

Fostering Global Citizenship

Newsletter with April-May 2015 Articles

This newsletter is part of IPS-Inter Press Service and Soka Gakkai International (SGI) project. It includes independent news and analyses as well as columns by experts, news from international NGOs and a review of the global media for a glimpse of what is happening on the ground. Newspaper articles reproduced in this newsletter are for personal use and aim at giving information to readers. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is forbidden.

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In run-up to the UN High-Level Summit in September in New York, a milestone United Nations conference in South Korea has highlighted the need for a new vision for education, which it aims to realise by 2030 with a view to fostering global citizenship by inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. The [Incheon Declaration](#) emerging from the [World Education Forum 2015](#) (WEF 2015) – organised by UNESCO, in close collaboration with other UN Agencies as co-conveners – has been welcomed by the global education community, including government ministers from more than 100 countries, non-governmental organizations and youth groups. “This Declaration is a huge step forward,” said the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova closing the May 19-22 conference. >> Pages 2-3-4

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The Greek philosopher Plato is reported to have said: “Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything.” What could be more suited to foster global citizenship than jazz for peace and freedom?

Against the backdrop of civil unrest in Baltimore, Maryland, the fourth annual International Jazz Day was celebrated with events around the world and appeals for peace, unity and dialogue. “Each of us is equal. All of us inhabit this place we call home,” said American jazz legend Herbie Hancock. “We must move mountains to find solutions to our incredible challenges.” >> Pages 5-6-7

In Bangladesh, Gender Equality Comes on the Airwaves



In Bangladesh, a country of 157 million people, 49 percent are women. A media survey has found that they are more often “seen” in illustrated sections of newspapers than “heard”. Majority of them do not have access to television or cannot read newspapers. Community radios are trying to rectify the situation. Momena Ferdousi, a 24-year-old student, hailing from the country's north-western Chapai Nawabganj District, is one of Bangladesh's up-and-coming radio professionals, who is determined to give voice to the voiceless, poor and illiterate women, as a first step towards sharing their concerns with the world at large. >> Pages 8-9-10

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This article tells the story of two women who fought against two evils: the practice of sexual slavery in Hindu temples, and forced labour. Finally free of the yoke of dual-slavery, they are determined to preserve their hard-won existence, humble though it may be. Stories like this highlight the need to spread the word that given the individual determination there is a way out of what appears to be a hopeless situation. BELLARY, India (IPS) - Huligeamma, a Dalit woman in her mid-forties, bends over a sewing machine, carefully running the needle over the hem of a shirt. Sitting nearby is Roopa, her 22-year-old daughter, who reads an amusing message on her cell phone and laughs heartily. The pair leads a simple yet contented life – they subsist on half a dollar a day, stitch their own clothes and participate in schemes to educate their community in the Bellary district of the Southwest Indian state of Karnataka. >> Pages 11-

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Conference Calls for Quality Education to Promote Global Citizenship

By Shin Mee



Photo credit: UNESCO World Education Forum 2015

SEOUL (IDN) - In run-up to the UN High-Level Summit in September in New York, a milestone United Nations conference in South Korea has highlighted the need for a new vision for education, which it aims to realise by 2030 with a view to fostering global citizenship by inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

The [Incheon Declaration](#) emerging from the [World Education Forum 2015](#) (WEF 2015) – organised by UNESCO, in close collaboration with other UN Agencies as co-conveners – has been welcomed by the global education community, including government ministers from more than 100 countries, non-governmental organizations and youth groups.

“This Declaration is a huge step forward,” said the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova closing the May 19-22 conference.

“It reflects our determination to ensure that all children and young people gain the knowledge and skills they need to live in dignity, to reach their potential and contribute to their societies as responsible global citizens. It encourages governments to provide learning opportunities through life, so that people can continue to grow and develop. It affirms that education is the key to global peace and sustainable development.”

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The Declaration builds on the global Education for All (EFA) movement that was initiated in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and reiterated in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. EFA – and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on Education – resulted in significant progress, but many of its targets, including universal access to primary education, remain unfulfilled.

