

# Rangoli art: A tiny but bold step towards modern science

Researchers in India are using the Rangoli art form to engage local Santhali women in discussions about health and nutrition. Rangoli is a form of art originating in India, where patterns are created on the ground using colourful materials like rice, flour, sand or flower petals. The final design has been adopted as the logo for the CHIRAG research project.

In this blog, Shuvajit Chakraborty from PRADAN describes how a participatory process using games and art helped women to understand dietary diversity and gain ownership of the project.



*Women create a logo for the project using food products.*

## [About the CHIRAG project](#)

The CHIRAG project (**C**reative **H**ub for **I**nnovation and **R**eciprocal **R**esearch and **A**ction for **G**ender Equality) is funded by the UK Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), through the UEA's Global Research Translation Award (GRTA). The project brings together information on particular food production choices, technologies, diets and consumption practices and their relationship to improving health and nutrition. We are working closely with communities, especially women's groups, youth groups and students to generate and share knowledge on sustainable food systems.

## [The 100 seeds game](#)

The paddy harvesting season had just ended in the Chakai block of south Bihar, which meant women from a community group could join a meeting about health and associated knowledge systems. We started the meeting with a participatory rural appraisal tool named the 100-seeds game. In this game the women prepare their seasonal weekly dietary platter and we try to measure the proportion of nutrients such as carbohydrates, protein, vitamins and minerals. Through this participatory exercise, all of us can understand the relationship between traditional food practices and what modern science tells us about nutritional properties of various foods.

This game generated a deep discussion about nutrients and their weekly diet, and we could see contextual understanding developing. Yet we wanted to go further, and enable the women to feel a sense of ownership around the CHIRAG project, as co-producers of knowledge with us.

### Using art to foster ownership

It was at this point the idea of a participatory logo came to mind. We encouraged the women to create a logo using the food products they had previously debated the nutritional merits of. But they were unfamiliar with the concept of a 'logo'.

Using a different approach, we asked for ideas of a unique artistic activity which could creatively express their understanding of dietary diversity. They discussed among themselves and decided to make a Rangoli of their food grains. We started them off with the outline of a lamp, because the Hindi word for lamp is *chirag*, which is also the project's name.



*The women creating the Rangoli lamp design*

We observed the women filling up the lamp outline with colourful grains, pulses, vegetables and eggs. We experienced the nitty-gritty of the process; the earnest discussion and consensual decision making of what to add and where to add it. We watched, spellbound, as the beautiful design appeared on the floor before us.

### The final result

Rangoli is a form of art where colours are used for creating an abstract pattern, but here the collective ideas of a group of women created a fusion of food and art with contextual meaning, grounding their discussions about diet into a recognised symbol for the project's work going forwards. This logo design didn't happen on a laptop, but on an earthen floor; not with graphic design software, but with tangible foods. This practice itself tells an alternative story of politics and development which the CHIRAG project is striving to deliver.



*The final Rangoli lamp artwork*



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(Professional Assistance for Development Action), a non-government, non-profit organisation that works with India's rural poor.

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*The Rangoli lamp art, incorporated into the CHIRAG logo, surrounded by a colourful letter C, representing the Sustainable Development Goals.*