

## Meet our Saathis : Leo Saldanha and the Environmental Support Group

Leo Saldanha joined the AID family as a Saathi in Dec. 2000. A lawyer from the University of Bangalore, Leo also holds a Bachelors degree in Environmental Science. He started as a coordinator for a Bangalore-based organization working with the street children and later initiated an informal forum called the Bangalore Support Group, which extends media and donor advocacy services to assist various campaigns and community organizations. Currently, Leo is coordinating the efforts of a small group of committed researchers, lawyers and activists, who together form the Environment Support Group (ESG).

ESG is a non-profit trust registered in Bangalore that brings a wide variety of environment and social issues to the attention of the public and government and fights to secure justice to local communities who otherwise may not have had a chance. Years of fighting court battles on public interest causes, lobbying, running press campaigns, writing appeals for support and engaging in public discussions on major environmental issues provide ESG the confidence for forming public opinion on several critical issues with marginal resources. One example is the anti-Cogentrix struggle, in which Leo and ESG influenced a major reform process of the power sector in Karnataka. ESG is currently involved in resolving the vexatious problem of mining in Kudremukh National Park. WWF-India, which for years has not taken any position on "controversial" issues, has now taken a clear and categorical stand against mining in Kudremukh, joining several leading international and

national environmental organizations who have supported ESG's rationale call to give forests a chance against wasteful mining. Thanks to the efforts of ESG, a negotiated settlement with the Government is likely to be realized soon. Based on its experience, ESG is now moving into prescriptive forms of engagement, advising on matters of environmental and social consequences.



*Surface layers of earth dug up in mining iron ore in Kudremukh result in extensive runoff into rivers during heavy rains.*

In the next few years, ESG plans to develop a comprehensive database on environmental decision-making experiences across the country. In conjunction with the law and policy documentation on such issues, this will enable a deeper understanding of the problems and enable further action. A network of groups and individuals is also being built to support and extend the ongoing work and provide critical research inputs. More information on Leo Saldanha can be found at the web-site [www.aidindia.org/publication/Jul01/leo.doc](http://www.aidindia.org/publication/Jul01/leo.doc).

*Tulika Narayan (AID-Maryland)*

## Women's Equality: A Closer Perspective

In every aspect of India's development today, it is imperative to look at any social issue from a woman's perspective. Her lack of awareness, independence or access to resources makes her family vulnerable too, in issues of health-care, economic conditions, education or environment. Our experience in AID through our diverse projects is that the same 'inequality' persists in every strata of the society, within different economic, cultural or social scenarios.

At the AID conference 2001, Mallika Dutt, a lawyer and founding member of *Sakhi*, a New York organization working on violence against women in the South Asian community, addressed the issue of Women's rights as a fundamental human rights issue. To tell the story of women's dreams, she has made an Indo-pop music album called *Mann ke Manjeerey* that highlights

the status of women in India and in Indian immigrant communities, and addresses issues pertaining to violence against women and women's empowerment. The music album also highlights how popular media can be utilized to catch people's attention on relevant issues. She stressed that the issues of domestic violence, inheritance and property rights are key to improving the status of women in society.

As a follow-up effort, AID Fellow Aravinda advises the forming of a women's cell to tackle the issue of dowry, which is the root cause of many atrocities such as bride-burning and female infanticide. Dowry is a major form of corruption, and hence should remain at the forefront of our campaign against corruption. All AID volunteers should pledge to oppose all forms of dowry in their own lives.

*Vaijyanti Gupta (AID San-Diego)*

## News and Notes

### AID-Bay Area hosts "Guitar" Prasanna

As part of the Hundred Block Plan (HBP) fund-raising effort, AID-Bay Area organized a 'Carnatic Guitar' concert by Prasanna on April 14, 2001. Prasanna, a renowned exponent of *carnatic* music on the guitar, was accompanied by Lakshman Mahadevan on the *mridangam*. The event featured a silent slide show of the AID activities and a short presentation on the HBP. Prasanna's music kept the audience spellbound throughout the evening. The fundraiser earned about \$12,000 towards AID-Bay Area's HBP target.

