

Adventures in India

**International Permaculture Convergence - IPC 13
November/December 2017**

The Conference

Professor Jayashankar, Telangana State Agricultural University

The Conference was held at the agriculture university campus, which is by far the largest I have been on. Like a town in itself, in a sprawling city of over 10 million people. Most participants arrived on Friday, where countless happy reunions took place amongst the feverish final preparations.

On the Saturday, we were greeted by a lovely and moving opening with traditional music welcoming everyone into the main hall, followed by a ceremony bringing in local seeds that were added to a stunning seed mandala in the centre of the entrance hall. Inspiring presentations from Vandana Shiva and Robyn Francis set the scene, then we had a feast of presentations to choose from, in four different rooms.

Personally, I went to great talks about permaculture in clay and sandy locations in the Caribbean; providing hope and opportunity for vulnerable youth in Melbourne Australia; permaculture pioneers working with refugees and war-torn communities in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Kasakstan; a journey through living soil with one of India's leading agriculture lecturers; the Aranya Farm and their amazing journey and much more. Andy Goldring also presented about CoLab and sociocracy, including reasons and history that has led to CoLab, and why we urgently need to scale-up our work in response to multiple global crises and an epidemic of idiocracy.

We were also treated to some fantastic cultural performances - activist story-telling and singing, traditional dance, traditional martial arts and music, a special treat!

The Convergence

Polam Farm, Telangana

We arrived on mass to the farm on Monday afternoon, set against a large lake with cotton crops surrounding the other sides. The farm itself is only a few years into implementation of its permaculture design and was very impressive, especially regarding their water catchment and management strategies. Even more impressive was the convergence set up and the sheer size of it - everything had to be constructed for the convergence, from the food and dining area, the presentation tents, compost toilets and washrooms, information areas, traditional skills space, hangout zones and more.

A slow procession through registration was followed by setting up our accommodation and orientating ourselves. We then filtered through to lunch, knowing that whatever else may happen, at least we would have fabulously delicious traditional Indian food, with much of it grown organically onsite.

IPEN in the CoLab sessions

The three CoLab sessions were a great chance to get new people aware of and involved with IPEN. Go to <https://international.permaculture.org.uk/> for more about CoLab

The first session was a fun and interactive session where we presented the history leading to the formation of CoLab, created a world map of the participants to show the diversity and to ask each group about what they need and what they could give, a 'nuts and bolts' of how CoLab will work and the plan for the next two sessions. The session seemed to go well, and the feedback we received was very positive.

Session Two

After the 'warm up' Jennifer lead the grouping process, which involved participants creating different groups they would like to see happen, then the rest of the participants joining with the groups that resonated most for them.

These were the groups that were active:

- IPEN (International Permaculture Education Network)
- PIRN (Permaculture International Research Network)
- Food Forest International Research Network
- Climate action
- International Development (including Disaster Risk Reduction and Prevention)
- Lab Techs
- Media
- Decolonising Permaculture
- Creating permaculture economy
- Earth building and art (Initially separate groups that joined together)
- Refugees and Permaculture

The top four groups have actually carried on from IPC 12 London Next Big Step process.

Each group responded to these questions:

- What is going well?
- What are the gaps?
- What is the vision?

The IPEN group had 12 very active and enthusiastic participants. Rather than just tell everyone about IPEN's history and planned activities, I handed out our info sheet so that people could have a brief look, then we split into 2 groups and all had a chance to answer and discuss the questions.

It was fantastic to see the array of answers and opinions from people of many different nationalities and perspectives. We have documented all the responses for future input and as most of the ideas reflected the IPEN survey results it gives further validation to our chosen working groups.

Third Session

During the third session, a group that had been organically forming at the IPC outside of the CoLab sessions - Children and Youth - joined as part of the IPEN group. Now Children and Youth are a separate group that is continuing to develop. We also had more new faces for IPEN - people who couldn't make the first two or who had heard about what we were doing.

This time with the groups focused on what we would need from CoLab, what they could offer and what are the steps forward from here. However, since we had many new people we spent half the session going through introductions and getting initial input. This was still valuable and along with the responses to the set questions we gathered more valuable information.

In both sessions we also collected contact details from people who wanted to stay connected.

Within the CoLab framework we had good discussions with a number of other groups that we are/will be collaborating with - Children and Youth, International Development, Climate Action and PIRN.

IPEN session

The IPEN session was a great opportunity to explain about IPEN in more depth and to share the results of the survey that we had conducted during 2017.

We had what is sometimes referred to as the 'graveyard slot' - after lunch, and it was a particularly hot day as well. To add to the mix, it was a late lunch after the morning sessions had gone over time.

Even so, we still had good turnout and a very interactive crowd. Due to the late start and people filtering in over about 20mins, we held an informal initial discussion about what people are doing and how IPEN could help them to be more effective and expansive.

The presentation that followed was well received with people particularly interested in the survey outcomes and enjoying the mycelium metaphor that sums up IPEN, CoLab and permaculture so well.

We also conducted further group discussions about education priorities and have documented those results. From both the CoLab group sessions and the IPEN session we collected the responses from participants before going in-depth about IPEN's activities or discussing the survey results. This was done deliberately to reduce bias and collect a broader range of information. Interestingly, the data collected from the IPC reflected the survey results, and therefore further clarifies IPEN's priorities and projects for 2018 and beyond.

After all the sessions, we now have another 25 people keen to be part of IPEN projects, networking and work. We are very happy with that result, as well as being able to share the continued progress of IPEN and IPEN's part in CoLab.

Summary

From both IPEN and CoLab's perspective IPC 13 was a great success and extremely beneficial to have the time and space to run the sessions. A huge thanks to the entire Aranya Farm organising team for giving us the opportunities to continue this important work.

As it is with all permaculture gatherings, so much of the discussions and progress that took place occurred not during the sessions but outside of them - at mealtimes and informally during breaks - and I know I wasn't the only one engaged in many a fruitful conversation!

Regarding the entire IPC - what a fantastic event! A great representation from India and over 60 countries, so much shared and learned, and another important building block for permaculture globally! And then there was the food!!!

On a practical finishing note - all that good permie-manure collected in the compost toilets will grow some amazing fruit trees. It is also a great metaphor for the IPC itself. I look forward to seeing them grow and harvesting many fruits in the future!