

Community Colleges as an Alternative System of Education



INTERVIEW WITH FR. XAVIER ALPHONSE, S. J.

Fr. Xavier Alphonse, S.J., served as Principal of Loyola college during 92-95 and is currently the Director for ICRDCE which has pioneered the formation of Community Colleges initiating the implementation of an alternative system of education for the poor and downtrodden from 1995. Since then he has

been involved in the preparation, establishment, monitoring and evaluation of 214 Community Colleges in 20 States of India. Besides training well over 1200 teachers, he has conducted 48 Workshops involving 950 NGOs, 2179 participants and has also organised 6 important National Consultations and 41 Regional Consultations among Community Colleges. In addition to the basic curriculum material he had prepared and supplied to all the Community Colleges, Fr. Xavier has published 21 books and 35 articles in the leading educational journals of India and abroad on the concept and implementation of the system. He was appointed as

Chairman of National Committee on Community Colleges to discuss the concepts and methodology for establishment and functioning of Community Colleges, was appointed by UGC in January 2007 and served as a member of various UGC committees. Considered as an authority on College Autonomy in India, he was appointed as member of UGC and has led many teams to inspect Deemed to be Universities and Colleges all over the country. In recognition of all his achievements and contributions, Dr. Xavier Alphonse has been conferred with thirteen prestigious awards. ■

What are community colleges?

It's an alternative system of education. Why do I call it so? It gives a second chance to those who've dropped out of school. It provides opportunity for those who otherwise would have been excluded. It is empowerment through skills development for the urban, rural and tribal poor. Basically the motto reads as "Including the Excluded, Giving the Best to the Least." In India, exclusion takes place on account of two reasons. One is social exclusion on the basis of caste. Most people belonging to the lower caste do not have opportunity for higher education, skills training or availing decent jobs. Second is economic exclusion, on account of poverty, because of which there's no upward mobility.

We do have a second motto called "Giving the Best to the Least." For example, though India may rank 7th in terms of software production in the Information Technology revolution, more than 70 per cent of people in India are excluded from this revolution. So, part of our response is to give computer training to the least of these left

outside. To summarise it, community colleges give access. Access is given by removing blockades such as minimum qualification and age bar. Secondly, what is noteworthy is the flexibility of the curriculum which is designed for the varying aptitude of the students and their ability to grasp and assimilate information. They may be slow or fast learners and categorized as urban or rural learners. Thirdly, if we have to reach out to the poor it has to be at an affordable cost. The course amounts to Rs. 5,000 for the annual training. Because it is for the poor, quality in training should not be compromised. Finally, the process aims towards providing life and job placement. Essentially, it is education for livelihood.

In the past, the national discourse on education was for knowledge but today it is education for livelihood.

How did the concept originate and establish itself in India?

Community colleges are popular in several Western countries though they may be called by different names. USA had

introduced the idea 100 years ago especially for those who came back from war, who were conscripted for military services and training. When they returned, they couldn't fit into schools and colleges as many had not completed school nor enter into colleges for lack of necessary qualifications. It was President Truman who started Land Grant Colleges which later went on to be called as community colleges.

The scope was enlarged to include all those who could not enter into higher education but who could do so eventually by going through the community colleges as a bridge course. There are at least 1,400 community colleges spread across all the States in the U.S. They are supported one-third by the Federal government grant, one-third by the County and the other one-third by the tuition fees. Universities like Harvard, Yale or Berkeley may charge around 18,000 to 30,000 dollars a year, but for community college students the fees will be as low as 1,100 dollars. The training period is for two years with 66 credits which will be accepted by formal and conventional Universities. They enter into higher education. Some colleges have around 40,000 students in multiple shifts allowing students to work and at the same time, do the training. Hispanics, African-Americans and other communities who want to improve their quality of life choose community colleges. The government is supportive and the movement is big.

What got you interested in the concept and practice of community colleges ?

