

Talking about poverty in Rajendrapur

Researchers from the School of Environment and Development, led by the Brooks World Poverty Institute (BWPI), have been in Bangladesh to launch an annual 'conversation' event with those living in extreme poverty.

The 'Rajendrapur Conversation', named after the area of Dhaka where it was held, was carried out by the University, in partnership with one of the world's largest NGOs, BRAC.

As part of the project those living in the area – which is one of the poorest in the world – were asked how adaptation of their homes and livelihoods could help them withstand the effects of climate change.

BWPI was accompanied on the trip by experts from Eco Cities, based at the Manchester Architecture Research Centre, to help draw up an action plan and a series of pilot projects – which, if successful, could be scaled up across urban Bangladesh through donor aid.

There are plans to repeat the 'Conversation' event in different countries each year. And the wider aim of the initiative is to launch a strategic global partnership between those living in poverty and world-class research to help eradicate poverty.

Meanwhile, in Manchester, BWPI and WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment, Globalising and Organising) have held a panel discussion on 'New Perspectives on Informality'.

Informal workers – including self-employed, street vendors, domestic employees and day labourers –



often work long hours, in hazardous conditions and for low pay. They constitute the majority of the labour force in developing countries.

The event, at the University, looked at the role of urban planning policies in reducing social exclusion against informal workers, trade policy, migration, and social protection, as well as the need to incorporate informality into international policy.

Sniff of success for scientist

A scientist who developed a new and fast method for detecting potentially harmful airborne chemicals has scooped the UMIP Technology Commercialisation Award for Engineering and Physical Sciences.

Professor Krishna Persaud, from the School of Chemical Engineering and Analytical Sciences, established MultiSensor Systems Limited (MSS) in 2007, to commercialise technology capable of sensing volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

The MSS monitoring system is designed for use in industrial and environmental situations. It is the culmination of 20 years of research in the field of the sense of smell, in which Professor Persaud is a leading authority. And it has been successfully commercialised with assistance from UMIP.

Meanwhile MTI, in collaboration with UMIP, have hosted a Dragons' Den style event to help turn ideas and inventions into successful commercial ventures.

More than 140 budding entrepreneurs, including professors and graduate students, attended the event, which was intended to show the audience that a spin-out company can be an achievable and attractive option for researchers.

Sharon O'Kane, co-founder and CSO at Renovo; Alex Hoye, CEO Latitude Group; Steve Purdham, CEO We7; and Paul Strzelecki, partner at Yorkville Advisors all offered insights based on their own entrepreneurial experiences.



Research shows performance can bring museums to life

Actors can be used to unlock the 'unheard' stories hidden behind the artefacts in museums, according to research from the School of Arts, Histories and Cultures.

The Performance, Learning and Heritage (PLH) research project – led by Professor Tony Jackson – analysed the use and long-term impact of drama at four sites, including the Manchester Museum (pictured), over three-and-a-half years.

The team of academics looked at the varied uses of drama as a medium of learning and interpretation in museums and historic sites.

They found that it had the power to reveal and provoke active engagement with the hidden stories and people behind the exhibits on show.

But they also found that the success of the projects depended on the reaction of visitors, how well they

were prepared and particularly whether they were willing to make the transition from 'visitor' to 'audience'.

The research findings have been published in a report, with an accompanying DVD. Professor Jackson says they will have implications for the future professional practice of educational theatre in museums.

Professor Jackson said: "The findings from the research are many, and they raise some important questions about the impact of drama in museum settings upon a range of audiences

"At its best, museum performance has value and long-term impact. It enhances the visitor's appreciation and critical understanding of the subject in question and can engender empathy with other life experiences from history.

"But the research also shows that the quality of a visitor's experience is governed by a complex array of factors, personal, cultural, institutional.

"It is in the detailed understanding of the transitions and oscillations that take place between 'visitor', 'audience', 'participant' and 'learner', where the research has been most productive."

Details of how to order the report and DVD can be found on the PLH website below.