



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

German Commission
for UNESCO



MAPPING CULTURAL DIVERSITY GOOD PRACTICES FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

A Contribution to the Debate on the Implementation of the
UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions

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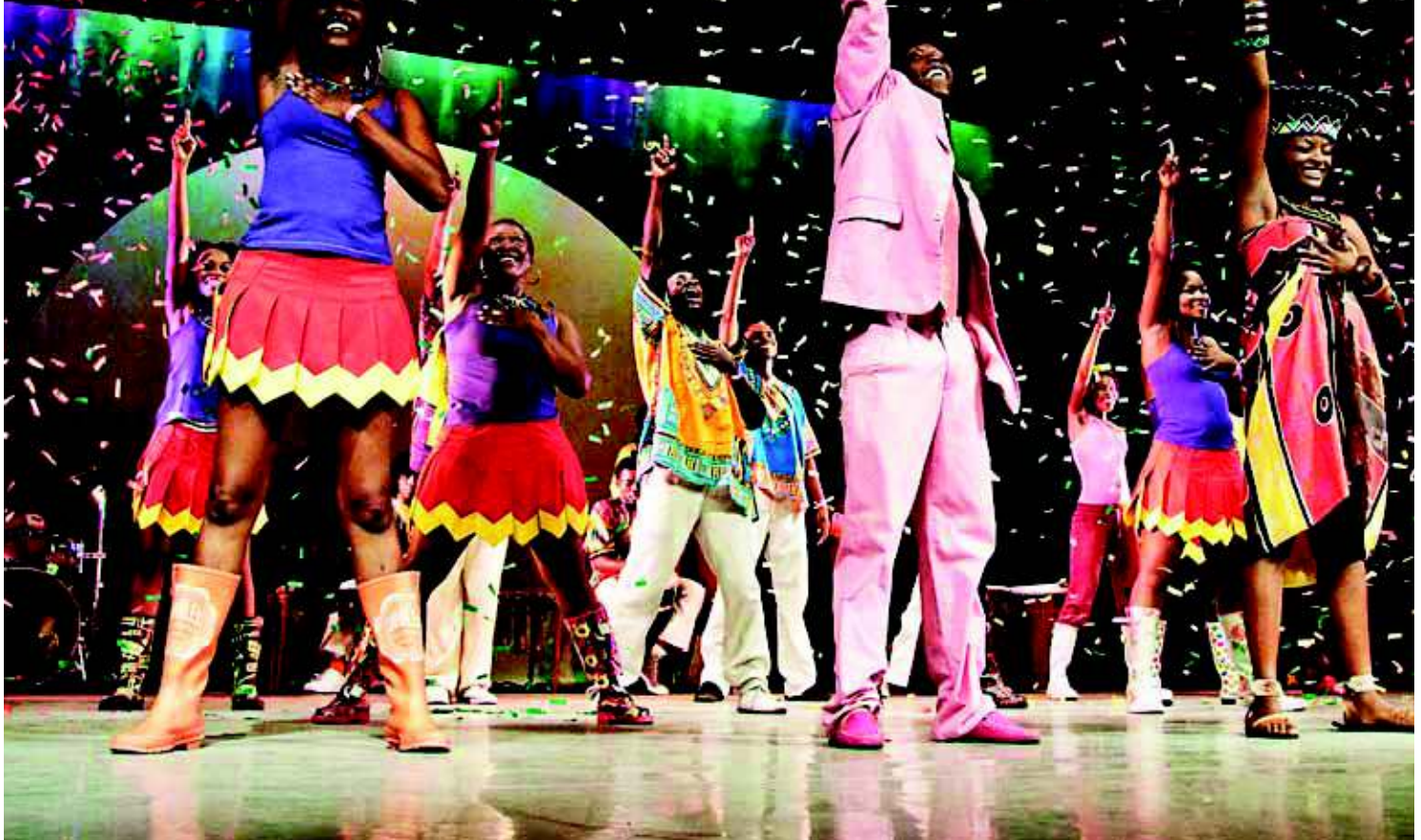
A Contribution to the Debate on the Implementation of the
UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the
Diversity of Cultural Expressions

