

REPORT
Of the Seventh INTAF World
Assembly
8th and 9th November 2008

“Poverty, Politics and Power”

Democratic politics have failed to deliver better outcomes for the rural poor. The policy decisions of democratic governments often advance the interests of influential groups, notably business houses, the media, political allies and international trading systems. It is therefore very important to understand the new role of private sector investment in providing development opportunities for the rural poor.

International organizations have now actively begun to research and explore these concerns. It is therefore the right time to address the issues of power and politics that affect government policies and poverty reduction schemes. International forums like the INTAF World Assembly are appropriate places for reviewing the triangular interaction between Poverty, Politics and Power.

On 8th November 2008 the village of Amarpurkashi in mid-west U.P., India, hosted the Seventh World Assembly of INTAF (International Task Force for the Rural Poor). The assembly began in traditional Indian style with the lighting of a ceremonial lamp by Jyoti Singh, INTAF International Convenor, and guest speakers. These included Greg Parker from Australia, Dr Shafiqur Rehman Burq, M.P., Dr Banwari Lal Sharma from *Azadi Machao Andolan*, Allahabad, Ajit Kumar Singh from *Chandrika Samajik Utthan evam Gramin Vikas Sansthan*, Bihar, Dr Naresh Jha, Bihar and Dr Dileep Kumar and Dr Girijesh Kumar from M J P Rohilkhand University, Bareilly. Dr Anand Kumar of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, later joined this panel.

In the afternoon, there were working sessions. Speakers included Surendra Kumar from Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi, Laxman Waghchaware from Maharashtra, Dr Hari Om Agrawal, Director, TMIMT University, Moradabad and Nayan Shukla, former chair of IVCS, London.

The first day ended with a cultural programme and a lively discussion where Dr Banwari Lal Sharma made an impassioned call for the eradication of the dowry system which all participants fully supported.

The second day began with a visit to the nearby Aril River to see the appalling pollution caused by the Shakumbhari and Ram Chandra Straw Products paper factories. This was followed by a working session of INTAF members, which culminated in a 9-point declaration. Discussion then focused on the challenges faced by INTAF.

A report of the last three years was presented and a new international co-ordinating committee elected. A further meeting to work out a three-year action plan was agreed.

FOLLOW-UP MEETING

On Sunday 1st March 2009, as agreed at the World Assembly, a small follow-up meeting was held. Ajit Kumar Singh, Secretary of *Chandrika Samajik Utthan evam Gramin Vikas Sansthan*, village Jamhor, Bihar kindly hosted the meeting. The following action plan was agreed:-

- A two-day state conference will be held in Pune, Maharashtra on a weekend late in November 2009. Laxman Waghchaware has agreed to host the conference.
- The next state conference after this will be held in U.P. or Rajasthan and may take place in 2010.

- A national conference will be held, possibly in Ghaziabad, in 2010 or 2011, depending on the date agreed for the next international conference.
- The next international conference will be held in 2011 or 2012 and

may be in London. The venue will be decided after discussion with INTAF members and other supportive organizations.

INTAF SEVENTH WORLD ASSEMBLY
KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Gregory Parker, Sydney, Australia

It is my great pleasure to accept your kind invitation to speak at the opening of this conference.

Let us first remind ourselves of the aims of INTAF.

1. To **identify** policies, programmes and projects that are contributing most to the all-round development of the rural poor
2. To **publicise** these policies, programmes and projects and to help make them as effective as possible
3. To **monitor and evaluate** the progress of these policies, programmes and projects

In brief, INTAF represents the voice of the poor at the international level.

The theme of the Seventh INTAF World Conference 2008 is Poverty, Politics and Power. This is summarized in the opening paragraphs of the programme as:

1. Failure of democratic politics to deliver better outcomes for the rural poor.
2. Importance of understanding the role of the private sector in providing development opportunities for the rural poor.

Inequality

May I stress the importance of why we are attending this conference through the words of Nelson Mandela (London 2005).

“Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such scourges of our times – times in which the world boasts breathtaking advances in science, technology, industry, and wealth accumulation - that they

have to rank alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils.”

There are extraordinary levels of inequality, which dominate a person’s whole life. The extent of inequality is breathtaking.

