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## NEWS

## City boy in running for global award

*Nominated for 2006 Jonathan Mann Award, Deelip Mhaske works to rehab 50,000 families in Kandivli slum*

[Snehal Rebello](#)

**Mumbai, March 25:** Deelip Mhaske began Saturday at 6 am, taking an American volunteer around the narrow lanes of Damunagar slum in Kandivli (East).

Next stop: Legal advice to a group of 50 local youths who want to register themselves as a non-governmental organisation and work on education and health issues at the slum.

Inside the 26-acre hutment colony, Mhaske has (27) been single-handedly involved in rehabilitating 50,000 families after the slum was demolished in 2000.

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Mhaske, a familiar face for the locals, lost his 10 ft x 10 ft home in the demolitions. The law graduate calls losing his home "the turning point in my life".

Currently pursuing his MPhil in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Bombay, Mhaske has been working in the field of education and health, especially HIV/AIDS, in five slums in Mumbai—Kandivli, Manori, Kanjurmarg, Goregaon and Borivali.

"I was depressed. It was a war-like situation. A pregnant woman died on the spot and many senior citizens also passed away as a result of contracting various diseases. I've been working here since then," he says.

For his tireless work, Mhaske has been nominated for the 2006 Jonathan Mann Award for Global Health and Human Rights.

The award, sponsored by Association Francois-Xavier Bagnoud, Doctors of the World, and Global Health Council, is given annually to a leading practitioner in health and human rights, and Mhaske is vying with 39 other nominees globally.



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Education and health are primary issues, says Mhaske. "I'm trying to build a generation who 10 years from now will fight for themselves and try to change the system. I'm preparing them for a time when they won't need me."

"I'm happy to hear of his nomination. Apart from his work on land reforms in Maharashtra, he is dedicated to social work with a practical perception," says Head of the Department for Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT-Bombay, and MPhil guide A Ramanathan.

And while health camps are organised and senior citizens get free medication, the funds come neither from NGOs nor funding agencies. "It's from well-wishers and friends," he says, standing on the plot that once was his home.

After the demolition, Damunagar's residents lost their identity and the school dropout rate shot up. With help from 100 local volunteers involved in informal teaching, 300 of the slum's students now study in nearby schools.

"We provide books, uniforms, fees and all study material. Before nursery, a child knows his alphabets in English," says Mhaske, the first Indian at the World Congress on Family Law and Rights of Children organised by UNICEF at Cape Town in 2005.

The son of Dattatray Mhaske (57) and Chamfabai (50)—farmers in a Jalna village—Mhaske was responsible for advocating land for 18 lakh landless farmers from the state government under the Swabhiman Yojana in 2005. His sister Sangeeta (28) is a lawyer with the Bombay High Court.

After his Law degree, Mhaske did his Masters in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, when he researched landless farmers in Maharashtra.

Ask him if he wants to get into politics and he flatly refuses. "I want to be involved in policy making on developmental issues," he says. It's just been two days since Mhaske got the nomination letter via e-mail.

"Oh, there are names of so many big people, I don't think I stand a chance," he smiles. And if he wins? "I will start a school and a health centre at Damunagar," promises Mhaske.

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