– A PROJECT OF THE U40-PROGRAMME „CULTURAL DIVERSITY 2030“ –

German Commission for UNESCO
Asia-Europe Foundation

Chapter 2

Protecting and Promoting Cultural Expressions



Dance Theatre Show, HIFA, see p. 40

The intrinsic power of cultural expressions as well as their value as economic goods have both been recognised by the Convention. Many good examples from the arts, media and culture represent this dual nature of cultural goods and services. Consequently, this chapter contains the largest number of good practices within the publication. The first part of the chapter presents examples of governmental initiatives, often implemented in partnership with civil society and/or with private companies. The second part presents examples by civil society actors, ranging from private foundations to NGOs and local initiatives. From the good practices discussed here, it emerges that cultural festivals serve as effective tools to celebrate cultural diversity by reaching a broad public, raising awareness and recognising both regional and national cultural expressions. This should encourage different stakeholders to take better advantage of existing and well-established festivals to promote the objectives of the UNESCO Convention.

Empowering Independent Filmmakers

Public Service Broadcasting Trust, India

Anupama Sekhar

In outlining the rights of parties at the national level, the UNESCO Convention specifically calls for “measures aimed at enhancing diversity of the media, including through public service broadcasting”. The Public Service Broadcasting Trust in India may be considered a good practice in this regard. It offers an innovative model for developing a shared public culture of broadcasting focused on diversity, accuracy, impartiality and access to marginalised audiences.

Along with freedom of thought, expression and information, the diversity of the media has been acknowledged by the UNESCO Convention as a significant contributing factor enabling cultural expressions to flourish within societies. Public service broadcasting can play a significant role in ensuring such diversity.

The Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) in India offers an innovative model for developing a shared public culture of broadcasting focused on diversity, accuracy, impartiality and marginalised audiences. As Rajiv Mehrotra, Managing Trustee, PSBT argues: “Just as numerous social services from education and health to public transportation cannot be left exclusively to their own processes and priorities, driven purely by the demands of the market, support through public funds and institutions of public broadcasting is crucial. A society that lacks an effective alternative media space or voice diminishes its fundamental democratic freedoms and choices while reinforcing the cultures of the privileged...The value of Public Broadcasting evolves from its credibility and its independence from the imperatives of both commercial broadcasting and those of the government or the state”.¹

Away from both commercial and state imperatives, PSBT, a non-governmental, not-for-profit trust based in New Delhi, aims to “create and sustain an independent, participatory, pluralistic and democratic space in the non-print media” in India. To this end, it enables the creation of content, the cultivation of discourse and the establishment of systems that will facilitate public access to the electronic media. Another objective is working towards the elimination of all forms of pre-censorship, especially in reality programming and film, in keeping with India’s liberal democratic Constitution.

Empowering Independent Filmmakers

The primary channel employed by PSBT towards realising its objectives is through the commissioning of independent films. Every year, PSBT commissions 100 films directly from independent documentary filmmakers. Half of these films are made by women and 65 per cent of funded films each year are by new filmmakers.

Open calls for proposals are usually made twice a year and widely disseminated through advertisements in the media and via direct communication to a community of over 1500 filmmakers. The call receives excellent response year after year. That funded proposals make up less than 10 per cent of all proposals received is proof of this.

PSBT directly reaches out to filmmakers through the call; hence, there are no ‘middlemen’ or production companies involved. This serves to effectively and innovatively support the independent filmmaking community in India.

Commissioned films reflect a wide variety of themes and engage with pressing civil society concerns. For instance, *Diversity* was a theme in 2009-10.

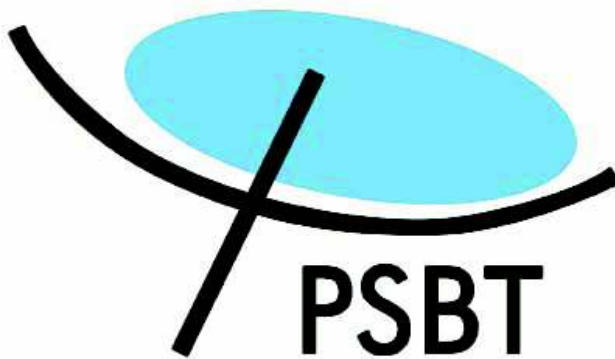
Financial support for the production of the film is the primary focus of the PSBT grant. Filmmakers are able to secure advances without bank guarantees and turn-around-time at each stage of payment/approval is on an average 20 working days. However, selected filmmakers are provided with more than just financial assistance. Mentoring support is offered at every stage of the filmmaking process, with rough cuts being evaluated by well-known film and media persons.

