

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT**

Amna Mirza
Mary Lugo
Cara White

415-356-8383 x442
770-623-8190
843-881-1480

amna_mirza@itvs.org
lugo@negia.net
cara.white@mac.com

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***THE REVOLUTIONARY OPTIMISTS* PREMIERES ON *INDEPENDENT LENS* ON
MONDAY, JUNE 17, 2013 ON PBS**

Inspiring Look at Children Working for Change in the Slums of India

(San Francisco, CA) – *The Revolutionary Optimists* reveals the work of Bengali visionary, Amlan Ganguly, a passionate former attorney who doesn't just rescue slum children — he empowers them to become change agents, battling poverty and transforming their neighborhoods with dramatic results. Filmed over the course of three years, the film follows Amlan and three of the children he works with on an intimate journey through adolescence, as they challenge the idea that marginalization is written into their destiny. A film by Nicole Newnham and Maren Grainger-Monsen, *The Revolutionary Optimists* premieres on the award-winning series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Stanley Tucci, on Monday, June 17, 2013 at 10 PM ET on PBS (check local listings).

Using theater, dance, and data, the children have cut malaria rates and turned garbage dumps into playing fields. Now, Amlan and the children have set their sights on goals that push the limits of optimism: trying to bring clean water to a Kolkata slum long denied it, and bringing education and hope to the migrant children working in brick-making fields on the outskirts of the booming city.

12-year old Kajal lives inside gate of a massive brick-making operation, and spends her days washing dishes, carrying bricks, and dreaming of becoming a tailor. After Amlan sets up a makeshift school inside the compound, Kajal suddenly has the chance to get an education. But when her mother falls ill, she must balance her desire to learn and make change with her need to survive.

Priyanka is the teenaged leader of a dance group founded by Amlan to keep slum girls in school and dissuade them from early marriage. But Priyanka's parents are abusing her and she sees only one way out — to marry her young boyfriend. Amlan fights to encourage Priyanka and the rest of the girls to stay in school and keep their eyes on her future. Priyanka's eventual decision to elope breaks Amlan's heart, but he resolves to keep fighting — hoping that one day Priyanka's children will know a better life.

Shika and Salim are fiery 12-year old best friends living in a neighborhood where each morning everyone must walk almost two miles before dawn to get water from a neighboring slum. The film explores the toll not having clean water takes on their families as it follows their heroic efforts to take action. By mapping their community and collecting data, Salim and Shika hope to convince the Colony Committee to give them a drinking water tap. Then fate intervenes, and they are chosen to speak in Delhi in front of Parliament on behalf of their group. Can these children bring about desperately needed change for the whole community?

To learn more about the film, visit the *The Revolutionary Optimists* companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/revolutionary-optimists>), which features information about the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

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There are more than 5,500 slum communities in Kolkata, India.

12% of Indian children age 5-14 are currently engaged in child labor.

Less than half of all girls in India enroll in secondary school.

47% of Indian girls are married by the time they reach 18.

Today, almost 1 billion people — one in seven of us — live in an urban slum.

The world's slum population grows by 6 million every year.

Today 884 million people do not have access to safe drinking water.

3.4 million people die each year from a water-related disease.

About Amlan Ganguly

A lawyer, Amlan began his career as an apprentice to the most reputed criminal lawyer in Kolkata (formerly known as Calcutta). He was soon disillusioned with a legal system that provided little justice to the poor unable to pay fees and withstand the long legal process.

In 1996, Amlan decided to make a complete switch and joined Lutheran World Service India. In 1999, Amlan registered Prayasam with a few friends with the intention of enabling children to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Under Amlan's leadership, Prayasam has emerged as a regional expert and trailblazer in child rights programming and workshops. Amlan is best known for his use of popular media to engage and educate children in an interactive, problem-posing approach. A self-taught choreographer and fashion designer, Amlan incorporates both contemporary and traditional art forms into Prayasam's alternative education models, which range from song, dance, and comics to puppetry and storytelling. Amlan has made mentorship a hallmark at Prayasam, which has become a platform for introducing young people of diverse backgrounds to the social sector.

Amlan's ideas about education have been recognized worldwide as both timely and important. In 2006, he became an Ashoka Fellow, part of an association of the world's leading social entrepreneurs. In July 2007, Amlan was invited by the Rockefeller Foundation to attend the

Global Urban Summit on Innovations for an Urban World in Bellagio, Italy. In 2011 Amlan was awarded the Ford Fellowship by the Ford Motor Company Fund and the Picker Center for Executive Education at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

Prayasam continues to introduce its peer education and child empowerment concepts to impoverished sectors of society. Notably, Prayasam is working with the West Bengal government to uplift brick kiln migrant worker communities — the first such collaboration between government and an NGO in India — through its signature Multiple Activity Centres. In addition to his work in West Bengal, Amlan facilitates leadership, soft skills, and gender trainings across India, most recently with World Vision India in West Bengal and under the aegis of the Xavier Institute of Social Sciences in Bangalore, India.

About the Filmmakers

Nicole Newnham (Co-Director/Producer)

Nicole Newnham is a documentary filmmaker who co-produced and directed the critically acclaimed *The Rape of Europa*, about the fate of Europe's art treasures during WWII. *The Rape of Europa* played theatrically in 80 cities across the country, was broadcast on PBS, earned nominations for two national Emmys® and a WGA award, and was shortlisted for the 2007 Documentary Oscar®.

Newnham was also nominated for a national Emmy® Award for co-producing and directing the documentary *Sentenced Home* (2006), broadcast on *Independent Lens*, which follows three Cambodian refugees in Seattle who are deported back to Cambodia after 9/11. With Pulitzer-Prize winning photographer Brian Lanker, she co-produced *They Drew Fire* (2000), a widely-acclaimed special for PBS about the combat artists of World War II, and wrote the companion book distributed by Harper Collins. She lives in Oakland with her husband Tom Malarkey and sons Finn and Blaine.

Maren Grainger-Monsen (Co-Director/Producer)

Maren Grainger-Monsen is a physician, filmmaker-in-residence, and director of the Program in Bioethics in Film at the Stanford University Center for Biomedical Ethics. Grainger-Monsen directed *Hold Your Breath* (2005) and *Worlds Apart* (2003), a large-scale project on cross-cultural conflicts in medicine, which was broadcast on national public television and is currently being used in over 70 percent of US medical schools.

Grainger-Monsen's previous films include *The Vanishing Line* (2000), her journey toward understanding the art and issues of dying, which was broadcast on the PBS series *POV*; *Where the Highway Ends: Rural Healthcare in Crisis* (1989), which won a regional Emmy® Award; and *Grave Words*, which was awarded first place in the American Medical Association Film Festival. She studied film at the London International Film School, received her medical doctorate from the University of Washington, and emergency medicine and palliative care training at Stanford University School of Medicine. She founded the Program in Bioethics and Film at Stanford University Center for Biomedical Ethics in 1998. Grainger-Monsen lives near Stanford with her husband, medical device entrepreneur and mandolin player Jeff Grainger, her two children Solenn and Tilson, and eight chickens.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the MacArthur Foundation. The senior series producer is Lois Vossen. More information at www.pbs.org/independentlens. Join *Independent Lens* on Facebook at www.facebook.com/independentlens.