Presently, 58 million children remain out of school – most of them girls. In addition 250 million children are not learning basic skills, even though half of them have spent at least four years in school. The Incheon Declaration must finish the ambitious EFA and MDG agendas, according to observers.

“If this generation of children is to someday reduce the inequalities and injustices that afflict the world today, we must give all our children a fair chance to learn. This must be our collective vision and commitment,” said UNICEF Executive Director, Anthony Lake.

The Incheon Declaration will be implemented through the Education 2030 Framework for Action, a roadmap for governments to be adopted by the end of the year. It will provide guidance on effective legal and policy frameworks for education, based on the principles of accountability, transparency and participatory governance.

According to UNESCO sources, effective implementation of the Education 2030 Framework for Action will require strong regional coordination and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the education agenda. It will also need more funding, especially for the countries furthest from providing inclusive, quality education.

More money

The Incheon Declaration points out that the aspirations encompassed in the proposed SDG 4 cannot be realized without a significant and well-targeted increase in financing, particularly in those countries furthest from achieving quality education for all at all levels.

“We therefore are determined to increase public spending on education in accordance with country context, and urge adherence to the international and regional benchmarks of allocating efficiently at least 4 - 6% of Gross Domestic Product and/or at least 15 - 20% of total public expenditure to education,” says the Incheon Declaration.

Noting the importance of development cooperation in complementing investments by governments, the Declaration calls upon developed countries, traditional and emerging donors, middle income countries and international financing mechanisms to increase funding to education and to support the implementation of the agenda according to countries’ needs and priorities.

The Declaration refers to a critical issue when it stresses that “the fulfilment of all commitments related to official development assistance (ODA) is crucial, including the commitments by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) for ODA to developing countries”.

In accordance with their commitments, WEF 2015 urges developed countries that have not yet done so to make additional concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for ODA to developing countries. The global gathering also commits to increase support to the least developed countries.

The Incheon Declaration further recognizes the importance of unlocking all potential resources to support the right to education. It recommends improving aid effectiveness through better coordination and harmonization, and prioritizing financing and aid to neglected sub-sectors and low-income countries.

The fact that South Korea hosted the conference was far from a surprise. The country is one of the 20 members of UNESCO's Education for All Steering Committee, has extended its global reach over the past few years by joining global education campaigns, including the UN's Global Education First Initiative and Global Partnership for Education.

Ahead of the WEF from May 19 to 22 in Incheon, South Korea's Vice Education Minister Kim Jae-choon stressed the importance of the gathering: "In the world, where everything is interrelated, those who can think and act globally will get more opportunities to succeed," adding: "Nurturing such talent is our vision for the next 15 years."

Having a global mindset did not mean that people should love their countries any less, but focusing too much on nationalistic education as a means of uniting people was perhaps a thing of the past, he told the [Korean Times](#).

Emphasising that view, the WEF 2015's Incheon Declaration says: “Our vision is to transform lives through education, recognizing the important role of education as a main driver of development and in achieving the other proposed SDGs (sustainable development goals).”

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Gender equality

WEF 2015 also recognizes the importance of gender equality in achieving the right to education for all. “We are therefore committed to supporting gender-sensitive policies, planning and learning environments; mainstreaming gender issues in teacher training and curricula; and eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence in schools,” says the Declaration.

The Incheon Declaration clearly stresses the need for fostering global citizenship, when it notes “with serious concern that, today, a large proportion of the world’s out-of-school population lives in conflict-affected areas, and that crises, violence and attacks on education institutions, natural disasters and pandemics continue to disrupt education and development globally”.

WEF 2015 participants, therefore, commit to developing more inclusive, responsive and resilient education systems to meet the needs of children, youth and adults in these contexts, including internally displaced persons and refugees.

They highlight the need for education to be delivered in safe, supportive and secure learning environments free from violence. They recommend a sufficient crisis response, from emergency response through to recovery and rebuilding; better coordinated national, regional and global responses; and capacity development for comprehensive risk reduction and mitigation to ensure that education is maintained during situations of conflict, emergency, post-conflict and early recovery.