I never knew the concept till 1995. Back then I served as the Principal for Loyola College. When we talk about the education scenario in India, we need to address four issues primarily. One is exclusion elimination. Around 160 million children go to standard one, eventually around 153 million drop out and only 7 million make it to higher education. Though today we have 343 Universities and 18,720 colleges in the country. Our enrollment has not even touched 10 per cent. So, what happens to the millions who get excluded in the process? Do they have any alternative? Community Colleges is that alternative system. Secondly, even in the formal colleges which offer engineering, medical, architecture, pharmacy or other professional courses and conventional colleges which with its arts and sciences courses, there is a big mismatch between education and employment. The present statistics point out that nearly 40 million people are unemployed, even after registering themselves in the employment exchanges. These are people who've completed their formal education but remain unemployed because they do not have skills which



Fr. Xavier leading a workshop on Community College at Chandigarh, Haryana

industries are looking for. With the changing scenario in the industry and job markets, these people do not have the skills that could keep pace with the growing demands in the employment market.

The third problem is capability poverty in India. When you consider 229 million people below the poverty line we have nearly 554 million people without skills in our country.

It's such a huge wastage of human resources. We are confronted with 75 per cent of the rural poor. The fourth issue is the number of school dropouts. Among the dropouts, nearly 50 per cent of them drop out from the fifth standard and 30 per cent drop out from eight standard and the other 20 per cent drop out completely out of standard tenth. Even in Tamil Nadu, nearly 83 percent don't enter colleges after their 12th standard.

In the past, the national discourse on education was for knowledge but today it is education for livelihood.

After my tenure as Principal of Loyola College, I went to the US for a year to study the community college system, and interacted with the students, staff, industrial partners, the governing boards. I found the system to be excellent which offered huge opportunities for the poor. It then dawned on me to introduce the system in India.

How do you categorize your target groups?

We have identified four target groups – tenth failed, tenth passed, twelfth failed and twelfth passed. We offer them a certificate programme in a particular skill like electrical, carpentry, masons, plumbing etc. For the tenth passed, twelfth failed and passed, we give a diploma. The certificate is for 22 weeks whereas the diploma is for 54 weeks. The courses offered are on various trades that are wanted in the local area.



Fr. Xavier with the Members and Officials of UGC, deliberating on recognition to Community College

What are some prerequisites for the success of community college?

In order to start a community college, the most important step is the need analysis of employment and self employment opportunities in the local area. This is the backbone. Only then can the courses be fixed and training be offered.

A vital aspect in the community colleges is the industry – institution linkages. Community colleges have around 200 industrial partners from hospitals, mechanic workshops, hotels, DTP centres, computer hardware and several other industry trades.

For this, a need analysis is so vital without which you cannot address the employment needs in the local area. In the final analysis one cannot orient the training programmes toward those needs.

In the last 13 years, there are now around 220 community colleges. With the primary aim of job placement, these colleges have trained around 60,000 students with 90 per cent employment placement. The rest have pursued higher education.

How are community colleges different from vocational training institutes?

Where we differ from the ITIs, Polytechnics and other vocational training institutes is that we've got clear-cut differences in our training methodology. There are four parts in our training modules. The first part is what we call Life Skills which is further divided into five segments. The first one is Life-Coping Skills, where personal transformation takes place. Areas like self respect, positive thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, stress management and time management are handled. Modules dealing with coping with fear, loneliness, sexuality, HIV-AIDS, substance abuse, anger, including interview skills

and presentation skills are also taught. These are covered in seven weeks time.

Apart from this we cover a course on Communication skills. We have created uniquely designed textbooks to deal with different skills like Spoken English, Computer hardware. We are now preparing materials on entrepreneurship. We must not only raise skilled job seekers but job creators and thereby promote self employment.

The 22 weeks really help the student who has gone through social, economical, psychological disadvantages or is suffering from deep seated inferiority complex or a sense of failure, disappointment and disillusionment. In fact, after the life skills programme, the student is able to channelize all their disadvantages into advantages and become self motivated to achieve in life. Whereas as vocational training institutes do not touch this personal dimension in people. We believe that the person has to be transformed before we impart skills. Training skills without the necessary change in mindset and attitude will not produce well rounded human beings.

