



# IACD PRACTICE EXCHANGE INDIA 2016

BY JOHN STANSFIELD

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Founded at Unitec Institute of Technology  
Auckland, New Zealand, in 2015



**This paper may be cited as:**

Stanfield, J. (2016). IACD Practice Exchange India 2016, *Whanake: The Pacific Journal of Community Development*, 2(1), 49-53

**ISSN 2423-009X**

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CONFERENCE REPORT BY  
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Put 18 Community Development specialists on a train together in India and you have much more than a mobile party. You have the international professional development experience of a lifetime. The International Association for Community Development (IACD) held a practice exchange in India in March 2016. Participants came from India, Kenya, USA, Scotland, Wales and myself, deputy editor of this journal, from New Zealand. The trip began with a roundtable conference on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) held at the India International Centre, (IIC), in New Delhi where we met with senior NGO leaders, community development (CD) practitioners and were far too well fed. The roundtable explored the implications of the goals for CD practice in India. We had a stunning line up of senior leaders and some very bright and enthusiastic younger presenters who were


already well on the way to incorporating the goals in their organisation's practices. Leaders from the northern states told alarming tales of the impact of climate change, in particular the decline in snowfall that is so essential for downstream agriculture.

Following the roundtable the adventure began in earnest with another fabulous Indian vegetarian meal selected by our hosts. We then took the night train to Kathgodam, followed by a hair raising minibus ride to Ranikhet in the state of Uttarakhand where we stayed in the historic Chevron Rosemount hotel and continued to eat far too well beneath the majestic Himalayas. Our hosts Anita and Kelyan Paul founded and co-lead the [Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation](#).

Grassroots is an inspiring organisation with a real depth of community development experience and innovation. This includes the house of [Umang](#), its fair trade enterprise and store. A team of hand knitters produce hundreds of fab-



**Image 1:** Villagers in a small town in the state of Rajasthan are working with the Centre for Community Development to implement an irrigation scheme that aims to lessen the localized impacts of climate change. Image by John Stansfield



ulous warm garments. The foundation also has a very advanced understanding of mountain ecology informing both its [community forestry](#) and [sustainable agriculture](#) efforts to improve livelihoods, nutrition, food security and environmental protection. Of particular interest to me was their small scale bio-gas plants, which I had been involved with some 20 years ago in Nepal. These units – originally made insitu of clay bricks – convert cow dung to cooking and lighting gas as well as fertilizer for crops. Grassroots has been in China investigating new fibre-glass units which are much faster to produce. Despite being a more advanced technology the units are still able to be managed and maintained in the village and produce clean gas, saving trees and improving the health of users. The villagers in Ranikhet took us to their impressive water reticulation plant and explained that prior to building this, women would walk to the river at 4am to fetch water as this was the safest time to avoid pollutants from upstream villages. As with other rural villages we visited there were very few working age men, as most were living as migrant workers in far off cities like Delhi.




**Image 2:** A doctor associated with NFP organisation Aarohi, located in the Central Himalayan region of Uttarakhand, speaks to IACD conference members. Image by John Stansfield

The next stop in the village was a large army regimental base. It is home to the [Kumaon Regimental Community Centre](#) where war widows have a fascinating enterprise producing Dharchuli shawls and stunning hand spun hand loomed tweed coats and jackets. Before my eyes the wool was deftly loaded into the loom and in a flurry of arms the cloth began to take shape. I am now the proud owner of a very warm one-of-a-kind tweed jacket produced with stunning skill on an ancient wooden loom. Now if only I had of had a bigger suitcase I would have gotten the coat as well!

Other visits whilst in the highlands included to the health centre and school of the [Aarohi](#) grassroots non-profit organisation. This school is another inspiring group which Anita and Kelyan were instrumental in founding. The health centre and school of this organisation were very impressive and their achievement of a 99 per cent immunisation rate in remote communities would be the envy of any New Zealand minister of health.

Another night train back through Delhi and then one further train saw us in the pink city of Jaipur in the state of Rajasthan, where we were once again stunned by the architecture and vibrant colour of one of India's most popular destinations. In Jaipur we were guests of the impressive [Centre for Community Economics and Development](#), which had developed a very strategic approach to their work resting on true CD principles of 'Community Empowerment' and 'Advocacy'. They had a very clear understanding of the SDG's and were incorporating them into all their work. The walls of the conference room were lined with working plans that gave a situational analysis of the issues relating to the goals. These were linked to current work as well as identifying areas for improvement and potential collaboration. The centre is housed in a beautiful building and also incorporates the Social Work Academy for Research, Action, and Justice which hosts visiting scholars and conducts research for action. Our generous hosts facilitated visits to two of their projects. A bone jarring two hour bus ride over the Rajasthan plains took us to a rural village where farming intensification was made possible through irri-



gation and crop diversification. However it had become necessary to dig the wells for irrigation deeper and deeper. These villagers are at great risk from climate change and our hosts were quick to explain the urgency for action around the SDGs.

The skill share concluded with a morning of reflections on what we had learnt and commitments to work further on the goals, which will feature in the joint IACD CDS conference in Minnesota, and the planned IACD ACDA conference in Auckland, February 2017.

Overall, the trip left me with an appreciation of how much more we need to learn and do to incorporate the SDGs into CD. It also highlighted the tremendous potential of using these goals as a framework for collaboration across civil society and with the state and private sectors. Indian NGO's – like those elsewhere -are at different stages in their understanding and utilisation of this opportunity with the more advanced having much to teach us in our Pacific region about how to put the goals at the centre of Community Development practice. I hope we see some of these inspiring leaders at the February conference.

If you ever have the opportunity to participate in an IACD practice exchange grab it with both hands. I am sure my colleagues will agree, we shared a rich and refreshing experience that will inform our planning and shape our future practice.



### Author Bio

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