It also recommends significantly increasing support for education in humanitarian and protracted crises. “We welcome the Oslo Summit on Education for Development (July 2015) and call on the Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa to support the proposed SDG 4,” says the Declaration. [IDN-InDepthNews – 28 May 2015]

ニューヨークで9月に開かれる国連ハイレベルサミットに向けて国連が韓国の仁川（インチョン）で開催した会議で、教育への新しいビジョンの必要性に焦点が当てられた。国連は、2030年までに、全ての人に対し平等で良質の教育と生涯学習機会を保証することによって世界市民を育成することを目指している。

[国際連合教育科学文化機関（ユネスコ）](#)が、ユニセフ(国連児童基金)、UNDP（国連開発計画）、UNFPA（国連人口基金）、UNHCR（国連難民高等弁務官事務所）、UN Women（国連ウィメン）、世界銀行と共同で開催した「[第3回世界教育フォーラム](#)」（5月19日～22日）で採択された、ポスト2015の教育目標の方針を定めた「[仁川宣言](#)」は、130か国の教育担当の政府高官や、市民団体、青年組織、学識経験者など、世界の教育界から歓迎された。

フォーラムの閉会にあたって登壇したユネスコの[イリナ・ボコヴァ事務局長](#)は、「この宣言は大きな一歩です。」と指摘したうえで、「尊厳を持って生き、潜在能力を発揮し、責任ある世界市民として社会に貢献するために必要な知識とスキルを、全ての子どもと青年が得るようにしようとの決意が、この宣言には反映されています。生涯を通じて学習の機会を提供するよう諸政府に求めることで、人々が成長し発達し続けることができるようにしています。また、教育が世界の平和と持続可能な開発の鍵を握るとの認識をこの宣言は示しています。」と語った。

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Jazz as a Force for Peace and Freedom

By A. D. McKenzie

The Greek philosopher Plato is reported to have said: "Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything." What could be more suited to foster global citizenship than jazz for peace and freedom?



Jazz legend Herbie Hancock, the brains behind International Jazz Day, an event that aims to encourage and highlight the "power of jazz as a force for freedom and creativity". Credit: A.D. McKenzie

PARIS (IPS) - Against the backdrop of civil unrest in Baltimore, Maryland, the fourth annual International Jazz Day was celebrated with events around the world and appeals for peace, unity and dialogue.

"Each of us is equal. All of us inhabit this place we call home," said American jazz legend Herbie Hancock. "We must move mountains to find solutions to our incredible challenges."

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Although the organisers of the event held on Apr. 30 did not refer directly to the protests that have followed the funeral of Baltimore resident Freddie Gray, an African-American who died in police custody, Hancock told IPS in an exclusive interview that musicians were conscious of this and other cases.

“Every time those kinds of things happen, not just with African-Americans or people of African heritage – but with different groups, whether it’s women being slaughtered, children being abused, ethnic groups being oppressed – we have to work to change things. This gives the music value and meaning,” he said.

International Jazz Day is Hancock’s brainchild, and it is presented each year by the United Nations’ cultural agency UNESCO in partnership with the U.S.-based Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. The organisers say the day is aimed at encouraging and highlighting the “power of jazz as a force for freedom and creativity”.

It is also meant to promote “intercultural dialogue through respect and understanding, uniting people from all corners of the globe,” says UNESCO.

In a sign of how significant the event has become since its launch in 2012, U.S. President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle will host the 2016 International Jazz Day and its signature event, the ‘All-Star Global Concert’, at the White House in Washington, D.C., Hancock announced.

“I spoke to Obama almost a year ago, at an event, and he said ‘let’s make it happen’. That wasn’t a promise because it was just in the moment, but he did make it happen, and the concert will be at the White House next year,” he told IPS.

After its beginnings in Paris three years ago, other cities which have played host to the global concert include Istanbul, Turkey, in 2013 and Osaka, Japan, last year.

The 2015 Global Host City was Paris once more, and jazz lovers were able to enjoy a day-long series of performances and educational programmes in different districts of the French capital. The presentations included workshops, master classes, discussions and jam sessions, in venues ranging from community centres to soup kitchens.

