Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha

Guidelines to document the production of traditional crafts

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Introduction

These guidelines are produced within the framework of the UNESCO project ‘Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha: Documentation, Education and Training to Revitalize Traditional Decorative Arts and Building Crafts in the Temples of Asia’. The project seeks to build local capacity in the conservation of arts and crafts associated with Buddhist heritage via the revitalization of traditional artisan skills, in particular amongst the sangha (monastic order).

In order to record knowledge about the crafts, the UNESCO project requires the documentation of the vulnerable crafts. This includes documentation about

- Production of traditional crafts
- Artistic styles of traditional crafts
- Traditional techniques of taking care of artistic and craft products in the religious setting

See the attached flowchart for more details.

As important craft traditions in Asia begin to disappear, the crafts skills as well as the pride and the dignity of the artisans are also dying out. With changing times, artisans are dissuading their children from following the path of local craft traditions, urging them to take up outside work rather than continuing the family vocation.

In order to revive any craft tradition that is not being practiced very actively, it is necessary for the facilitator to develop an in-depth understanding of the process of making the craft products and the context in which the craft has been practiced.
1. Purpose of the guidelines

Written on the basis of accumulated on-site experiences, this handbook provides guidelines for documenting the production processes of a craft. By following the guidelines, the reader should be able to document a craft in such a way that it provides a clear insight into the processes involved in their production, so that, if required, it can be revived in the same social and cultural context in which had thrived and is now dying out.

The documentation output resulting from these guidelines can be assembled into a manual that will allow future artisans to produce the craft in an authentic artistic and social manner. This will produce the documentation output “technical manual for craft production”.

The manual could take the form of a printed document or a video. The documentation team should prepare for this accordingly.

The “technical manual” should be used by the craftsperson in conjunction with the “artistic stylebook” about the traditional crafts.

2. Assembling the documentation team

The documentation process requires certain skills. The team should comprise of persons who can help deliver the required results:

- Communication in local language
- Knowledge of the local environment
- Ability to communicate with the local elders
- Ability to communicate with the local women
- Command over written English
- Familiarity with local art and craft technologies
- Photography
- Video documentation
- Audio recording
- Ability to observe and record observations
- Ability to make graphic records and diagrams
Before commencing documentation activities in the field, the team should prepare the appropriate personnel, working space, materials and equipment.

### 3. Preparing basic requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item/activities</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Working team</td>
<td>See above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2.  | Support staff                    | • Accountant and stock keeper  
• Computer operator  
• Assistant.                                           |
| 3.  | Working space                    | A central unit where  
• The field information can be collated  
• The documentation can be refined to produce explanatory narrations  
• Working team can report and replenish their work requirements.  
• Equipment can be stored                                           |
| 4.  | Work planning                    | • A map of the region where the craft is to be documented                     |
| 5.  | Teams briefing and debriefing    | • White board and markers  
• Conference table and chairs  
• Stationery                                                            |
| 6.  | Teams depart and return          | • Travel kits (may include tents, rucksacks, etc if required)  
• Mobile phones  
• Cash reserves  
• Changing room, washroom, lockers if necessary  
• Emergency information for each team member including family details, addresses, permits, insurance, etc. |
| 7.  | Communications with site teams/others | • Telephone, fax, internet  
• Mobile phones  
• GPS, if necessary                                                   |
| 8.  | Resource management              | Administrative records such as  
• Consumable stock registers  
• DSR  
• Tour records  
• Cash books, ledgers, bank records, etc  
• Advance register, loan register, issue register  
• Suppliers list                                                          |
| 9.  | Emergency responses              | • Emergency response action plan (written and displayed)  
• Medical kit  
• Contact numbers (police, fire, insurance, etc)                          |
| 10. | Tools and equipment store        | • Stationery  
• Cameras, film for print and transparencies  
• Digital cameras, and memory sticks  
• Audio and video recording equipment, tripods  
• Polycarbonate containers for collecting samples and for measuring  
• Travel kits  
• Core drill, water lance  
• Electronic weighing machine  
• Small tools such as forceps, scalpels, spoons  
• Hacksaw  
• Extension cords  
• Umbrellas  
• Large-sized polythene sheets  
• Ropes and cords  
• Measuring tapes  
• Saw, hammer  
• Portable tables or simply light boards  
• Grey, cream, black cloth of very close weave for photography of samples at site |
| 11. | Collation of field observations  | • Computers, scanner, printer  
• Blank photo albums  
• CDs  
• A proper documentation system that allows quick and correct retrieval of information |
| 12. | References                       | • Basic books related to the regions and the crafts  
• Links to libraries                                                   |
4. Finding the craftspersons and the crafts production centers

