



**Better Life Foundation**  
**“FARMERS’ INNOVATION CENTER”**  
Angangba, Nagaland (INDIA)  
Design Note

## “A Space for Positive Social Impact”

**Better Life Foundation’s Innovation Centre** is an attempt in gathering generations of collective local wisdom and innovation in the crafts of habitation and rooting them in a physical architectural space at Angangba village in Nagaland, one of the North-Eastern states of India. The project has been planned in a way that would involve as many members of the community as possible; the construction is being orchestrated as a social process, based on participation and engagement.

The brief called for the creation of indoor space/s to hold group discussions, workshops, training sessions and community programs related to *low chilling apple cultivation* (an innovative agro-farming technique with focus on afforestation) which has been innovated as an environmentally sustainable alternative to the traditional “[\*jhum \(shifting\) cultivation\*](#)”.

The brief also envisioned a gallery to showcase various local innovations and products to nurture inventiveness and promote awareness within the regional community at the grassroots level. The key mission of Better Life Foundation and its spaces will be to foster economic and environmental sustainability for the local agrarian community.



## From Hearth to Heart

At the **Heart** of the Innovation Centre is a small platform perched precariously upon the higher reaches of the hill’s ridge. All around, the platform commands staggering panoramas of deep green valleys and dramatic skies. The slopes of this hill lie primed for the cultivation of *low chilling apples*.

It is this platform (admeasuring 14ft X 50ft) that has been selected as the site for the Innovation Centre. Immediately next to adjacent to this platform to the South lies an existing home. The current Farmer’s Centre – built in the region’s historical spatial tradition – is organised around a central kitchen with a fireplace; the fireplace and kitchen are traditionally the most social and important of domestic spaces in the Naga household. Thus, great social significance is attributed to the **Hearth**.

An important philosophy of Better Life Foundation is to bring together local innovation with global enterprise for an environmentally and socially sustainable human society. From this core value was born the architectural principle '**From Hearth to Heart**', a signifier of the importance of functionally and physically linking the existing traditional space (hearth) and the envisioned innovation lounge (heart).



### **Journey to a Better Life**

The master plan for the Better Life Foundation Innovation Centre comprises of several functions and activities. These components are organized over the landscape of site in four journeys or experiential routes.

1. **Journey of Shared Learning:** Beginning at the very entrance of the site is the public drop off, a sort of town square; this space will house the entry services and indigenously designed cold storage unit. Abutted by the vertical hill face on one side, the road from the entrance to the Innovation Centre is envisioned as an educative museum space where the hill serves as a climate protected gallery to showcase local innovations through photos, posters, models and installations while doubling up as a pedestrian pathway.
2. **Journey of Ecological Learning:** A journey through the wild apple plantations on the hillsides and up to the model farm on the neighbouring hill emerges from the Innovation Centre itself. The motive of this journey is to bring the villagers, visitors and inhabitants in close contact with the safe and productive techniques of plantation, possibilities of environmental friendly futures and therapeutic farming.
3. **Journey of Spiritual/Self Learning:** All great actions begin with introspection. Being mindful of this, the Better Life Foundation Centre also invites travellers, thinkers and seekers to participate in its vision as part of this journey. The journey manifests as a series of tents that are perched over the outermost tips of the hill overlooking the vast landscape. These tents are arranged to encircle the Innovation Centre such that the beginning and end of this trail leads the user through the Heart and Hearth.

4. Journey of Social Learning: The final journey binds the individual to the society. Whether one is a villager or a visitor, this journey leads them from the Innovation Centre to the 100-seater open air amphitheatre which is carved into a natural depression in the slope. Stepped seating, weaving through wild apple tree trunks will be approached through a series of *machangs* that emerge at the Innovation Centre.

The four journeys capture individually the essence of Better Life Foundation's philosophies but together they create something much more powerful – a real physical space in which the philosophy for a better life can be realised.



### **The Innovation Centre**

The innovation centre is envisaged as a collection of spaces, permeable and enclosed, formal and informal, programmed and un-programmed to host community dialogues in groups of various sizes at different occasions. The notion of space-production transcends the physical boundary of the building plinth and defines a spatial agglomeration comprising of an outdoor public realm, a rooftop *machang* overlooking the mountain and the apple plantation, an extended contemplating platform towards the valley with an undisrupted visual connect to the astounding mountain ranges. The ideation lounge at ground plinth is an uninterrupted flexible space (no internal partitions) that can be re-arranged into multiple appropriation of seating arrangement as per the need. The rooftop *machang* provides an elevated platform to have informal discussions with a mountain views all around.