Coinciding with UNESCO’s on-going 70th anniversary celebration, the ‘All-Star Global Concert’ took place in a packed auditorium at the agency’s headquarters, with top United Nations and French officials among the audience, including U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and France’s Justice Minister Christiane Taubira who has long fought discrimination.

“Jazz has taught me much,” said Ban. “When things become difficult, I’ve learned that you just have to improvise.”

He and the multi-cultural audience then settled back to enjoy the show, with its line-up of 30 renowned artists. The concert kicked off with vocalist Al Jarreau warming up the crowd and moved to a stirring tribute by South African musician Hugh Masekela to his country’s late icon Nelson Mandela.

As Ban had remarked, the concert was like a “mini-UN”, as American pianists such as Hancock and John Beasley (the show’s musical director) joined with Brazilian vocalist Eliane Elias, Scottish singer Annie Lennox, Tunisian oud virtuoso Dhafer Youssef, French percussionist Mino Cinélu, Chinese teenage pianist A Bu, and a host of others to celebrate jazz and its influence.

Hancock said musicians and others were working for tolerance, mutual respect and global peace. “I’ve seen musicians from opposing sides unite to play the most beautiful music and tell the sweetest stories,” he said in his speech to the audience. The ‘Who’s Who’ of jazz also included singer Dee Dee Bridgewater, who thanked France for opening doors and welcoming jazz musicians; saxophonist Wayne Shorter, who played alongside the young Washington, D.C.-born bassist Ben Williams and oud player Youssef for a world-premiere piece; and vocalists Dianne Reeves and Lennox (more known for rock), who drew cheers for their powerful renditions.

At the launch, UNESCO’s Director-General Irena Bokova said: “Jazz means dialogue, reaching out to others, bringing everyone on board. It means respecting the human rights and dignity of every woman and man, no matter their background. It means understanding others, letting them speak, listening in the spirit of respect.

“All this is why we join together to celebrate jazz; this music of freedom is a force for peace, and its messages have never been more vital than they are today, in times of turbulence,” she added.

Other countries that staged events to celebrate the day included South Africa, where organisers presented a series of workshops, seminars and performances with the theme of achieving change, and the United States, where award-winning artists gave concerts in New Orleans and other cities. (IPS | 02.05.2015)

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In Bangladesh, Gender Equality Comes on the Airwaves

By Naimul Haq

In Bangladesh, a country of 157 million people, 49 percent are women. A media survey has found that they are more often "seen" in illustrated sections of newspapers than "heard". Majority of them do not have access to television or cannot read newspapers. Community radios are trying to rectify the situation. Momena Ferdousi, a 24-year-old student, hailing from the country's north-western Chapai Nawabganj District, is one of Bangladesh's up-and-coming radio professionals, who is determined to give voice to the voiceless, poor and illiterate women, as a first step towards sharing their concerns with the world at large.



*Community radio stations in Bangladesh provide newscasters the opportunity to discuss topics of relevance to rural women.
Credit: Naimul Haq/IPS*

DHAKA (IPS) - Judging by how often they make headlines, one might be tempted to believe that women in Bangladesh don't play a major role in this country's affairs.

A recent media monitoring survey by the non-governmental organisation Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) revealed that out of 3,361 news items studied over a two-month period, "Only 16 percent of newspaper stories, 14 percent of television news [items], and 20 percent of radio news [items] considered women as subjects or interviewed them."

Fewer than eight percent of all the stories had women as the central focus. Of the few women who actually made an appearance on the TV screen, 97 percent were reading out the news, while just three percent fell into the category of 'reporters'.

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Only 0.03 percent of all bylined stories studied during that period carried a woman's name.

The monitoring report found that even though more women appeared in photographs than men, they were quoted far fewer times, proving the old proverb that, in this country of 157 million people, women are still "seen and not heard."

While these statistics might seem daunting, women across the country who are not content to sit by and wait for the situation to change have taken matters into their own hands. They are doing so by getting on the airwaves and using the radio as a tool to raise the voices of women and bring rural issues into the limelight.