The documentation team should start by referring to the available literature on the art and craft traditions of the region. Such publications are usually in the art history sections of libraries. Literature related to the raw material and the process by which the craft products were created can often be found in literature related to art conservation and restoration, as well as in books related to the nature of product, i.e. metal, paper, textile, etc.

The team should also draw up a list of places known to be famous for that craft. These places can include those places where the craft is not practiced now but is known to be inhabited by people (especially older people) who used to be practitioners of the craft.

Plot these places on a map of the region. This will produce the output “location map of craft production centers”.

The team should identify a place that is not too difficult to access for the first survey. Each place which one visits will give leads to other places where the craft is practiced or where the old craftspersons live.

Please see Annex for a sample map of craftspersons and production centers.

5. Developing a survey of craftspersons

The documentation team should prepare a survey procedure to be used in interviewing craftspersons and studying about the crafts production in the field. Prior to field work, the team should undertake

- Background research about the crafts to gain familiarity about the tools, techniques, materials and other issues which will be discussed
- Preparation of the survey form and equipment

The survey topics concerning the craftsperson can include

- Record of the craftsperson’s involvement with the craft
- Problems faced by the craftsperson
- Hopes and aspiration of the craftsperson
- Finished products
- Networking to other such craftspersons or crafts.

Please see Annex for a sample questionnaire profiling a craftsperson.

The survey topics concerning the craft production process can include

- Preparation of the products
- Process/technique
- Materials
- Tools
- Actors
- Rituals / practices associated with the craft.
- Calendar of craft production
• Problems about the craft production

Please see Annex for a sample survey about the process of crafts production.

Once the team has developed the survey about the process of crafts production, it would be useful to test it. Careful planning of the survey yields better and more complete results, less mistakes and better utilization of resources. The purpose of the test is just to see if the survey procedure is well understood and executed by the team. It would be convenient if this test is carried out somewhere very close to the central working space. The test place does not have to be a craft centre — the team could choose a tailor’s shop, a bakery, or an artist neighbor, for instance.

After the test survey is done, the team should compare well the documentation tallies with the actual production process. The documentation should be such that a third person could be able to make the product following the documented process.

The team may need to improve the survey technique if you are not achieving success in producing clear documentation.

Sometimes, it is better to establish contact without having to take out notebooks, pens, cameras and measuring tapes. Recording can take place once it is established that sharing of information is in the mutual interest of the craftspersons and the documentation team.

In villages, it is better to meet the village headman first. Ask to see the various village products. Some of these may be related to the craft that the team wants to document. Ask who are the people who made these products or who made them in the past.

Ask to be escorted to one of these houses where the master craftspersons live and often work.

The team should start by introducing each person of the team. Take a few photographs of your home and your family. Offer a hand of friendship as you would normally do, especially as you have traveled to this ‘far-off’ village. Communication will happen in the natural course of action.

The team should mention that the quality of the craft that has caught your attention and that you wonder how it was made and whether it is made just as it was made many years back.

Questions about the current context for craft production can include

• How old and how big is the village, etc?
• What are the problems that the people face there?
• Who is responsible for solving these problems?
• Why do these problems exist?
• Can a revival of the craft help to solve any of these problems?
• If so, how? (Take suggestions from the craftsperson on how this can happen.)
Questions about the craftsperson can include

- What is his/her area of specialty?
- How long he/she has been practicing?
- Where was he/she trained, with who, and for how long?
- What is he/she currently producing?
- What are some outstanding samples of his/her finished products?
- Does he/she currently teach?
- What are some of the difficulties in continuing with the craft?

Record the answers of the craftsperson to these questions. This will produce the output “profile of craft producers”.