So in the community college systems we have three components – Attitude, Skills and Knowledge. Attitudinal formation is critical, secondly is the theoretical aspect of the work skills and thirdly the hands on experience in terms of internship. A nursing assistant must spend two months in a hospital. Similarly, a mechanic must work two months in a mechanic workshop.

We have the onsite supervisor to help the students in the internship. Since there are good tie ups with the industry, our college teachers are able to monitor and assist the students, after which the students come back for evaluation and prepare themselves for employment. Evaluation is done by the life skills teacher, work skills teacher and

onsite supervisor and the individual student. If the student is not confident and needs further training, we provide them this facility with the sole aim that the student will find job placement. Vocational institutes don't provide this level of training.

What is the role of the industry in community colleges?

The active and dynamic ongoing relationship with the industry is of immense advantage. In several community colleges across India, many industry representatives themselves volunteer to teach and they take the students for onsite training. Because it provides a win-win situation for the industry, the community colleges and the poor who

As someone pointed out the community colleges are a democratic response to globalization. Globalization is inevitable and our community colleges can equip the poor with the required skills to face it.

need employment. Industries feel socially responsible in such collaboration. They don't have to train people afresh since we do that. Several students in the rural community colleges display levels of talent and skills, so much so they are inducted during the internship process itself.

They help community colleges in primary five areas. They help in the development of the curriculum. The industry requirement is spelt out by them. Secondly, they serve as members of the advisory boards in several community colleges. Thirdly, they come to teach as regular or part-time guest lecturers. Then, as I said, they take our students for internship and finally they place them in jobs. Many colleges have Memorandum of Understanding with the industries. For example, the Madurai Community College has an MOU with SUSI Autos, which services around 450 vehicles a month. The students from the college are absorbed in their services. In the recent past, we had organized a conference of around 200 delegates from the community colleges across India and around 100 delegates representing several industries. These industry delegates presented their requirements and interacted with colleges.

You serve as the Director for Indian Centre for Research and Development of Community Education (ICRDCE). What are its functions?

Our job is to facilitate and coordinate with over 200

community colleges. We identify the colleges. Usually, church congregations, dioceses and NGOs apply in our institute. If one is desirous of starting a community college, we first study the organization and its capabilities. We then help them to do the Need Analysis and the feasibility study. We recruit teachers and train them. We have conducted around 21 training programmes for 2000 teachers across India. It's critical to teach them curriculum on the changing and emerging needs in the market. ICRDCE involves in curriculum designing and publishes various text books and other publications. We also do the evaluation of the community colleges, the students and staff.



National leaders of Papua New Guinea consulting with Fr. Xavier

What factors led to its formation?

Madras Community College in Chennai was the first community college in India. Many didn't understand the concept initially. After introducing the one year diploma programmes, the momentum picked up really well. When the movement grew to around hundred institutions or so, there was a great need for co-ordinating and facilitating in terms of establishing and monitoring, orientation, curriculum development, resource preparation, evaluation etc. Thus ICRDCE was created as a co-ordinating agency and has played a vital role since its inception in the creation and monitoring of colleges, establishing linkages with industries, providing job placement. There is also an ongoing research done in the institute, through its documentation centre which collects relevant information from colleges. From 1993 we have documented the evolution of the colleges in terms of newspaper clippings, video tapes, details of each college with its history and growth. So the Institute was created out of a felt need among community colleges.

The ICRDCE's has crossed several milestones. What are its greatest achievements?

An important work that we do is to lobby with the State and the Central Governments for recognition and accreditation. We have succeeded with the TN government as they have passed a GO which states that community colleges have

been recognized as centres for job training under TN Open University. The Indian Centre was instrumental in the composition and promulgation of the Tamil Nadu Government Order (G.O.) on community colleges. 118 colleges are under the TN Open University. The Chief Minister has apportioned Rs. 1 crore in the budget from which Rs. 1000 will be given to each student. Though the amount is small, the recognition is historic for the movement.

