

DIRECTOR OF OSCAR® WINNER *SMILE PINKI*
PREMIERES NEW INDIA DOCUMENTARY ON CHILDREN'S DAY

14 November 2014 -- Oscar-winning director Megan Mylan is returning to India to release *After My Garden Grows*, her new short doc that captures a rising tide in rural West Bengal where more than 40,000 adolescent girls have turned into the latest crop of breadwinners and revolutionised the Indian daughter stereotype.

The film will launch in India on Children's Day as a **Double Mazza at PVR Cinemas** in 8 metro areas sponsored by Shaadi.com as well as at the Kolkata Film Festival, the International Film Festival of Goa and on social media. Mylan is bringing the film to India with an innovative free distribution strategy that brings together Government, Bollywood, Corporate and Advocacy leaders to propel conversations forward on how each Indian can contribute to improving the future of its girls through time, expertise, influence and funding.

Fundamentally, the film echoes PM Narendra Modi's global call to celebrate India's daughters and to "create an atmosphere of equality" for the girl child. In an unprecedented step last month, he invited citizens to share their views to help formulate the soon to be announced policy for girl's development in India under the aegis of the *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* scheme.

After My Garden Grow tells the story of Monika Barman, a teenager from Cooch Behar, growing a tiny rooftop garden with the hope of feeding her family, paying her school fees and delaying her marriage. Entering Monika's home, the short doc explores a strategy for empowering young girls, underway in rural India. These young girls are taught to cultivate a variety of produce on small patches of land wherever available – be it on rooftops or roadsides – to sustain themselves, earn income and gain independence. The story is proof that the problems of Child Marriage, Illiteracy, Malnutrition and Poverty, stem from a simple truth – India is underestimating its girl power. Mylan documents the seeds of change the state government has sowed through its implementation of this micro-agriculture program under the larger Centrally-supported scheme *SABLA*, in collaboration with Landesa, a non-profit working to improve land rights in India. It reveals one powerful solution among hundreds that are changing the girls' futures in measurable replicable ways.

India leads the world in the number of child marriages. According to UNICEF, in India, 47% of girls marry before 18. While the legal age of consent here is 18, the actual median age of marriage in rural India is 16. Globally, 14 million girls are married as children each year. Girls who marry early are more likely to drop out of school, suffer health problems, live in poverty, and experience gender-based violence. It is one of the

primary reasons for the country's poor ranking globally for maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates.

"At a time when we see daily reports of women's rights in India under attack, it is a privilege to be able to share this positive story about how a seemingly tiny plot of land and simple gardening skills can empower young women to change a centuries-old tradition and the course of their destinies," said filmmaker Megan Mylan.

###

INTERVIEWS

Director Megan Mylan will be traveling with Monika Barman from the film and her sister Kanika Barman who is a young bride and mother. They are available for interviews along with leading Indian gender advocates.

Still photographs and additional information available at: www.GROWAGIRL.in

MEDIA CONTACT:

Silky Chopra Mehrotra

Avian Media

M: +91 9820109036

D: + 91 11 4662 5562

E: silky@avian-media.com

Alison Saldanha

M: +91 9820109036

E: alison.saldanha@gmail.com

POLICY ANGLES TO EXPLORE:

- On the occasion of the International day of the Girl Child, PM Narendra Modi, called on all citizens to “create an atmosphere of equality” for the girl child and invited the public to share their views and resources to help formulate a new policy for girl’s development in India under the aegis of the *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* scheme. Through the e-governance portal, mygov.in, the public can now directly interact with the Central administration to give its inputs and thoughts on how the nation can move forward with this decision.
- A study by non-profit land rights organization Landesa that analyses the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and the property rights of women in particular. According to the study, the succession law in its current form puts limitations on gender equality and is found to be intrinsically linked with the legally banned practice of dowry. (December 2013)

See more at : <http://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/hjaa-study-report.pdf>

DATA ANGLES TO EXPLORE:

- The World Bank on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child this year released a new report -- *Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity*. The report, released ahead of the [International Day of the Girl Child](#), distills vast data and hundreds of studies to shed new light on constraints facing women and girls worldwide, from epidemic levels of gender-based violence to biased laws and norms that prevent them from owning property, working, and making decisions about their own lives.

See more at:

- <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/enGENDER%20IMPACT%20-%20Research%20Brief%20Early%20Marriage%2008.07.pdf>
- A recently published UN Women's study on representation of Gender in Media showed that the country has a high percentage of sexualized female characters in its films which is much more than the global average (34.1 percent vs. 24.8 percent)

See more at: <http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2014/global-film-industries-perpetuates-discrimination-against-women-2/#sthash.v8OdMD7z.dpuf>

- The International Center for Research on Women recently released a new report, [“More Power to Her: How Empowering Girls Can Help End Child Marriage,”](#) which shows how and why investing in girls is critical to the global movement to end child marriage.

