

**“Investing in the Rural Poor”  
Sixth World Conference of  
INTAF  
International Task Force for the Rural Poor**

INTAF, the International Task Force for the Rural Poor, is a network of NGOs and individuals who are working for or supporting the rural poor. It holds an international conference every three years. The main aim of INTAF is to highlight policies and programmes that help the rural poor who have no resources and cannot represent themselves at any international forums. INTAF, a small organisation supported by IVCS, represents the poor on the international stage.

Indian Volunteers for Community Service (IVCS), a registered charity based in Harrow, hosted the Sixth INTAF World Conference at Friends' Meeting House in Pinner on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2005. The theme was “Investing in the Rural Poor.” Lord Navnit Dholakia, Gareth Thomas, M.P. for Harrow West, Meera Tiwari from the University of East London, Andrew Sumner from South Bank University and Mukat Singh, Director of the Amarpurkashi Project in India presented papers. Delegates from India, Bangladesh, Slovakia, Spain, Madagascar and the UK participated in the conference and in the general assembly of INTAF held at the IVCS office on the following day.

The Sixth World Conference was aimed at drawing the world's attention to the plight of the rural poor. It was inaugurated by Lord Dholakia OBE, DL who spoke at length on the need to bridge the unjust gap that exists between rich and poor.

Gareth Thomas, MP for Harrow West and parliamentary under-secretary in the Department for International Development (DFID), highlighted the importance of investing in services for the rural poor and stressed the need to address the causes of corruption and the necessity of establishing an anti-corruption body.

Andrew Sumner and Meera Tiwari discussed the Millennium Development Goals in detail, presented recent alarming statistics from India and explained the complexities of the rural poverty problem. Their upcoming research project will deal with ways of empowering the rural poor.

They pointed out that there is a lack of statistical data with which to measure degrees of corruption within a developing society.

Mukat Singh, international co-convenor of INTAF and project director of a grass-root NGO in rural India, explained that talk of the ‘common good’ and ‘ethical and moral discourses’ does not move the rich. Their key motivation remains investing for profit. The poor must therefore prove that they are a profitable investment. He quoted C K Prahlad, a management guru based in the United States, who concludes that ‘4 billion poor of the world could drive the next round of global trade and productivity and be an exciting source of innovation.’ Thus developing countries offer tremendous growth opportunities and the rural poor represent a significant latent purchasing power that is just waiting to be unlocked.

The conference continued on 3<sup>rd</sup> July with a plenary session in which a London declaration was adopted and recommendations discussed and passed.

The triennial General Assembly of INTAF which followed the plenary session unanimously re-elected Jyoti Singh as International Convenor for the next three years. An international co-ordinating committee was also elected, comprising convenors from Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Slovakia, Canada, India, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, China and the UK.

#### **INTAF DECLARATION**

We, the members of the Sixth World Conference of INTAF,

1. Express our solidarity with all those living in poverty worldwide, in particular the rural poor and rural migrants living in cities and shanty towns
2. Declare that a commission for Asia should be set up on similar lines as the Africa Commission

- because the majority of the world's poor live in Asia
3. Declare that independent bodies should be established to address corruption issues in all countries of the world and any existing and relevant institutions should be taken under the umbrella of these bodies
  4. Declare that governments and aid agencies should fully utilise the experience and knowledge of grass-root NGOs and support their action research, training, advocacy and pioneering work.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The majority of the rural poor of developing countries live in Asia. We recommend that a commission for Asia on the lines of the Africa Commission be set up to focus efforts on eradicating poverty.
2. With four billion people earning less than \$2 a day, the poor make a clear majority in the world and represent a huge potential of latent purchasing power. Both public and private investors must invest generously in these people, not only for sustainable growth but also for sustainable profits.
3. Voluntary development agencies based in villages and involved in the empowerment of poor people have unique experience and expertise in the real problems of the poor. We recommend that this knowledge be valued and made full use of, particularly in research and the training of government and donor agency staff.
4. Existing education systems in developing countries do not meet the needs of the poor. They create more problems than they solve. They domesticate and oppress students and inculcate in them a culture of silence. Such an education does not empower the poor to break the vicious circle of poverty. We recommend that independent international research institutions, supported by donors, be set up to collect the best educational ideas and practices worldwide and carry out action research to find workable and innovative solutions which will bring about healthy changes in existing education systems.
5. Innovative educational programmes such as the YES forum (Youth for Sustainability) and the Post-Graduate Diploma in Rural Resource Management should be supported and widely publicised. A new generation of students must be trained to solve the problems of rural families and cause a change in rural life while at the same time living a fuller life themselves. They should also learn to think logically and creatively and protest systematically against the failings of the government and other bodies. Such training needs to be actively promoted in all developing countries.
6. In some countries are manipulating the figures of children admitted to primary schools so that they comply with the Millennium Development Goals related to primary school enrolments and the gender gap. We recommend that these figures be compared with the dropout figures at the end of Year 5. We also recommend that the MDG should only be regarded as achieved on the basis of the lowest dropout rates and not on the basis of enrolments in the first and second years of primary school.
7. Village education committees, wherever they exist, have little power over the teachers' behaviour and performance. It is often the headmaster of the primary school who appoints them and keeps a fictitious record of meetings. We recommend that the parents of the children at school should be represented in the majority and that the committee should have the power to regulate and control failing teachers and reward good ones.
8. There is currently a lot of talk among governments and donor agencies about the plight of the poor but the actual policies and programmes they formulate

continue to have very little effect because the implementation is poorly and half-heartedly done. The policy-makers must therefore ensure that they include rigorous monitoring and continuous evaluation as an integral part of all plans.

9. Independent government-funded bodies need to be established to effectively track and report on the performance of government policies so that feedback on previous successes and failures can be incorporated at the planning stage of future schemes.
10. Governments and aid agencies tend to formulate plans and programmes that rarely break new ground. Instead, innovative and creative ideas should be actively encouraged and fully supported.
11. Raw materials, natural and physical resources are invariably found in rural areas but are largely unexplored. They offer tremendous opportunities for growth and development. Innovative partnerships and entrepreneurial opportunities should be created in rural areas, with due regard to safeguarding the interests of local people.
12. The poor and particularly the rural poor are the main victims of corruption. Some national governments have established anti-corruption agencies but these are insufficient and ineffective. An independent and autonomous commission for corruption and redressal must be set up and all existing anti-corruption agencies should work under its umbrella.
13. Research on poverty is often misleading because the huge gap in language, culture and lifestyles between the researchers and their clients means that the information they gather is frequently irrelevant. The commissioning agencies must ensure that researchers are those who live and work among the rural poor.
14. The media cover only the visible images of poverty and that too,

rarely. The causes and impact of poverty should be a regular feature; the poor of today are the readers and viewers of tomorrow.

15. Services and administrative centres for roads, transport, electricity, water, health care, security, education and banks are all concentrated in towns and cities, even though it is more expensive to run them there. We strongly recommend that these services be fairly dispersed and largely based in rural areas. This is absolutely essential for the empowerment of rural people.
16. Advances in telecommunication and IT are now beginning to reach poorer people in remote regions. We recommend that similar attention be focused on improvements to other areas of rural life.