Media has been mobilized as a key partner for promotion. Folk art and culture has caught media attention and the leading newspapers, magazines and television channels across the world have covered the festivals, events and tourism destinations.



## Project Evaluation

External evaluation has been done by Cultural Programme Officer of UNESCO, New Delhi Office and faculty of NIILM, Centre for Management Studies, one of the top five business schools of Delhi.

UNESCO, New Delhi, in their evaluation, has appreciated the successful results in terms of income generation of artists after 6 yrs of project investment saying that using traditional artistic and creative skills of people as source of livelihood is a viable development model for rural India. The methodology adopted was appreciated as having potential to be replicated in another part of India. The overall inclusive growth of the entire artist community was also highlighted in the evaluation. Infusing interest about the folk forms among the young generation and the awareness building of the artists on the need for maintaining authenticity of their folk forms while appealing to the marketability were also highlighted in the evaluation report. UNESCO, New Delhi also envisioned the possibility of the art forms surviving through creating new market and converting the conventional Government 'subsidy' and 'patronage' to 'investment'.

NIILM Delhi (a business school) did the study to assess development in the lives of not only the folk artists but also the community at large and also to gauge the viability of cultural tourism in the six villages where folk art centres have been developed. The evaluation report has referred to the approach used in the project as unique. The effectiveness of the 'investment in people' in making the project successful and attracting investment almost equal to double the initial investment has been seen as a noteworthy achievement by the organisation. The inclusive development of the artists and their family that included increase in income as well as in living standards was also recognized and appreciated. The success that has come through exposure and collaboration with the western world in terms of improvisation of art forms and creating market linkages is also accredited along with the presence of the art forms in national cultural events and that of the revival of the genre named 'Bangla Qawaali'.



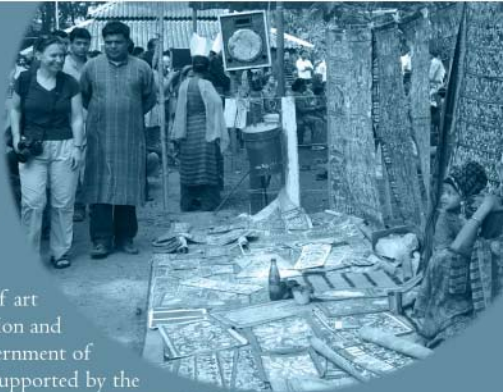


## Benefits of AFL Model

### A viable option for livelihood

The art forms have become the primary source of livelihood for 30% of the beneficiaries and an important secondary source of income for the others. The beneficiaries have transformed from 'daily labourers' to artists and cultural entrepreneurs.

The project has established a model for professionalisation of art skills and has drawn the attention of the Planning Commission and the National Skill Development Mission in India. The Government of Bihar has adopted the model as part of JEEViKA project supported by the World Bank. Corporates are showing interest in making similar investments as part of CSR.



***Moyna Chitrakar, a Patachitra artist from Medinipur says 'Me and my husband Malek used to beg in villages, now I have 2 storied house. It's a dream come true.'***

***Golam Fakir, a Baul-Fakiri singer from Nadia is a fascinating case study of an identity transformation, from a non-entity in the neighborhood to a celebrity artist in a span of six years! "I have been performing in about 20 -25 shows a month and moving from one city to other. This project has given me opportunity to visit places like Paris, London, Geneva, Tunis, Dhaka, Schenzen, Dundee and Liverpool," recalls Golam.***

### Achieving MDGs

- **Achieving MDG 1:** ICH based creative industries have led to alleviation of poverty, greater dignity and recognition to the artists. Average monthly income has increased from 8 Euro to 40 Euro per month with the monthly income of the leading artists (around 200 people) ranging from 200 Euro to 350 Euro.
- **Achieving MDG 3:** 10% of the folk artists are women and all are enjoying improved status in their families and communities. They are earning from their art forms and travelling alone across the country and globe. The story of women empowerment through Patachitra art was awarded the Most Creative Community Outreach project in UNWomen, Singapore's 'Project Inspire', supported by Master Card.
- **Achieving MDG 8:** The project has contributed immensely to achieving MDG 8 of fostering global partnerships. Project activities have led to exchanges between people from four continents namely, USA from North America, UK, France, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Denmark from Europe, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Bangladesh, China, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia from Asia and Egypt, Tunisia, Ethiopia and Kenya from Africa. This can be an excellent platform to develop a North-South-South linkage in creating an alternative development model using art and culture.



## New Partnerships

Partnerships have been established for promotion, capacity building, publication and partnerships facilitating performances across India and abroad. Music companies and production houses, both national and international, including World Music Network, London, Maison des Cultures du Monde (MSM) & Zaman Productions of France, have facilitated global promotion of the art forms. Folk performances by the artists are regularly showcased by the television channels. ICCR has supported festivals and empanelled many rural artists and also extended financial support to tour Europe and Japan for participating at various festivals.

## Promoting Cultural Diversity & Pluralism

AFL ushers in a spirit of universal brotherhood and promotes cultural pluralism through exchange and collaboration. Promotional events have led to appreciation of subaltern culture & lifestyle and awareness has been developed at global and national levels on all the six art forms. With exposure, the artist communities are overcoming caste and gender barriers.

## Inclusive Growth

The marginalized artists are now cultural entrepreneurs leading change for development. They are buying land, building brick houses, installing sanitation and electrical connection as well as buying cycles and mobiles. They enjoy improved access to health care owing to health insurance. Awareness has resulted in increased sanitation (7% to 87%) and education coverage (98% are sending children to school).