Women comprise 49 percent of Bangladesh's population. Like the vast majority of people here they are concentrated in rural areas, where 111.2 million people – or 72 percent of the population – live.

Their distance from policy-making urban centres casts a double cloak of invisibility over women: according to data gleaned from the BNPS study, a mere 12 percent of newspaper articles, seven percent of TV news items and just five percent of radio stories focused on rural or remote areas – even though urban areas cover just eight percent of this vast country's landmass, and host just 28 percent of the population.

The absence of women and women's issues in the media is a dangerous trend in a country that ranked 142nd out of 187 states in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s most recent Gender Inequality Index (GII), making Bangladesh one of the worst performers in the Asia-Pacific region.

Yet, even this is not mentioned in the news: the BNPS study showed that less than one percent of over 3,000 news items surveyed made any mention of gender inequality, while only 11 news stories challenged prevailing gender stereotypes.

Given that Bangladesh has an extremely low literacy rate of 59 percent compared to the global average of 84.3 percent, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the importance of radio cannot be underestimated.

Even in a nation where 24 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, radio is a widespread, relatively affordable means of plugging into the world, and is extremely popular among the millions of rural families that comprise the bulk of this country.

Lifting the voices of rural women

Momena Ferdousi, a 24-year-old student hailing from Bangladesh's northwestern Chapai Nawabganj District, is one of the country's up-and-coming radio professionals.



More and more women in Bangladesh are turning to community radio as a means of spreading awareness on women's issues. Credit: Naimul Haq/IPS

She is the senior programme producer for Radio Mahananda, a community radio station launched in 2011 that caters primarily to the thousands of farming families in this agricultural region that comprises part of the 7,780-square-km Barind Tract.

She tells IPS she would not be where she is today without the support and training she, and scores of other aspiring female radio workers, received from the Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC).

Fellowships and capacity-building initiatives sponsored by BNNRC have resulted in a flood of women filling the posts of producers, anchors, newscasters, reporters and station managers in 14 regional community radio stations around the country.

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“The road to my employment was challenging,” Ferdousi explains, “but BNNRC saw the potential in me and [other] female journalists and I believe we have made substantial changes by addressing gaps in women’s right to information.”

Miles away, the confident voice of Sharmin Sultana on Radio Pollikontho, broadcast in the northeastern district of Moulvibazar, reaches roughly 400,000 people spread over a 17-km radius.

With five hours of daily programming that focus largely on issues relevant to rural women, Radio Pollikontho has filled a huge gap in this community.

“It is an amazing feeling to conduct a programme, interact live with guests and respond to our audience’s requests to discuss health, women’s rights, social injustice, education and agriculture,” Sultana tells IPS. “When we began we had only one programme on women’s issues, now we run five programmes weekly, exclusively dedicated to women.”

“Most of our audience are poor,” she explains, “and they either don’t have access to television or cannot read newspapers. So FM radio, available even on the cheapest mobile phone, has been very popular and the demand for interactive live programmes is increasing by the day.”

The difficulties facing women here in Bangladesh are legion.

Only 16.8 million women are employed in the formal sector, with the vast majority of them performing unpaid domestic labour on top of their duties in the farm or field.

A lack of financial independence makes them extremely vulnerable to domestic violence: a recent study by the deputy director of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) found that 87 percent of currently married women have experienced physical violence at the hands of their husbands, while 98 percent say they have been sexually ‘violated’ by their spouses at some point during marriage.

The survey also revealed that one-third of all married women faced ‘economic abuse’ – the forcible withholding of a partner’s financial assets for the purpose of maintaining financial dependence on the perpetrator of violence.

In 2011, 330 women were killed in dowry-related violence.

Other issues, like child marriage, also make pressing news bulletins for community radio stations directed at women: according to United Nations data, some 66 percent of Bangladeshi girls are married before their 18th birthday.

The situation is bleak, but experts say that as women become educated and aware of their rights, the tide will inevitably turn for the better.

