



RIHAN NETTO

Habitat India partner Beby Tatyaba Kakre (left) and her daughter, Lalita, have a new home.

Celebrating International Women's Day in India

By Phillip Jordan

Just north of Bangalore, India, is a resettlement community named Hegde Nagar.

Hegde Nagar didn't emerge as the result of natural growth or even urban sprawl. It exists because Bangalore's government decided to ship impoverished people from its urban slums to this previously barren land outside the city in the mid-1980s.

Relocated families—nearly all are members of India's lowest castes—did their best to create makeshift shelters in Hegde Nagar. Without supplies, support or income-earning opportunities, however, those shelters offer little protection from the elements—or intruders. Proper sanitation facilities are scarce. Most homes lack doors, floors and privacy.

Alcoholism has become common among men in the community, frequently leaving women alone to work and take care of their children. Most women are day wage-earners who make about 50 rupees per day—about US\$1.10.

Many of these women haven't given up hope for a better future, though. Hundreds have formed self-help savings groups, pooling their resources to

improve their situation. The self-help groups have become agents of change in Hegde Nagar; they also have enabled their members to actively partner with Habitat for Humanity India.

On March 8, about 15 of these women will join more than 100 Habitat volunteers—also mostly women—to celebrate International Women's Day by starting a two-week building blitz in Hegde Nagar.

The build was promoted as a Women Build Global Village trip and includes three Habitat programs and volunteers from six countries. The 15 new homes are part of Habitat India's ongoing campaign to serve 50,000 families by the end of 2011. As part of that campaign, Habitat India launched a series of Women Build events—bringing together women of means to partner with low-income women in need of safer, improved housing.

“Partnership is at the very heart of the mission of Habitat for Humanity,” said Mahesh Lobo, Habitat India's director of program development. “The entire ministry revolves around partnerships ... and we consider each member of the Women Build teams

visiting us as important partners.”

Thanks to collaboration with a community development program called Brothers Integrated Rural Development Society, Habitat India already has built 30 houses in the neighborhood and helped to improve the area's economic development. This March's Women Build Global Village experience will further boost Habitat India's goal of serving 150 women-headed families throughout Bangalore by 2011.

In addition to working alongside Indian women, the visit will include plenty of educational opportunities for volunteers, such as a tour of Hegde Nagar, study sessions on self-help groups and microfinancing, visits to local businesses headed by women, and trips to nearby orphanages.

The largest contingent of international volunteers, 50 members strong, was organized through Global Village's HFHI sending program based in Americus.

The team includes leaders versed in issues relating to women and children living in poverty housing: Terry Gaar, training and outreach specialist for HFHI's Women Build program; Lori Vaclavik, an HFHI global engagement officer whose focus includes engaging Habitat's women supporters; and Nell Pittman, a former HFHI Women Build staffer who now works with Habitat Stanislaus County in California.

“This is a tremendous opportunity to connect people in new ways and for volunteers to meet women who have formed these savings groups and better understand that model,” Gaar said. “This is also just such a special kind of GV trip, with the women's issues and educational aspects.”

Global Village offers several Women Build-focused trips each year. Future special-interest trips are posted online at http://www.habitat.org/gv/special_interest_builds.aspx.

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