Some global examples of inequality:

- The income of the world’s 500 richest billionaires exceeds that of its poorest 416 million people.
- Who ends up paying for climate change caused by the wealthy industrialized countries? The poor people.

Some Examples within countries:

- In the UK life expectancy in the wealthiest areas is 8 years more than that in the poorest.
- In my country Australia, the life expectancy of its indigenous people is a massive 18 years less than that of the rest of the population. Yet Australia is one of the world’s richest countries measured by the Human Development Index. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that poverty and inequality are the prime cause of the high rates of sickness and other causes of death in Australia’s indigenous communities.

Need for Success Stories

The opening words in the conference invitation state that democratic politics have failed to deliver better outcomes for the rural poor. I have just quoted some dramatic examples. Although we learn from our mistakes, we will benefit from looking at successes.

Please remember that the aims of INTAF are to identify, publicize, monitor, and evaluate policies, programmes and projects

that are contributing most to the all-round development of the rural poor.

Would these two recent laws be called successes in India?

The Right to Information Act, and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

1. **The Right to Information Act.** We also have this as a freedom of information act in Australia, but it seems to be 'freer' in India. In last Wednesday's 'Times of India' newspaper, your Prime Minister stated
'RTI is a powerful instrument of citizens' empowerment. It was indicative of the process of nurturing democracy and the assertion of people's power at various levels of government.'

He also warned about 'vexatious demands' depriving genuine information seekers.

The exponential growth of request for information by people during the three years of the act says to me that the RIT Act is working wonderfully.

My plea to the INTAF network is to monitor any attempts by Governments to minimize access to the Act. In these times, sometimes Governments refuse to be open with citizens and use the excuse of 'it is a matter of national security'.

2. **The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.**

This Act guarantees 100 days work to the poor.

Let us look at how this Act became law so that we can learn from the process leading to its success

1. The legislation was a response to drought and rural distress in Rajasthan.
2. Activists successfully rallied people in a 'right to food' campaign.
3. This motivated the opposition party to include employment guarantee in their election promises.
4. After the opposition won the election, the Ministry of Finance opposed the draft act.
5. Again the activists campaigned using media coverage to label the Ministry as being 'anti poor'.
6. There were compromises, but civil society's mix of political lobbying and public campaigning meant the law was eventually passed.

Thus Active Citizens are essential in making today's States work effectively to end poverty and inequality in ways that are sustainable.

Equality and redistribution are hardly mentioned in the Millennium Development Goals. Yet equality is good for growth and also makes that growth more effective at reducing poverty.

Conclusion

If you walk along the lower verandah of this lovely college, you will see on the wall the famous words of M.K. Gandhi:

'Become the change you want to see in the world.'

So if we are actively campaigning against inequality, we should also seek simplicity in our own lives.

Please be motivated by those words of Nelson Mandela and ask yourselves:

Can I imagine a more worthwhile cause than the fight against the scourges of

poverty, inequality, and the threat of environmental collapse?

This is the noble task of the INTAF network!

**AMARPURKASHI DECLARATION
“A Call for Action”**

1. We express our solidarity with those groups, organizations and individuals who are working to empower the rural poor in a positive, effective and accountable way.
2. We express our concern with the performance of democratic governments that have failed to deliver better outcomes for the rural poor. Nevertheless we believe that democracy is the best method of governance and that an effective, accountable democracy can truly empower the rural poor.
3. We feel that public/private partnerships work on the sole motivation of protecting their monetary capital and earning maximum profits. This goes against the basic interests of the rural poor.
4. We urge all world governments to adopt policies and programmes that make them more responsive, effective and accountable. We believe that the way forward is for us all to work for a common, sustainable future.
5. We ask our members to make every effort to motivate, mobilize and encourage the rural poor to make increasing use of their voting rights. At present, this is the only method available to them for bringing about changes in governments and their policies.
6. We fully appreciate the efforts of the Indian government in implementing the far-reaching and enabling “Right to Information” Act. We recommend that there should be no restrictions for access to this act and that its use and effectiveness be closely protected.
7. We also express our appreciation for the decision of the Indian government to declare the River Ganges a national heritage site. We hope that this will be translated into effective programmes of action to make all our rivers free of pollution and to keep our environment clean.
8. We support the call given by Dr Banwari Lal Sharma to all members and in particular to today’s youth to refrain from giving or taking dowries in marriage.
9. We urge the government of India to pass a “Right to Recall” act to withdraw elected people’s representatives and thus make the government more accountable.