## Return on Investment

Investment into art skills of traditional and marginalized artists has a huge return potential, for a country like India. A total of Rs. 8 Crore (1.3 Million Euro) has been invested in last 7 years catering to 3200 beneficiaries, which translates to Rs. 25000 per person. Average increase in income for the last 4 years is Rs. 1750 per month per person. Leaving aside the other socio economic benefits and improvement of quality of lives, in 4 years we see an ROI of over 300%.





Sustainability of this initiative rests on four drivers, namely, long term investments, policy infrastructure, effective partnerships, and innovation. The model has proven, beyond doubt, that it is possible to make exponential social impact with sustained patronage. Portability of this model is also high, as the process involved is agnostic to the art form per se. There will be interesting challenges to take the expertise to other parts of the country and across the globe, primarily because of demographic variations like language, and cultural norms. However, these can be factored into the work plan suitably calibrated with necessary local and expert views.

Policy infrastructure is a huge enabler and can have maximum impact over a longer term. Indian Planning Commission is willing to look at the possibility of accepting 'traditional art and craft skills' as 'employable skill'. Tourism department, Govt. of West Bengal is contemplating main streaming of these village festivals initiated during our AFL project period.

Effective partnerships, is key to the success of a program of such a scale. At the project conceptualization phase itself, competency mapping and necessary gap analysis help us to identify and reach out to potential partners. Building a robust partnership based on common goals and complementing skill sets ensures collaborative delivery.

Innovation is the most critical element in the entire process. At every stage of project conceptualization to delivery, innovation is the norm. Process, people, partnership all contribute to make the model capable of innovating.

We are keen to apply this proven 'model' of 'art for livelihood' in various parts of India and also develop a globally replicable model. We need long term investment and knowledge partners to extend this initiative to alleviate 100,000 poor and marginalized folk artists from poverty across India by 2015.

### Village Festivals

Medinipur - POTMaya (Annual festival of Patuas organized in Pingla): 25-27 Nov, 2011

Purulia - Chau Utsav (Festival organized by Chau artists): 16-18 Dec, 2011

Nadia - Fakiri Utsav ( Festival organized by Baul/Fakirs in Gorbhanga): 13 – 15 Jan, 2012

Malda - Gambhira-Domni Utsav (Annual festival organized by folk artists in Malda): 27-29 Jan, 2012

Purulia - Basanta Utsav ( Festival during holi, the festival of colours): 8 – 11 Mar, 2012

## Way Forward

AFL approach is a viable option for converting traditional skill into employable skill and generating meaningful engagement and livelihood at grass-roots. Convergence of serious stakeholder interest is a must to achieve scaling up of this model.

Institutional support system is necessary to develop creative micro and small enterprise based on heritage skills. Investment needs to be made to develop entrepreneurship skills of cultural practitioners and to support the emergence of local creative enterprise in a mission mode. Government, multilateral aid agencies and foundations can support this initiative by including AFL as a potential focus area in their pursuit of poverty alleviation funding. In our estimate, to take a group of 500 rural artisans out of poverty, it will take 3 years time and a total of Rs. 25,000 (400 Euro) per person as investment. This will improve artists group's monthly income at least by Rs. 1000 per month, which effectively means 100% ROI within the project period itself.

Policy framework may need to move towards a more visible integration and mainstreaming of culture into development policies and strategies. Inclusion of 'Traditional art skills' in the inventory of 'skill' by the National Skill Development Mission may be a game changer for this mission. Corporate and Chambers of Commerce as well as media and academics can play an important role in supporting folk art and policy advocacy.

Corporate CSR policy framework, if supportive of AFL mission, will have a profound impact on its delivery and sustainability. Corporate may invest in artist communities, especially those at production centre neighbourhood. Corporate may also invest in documenting oral traditions, village festivals, collaboration and exchange initiatives and technology inputs.

banglanatak dot com can, and will bring in all the technical know how and innovation potential from its repertoires of art for livelihood initiative, and we will have a winning formula if we can get international donors, Corporate, and Government to join hands to provide necessary financial and policy support.



banglanatak dot com is a social enterprise established in 2000. The organisation works across India for fostering community led development using culture based approaches. Key areas of work are C4D, and development of community-based enterprise offering products and services based on heritage skills in performing arts and crafts.

Founder Director of banglanatak, Amitava Bhattacharya, an engineer from IIT Kharagpur and a Chevening Gurukul Scholar in Leadership and Excellence from the London School of Economics has 22 years of global work experience. Co-Directors are Ranjan Sen, with 30 years of journalism experience and Ananya Bhattacharya, an electrical engineer from Jadavpur University and a Commonwealth Scholar with Masters in Sustainable Development from Staffordshire University, UK. Managing team includes Suman Mukherjee (Engineer & MBA from IIT, Kharagpur), Sayantani Raychaudhuri (Masters in Literature from Presidency College), Madhura Dutta (Masters in Sociology and Common wealth Scholar with Masters in Sustainable Development from Staffordshire University,UK). The organization has a team of 70+ people with diverse background in engineering, sociology, media, fine arts, literature,economics and theatre.

banglanatak has been supported by various Ministries of Govt. of India and State Govt. of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand & Rajasthan, UN agencies (UNESCO, Unicef, Unifem, UNFPA, UNODC), European Union, US Dept. of State, INGOs etc. banglanatak dot com has been accredited with advisory status to the ICH Committee of UNESCO (2010).



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