9. Documenting the crafts tradition and finished products

Questions about the modern downtown of the crafts can include the following factors

- Financial
- Educational
- Social
- Personal
- Laws, rules, regulations
- Disappearing or incomplete knowledge of the craft
- Lack of raw materials
- Lack of working capital
- Diminishing markets and demand
- Rise of modern mass produced products
- Difficulties in marketing

Questions about the craft movement in the region.

- What is the dispersion of the craft community in the region?
- Which are the craft communities within which marriages take place?
- Where are the relatives of the craftpersons dispersed?

This will give an indication of places where the craft knowledge may be dispersed and could be used to plan further research in other geographical areas.

The team should ask to see the different products made from the craft (if available).

The documentation of the products should include

- A visual description of the object
  - Size
  - Shape
  - Colour
  - Texture
  - Material
10. Documenting the process of making the products

Now that the documentation team has a better understanding of the present-day situation of the crafts as well as more familiarity with the craftsperson, it will allow for you to follow the explanation about how the craft was produced more easily.

Start by asking the craftsperson “How was the product made?”

- Note down steps as they are narrated. Do not worry about the sequence at this stage, and avoid interrupting the flow of narration.
- Note down the raw materials if they are mentioned. Use the local terms used by the narrator. If the craftsperson is sitting in the workspace ready to produce the product for you, then instead of the raw material, you may see the modified version of the raw material that is to be used in the preparation of the product. These are two different things and often may have different names, appearance and properties.
- Note down the tools, utensils and other household items used in the process
- If some other craftsperson sits down, let them. If they interrupt, let them, and note their comments. If it is disturbing the flow of information from the primary narrator, then tell them gently ‘after this…”

After the explanation, you might have to ask for additional clarifications to ensure that the following questions and points are covered.

Where is the product made?

- What is the primary work area(s)?
- See the place where it was made. (This could be one of the rooms in the house or it could be a place nearby.)
- What is the preparation required before beginning work in the work area?
- Are there alternative work areas?
What are the raw materials used?

- What are the raw materials?
- Provide a brief description for each material.
- What are the local terms that they are called?
- Are there other local synonyms used?
- Where can you can buy or source these materials from?
- How much of these materials can be collected at one time?
- What are the problems encountered in collecting these materials?

How are the raw materials modified?

- How is the raw material modified, and into what?
- What is its local name now?
- Provide a brief description.
- How much time does this modification take?
- Who does it generally?

What are the tools used?

- What are the tools used?
- Photograph the tools together, and also separately during use.
- What are their local names?
- Do simple sketches of each tool, if possible.
- Record their
  - Size, material, source
- How old is the tool?
- Did the craftsman’s elders also use the same tool or was it different?
- If a certain tool is not available, what will the alternative be?
- Who produces the tool?
- Can the tool be purchased at the market?
- If so, what is its present price?
- How is the tool maintained and by who?
- How frequently is the tool maintained?
11. Repeating the process to the craftsperson

Repeat (and also act it out if there is scope for it) what you have noted down to express your understanding of the process. Note any corrections they make in your actions and explanations.

Use the local terms when repeating the process. Your pronunciation may be corrected. Tally the use of the terms with the objects used in the process. Make corrections if required. Often more than one term could be used for one raw material or tool. Note these terms. Also note that the other term could also refer to a slight variation in the object. Note that variation.

Try to see and feel the tools and materials used in the production.

12. Interviewing another craftsperson on the process of making the products

Note that various variations will emerge when the team interviews different craftpersons and in different locations. An individual doing it alone may do it differently than when the same person is working in a group. When interviewed alone, the craftsperson may present different or more elaborate descriptions of the process than when they are in a speaking in a community gathering.

Even though you now have a basic understanding of the process, note down the process explained by another craftsperson with an unprejudiced mind. If there are variations, ask about the ‘other’ method you know of. Then ask if there is any other variation and why.

13. Documenting the rituals and ceremonies associated with making the product.

There are often associated rituals and ceremonies which are interlinked with the process of making the craft product. It is better to interview the craftsperson about the associated rituals and ceremonies after the interview about the process. This will allow for a cross-check of the sequence of the production process at the same time. However, the team should see how the situation is. If the craftsperson is clear in his or her narration, one could even intersperse the first interview with questions on the rituals and ceremonies.

