Realizing the importance of traditional media for health communication and gainfully using different folk forms to effectively communicate family planning and RMNCH+A health messages to the rural masses, SIFPSA over the years has made unparalleled contributions to the state in the field of health and family welfare.
Folk media is one of the most effective ways of building audience participation and imparting information, owing to the use of colloquial and identifiable dialect resulting in establishing an instantaneous and direct rapport with the community. Serving as a source of education and entertainment, folk media provides 'edutainment', reaching out and touching the hearts of the rural masses. Traditional folk media has been increasingly recognized as a viable tool to impart didactic messages in an entertaining manner.

SIFPSA, way back in the year 1995, pioneered in formulating a state wide communication strategy for health and family planning in Uttar Pradesh, developing an over-arching BCC campaign titled 'Aao, Batein Karein' illustrated by Totu and Mynah, birds derived from folk lore recognized in UP as secular symbol associated with story telling, with the aim of bringing the hitherto taboo subject of family planning out into the open and triggering dialogue between young couples, providers and clients, between policymakers and implementers. The campaign, intended to raise awareness and knowledge of family planning methods and allay myths and misconceptions associated with its use, proved to be a tremendous success.

SIFPSA over time introduced many IEC/BCC strategies revolving around NHM issues for improving the demand for and quality of reproductive health services. Behaviour change communication program is a continuous process that needs to be undertaken on regular intervals to reach out to young couples entering the cohort, reinforcing messages to the older couples and community at large. Taking the onus of stimulating behavioral changes in the community towards promoting optimal health seeking behaviour further, SIFPSA developed and implemented the campaign 'Chalo Gaon Ki Oar' involving three components: Radio Drama Series 'Sunehre Sapne Sanwarti Rahein', Audio Spots production/airing and Folk Media, owing to their maximum reach, in media dark rural areas, to capture the community level target audience, covering health and family planning issues and unfolding the role of ASHA. The campaign, that was launched in the year 2014-15 by the GoUP, owing to its success, audience demand for continuation of the activity and the need to recapitulate it, saw its relaunch on December 04, 2015 at Lucknow by the Hon'ble Member of Parliament from Kannauj, Mrs. Dimple Yadav. The campaign embraced the whole of Uttar Pradesh, covering all RMNCH+A health issues.

While the article on radio drama series has already been published, the current article exclusively focuses on the Folk Media activities carried out by SIFPSA under the campaign 'Chalo Gaon Ki Oar'.

SIFPSA had trained the folk troupes, registered with the Information Department, in
collaboration with the Bhartendu Natya Academy, Lucknow on folk forms-Nautanki, Nukkad Natak, Puppet Show, Jadu and Birha, known to influence behaviour patterns in rural communities, for spreading mass awareness on NHM issues and the role of ASHA. The scripts were developed by the best script writers of Lucknow and the content vetted by NHM Experts. The troupes performed at the block level 'haats' and at PHCs. A total of 1640 folk shows were held across all 820 blocks of the State.

To assess the folk shows in terms of quality of message delivery, regularity, consistency and participation of the targeted audience, an external on-spot monitoring was commissioned to AMS, Lucknow that revealed very encouraging results leading to a decision by the state government for major expansion of the folk media campaign in the year 2016.

Twenty five districts spread across all four geographical zones of the state were identified for on-spot monitoring of the folk shows, ensuring fair representation. The agency monitored a total of 339 folk shows that revealed a very positive picture of the strategy. The shows were rated very highly in terms of appropriateness of message, being captivating enough to hold listeners' interest and convey important health related messages amongst the rural communities in a simple and easy way. The scripts spun around story ideas rich in entertainment value and interspersed with RMNCH+A related messages. About 66 percent programmes were found to be having more than 150 audience size. At more than 95 percent places, folk shows were found to be clearly audible, with language used simple, easy to understand and effective, with a touch of local dialect that kept the audience enthralled. In nautanki and puppet show, viewers appreciated the enactment of ASHA's character and also the role of ANM. Birha was highly appreciated for the lyrics, voice quality and coordination with musical instruments like harmonium and tabla. More than two-thirds of the respondents found the shows extremely useful and said that prior to watching the programme they either had no knowledge or possessed incomplete knowledge on the issues addressed. More than three-fourths of the viewers were males of different age groups. This could be due to the reason that the folk performances were being organized at the haats/bazaars. At 20 percent of the places, people were found to be getting disturbed by the clamor and noise of the bazaar, one disadvantage of organizing the show in bazaars, another being, low attendance of women at such places. While BPM, MOIC and Gram Pradhan were found to be present only in 25 percent of the programs, ASHAs were found available at more than 70 percent of the
venues followed by ANMs at 45 percent. As informed by the ASHAs, due to frequent cancellations and rescheduling of the programmes, publicity measures could not be undertaken at some places. Few problems identified during the monitoring of the folk programmes were primarily administrative in nature, which suggested pre-planning in terms of selection of venue, pre-publicity and involvement of community/opinion leaders in order to reach out to the maximum number of targetted audience.

Owing to the huge success of the folk shows, the state government has decided to implement the folk media campaign on a much larger scale covering 3480 villages across all 820 blocks of Uttar Pradesh in the year 2016. Taking cognizance of the study findings, the folk shows will be held at places in villages suitable for all and not in village haats (market place) which kept most women and adolescent girls from watching them.