

IVCS**INDIAN VOLUNTEERS FOR
COMMUNITY SERVICE****Registered Charity No. 285872***Patron: Robert Evans, Member of the European Parliament*

Newsletter



INTAF WORLD CONFERENCE

On 2nd and 3rd July 2005, IVCS hosted the Sixth INTAF World Assembly on "Investing in the Rural Poor". Participants included delegates from India, Bangladesh, Slovakia, Spain and Madagascar. The conference was inaugurated by Lord Navnit Dholakia who spoke about the need to bridge the unjust gap between rich and poor. Other speakers included Gareth Thomas, M.P. for Harrow West and under-secretary in the Department for International Development (DFID) who spoke on the importance of investing in services for the rural poor and addressing the causes of corruption so that valuable aid and services did actually reach them. He recommended the establishment of an anti-corruption body.

Meera Tiwari from the University of East London and Andrew Sumner from South Bank University discussed the Millennium Development Goals, presenting some recent statistics from India and explaining the complexities of rural poverty. They also suggested that there was not enough statistical data with which to measure degrees of corruption within a developing society.

Another key speaker was Mukat Singh, Director of the Amarpurkashi Project in India, who

pointed out that ethical and moral discourses do not move the rich. The bitter truth is that the rich are only motivated by investment for profit which, in practical terms, means that the poor must prove themselves investment-worthy. He quoted C K Prahlad, a management guru based in the USA, who suggests that "4 billion poor of the world could drive the next round of global trade and productivity and be an exciting source of innovation". Developing countries offer tremendous opportunities for growth and the rural poor represent a significant latent purchasing power that is just waiting to be unlocked.

On 2nd July, the conference was held at Friends' Meeting House, Pinner which proved a very convenient and welcoming venue. The plenary session on 3rd was held at the IVCS office in South Harrow. A London declaration was adopted and recommendations discussed and passed. This was followed by the tri-ennial General Assembly of INTAF (International Task Force for the Rural Poor) which elected an international co-ordinating committee for the next three years. Members include convenors from Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Slovakia, Canada, India, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, China and the U.K.

DRIVE

The year 2005/2006 began well for the DRIVE scheme, with 8 pvs in September, 7 in October and 7 in November. Groups included participants from Sardinia, Scotland, Belgium and the USA.

All three groups settled in extremely well and the evening discussions were both enjoyable and stimulating. Pvs participated enthusiastically in early morning yoga and dutifully practised the Hindi they learnt in the afternoon lessons.

Their activities resulted in some lovely murals for the school and interesting conversation classes in the degree college. Those involved in English conversation also left some very useful lesson notes and ideas behind for future pvs. One pv researched further into the Amarpurkashi story so that it can continue where it left off in the early 80s. Another started the important and long overdue task of indexing the articles in the IJRS. One pv offered to raise funds back home to cover costs of advertising the PGRRM course in Indian national papers. Another, a qualified photographer, made a beautiful film of APK. One pv gave a fascinating talk on hypnotherapy.

There were no problems with any group or individual and indeed, all of us at APK felt it a privilege to be host to pvs who showed such interest in the culture, people and project and were so open-minded and sensitive to the many differences between rural Indian life and their own Western one.

Two pvs are currently braving the January cold at APK, five more are scheduled to go in February and seven in March. They include participants from Australia, Belgium and Slovenia.

Since September 2005, Rajni has been employed as the new Project Visitors' Co-ordinator. She has taken over many of the responsibilities that Pushpa used to have and, according to feedback from three groups of pvs, is doing a first-rate job. They find her very easy to get on with and like her relaxed attitude and sense of humour. We have also been fortunate in gaining the voluntary services of Mukesh, Pushpa's younger brother who is living at APK while studying for his LLB in Moradabad. He offered to take the morning yoga and afternoon Hindi lessons and has proved a great success. In return, IVCS has covered the cost of his board and lodging. Mukesh himself feels that he benefits personally from his participation. Certainly he has become much

more confident and is able to converse quite fluently in English now. He also takes a keen interest in various project events.

