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Messiahs of India's poor

India is not the land of their birth. But, it is the place of their work, the platform where all their dreams, passion, expertise and skills converge towards improving the quality of life that one third of our country's population lives. Meet some expats who have come from far away lands to India Urban Conference to present their work for the underprivileged through direct interactions with the people and through their research in the social sector in India. Their endeavours to make lives of the poor better tell inspiring stories. Dr Robin King CSTEP, Bengaluru King is an economist who is interested in structural changes in India's economy and is keen to fill the gaps in the success story of India's growing economy. She has been studying the links between mobility, shelter and livelihoods to understand the evolution of present day Bengaluru where wealth has increased significantly as poverty has increased. "Bengaluru's IT industry and its success is known worldwide but the delivery of services to a large chunk of the society is not up to the standards in terms of both quality and quantity. Today, we have a larger number of poor people than ever and the number of slums is higher than ever," said Dr King, a US citizen. For the last three-and-a-half years, Dr King has been working to find answers to many questions in the area of urban poverty. Her studies on the urban poor and the homeless have tried to put many social issues in perspective with the help of maps, images, statistics and other data. One of the biggest projects that she and her team have been working on is survey of slums. "This is a huge piece of economy and it is a large number of people, who generate a huge output. Overlooking their interests and welfare is not good for the society," said Dr King. As a Principal Research Scientist at the Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), Dr King helps manage the Next Generation Infrastructure Laboratory at CSTEP. Dr King engages women from the local communities to collect data, which she analyses. On her assignments, she has picked up the local languages and can speak little bit of Kannada, Telugu and Tamil but she is not satisfied with this. She wants to be able to communicate with the local population fluently in their own language. Carlin Carr, Searchlight S. Asia Carlin Carr, an American, is based out of Mumbai and has been working on the issues of urban poverty since February. She produces a newsletter called Searchlight South Asia (created by Intellect for the Rockefeller Foundation) to highlight the trends in urban poverty, their possible impact on the urban poor and to find effective solutions to their problems in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. For this, she keeps a tab on everything that impacts urban poverty. Besides this job, she works with street children in Mumbai, something that she had done for a year in 2009 when she came to Mumbai as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar. Prior to her current assignment at Intellect, Ms Carr has worked Safe Water and Network in New York and has dealt with the issue of provisional water to India, Ghana and Kenya. "When I interact with the people and get to understand their issues, the whole thing about the best job and the biggest money seems so pointless. I have been given so much. Let me live my life by giving something back," said Ms Carr. Rahim Sayani, student Twenty one year old Rahim Sayani, student of Environment Science Yale University, loves stories- people's story. He also loves to tell these stories

that he discovers while travelling and working with people to the world through his photos. An American of Pakistani origin, who has many relatives in India, Rahim has been exposed to a diverse cultural and social set up. After a few touristy trips to India, Rahim decided to get a real feel of India three years ago. He started teaching children in the slums of Delhi. This was between the first and second years of his course at Yale and it invoked many new social and cultural sensibilities in young Rahim. He saw the informal public spaces in the slums and villages act as a platform for social interactions and build relations. At IUC in Mysore, Rahim highlighted, through his analysis of the film Salaam Bombay, how crucial availability of resources and space are in building and retaining social relationships. His final year thesis revolves around urban public spaces. At the end of this year when he finishes his Bachelor's course at Yale, Rahim intends to travel extensively to discover stories and tell them to the world through his photos.

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