BNNRC Chief Executive Officer A H M Bazlur Rahman, who pioneered rural radio broadcasting efforts around the country, tells IPS, “Issues like budget allocation, lack of appropriate sanitation, violence against women, fighting corruption, [and] education for girls are [often] neglected by policy makers. But if we can give women a voice, these problems [will] gradually disappear.”

It remains to be seen whether or not more women’s voices on the air will uplift the half of Bangladesh’s population in need of empowerment. But every time a woman’s voice crackles to life on a radio show, it means one more woman out there is hearing her story, learning her rights and moving closer to equality. (IPS | 8 April 2015)

人口1億5700万人の**バングラデシュ**は、その49%が女性である。あるメディアの調べによると、女性たちは、その声が「聞かれる」よりも新聞のイラスト入りの記事で「見られる」ことの方が多いという。女性の多くはテレビを持たず、新聞を読むこともできないが、コミュニティラジオがこの状況を変えようとしている。バングラデシュ北西部チャパイ・ナワバングラデシュ出身の学生**モメナ・フェルドウシ**さん(24)は、有望なラジオ専門家の一人である。声なき人々、貧しい人々、読み書きができない女性たちに声を与え、彼女たちの関心を世界と共有するための第一歩にしたいと決意を固めている。**【ダッカIPS=ナイムル・ハク】**

どれだけ新聞の見出しを飾ったかという基準から言えば、バングラデシュの女性は国の中で主要な役割を果たしていないと考えたくもなる。

非政府組織「**バングラデシュ・ナリ・プロガティ・サンガ**」(BNPS)による**メディア調査**によると、2か月間の3361本の報道のうち、「女性をテーマとしているか、女性にインタビューしたもの」は新聞記事の16%の新聞記事、テレビニュースの14%、ラジオニュースの20%に過ぎなかったという。

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From Slavery to Self Reliance: A Story of Dalit Women in South India

By Stella Paul

This article tells the story of two women who fought against two evils: the practice of sexual slavery in Hindu temples, and forced labour. Finally free of the yoke of dual-slavery, they are determined to preserve their hard-won existence, humble though it may be. Stories like this highlight the need to spread the word that given the individual determination there is a way out of what appears to be a hopeless situation.



Bhagyaamma, a Madiga Dalit woman and former 'devadasi' (temple slave), has found economic self-reliance by rearing goats in the Nagenhalli village in the Southwest Indian state of Karnataka. Credit: Stella Paul/IPS

BELLARY, India (IPS) - Huligeamma, a Dalit woman in her mid-forties, bends over a sewing machine, carefully running the needle over the hem of a shirt. Sitting nearby is Roopa, her 22-year-old daughter, who reads an amusing message on her cell phone and laughs heartily.

The pair leads a simple yet contented life – they subsist on half a dollar a day, stitch their own clothes and participate in schemes to educate their community in the Bellary district of the Southwest Indian state of Karnataka.

But not so very long ago, both women were slaves. They have fought an exhausting battle to get to where they are today, pushing against two evils that lurk in this mineral-rich state: the practice of sexual slavery in Hindu temples, and forced labour in the illegal mines that dot Bellary District, home to 25 percent of India's iron ore reserves.

Finally free of the yoke of dual-slavery, they are determined to preserve their hard-won existence, humble though it may be.

Still, they will never forget the wretchedness that once defined their daily lives, nor the entrenched religious and economic systems in India that paved the way for their destitution and bondage.

"I was 12 years old when my parents offered me to the Goddess Yellamma [worshipped in the Hindu pantheon as the 'goddess of the

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fallen’], and told me I was now a ‘devadasi’,” HuligeAmma tells IPS.

“I had no idea what it meant. All I knew was that I would not marry a man because I now belonged to the Goddess.”

While her initial impressions were not far from the truth, HuligeAmma could not have known then, as an innocent adolescent, what horrors her years of servitude would hold.

The devadasi tradition – the practice of dedicating predominantly lower-caste girls to serve a particular deity or temple – has a centuries-long history in South India.

While these women once occupied a high status in society, the fall of Indian kingdoms to British rule rendered temples penniless and left many devadasis without the structures that had once supported them.