NEW U.K. LINK

In the summer of 2005, we were delighted to hear from Bala Thakrar, a remarkable young woman whom we first met when she worked for the Confederation of Indian Organisations and gave us invaluable help with our application for a National Lottery grant.

Bala has set up the Asian Foundation for Philanthropy to encourage a culture of giving amongst British Asians, build awareness of development issues within the Asian diaspora and provide volunteering opportunities for young Asians. We have had a number of stimulating meetings and Bala will be visiting APK in February. We hope to work together to make young Asians in Britain aware of the unique opportunities available to them from something like the DRIVE scheme.

AMARPURKASHI NEWS

Highlights of the last seven months include:

- § Scholarships, in the form of fees and school dress, were given to 36 boys and 32 girls from the Gramodaya Primary School, Amarpurkashi.
- § Scholarships were also awarded to 10 students from Jafarpur Junior High School and 10 students from Vimla Devi Junior High School, Karia Mayee.
- § The enrolment of girls at all levels of education is steadily improving. There are 37% girls in the Gramodaya Primary School, an increase of 4% on last year; 19.2% girls in Jafarpur Junior High; 27.4% girls in Vimla Devi Junior High; 26.5% girls in the Intercollege, Amarpurkashi; and 37.5% girls in the Gramodaya Degree College, Amarpurkashi, an increase of 8% on last year.
- § On Sunday 16th October, staff from APK travelled by jeep and *jagaaru* to Jafarpur Junior High where staff training was held. The day began with

breakfast, followed by *shramdan* (voluntary physical work) clearing the bushes and weeds from the school grounds and then training sessions. After lunch, staff formed into groups and looked at a range of topics; finally, each group gave feedback. It was a long, hot day but staff were full of praise for the venue, the food (APK kitchen staff took everything with them and cooked it fresh, starting at 4 in the morning!), the *shramdan* which engendered real team spirit and the group discussions which gave even the shyest a chance to participate.

- § The annual Science Fair was held on 27th October and was a spectacular success. A small seminar was also held at the same time for local farmers. On the 28th October, there was a special science competition for students which attracted students from Bilari and Chandausi as well as Amarpurkashi.
- § A free eye camp was held from 7th to 12th November, thanks to a generous donation from Hari Dhanoo who was luckily able to fly to India and be there from start to finish. Over 500 patients were treated for various eye ailments and 53 operated on for the removal of cataracts.
- § Since November 2005, local farmers have been protesting against the pollution of their land and crops by the paper mill. Wheat, mustard seed and sugar cane crops are standing in black, highly polluted, evil-smelling water full of effluent from the Shakumbhari paper mill that was set up by the Aril Nadi (river) some years ago. Farmers are asking for compensation but the powerful, rich mill owners have so far shown no sign that they care anything about the appalling pollution their mills have caused.
- § The project agreed to take on a new project which will campaign against female foeticide and encourage parents to register their newborn children.

ORISSA

From 5th to 7th November, we (Mukat and I) attended an INTAF conference which resulted in the successful formation of a state branch of INTAF in Orissa.

The conference was hosted by the NSP project in Daya Vihar, District Puri. This project is situated in a very poor, rural area about 30 miles from the town of Puri. The project itself is well worth a visit. It has a large campus with beautiful gardens and simple but adequate buildings. There is a high school and college, a vocational training centre, a large girls' hostel, a school for disabled students and one for the deaf and blind, an orphanage, a home for the elderly and a refuge for abused women. The staff are all local people and well trained, committed and hard-working. NSP also runs a home for the elderly and a drug rehabilitation centre in Puri.

During our visit, we were taken on a boat ride on the nearby lake which was a wonderful experience. The lake and the river into which it flows regularly flood the surrounding countryside, making it almost impossible to grow anything, even rice. We saw only a handful of people, mostly poor fishermen, living on the muddy banks of the lake. Nearly all the land was under water.