Questions related to associated rituals directly associated with the process of crafts production can include:

- What are the necessary rituals when preparing the product?
- Who conducts the rituals?
- Who participates in the rituals? Why and why not?
- What is the meaning of the ritual?
- Are these rituals laid out in texts? Which ones?
- Are these rituals informal and passed on in an intangible manner?
- How elaborate can these ceremonies get?
- What other rituals are there, that may not be really necessary, but are practiced?
- Often there are stories behind the rituals. They can be recorded along with the actual narration, music, etc.
Sample documentation of rituals directly associated with the process of crafts production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Process sequence</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Ritual or ceremony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>01</td>
<td>Pray to the plant and the earth to excuse the impending action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Remove the bark from the tree with help of the sickle</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>When the ‘beater is handled for the first time in the day, a prayer is read and water sprinkled on the beater.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Boil the bark for 20 minutes and allow to cool</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Place six to ten handfuls of this wet fibre in a vat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Place six to ten handfuls of this wet fibre in a vat</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>Beat to pulp with beater</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The crafts production may also be related to:

- Seasonal calendar of activity
- Local festivals
- Calendar of preparation of the craft product

Sample documentation of seasonal calendar of activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Seasonal activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Marriage ceremonies, sowing of the pulses, repairing of the village water systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February - March</td>
<td>Cattle markets, selling of the stored grains in the government depots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April - May</td>
<td>Folk theatre in the evenings, low activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June - July</td>
<td>Paddy sowing and transplanting, agriculture activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample documentation of local festivals and craft production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solar calendar</th>
<th>Local calendar</th>
<th>Festivals</th>
<th>Craft production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-June to mid-July</td>
<td>Ashad</td>
<td>Chandan yatra</td>
<td>Wooden images of Jagannath and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-October to mid-November</td>
<td>Kartik</td>
<td>Dussehra Kartik Purnima</td>
<td>Paper mache masks, Boats made of ‘sholapith’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample calendar of preparation of the craft product

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Seasonal activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Gather certain materials during cool season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February - March</td>
<td>Process the materials and allow to rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April - May</td>
<td>Prepare tools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. **Collecting samples of materials**

Collect samples according to an ordered sequence and methodology, documenting them in a pre-prepared format. Careful documentation at this stage will avoid confusion later on when the team returns to the central unit.

The samples can be collected after the interview is over, during the actual production process, or in between. Anyone with a basic understanding of the process can collect those samples that have been narrated and demonstrated by the craftsperson.

The appropriate materials and tools should be used to collect the samples:

- Tissue paper
- Small boxes
- Polycarbonate bottles or jars, especially for liquid and pasty samples
  - 500 ml and 1000 ml sizes
- Film roll canisters are very good for small samples
- Forceps, spoons
- Gloves
- Plastic ‘easy-to-seal’ pouches
- Small pick and hammer
- Rigid box to carry the samples back in, with compartments if possible
- Note pad, pencil, sharpener, eraser, 6-inch ruler, paper cutter
- Rubber bands, cord, sellotape
- Candle and matchstick, if water-proof sealing is required.

15. **Visiting another site**

The documentation team should visit another site in order to repeat the documentation process. Note the local variations. Ask if any type of resources are shared with other villages, sites or communities that make similar crafts. This resource could be a raw material source in a forest or a marketplace.

16. **Cross-checking the field documentation with other sources**

After the documentation team has collected the “recipe” from the interviews with craftspersons, it would be useful to compare the results with any instructions which have been recorded in historic manuscripts, texts, or other evidence of traditional techniques which may be available.

17. **Making the product on-site**

Once the preliminary documentation has been gathered from interviews and other sources, the team should encourage the community to try their hand at making the dying product again in the traditional manner. Identify one central village where you can sense interest, skill and basic infrastructure to be able to achieve a good quality of the product. The on-site crafts production will offer another opportunity to observe the process as well as another opportunity to improve the existing documentation.

In making the product on-site, the team should make it known that the locals and the visitors are equal partners in the effort, and that both should contribute to try to revive the craft by first documenting
Preparations

- Ask the lead craftsperson to make the product and to organize the others.
- Repair the old infrastructure and tools. Avoid making or buying new infrastructure or materials. By doing this, one can encourage the local community to source long-lost tools and trace broken-down infrastructure which may have been derelict for years.
- Ask the villagers to collect and/or buy the required materials. If needed, the team should give some money to the lead craftsperson after asking how much to give. They communities usually manage with very little outside assistance.