Pushed into poverty but unable to find other work, bound as they were to the gods, devadasis in many states across India’s southern belt essentially became prostitutes, resulting in the government issuing a ban on the entire system of temple slavery in 1988.

Still, the practice continues and as women like HuligeAmma will testify, it remains as degrading and brutal as it was in the 1980s.

She tells IPS that as she grew older a stream of men would visit her in the night, demanding sexual favours. Powerless to refuse, she gave birth to five children by five different men – none of whom assumed any responsibility for her or the child.

After the last child was born, driven nearly mad with hunger and despair, HuligeAmma broke away from the temple and fled to Hospet, a town close to the World Heritage site of Hampi in northern Karnataka.

It did not take her long to find work in an open-cast mine, one of dozens of similar, illicit units that operated throughout the district from 2004 to 2011.

For six years, from dawn until dusk, HuligeAmma extracted iron ore by using a hammer to create holes in the open pit through which the iron could be ‘blasted’ out.

She was unaware at the time that this back-breaking labour constituted the nucleus of a massive illegal mining operation in Karnataka state, that saw the extraction and export of 29.2 million tonnes of iron ore between 2006 and 2011.

All she knew was that she and Roopa, who worked alongside her as a child labourer, earned no more than 50 rupees apiece (about 0.7 dollars) each day.

One of hundreds of illegal open-pit iron ore mines in the Bellary District in India that operated with impunity until a 2011 ban put a stop to the practice. Credit: Stella Paul/IPS

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In a bid to crack down on the criminal trade, police often raided the mines and arrested the workers, who had to pay bribes of 200-300 rupees (roughly four to six dollars) to secure their release.

In a strange echo of the devadasi system, this cycle kept them indebted to the mine operators.

In 2009, when she could no longer tolerate the crushing workload or the constant sexual advances from fellow workers, contractors and truckers, who saw the former temple slave as ‘fair game’, HuligeAmma threw herself on the mercy of a local non-governmental organisation, Sakhi Trust, which has proved instrumental in lifting both her and her daughter out of the abyss.

Today all her children are back in school and Roopa works as a youth coordinator with Sakhi Trust. They live in Nagenhalli, a Dalit village where HuligeAmma works as a seamstress, teaching dressmaking skills to young girls in the community.

Caste: India’s most unsustainable system

The story may have ended happily for HuligeAmma and Roopa, but for many of India’s roughly 200 million Dalits, there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

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Once considered ‘untouchables’ in the Indian caste system, Dalits – literally, ‘the broken’ – are a diverse and divided group, encompassing everyone from so-called ‘casteless’ communities to other marginalised peoples.



Dalit women and their children, including young boys, are working together to end the system of ‘temple slavery’ in the Southwest Indian state of Karnataka. Credit: Stella Paul/IPS

Under this vast umbrella exists a further hierarchy, with some communities, like the Madiga Dalits (sometimes called ‘scavengers’), often discriminated against by their kin.

Historically, Madigas have made shoes, cleaned drains and skinned animals – tasks considered beneath the dignity of all other groups in Hindu society.

Most of the devadasis in South India hail from this community, according to Bhagya Lakshmi, social activist and director of the Sakhi Trust. In Karnataka alone, there are an estimated 23,000 temple slaves, of which over 90 percent are Dalit women.

Lakshmi, who has worked alongside the Madiga people for nearly two decades, tells IPS that Madiga women grow up knowing little else besides oppression and discrimination.

The devadasi system, she adds, is nothing more than institutionalised, caste-based violence, which sets Dalit women on a course that almost guarantees further exploitation, including unpaid labour or unequal wages.

For instance, even in an illegal mine, a non-Dalit worker gets between 350 and 400 rupees (between five and six dollars) a day, while a Dalit is paid no more than 100 rupees, reveals Minjamma, a Madiga woman who worked in a mine for seven years.

Yet it is Dalit women who made up the bulk of the labourers entrapped in the massive iron trade.

“Walk into any Dalit home in this region and you will not meet a single woman or child who has never worked in a mine as a ‘coolie’

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(labourer),” Manjula, a former mine-worker turned anti-slavery activist from the Mariyammanahalli village in Bellary District, tells IPS.