But where we've actually succeeded in implementing the scheme is the role played by service minded NGOs and Christian organizations as many of them have the vision/mission and the infrastructure to implement the schemes. However, we are secular in our approach in that we offer our services to anyone wanting to serve humanity. We have offered our services to Hindu, Muslim and Sikh organizations. The movement is now a national phenomenon.

Initially, we were called Madras Centre but after growing to a national level movement in 20 States in India, we changed our name to Indian Centre. But now we've expanded into the international arena with community colleges established in Papua New Guinea and other parts of Africa. We're expecting the President of Papua New Guinea to arrive here with around 53 teachers. When that takes place, we'll be called the International Centre. There are invitations from Thailand and Indonesia as well. The economic deprivation is similar in these places. As someone pointed out the community colleges are a democratic response to globalization. Globalization is inevitable and our community colleges can equip the poor with the required skills to face it.

How is the Institute sustained?

It's run by the Jesuits, founded by the Madurai Jesuit Province. After purchasing a small place in Chennai, a Catholic agency from Amsterdam took over and has been helping me so far. We are creating a sustainability fund and it's growing. We also charge a small amount from colleges

for our training programmes.

Community colleges haven't been recognized yet in the mainstream. What are some roadblocks in the way?

In the past the Government's priority has always been on primary, secondary and higher education. The Government never thought about or factored in the reality of drop outs in the previous 10 plans. But with the growing awareness of the community college model and its potential to help the poor, it is now finding its place in the 11th Plan. As a member in the UGC and chairman of the National Committee, we've been lobbying for the Central Government to recognize our system. The Knowledge Commission has indicated that at least 210 colleges need to be formed. Union Grants Commission has shown interest.

We follow a democratic process in our dealings with the government and others. We have, at least once in six months a meeting with all the community colleges. Decisions on directions are taken collectively through consultations and workshops. For example, we had dialogued with the colleges and only then

joined the Tamil Nadu Open University. We are careful that our original spirit and ethos of community colleges and its vision for the poor are not lost in unwise decisions. There are risks of such a movement like ours getting in the wrong direction with the wrong people who'd want to commercialize on the idea.

How do you see churches and mission organizations realizing the potential of community colleges and starting them?

I think they'll play a significant role. If you look at history, it was the missionaries who bought the primary school to villages and started colleges. We need to relook at how our churches and missions need to get involved in nation-building today.



Fr. Xavier participating at the World Congress and International Association of Colleges, New York

We need to relook at how our churches and missions need to get involved in nation building today.

INTER-MISSION INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLEGES - A Case Study



With over 300 million people below the poverty line, this has a direct bearing on the education scenario in India. 154 million out of the 160 million who go to the first standard drop out eventually. And given the education system, there is a huge mismatch between education and employment. Added to this is the gnawing statistics of unemployment, underemployment and unemployability. If the statistics given by the National Information Centre are any indications to go by, then what becomes obvious is the huge percentage of dropouts at the high school and higher secondary school stages. This calls for an alternative system of education like the community colleges.

B. Bhavani is a case in point. She dropped out of tenth standard owing to severe conditions at home and financial constrain. Her father, addicted to alcoholic was run down by a truck and died on the spot. Being the only breadwinner in the family, her mother could earn a pittance of Rs. 1000, which was way below the subsistence level. It was difficult to make ends meet. With all hopes crushed and her confidence at its lowest ebb, Bhavani was told about a community college that would be able to train her and equip her with the skills to enter the job market. She entered IID Community College, (formerly Tabitha Community College) and joined the Diploma in Health Assistant (DHA) course. Heavily bogged down by a deep sense of inferiority and inadequacy, she thought she couldn't make it. But the life coping skills and other skills training modules taught along with the high quality training in nursing eventually prepared her to face up to the future. Bhavani is a confident nurse now and a totally transformed one at that. Multiply this into thousands, that's the scenario of hope which community colleges can offer.