¹ Rajiv Mehrotra. *A Mandate for Public Broadcasting*. http://www.psb.org/general/mandate_public_service Accessed 15 November 2010.

Innovative Partnerships Ensure Wide Reach

Once the film is complete, it is guaranteed telecast on Doordarshan, the national terrestrial channel of India’s public broadcaster. PSBT films presently reach more than 600 million potential viewers.

The wide reach of PSBT’s films is made possible by an innovative partnership with Prasar Bharathi, a state-funded broadcaster. India’s national televi-



sion channel, Doordarshan meets approximately half of PSBT’s production costs and provides free airtime.

In addition, commissioned films are widely shown in national and international film festival screenings. Screenings are also encouraged at schools and universities and as part of workshops, campaigns and conferences both in India and abroad.

UNESCO has also been supporting PSBT’s work, specifically the organisation of an annual international film festival that showcases some of the best short films from across the globe along with PSBT’s own work.

Partnerships are also in place with the Ministry of Environment, Government of India; the United Nations Population Fund; United Nations Development Programme and the MacArthur Foundation to create films on specific themes including women leaders and sexual and reproductive health.

PSBT is open to establishing partnerships with the voluntary sector so that they can help reflect civil society and community agendas from the bottom up and effectively use their communication budgets.

A Festival Celebrating the Documentary Genre

Another important platform facilitated by PSBT is through the Open Frame, its annual International Film Festival and Forum, organised in partnership with UNESCO and with the support of the national public service broadcaster, Prasar Bharati, INPUT (INternational PUBLIC Television) and the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. The tenth edition of this Festival was successfully organised in 2010.

The Open Frame – Delhi’s biggest documentary festival – assumes importance as a space for documentary and reality films from across the world, which reflect significant civil society concerns. The Festival goes beyond the screenings of culturally-diverse films reflecting alternative realities by actively engaging audiences and filmmakers on the issues in question. This assumes particular significance for filmmakers from developing countries where opportunities for such dialogue are limited.

In addition, the Festival has a strong training component. Workshops on documentary filmmaking and film appreciation are organised for film and media students. The presence of media students at the Festival is also an encouraging sign. Each year, over 400 of them join the dialogues at the Open Forum.

The Media Fellowship Programme at PSBT is another interesting aspect of its work as it aims to initiate in-depth research on contemporary media programming and its impact on the self-image and worldview of media consumers. The research specifically focuses on the Indian context.

A Good Practice for the Convention

The work of PSBT in reaffirming the real importance and need for Public Service Broadcasting in India may be seen to translate the provision of Article 6 h) into reality. In outlining the rights of parties at the national level, the Convention specifically calls for “measures aimed at enhancing diversity of the media, including through public service broadcasting”. PSBT can be considered a good practice in this regard.

In the spirit of the Convention, PSBT has been working to “provide opportunities for domestic cultural activities for the creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment of such domestic cultural activities, including provisions relating to the language used for such activities, goods and services” [Article 6 b)]. It

remains a rare example of support to the independent film sector in a country internationally known for commercial Bollywood cinema. By directly connecting with and empowering independent filmmakers, PSBT work qualifies as a “measure...aimed at nurturing and supporting artists” involved in the creation of cultural products.

Another valuable lesson in the PSBT model is that of forging innovative partnerships. As an independent initiative in public broadcasting, PSBT has been able to create and sustain collaboration with the state-funded broadcaster. This partnership remains critical to maintaining the wide reach of the commissioned films through the national television channel. In doing so, PSBT serves as a good example of the partnerships called for by the Convention between State Parties and civil society organisations [Article 12 c)]. In developing sustainable partnerships at the national and international level, PSBT is also contributing to strengthening local cultural production and distribution, thus facilitating

the movement of independent Indian films to regional and global markets (Article 14 – *Cooperation for development*).

In the work of PSBT is a good example – with potential for replication elsewhere – of an innovative model to “create a public culture through the airwaves that is plural and equitable in its representation”.²

More information: www.psbto.org

Anupama Sekhar is Project Manager for Cultural Exchange at the Asia-Europe Foundation, based in Singapore. As a curator, she is specifically interested in creating alternative spaces for and modes of dialogue. As an artist, she primarily works with poetry. She is also a trained dancer in the Indian classical tradition of Bharatnatyam. Anupama has been a Fellow of the U40-programme since 2009.