In order to refine the documentation, the team should note the following things:

Persons involved

The team should notice which persons are called by the lead craftsperson to take part in the above preparations. These are persons the craftsperson knows have the skills to deliver the final product. These would be possible resource persons in the future.

- Which individuals are asked to assist?
- Are they male or female?
- What work is each one doing? What are their different skills?
- What is their attitude in working (orderly, slow, energetic, happy, sulky)?
- What are the tools used?

Once the process is well underway, you can ask the persons involved their names, their age and what do they do for a living, if you do not know them already. If this will not be convenient, you can ask someone else for the names.

Ingredients

When craftspersons prepare a material, they prepare compositions in a seemingly haphazard manner, with ratios of mixtures decided by feel. For the purpose of documenting their way of working, this is fine. However, for purpose of presenting this documentation or for teaching the preparation, this is not enough.

In order to document the specific quantities of materials used, the team should measure everything by volume. It is easier, consistent and easy to replicate by anybody. The team should use 500 ml and 1000 ml plastic/poly carbonate jars to measure the volume of the buckets, tins or other containers that the craftspersons use for their work. If there are powdery products, then when measuring by volume, do not press in the product to accommodate more in the container. Let everything settle under its own weight.
Production process

It is very important to note down the steps in this live demonstration of the process. These include:

- What is the time of day?
- Are there any preparations for the exercise?
- Are there any community rituals?
- Are there any personal prayers before commencing the work? Often these are accompanied by quick fluid movements that can be missed, such as bringing the trowel to touch the forehead before placing the first splatter of plaster on the wall.
- What is the quantity of materials used?
- What is the sequence in which the materials are put together?
- What is the method of mixing the materials?
  - pounding, cutting, turning over, stirring, shaking, etc
- How much time does each step take?
- How do they test that the material is now ‘ready’?
- How do they store the prepared material?
- How long before the material is used?
- For how many days can the prepared material keep? Is it desirable, avoidable or does it not make a difference?
- Instead of these materials, what other materials from the market is used or could be used as an alternative additive?

Failure of the product

Many times, the produced material may fail. The surveyor could ask the craftsperson, other craftspersons, and elders in the village about these failures. It would be very helpful to see some real example of work gone wrong, if possible.

The questions could include:

- What could go wrong?
- Why does this happen?
- Note down these processes of failure. These could be related to
  - climate change
  - poor quality material
  - poor quality in the preparation process
  - change in composition, etc

Later on at the central unit, the team may further consult someone who understands the material and technology of the product well. These persons could be experienced craftspersons, chemistry professors, engineers, art conservation related research and analysis labs, etc. Additional laboratory tests may be undertaken to analyze the materials or to analyze cases of product failure.
Once the field investigations have been completed, the team will be ready to conduct further analysis back at the central unit and, finally, collate the information.

Depending on the available resources, the samples of the prepared material which were collected should be analyzed for their composition. This will help to analyze actual products prepared long ago by acting as a referencing analysis.

If possible, the documentation team should discuss further with resource persons about the underlying technical rationale that exists in the traditional formulas and process. This will yield a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of production that are crucial for reaching the quality of the product that was reached by the master craftspersons in the past. It may also shed light on the process of deterioration of the product.

The recorded memories of different craftspersons about various methods should be placed alongside both the narrations of present crafts practice and the record of the practical demonstration of preparing the product. Viewed together, these will allow the team to infer the viable methods to be used in producing the craft products.

Based on the different narratives and analyses, the team should record the process clearly step-by-step in a simple technical manual. This could take the form of a printed document or a video.

For each step, the manual should convey, at a minimum:

- rituals performed
- tools used
- amount of materials needed
- order that materials were added
- method of preparing material
- desired output of that step
  - consistency, color, texture, volume, etc
- warning signs that the process is going wrong

In the case of a printed document, simple visual diagrams or photographs of each step would be helpful.

This will produce the output “technical manual for craft production”.

Please see Annex for excerpts from completed manuals.

Once the manual has been completed, it is recommended that the team should return to visit the site once again to show the community the shared documentation product. Depending on the readiness of the village, the team should discuss the possibility of initiating a crafts revival project using the documentation as a guideline.