Jochen Tewes, a mechanical engineer from Germany came to India in 1973 with the burden for the economically under privileged in India. Tewes observed that the children in

the hundreds of orphanages supported by Inter-mission and other India partners, were bereft of skills that are required in the job market. A strategy was in order. With like-minded friends he started Inter-Mission Industrial Development Association (IIDA) in 1974.

Inter-Mission Industrial Development Association (IIDA) entered the scene with the focused vision to give relief and rehabilitation to the people below the poverty line, much before any missions in India thought about dealing with the systemic problem of unemployment in India. IIDA is a charitable Social Service Organization functioning with the mission which is "motivated by the love of Christ to provide value based holistic training and rehabilitation to orphans, poor youth, poor women, the unemployed and the underprivileged". IIDA has completed 34 years of illustrious mission work.

Today IID runs 4 Industrial Training Schools, 7 Community Colleges and few daycare and health care projects for the benefit of its target groups. Unemployment is the root cause of many problems prevalent in India. It developed also because of an imbalance between education and employment. Through the community college system the aim was to provide work and life coping education, enabling the disadvantaged to find employment.

The Inter-Mission Micro Enterprise Development (IMED) Programme was started in the year 1996 to help women by micro-loans to start their businesses and by programmes that help them save money. IMED has been a successful venture by IIDA and has benefitted 26,000 women. IMED turned autonomous and registered as a company, Growing Opportunity International.

"As the IMED work expanded, the women who were being helped brought to the light the problems that their children were facing. The survey study revealed that most of these women's children were female, and had stopped going to



Students of computer diploma course

school for various reasons,” says M.R. Christopher, Chief Operating Officer, IID Association.

IID decided to set up non-residential training centres for young people, particularly girls, to help them learn skills, to find jobs, and to show them that they too could earn money and help support their family. In 2003, the first ‘Tabitha Community College’ was started for girls in the centre of Chennai city. Other Community Colleges followed in other parts of Chennai both for boys and girls. Through the tsunami disaster in December 2004 the need in the coastal towns of Karaikal and Mahabalipuram challenged IID to start 2 Community Colleges in the year 2005. The young women and men learn a variety of subjects such as: Computer Applications, Typewriting, Shorthand, Accountancy, Fashion Design, Health Assistants, Medical Lab Technicians, Electricians. and a variety of other job oriented courses. Not only work skills were taught, but also subjects such as Life coping skills, Communication and Interpersonal skills. Before they complete their one-year training, the students are sent to companies and industries for a one-month internship period.

The IID community colleges have so far trained close to 3000 students with around 90 per cent job placement. The remaining have opted for higher education. Surya, a student who passed out from IID is now well placed in a company, MLS. “My current role is as manager for the Corporate Business Services. I also provide consultation for the existing Business Centres in India on how to manage their Infrastructure. I head the Business Centres Projects in India.” After completing her 10th Standard, Surya couldn’t continue her studies due to personal problems. She adds: “I had completed only 10th Standard and I could not pursue a degree in any of the regular colleges, which was one of the reasons why I joined IID. IID Community College was a great opportunity which changed my life completely and I really had a goal in life. They have also led me close to our

Lord Jesus.”

IID serves all communities without discrimination of caste, gender or religion while at the same time laying much emphasis on maintaining a Christian atmosphere of love and service to the poor. All the members of the General Body and other staff are seasoned Christian leaders and workers. IID is a member of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (New Delhi), Skills for Progress (Bangalore), Inter-Mission Network (Hanover, Germany) and Opportunity International (Chicago).

With a strong foundation on Christian discipleship, students have gained significantly from the devotions and biblical insights interwoven with the module of the Life Coping Skills and core subjects. “The teachers have been encouraging in many ways and especially the time when I had depression and was facing tough times in my life. They really encouraged, guided me on specific problems and how to go about it and how to resolve it. They were concerned and cared for me personally,” adds Surya. It is this level of holistic approach given to the body, mind and soul that’s unique about the methodology of IID Community College.