We also visited some of the Self-Help Groups set up by Prados Pati, one of the B.Ed. lecturers at Gramodaya College, Amarpurkashi. Most of the groups consisted of women and all were situated in villages. We were struck by the poverty that made Uttar Pradesh look quite well off in comparison and also by the cleanliness we found everywhere. There was no litter of any kind. The village lanes were spotless, as were the homes. One village where tribal families lived, had successfully taken on a sanitation project and used proper toilets instead of the nearby fields. The astonishing thing about this was that they maintained the toilets themselves and shared them with other families. We were also impressed by the training in local arts and crafts that we saw being given to women who would then go on to make and sell a range of products in the nearby towns.

I felt quite humbled by this visit to Orissa. It really brought home to me how relative poverty is. Orissa is the poorest state in India and I had expected it to be an even worse version of the kind of poverty I saw in U.P. However, it was very different. For a start, the villages and towns

we saw in the district of Puri were astonishingly clean and litter-free. People were thin but wiry, very simply dressed, refreshingly honest and hard-working. They lived very simply too. In comparison, U.P. seemed very dirty, shoddy and corrupt, its people often greedy, grasping and lazy. Of course, these are generalizations but nevertheless, there were stark differences between the two states.

PGRRM COURSE AND WEBSITE

Disappointingly, there were no applicants for the 2005/2006 course of this innovative course. However, news of graduates from the first and second batches was most heartening. Sunil from the first batch was married in December; he has just been awarded a three-year contract to work for the World Health Organisation.

In September 2005, Shobhana and I completely revised the PGRRM website so that the information on it was clearly presented and easily accessible. Since then, we have had a number of enquiries from overseas applicants and four definite applications which are now being processed.

It therefore looks extremely hopeful that in September 2006 we will admit overseas students to the course for the first time. Meanwhile, extra efforts are being made to recruit good local students. To view course details, please visit the website at www.villageindia.org

CONGRATULATIONS !

- § To Howard and Tracy Ingham, pvs from October 2004, on the birth of their first child, a lovely boy called David.
- § To Kiran, pv from October 1999, and Pawan Rawal, on the birth of their first child, a beautiful son called Dylan.

SCHOLARSHIP SUCCESS

Pushpa, project co-ordinator at Amarpurkashi for the last six years, arrived in London in July 2005, thanks to the generous support of past pvs. She settled in remarkably quickly and is now studying computing at Lambeth College and working part-time at a local pharmacy. She hopes to do an advanced course in computing

next year so that she will then have the skills to get a job in that field.

IJRS

The International Journal of Rural Studies is published twice a year from Amarpurkashi. Annual subscription to the journal is £20 and past issues can be obtained at £5 per copy.

In the October 2005 issue, articles included:

- § *INTAF World Conference Report and Recommendations*
- § *Organizational Change in Pakistan*
- § *The Dalit Question*
- § *The Jungle and the Village*

FUND-RAISING

- § A very successful Quiz Night on 30th January, 2005 raised £150 for the Tsunami Appeal.
- § On August 21st, a very enjoyable game of softball in Hyde Park raised £90 for IVCS
- § On September 25th, an exciting day of go-karting raised £750 for IVCS.

E.C. MEETINGS

The last E.C. meeting was held on Sunday 8th January. Nine committee members attended and we were pleased to welcome Pushpa as an observer. Among agenda items discussed were the DRIVE scheme, an interim report from APK and the half-yearly transfer of funds to India.

COMING EVENTS

- § The next E.C. meeting will be held on Sunday 21st May
- § An orientation training for all those interested in running or assisting in orientations will be held on Sunday 2nd July
- § An orientation day for 2006/2007 pvs will be held on Saturday 22nd July
- § The Annual General Meeting of IVCS will be held on Sunday 23rd July