



## AUTUMN NEWSLETTER ISSUE 29



**EIGHTH INTAF WORLD CONFERENCE**  
London, 18th June 2011

A very successful Eighth INTAF World Conference was held in Development House, London, with the generous support of AFP (Asian Foundation for Philanthropy). The theme, "Experiences of Working with the Rural Poor", provided a unique opportunity for people with different experiences to give their views from a range of interesting perspectives.

The first speaker was Mukat Singh, who spoke from a grass-roots perspective as someone who has worked with the rural poor for the last forty years. He talked frankly about the lessons he has learnt, namely, that it is only by living and working with the rural poor that you can help them; that the greatest obstacle is the attitude of those who are supposed to help them; that it is not enough merely to bring education to the villages – you must look at the kind of education they are receiving; that the lifestyle of urban dwellers is the most expensive, exploitative and wasteful while that of villagers is sustainable and community-oriented; that all policies and programmes are devised by urban academics sitting in offices far from the realities of rural poverty; and that none of their schemes takes regional differences into account.

He finished on a positive note by pointing out that those fortunate to live and work among the rural poor are invariably enriched by the experience.

The next two speakers, who gave a joint presentation, were Dr Kamal Taori, Chairman of the Rural Business Hub in India and Irmel Marla, originally from Germany but now living in India and Chair of the International Institute for Holistic Research and Voluntary Action, a joint India/Germany establishment. They emphasized the importance of a holistic approach and self-realisation without exploitation.

There was a complete change of perspective from the next speaker, Stephen McClelland, who is Head of European Programmes at DFID (Dept. for International Development). He spoke in a personal capacity, drawing on his knowledge of the way the government works. He gave many facts and figures which enlightened the audience about the ways that the government is trying to help the rural poor. He agreed that criticism of government officials is often warranted and of course they have to be held to account, but he also pointed out that they are indispensable if we are to abolish poverty for only governments can deliver on a big enough scale.

Hari Dhanoo, from Trinidad, whose ancestors came originally from Eastern U.P., spoke from the perspective of an individual donor. He has visited APK and seen the work done there and this has inspired his continuing support.

Bala Thakrar spoke next. She first went to India as a graduate, backpacking around the sub-continent. This trip fired her deep love for India and paved the way for a remarkable career that culminated in the successful establishment of her own organisation, the Asian Foundation for Philanthropy. She has devised a pioneering scheme for people of Indian origin to volunteer in India as well as other innovative programmes such as Gyaan Yatra.

The next speaker, Jasber Singh, brought the perspective of a researcher. He spent a year in four different districts of Andhra Pradesh, carrying out research into biofuels and the experiences of the rural people who grew biofuel crops. He found that biofuel was not the answer to rural poverty and was shocked to learn of the painful experiences *dalits* and tribals had.

The final speakers were three volunteers. The first, Nayan Shukla, went to India in 1988. He has paid many return visits since then and became closely involved with VRI here, supporting development

work in India by raising funds and raising awareness. Sophie Bray and Aditi Shah spoke of their recent time as volunteers. They had thoroughly enjoyed getting involved and felt it had been an enlightening experience.

The conference was followed by an informal meeting the next day, where some of the hoped to hold the next international conference in India in two years' time.

## VISITORS FROM INDIA

Unfortunately, no one from India was able to get a visa in time to attend the conference. Dr Jai Pal Singh Vyast received his visa just two days later and decided to make use of it and go abroad for the first time. He stayed with Mukat and Jyoti for his two-week visit and enjoyed trips to Oxford and famous London landmarks. He was also interviewed on television on the Venus channel by Krishan Ralleigh, editor/founder of the magazine India Link International, and presenter of the Venus programme 'Mera India'.

Other visitors from India who came abroad for the very first time were Ram Vir Singh and his wife Sushma from Amarpurkashi. Many VRI/IVCS project visitors will know them. Their son, Pawan, who married our project visitor from 1999, Kiran Patel, sponsored them for a two-month family visit.

## VRI NEWS

- The AGM of VRI was held on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2011. Annual reports were presented by the Chair, the Treasurer and the Field Director. Copies are available from Jyoti at [enquiries@vri-online.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@vri-online.org.uk)
- A number of previous volunteers are planning return visits to APK this autumn. They include Greg Parker, a volunteer in Feb. 2006 and Vibha Aggarwal, a volunteer in October 1996. Vibha hopes to spend a month in APK with her two young daughters. There are also two new volunteers going out in October, one from the U.K. and one from Canada.
- Negotiations are going on at the moment for a group of undergraduate students from the Agricultural Science Faculty of the University of Sydney to spend two weeks' field trip at Amarpurkashi, doing a research project that will form part of their course. At present, the

university sends students to Laos and China for field trips but they are keen to extend this to India. If this goes ahead, the students will go out in February 2012

## AMARPURKASHI NEWS



Girls line up for morning assembly at the project's secondary school.

One of the highlights of the Field Director's Annual Report was the steady increase in enrolments of girls at all levels of education. There are now 42% girls at our primary school, 41% at the secondary school and 45% at the degree college.

Volunteers for Rural India  
(Formerly IVCS)

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