See more at: <http://www.icrw.org/media/press-releases/press-release-report-investment-girls%E2%80%99-empowerment-key-ending-child-marriage>

About the Film:

After My Garden Grows, is a new short documentary by Oscar® winning director of *Smile Pinki*, Megan Mylan. The film tells the uplifting story of Monika Barman, a rural Indian teenager growing a rooftop garden to feed her family and sow the seeds of her own independence. The film premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival and will be launching in India in November 2014.

2014, Color, Bengali with English subtitles, 10 minutes.

After My Garden Grows is a Principe Productions film supported by Sundance Institute in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with additional support from the Kendeda Fund.

FILM CREDITS

featuring MONIKA BARMAN

director/producer MEGAN MYLAN

editor PURCELL CARSON

camera MARIO FURLONI

sound SONIA NARANG

field producers TESS JOSEPH and ROOP SEN

assistant editor NINA SEN

color grader GARY COATES

audio post JIM LEBRECHT

music PRASANNA

©2014 PRINCIPE PRODUCTIONS

About the Director: Megan Mylan

Megan Mylan is a New York-based documentary filmmaker whose work has been recognized with an Academy Award®, Emmy-nominations, Independent Spirit Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Through extensive social action campaigns, Megan's films have raised millions of dollars for charitable causes, motivated thousands of volunteers and informed public policy. She recently completed, *Raça*, a documentary on Brazil's unfolding struggle for racial equality. The film is currently in national theatrical release in Brazil. Megan directed and produced the Oscar®-winning film *Smile Pinki* broadcast on HBO and the Sundance Channel in the U.S. and internationally. Her film, *Lost Boys of Sudan*, had a 70-city theatrical release and international broadcast in 30 countries. Megan also directed *Batidania* on Brazilian resistance music and worked on a variety of films including the Oscar®-nominated, *Long Night's Journey Into Day* and the Sundance Award winning film *Sing Faster*. Before beginning in documentary, Megan worked with Ashoka, an international development non-profit, in the U.S. and Brazil. She has a Bachelor's from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and Masters' degrees in Journalism and Latin American Studies from the University of California at Berkeley. She serves on the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Executive Committee for Documentary and recently served as guest director of the Documentary program at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism.

THE GIRLS GARDEN PROJECT IN WEST BENGAL:

In early 2012, the Women and Child Development Department of Government of West Bengal, India partnered with non-profit organization Landesa (formerly Rural Development Institute) for implementing the SABLA program, which aims at improving the nutritional and health status of adolescent girls and empowering them through education on life skills, health, nutrition, and vocational skills.

Landesa has added a curriculum on land rights, asset creation, and land-based livelihoods for adolescent girls to the SABLA curriculum. The hands-on activities of the program focus on teaching the girls to cultivate small “kitchen gardens” with nutritious produce that they can add to their family’s food supply or sell for income. The girls’ families are now beginning to see them as assets rather than burdens and are delaying their marriage. Some girls have even used their new savings to return to school. In addition to the discussions on land rights and land based livelihoods, girls learn about health, nutrition and various aspects of their own empowerment.

Since March 2013, the project has expanded to five additional project areas in the district, to reach more than **40,000 adolescent girls**. Special emphasis has been placed on including girls who have already left school and are at very high risk for early marriage.

Presently, Landesa is working with the government to scale this innovative intervention in five districts starting 2015. Landesa is working with partners to explore integrating the initiative with existing ‘*Kanyashree*’ programme by the state government which aims at continued education and delayed marriage for the girls. The project’s intended high-level outcome is that up to **1.4 million girls** will be positioned to realize land rights as women, improving their economic and social prospects and empowering them to reduce vulnerabilities that they face as adolescents.

About Landesa:

Founded as the Rural Development Institute, Landesa has partnered with governments and local partners in more than 40 countries on reforms that have improved land rights for more than 100 million families since 1967. When families have secure rights to land, they can invest in their land to sustainably increase their harvests and reap the benefits –improved nutrition, health, and education – for generations.

Landesa’s involvement in India started in 1999 with focused field research. This research led to engagement with the national government on crafting new land policy that would focus on the rural poor. These pro-poor policies serve as a foundation for Landesa’s continued work in India as it partners with the national and state governments to develop and implement specific large-scale programs. Landesa currently has staff and programs working to improve land rights for the poorest women and men in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Odisha, West Bengal, Karnataka and Bihar.