-- Aarathi Rishi (AID-Bay Area)

### AID-Austin works with NAAO

AID-Austin and AID-San Diego reviewed and approved a project by TRU (Trust for Reaching the Un-reached) towards long-term rehabilitation efforts in Gujarat after the earthquake. \$15,000 from AID funds was directed mostly to provide housing in three districts of the affected areas. AID-Austin also worked with Network of Asian American Organizations (NAAO), a local charitable organization, to provide additional funds of \$16,500 to TRU towards their health budget.

-- Harish & Chandrika (AID-Austin)

## • A a r o h i •

*Sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan*

*Amaan Ali Bangash & Ayaan Ali Bangash*

*Rahid Mustafa on tabla.*

### Portland, OR

**July 29**, 6 PM at Newmark Theater Hall, 1111 SW Broadway, Portland, Oregon. For tickets, please call (503) 224-8499 or visit [www.portlandguru.com](http://www.portlandguru.com)

### San Diego

**August 11**, Mandeville Auditorium, UC San Diego. For tickets, please call Arun at (858) 558-7605 or send email to [sandiego@aidindia.org](mailto:sandiego@aidindia.org)

### Bay Area

**August 18**, 6:30 PM, at Spagenburg Theater, Palo Alto. For tickets contact Aradhana at (510) 781-0842 or send email to [tickets@aidsfbay.org](mailto:tickets@aidsfbay.org)

**All proceeds go towards supporting the Hundred Block Plan and other AID projects.**

## Globalization and the Indian Farmer

In any meeting of farmers in India today, it is very likely that one will hear a discussion on the issue of globalization and other questions like: What is the World Trade Organization? Who are the big players in acquiring land, selling seeds? Who plans water projects? Why are farmers having such a tough time surviving?

The recent lifting of quantitative restrictions by the government of India, allowing unlimited import of more than 1400 items into the Indian markets (in many cases after the items have been rejected by other markets) has forced farmers, weavers and other skilled workers to see Global Trade Agreements as the new weapons of the world powers. While people are able to handle the forces of nature such as flood, drought, cyclone and even earthquake with courage, the same people experience despair in the face of policies that they have no voice in their shaping. Noted journalist P. Sainath's summing up of India's food security as a "hungry surplus" has been quoted so often in the past few months that many may no longer be shocked at its implications. While politicians shift the blame towards easy targets like drought and natural calamities, the people can no longer ignore the policy decisions placing farmers at risk and depriving people of adequate nutrition. Understanding these policy decisions will require a new way of looking at hunger and the way food circulates through society. -- Aravinda (AID-Mumbai)

A compilation of links to articles on the effects of the government policies and globalization on Indian agriculture, including some articles by noted journalist P. Sainath, can be found at the website [www.wam.umd.edu/~nagini/IndianAg.htm](http://www.wam.umd.edu/~nagini/IndianAg.htm)

### Mark your Calendar

AID Dallas invites you to "Festival of India", a cultural festival on the lines of India's college festivals, on Saturday, July 7, from 11:00 AM to 8:00 PM. Events at the festival include *Antakshari*, quiz, charades, a children's quiz, one act plays and a fusion concert. Videos of AID projects will also be screened during the festival. The event is held at the DFW Hindu Temple. More information about the event is available at:

<http://www.aidindia.org/dallas>.

Email: [info@aidindia.org](mailto:info@aidindia.org)

Phone: (301) 422 7765

Web: <http://www.aidindia.org>

### MAKE A TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATION TO AID

- By Credit Card, please call (301) 422 7765
- By Check, please send in favor of AID to:

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AID relies solely on your contributions to fund community development projects in India. AID volunteers work hard to put funds to optimal use in project and awareness work. Every project is visited and monitored. All donors receive monthly updates of our projects and activities. To obtain a copy of the current financial statement, please write to AID. Documents and information pertaining to AID can be obtained from the Secretary of State for the cost of copies and postage.