**The International Co-ordinating
Committee for
2008-2011**

1. International Convenor
Jyoti Singh U.K.
2. International Co-convenor
Mukat Singh India
3. International Co-convenor
M.S. Acharya India
4. International Co-convenor
Ajit K. Singh India
5. International Co-convenor
Greg Parker Australia
6. National Convenor, India
Bharat Bhushan
7. National Co-convenor, India
Naresh Jha
8. National Convenor, China
Prof. Zhu Shaumin
9. National Convenor, Australia
Cynthia Wilkinson
10. National Co-convenor, Australia
Greg Parker
11. National Convenor, Bangladesh
Enamul Kabir
12. National Convenor, Trinidad/Tobago
Hari Dhanoo
13. National Convenor, Sweden
Swati Cremer
14. State Convenor, Bihar
Ajit K. Singh
15. State Co-convenor, Bihar
Dinesh K. Dev

16. State Convenor, Rajasthan
M.S.Acharya
17. State Co-convenor, Rajasthan
L.D. Singh
18. State Convenor, Maharashtra
Lakshman Waghchaware

Maharashtra, Inc

19. State Co-convenor, Maharashtra
Indumati Jagtap
20. State Convenor, Kerala
K. Sukumaran
21. State Co-convenor, Kerala
Samir Bawa
22. State Convenor, U.P.
Ram Murat Pandey
23. State Co-convenor, U.P.
Muneem Gautam
24. State Co-convenor, U.P.
Satish Naik

INDIA CHAPTER

National Committee, India
Convenors for Eastern Zone

Diwakar Bhatt Ajit K. Singh Santanu Jha
Naresh Jha Sunil K. Singh Vijay K Singh

Convenors for Western and Southern Zone

Lakshman Waghchaware (Maharashtra)
Samir Bawa (Kerala)

INTAF GENERAL ASSEMBLY REPORT 2005 – 2008

Since its inception at a seminar held in Amarpurkashi in 1988, INTAF – International Task Force for the Rural Poor – has aimed to identify and publicize positive examples of rural development and integrated education. It has also worked to get recognition among the global community for the suffering of the rural poor, and it has sought out those schemes and policies that are most beneficial to the rural poor.

To help it achieve these aims, in 1994 INTAF established a twice-yearly journal, the International Journal for Rural Studies (IJRS), which is sponsored by a UK-registered charity, Indian Volunteers for Community Service (IVCS). This journal gives researchers and grass-roots workers the opportunity to publicize their efforts to a wider audience and is a useful forum for the expression of ideas, concerns, successes and failures. In recent years, the journal has been available on the IVCS website and has consequently attracted articles from as far afield as Ghana, Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Swaziland and Saudi Arabia.

INTAF is not a registered body, has no regular income and relies completely on voluntary support. IVCS continues generously to donate office space and facilities in London while the Society for Agro Industrial Education in India always makes its campus available.

Under the INTAF constitution, an international conference is due to be held every three years. In July 2005, this was held in London where the topic of discussion was “Investing in the Rural Poor.” This year, the committee took into account the fact that most INTAF members are from India. For them, travel abroad is not a viable option. Thus it was decided to hold the seventh conference on the campus of the Gramodaya College and Research Institute,

situated in the village of Amarpurkashi in mid-western U.P., India.

This year’s topic takes a somewhat different approach to previous ones. Three key words – Poverty, Politics and Power – give participants ample material for thought. In this era of globalization, an understanding of the intricate links between these three is crucial to success in empowering the rural poor.

Development work is never easy and those involved in or supporting it are committed, focused, busy individuals. Consequently, keeping a network of such people operational is a difficult task. But it is often the hardest and most challenging things in life that are the most important and the most rewarding. INTAF has kept going against considerable odds and we hope that this year’s General Assembly will not only breathe new life into it but will formulate exciting and sustainable plans for the future.