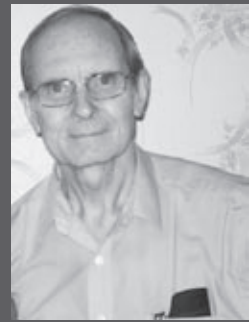
Students in the Community College are mostly poor and supported by local sponsors. Christine Kirubala is the vice-principal of the IID community colleges. “The students who come here are very poor and most of them are dropouts from Government schools. Several of them have problems coping with anger, depression, self esteem. The Life Coping Skills module is truly transformative as it helps them to come to terms with who they are,” says Kirubala.

The close and active linkage between industry and community college is an important factor in the success of community colleges. On completion of the courses, as per the directions of Tamilnadu Open University, the students are sent to organizations for Internship, where most of them are absorbed after their exams, for employment. Similarly, the Industrial Schools offer job oriented Certificate courses recognized by the Department of Employment and Training, Government of Tamilnadu and National Council for Vocational Training. After the completion of courses, students are absorbed in various Industries.

The courses offered by IID follow credit based semester pattern. “Much effort has been taken to make the course standardized, innovative and academically oriented. We follow a 50-50% external and internal assessment. The course content has always been upgraded to the quality level that’s best suited for our students,” says Dr. Leela, IID’s Academic Dean. Dr. Leela is an experienced veteran who had put in decades of service in Women’s Christian College as HOD, Chemistry and Vice Principal. She states:

Transformational Community College

Jochen Tewes - Founder, President IID Association



What motivated you to start IID?

IID was originally started as a ministry to give vocational training to the underprivileged and orphans. When I first came to India in 1970 there were no public or private opportunities for such youth to get onto their own feet. In the same time the character-building of these young people was on my heart and we always combined the practical and personal aspects in our training.

What is the purpose and aim of the community college system? What are its advantages?

When Micro Enterprise Development for slum women groups was introduced in IID we felt the need of taking care of youth from the slums, as well. Only then we looked for other training and motivation facilities besides the industrial schools and found it in the Community College education system. We contacted Fr. Dr. Xavier Alphonse and he helped us to start this system within IID. The first Community College was started for girls in a rented office space in the year 2002 in Vadapalani, Chennai, and it took off very well.

How would you assess the impact of IID's community colleges?

The impact is very measurable and significant on the lives of thousands of students in our CCs. They receive working skills that are job-oriented and soft skills such as English, life coping skills and social/moral inculcation

How do the community colleges sustain itself financially

We charge a minimum fee from the students and raise funds for the rest by way of income generation projects and donors for individual students. Rs. 12000 covers the full training of a student for a year and enables the transformation of a student's life.

Is IID partnering with other agencies to promote the concept of community colleges? How can the concept be promoted?

We work together with other evangelical institutions and hope that many will join starting new colleges all over India. We are in the process of forming an alliance for those who are interested, and it looks that many are prepared to join the alliance. Those of them who wish to have know-how and assistance enroll in a franchise arrangement with us against a small fee that is adjusted to the size of the college. At present there are already three franchises that are running CCs and 4 more that have registered for the next academic year. Others are in the process of joining. We help them join the affiliating bodies such as ICRDCE and TNOU and BSS.

What are your future plans?

Our aim is the upgrading of our community colleges to a standard that enables the students "vertical mobility", i.e. the students will be able to use our credits for further study they want to do in Universities. This means an improvement in the quality of our training. We also aim at reaching out to all the States in India and run our own CCs or network with others in this field.

We are motivated by the love of Christ to show concern for the poor and want the CCs to be transformational in every aspect. CCs are very flexible and we wish to introduce short term classes, night classes, correspondence courses and seminars. Being involved in Micro Enterprise Development, we want to promote MED also through specialized courses for the clients as well as for leaders or organisations and MED staff. ■

"Our students are exposed to refresher courses, basic computer awareness in all our courses, Spoken English, sports and co-curricular activities so that the whole person—the mind, body and soul – is nurtured." IID Community Colleges offers its own certificates to the students in addition to the certificates issued by Tamil Nadu Open University. The Students also have the added advantage of appearing twice for the examinations, - IID's semester exams and the annual exams conducted by TNOU. The parallel methodology adequately prepares the student to

develop holistically.

