

WHV – Community engagement in heritage conservation

Ruins of the Buddhist Vihara at Paharpur, Bangladesh

PROJECT DATES

Cultural property inscribed on the World Heritage List (1985)

01-31 October 2025

THE SITE - Evidence of the rise of Mahayana Buddhism in Bengal from the 7th century onwards, Somapura Mahavira, or the Great Monastery, was a renowned intellectual center until the 12th century. Its layout perfectly adapted to its religious function, this monastery city represents a unique artistic achievement. With its simple, harmonious lines and its profusion of carved decoration, it influenced Buddhist architecture as far away as Cambodia.

OBJECTIVES - The terracotta plaques of the Ruins of the Buddhist Vihara are known as one of the best examples of terracotta in this whole of deltaic lands around. Thousands of these artefacts adorned the monument in different layers and size. But, unfortunately, those important artistic masterpieces are gradually deteriorating due to environmental factors like erratic rain, flood, water clogging and salinity further stimulated by vegetal germination, theft, and vandalism. Immediate attention is needed to avoid further worsening the condition. It is also alarming that the traditional craftsmanship is no longer considered as a well-deserved occupation to the new generation observing the disadvantaged lifestyle. Therefore, the project aims to create awareness, strengthen collaboration between local and international partners to protect the authenticity of the site by ensuring the continuity of terracotta artisan as a well-deserved profession. In this way the emerging professionals get the much-needed training and the practical experience essential to work on site.

ACTIVITIES - The volunteers will participate in hands-on terracotta making workshops with the local artisans, produce diversified products, find out ways to expand their market or opportunity for work. They will conduct trainings for the the artisans to take online order and deliver products, and will reproduce small scale terracotta souvenirs for the visitors in order to create awareness, spread the challenges and techniques required for the preservation of the site.

PARTNERS - Department of Archaeology; Bangladesh National Museum; Institute of Fine Art-Dhaka; UNESCO Dhaka; ICOMOS Bangladesh; Paharpur Adivasi School; Paharpur Terracotta Artisan community; New Age; Manabjainin.

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