Herself the daughter and granddaughter of devadasis, who spent her childhood years working in a mine, Manjula believes the systems of forced labour and temple slavery are connected in a matrix of exploitation across India’s southern states, a linkage that is deepened further by the caste system.

She, like most official sources, is unclear on the exact number of Dalits forced into the iron ore extraction racket, but is confident that it ran into “several thousands”.

Destroying lives, and livelihoods

Annually, India accounts for seven percent of global iron ore production, and ranks fourth in terms of the quantity produced after Brazil, China and Australia. Every year, India produces about 281 million tonnes of iron ore, according to a 2011 Supreme Court report.

Karnataka is home to over 9,000 million tonnes of India’s total estimated reserves of 25.2 billion tonnes of iron ore, making it a crucial player in the country’s export industry.

Bellary District alone houses an estimated 1,000 million tonnes of iron ore reserves. Between April 2006 and July 2010, 228 unlicensed miners exported 29.2 million tonnes of iron ore, causing the state losses worth 16 million dollars.

With a population of 2.5 million people relying primarily on agriculture, fisheries and livestock farming for their livelihoods, Bellary District has suffered significant environmental impacts from illicit mining operations.

Groundwater supplies have been poisoned, with sources in and around mining areas showing high iron and manganese content, as well as an excessive concentration of fluoride – all of which are the enemies of farming families who live off the land.

Research suggests that 9.93 percent of the region’s 68,234 hectares of forests have been lost in the mining boom, while the dust generated through the processes of excavating, blasting and grading iron has coated vegetation in surrounding areas in a thick film of particulate matter, stifling photosynthesis.

Although the Supreme Court ordered the cessation of all unregistered mining activity in 2011, following an extensive report on the environmental, economic and social impacts, rich industrialists continue to flout the law.

Still, an official ban has made it easier to crack down on the practice. Today, from the ashes of two crumbling systems – unlawful mining operations and religiously sanctioned sexual abuse – some of India’s poorest women are pointing the way towards a sustainable future.

Their first order of business is to educate themselves and their children, secure alternative livelihoods and deal with the basic issue of sanitation – currently, there is just one toilet for every 90 people in the Bellary District.

The literacy rate among Dalit communities in South India has been found to be as low as 10 percent in some areas, but Madiga women are making a massive push to turn the tide. With the help of the Sakhi Trust, 600 Dalit girls who might have missed out on schooling altogether have been enrolled since 2011.

Today, Lakshmi Devi Harijana, hailing from the village of Danapura, has become the first Madiga woman in the region to teach in a college, while a further 25 women from her village have earned their university degrees.

To them, these changes are nothing short of revolutionary.

While some have chosen to travel the road of intellectual advancement, others are turning back to simple skills like sewing and animal husbandry.

Bhagyaamma, once an exploited temple slave who also worked in an illegal mine for several years, is today rearing two goats that she bought for the sum of 100 dollars.

She tells IPS she will sell them at the market during the holy festival of Eid al-Adha – a sacrificial feast for which a lamb is slaughtered and shared among family, neighbours and the poor – for 190 dollars.

It is a small profit, but she says it is enough for her basic needs.

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Although the government promised the women of Bellary District close to 30 billion rupees (about 475 million dollars) for a rehabilitation programme to undo the damages of illegal mining, the official coffers remain empty.

“We have received applications from local women seeking funds to build individual toilets, but we have not received any money or any instructions regarding the mining rehabilitation fund,” Mohammed Muneer, commissioner of the Hospet Municipality in Bellary District, tells IPS.

Not content to wait around, the women are mobilising their own community-based, which allocates 15,000 rupees (about 230 dollars) on a rolling basis for families to build small toilets, so that women and children will not be at the mercy of sexual predators.

Also in the pipeline are biogas and rainwater harvesting facilities.

As Manjula says, “We want to build small models of economic sustainability. We don’t want to depend on anyone – not a single person, not even the government.” (IPS | 21.04.2015)



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