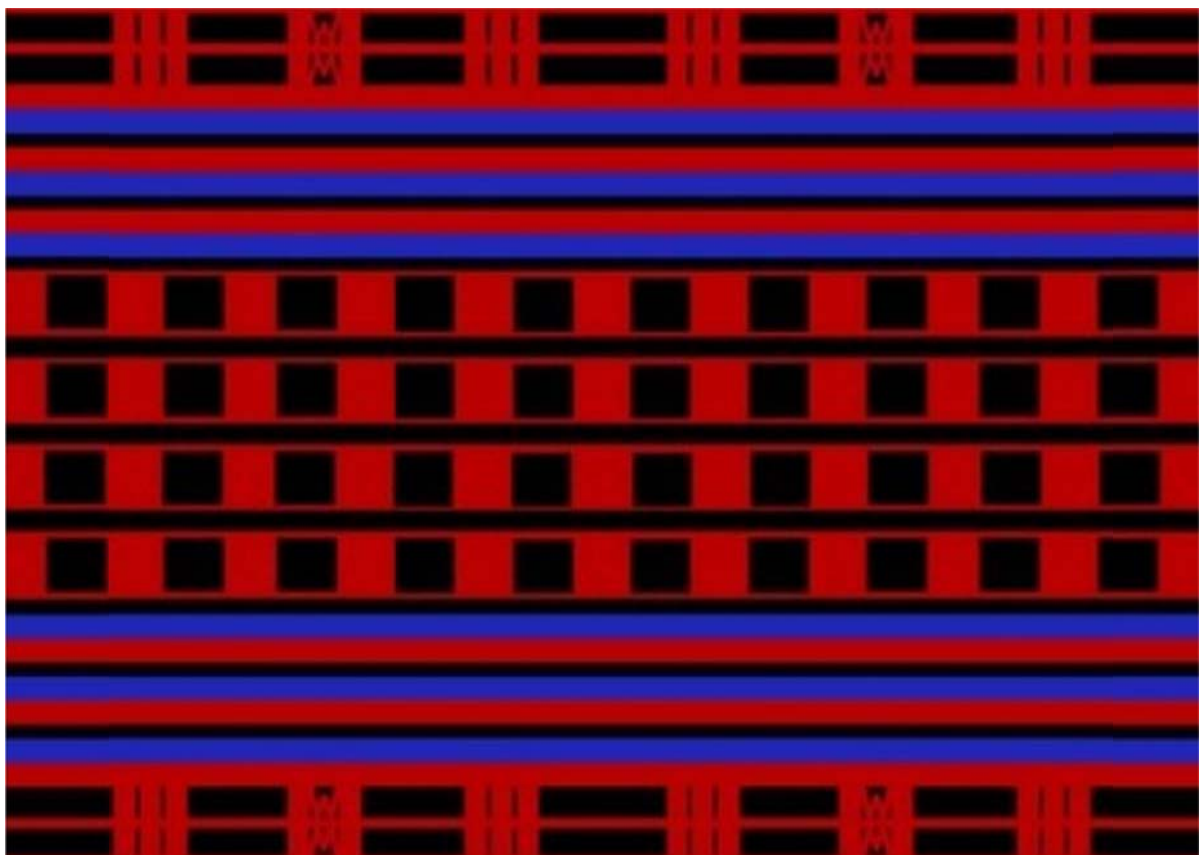
### **Architectural Expression**

The structure exhibits the indigenous knowledge in bamboo construction and the raw materiality of bamboo creates an architectural expression that appears contextually insightful. The entire structure is designed using bamboo sections of various lengths and diameters available locally in the region. The profile of the sloping roof covering the machang has a historical reference to the traditional roof form of the rural huts of the region. The geometry of the sloping roof allows covering the machang at one side and further extends over the entrance walkway to finally merge into the ground with apple plantation, thus creating a complimenting gesture with the plantation. The innovation center will be electrified by rooftop solar panels.

Inspired by the Sangtam Naga shawls of the Tuensang district, wooden clerestory will invite a meditative play of light and shadow into the indoor space of the ground floor lounge. In a bid to minimize visual barriers between the indoor and outdoor space, the façade of the Innovation Centre up to the lintel height is designed as glazed shutter windows in wooden frames expressed in slick contemporary style.

The innermost space of the lounge is envisaged as an invocation to the region's original 16 tribes. Here will hang customized shawls of each of the tribes enclosing among themselves a space for innovation and growth which is deeply respectful of the region's roots and culture.

Better Life Foundation is committed to develop projects of similar nature intended towards positive social impact across various villages in Nagaland through community participation.





**Team:**

**Promoter:** Mr. Sethrichem Sangtam, MD, Better Life Foundation

**Design Team:** Uday Ranjan Goswami (Architect, Mumbai), Jayesh Ganesh (Architect, Bangalore), Dipayan Bhowmik (Architectural student, Stuttgart)

**Technical Support:** Nagaland Bamboo Mission, Dimapur

**Execution:** People of Longkhim and Angangba