A good measure of IID College's impact is the support and recognition given by high profile leaders in society. "We organized the first Community College Graduation function in Chennai last year with around 700 of our students graduating. Dr. K. Ponmudi, Honourable Minister for Higher Education, Government of Tamilnadu, was the Chief Guest of the function and it was attended by dignitaries from educational, social, diplomatic and spiritual fields," recounts Christopher. Fr. Xavier Alphonse, the key leader

of the community college movement is all praise for IID's work among Community Colleges. He is often consulted by IID on matters related to the movement.

With IID having established its credibility, other agencies have shown keen interest to partner with IID as its franchisee. Prasanna Kumari Community College is one such church agency which is supported by the Women's Centre of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological Seminary. "We wanted to use the community college concept modeled by IID to continue the work done by the late Dr. Prasanna Kumari, who was known for her work in empowering women," says Dr. Samuel Meshach.

Mission organizations are not far behind in embracing the concept. An organization such as Friends Missionary Prayer Band with its huge network among mission stations and communities finds the community college format of strategic worth. "Our immediate plan is to start a Community college in Barharwa, Jharkhand for believers' children from the 'Malto' and 'Santal' congregations. The development of infrastructure is on the way. We hope to start it in July 2009. We do plan to start two more - one in Chennai and another in Nagercoil to help believers' children in Tamilnadu mission fields", says M. Jaisingh Sugumaran, Secretary - HQs. & Church Mission Relation & Partnership, FMPB. He further states: "Many of our teenagers or young adults in the mission fields, who are poor, will be undergoing training in our Community College under our missionaries and we intend to use our own qualified missionaries as Faculty wherever possible and it gives us the chance to help in their spiritual life also. When these candidates come up in their career, they will be a blessing in the growing churches."

Other Christian organizations such as Youth With A Mission, World Vision and even local government bodies, like Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, which have established strong networks among hundreds of local communities refer prospective students to IID.

Besides missions and churches, a diplomatic body such as the German Consulate has even sponsored a Lab Model equipment worth Rs. 3 Lakhs towards the nursing students at IID. There are several other influential stakeholders who would want to partner with IID. "We're approaching corporate bodies such as TCS, State Bank of India and TCS for student course sponsorship. With several

such organizations having set apart corporate social responsibility funds, we have been given assurances of future support," points out Christopher.

"We are still awaiting the final nod of the Central Government in terms of recognizing the role of community colleges in India. The biggest beneficiary will be the students," says Christopher. He laments that the students have had to bear the brunt as they cannot avail the government's subsidized students bus pass or register themselves in the employment exchange. "And of course, community colleges will stand to benefit immensely as the Central recognition will help colleges such as ours to receive Government aid. Much of the credit needs to be given to Fr. Xavier for lobbying our case," he observes. The exemplary work done by over 200 Community Colleges in India has made the officials at the Centre to sit up and take notice. These colleges have given the Government a viable option to strategically plug some of the loopholes in the educational system in the country.



IID Community College Graduation Ceremony

Inter-mission Industrial Development Association has several volunteers offering their services free of charge. Anugraha is a final year B.Com student at Women's Christian College. Prior to her volunteering for IID, she had heard about their work among the poor in imparting training in skills development. "I share with the students what I know and it's gratifying to see them learn and transform over a

period of time. However, I learn from the students as much as I teach them," says Anugraha, who now teaches Spoken English in one of IID's community colleges.

"When I interact with the students who are underprivileged, poor and come from broken families, I am convicted of how comfortably I've lived my life in the midst of so much deprivation and pain," says a deeply impacted Anugraha.

IID is now gearing itself to share its experiences by providing formal linkages with mission and church organizations. Plans are on the anvil to form the Alliance for Community Education and Transformation (ACET) and to register it as a Society. An ad hoc committee with seven members has already been formed with objectives laid down. The Alliance will serve as a nodal body to help like-minded mission agencies for networking, consulting, resource sharing and strategic planning.

Bennet Emmanuel

CM