

# INAUGURAL ADDRESS\*

BY

SHRI M. RAMAKRISHNAYYA

*Mr. President, Members of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics, Ladies and Gentlemen :*

I deem it a privilege and honour to be invited to inaugurate the 30th Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics. I understand this is the second time that the Society is meeting in Orissa, the first occasion being December, 1965 in Cuttack. When I accepted the invitation, I thought I could, as Adviser to Governor of Orissa, extend to you a warm welcome to the State and convey the Government's good wishes. Since then, a popular Government has taken office and I have ceased to be the Adviser. However, I am sure the new Government of Orissa will not grudge me the privilege of speaking on their behalf and conveying their welcome and best wishes.

2. I have heard it said that Indian Agricultural Statisticians are among the best in the World but the same cannot be said about the Indian Agricultural Statistics. This means that our theories, methodologies and concepts are good but some constraints come in the way of their application in the field. Your Society has no doubt done commendable work over the years in identifying these constraints and finding ways and means of removing them and improving the quality of our statistics. But in this as in other scientific endeavours, the more we advance the more is revealed what is to be achieved.

3. The country has launched upon a comprehensive programme for the removal of poverty which is popularly known as the 20-Point Economic Programme. Be it land reforms, house sites for the landless, abolition of bonded labour or higher agricultural production, agricultural statisticians have an important role to play. Gone are the days when it was fashionable to debate whether a scientist should only engage himself in the task of finding truth and stating facts and no more, or he should also suggest remedies to the problems

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thrown up by the data. Perhaps it was felt that respectability lies in merely stating facts without value judgements. Happily, however, no body refers to such a controversy now-a-days. To a rational mind facts are eloquent and a statement of fact is often suggestive of what should be. It is agreed that the value of any study, investigation or research is ultimately determined by the degree of its social utility. Statistics is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end. It is this change in conceptual approach which has in recent years helped statisticians to play their role more effectively in providing effective guidelines for formulation of policies, plans and programmes.

4. Here I must record my appreciation of the contributions made by the statisticians in understanding the magnitude of the problem of poverty more precisely through consumer expenditure surveys etc. The tools devised and employed by you in the measurement of poverty, identification of its social and occupational characteristics, determination of its pattern of regional distribution, as well as its variation over time and other related diagnostic analysis have earned credit to your profession. I am confident that in this mighty task of removal of poverty your professional expertise will always serve to provide dependable guidelines to policy makers and economic planners.

5. In the wake of planning for faster economic development, specially in a State like Orissa, agricultural statistics has become all the more important as a tool for determining the policy, strategy and programmes for accelerated agricultural growth. This tool, however, has not been quite effective so far, in providing sound and reliable guidelines for such determination. Though the Bureau of Statistics and Economics has been striving hard in collecting data on acreage and yield of some principal crops in the State, I feel, they are not quite adequate or exhaustive. Such data are presently available at the State level or at the most, at the District level. But micro-level planning demands information at smaller geographical levels like, Gram-panchayats and Blocks. Absence of reliable information at such lower unit levels has posed problems in the effective reorientation of our relief operations in the wake of natural calamities. It has, therefore, become almost imperative to strengthen our primary reporting agency for collection and compilation of agricultural statistics at the village and Gram-panchayat levels.

6. In the absence of reliable and exhaustive data at these levels, formulation of village plans for integrated development is proving difficult. We feel the need for a suitable agency which can provide

us with adequate quantitative intelligence about the extent of economic strength or weakness of areas and geographical regions. Basic statistics at lower levels will help proper identification of specially backward areas and weaker pockets and suggests priorities for development. Our statistical machinery should equip itself for providing necessary data on agricultural and allied sectors at the lower levels. No doubt, the building up of data-base at the lower level is expensive but it is also obvious that not building it will prove even more expensive in the long run.

7. I understand that since some years, at the instance of the Government of India, a scheme namely, Timely Reporting Scheme (T. R. S.) is being implemented in almost all the States with cent per cent central assistance. This scheme, in a slightly modified form is being implemented in Orissa. The Eastern Region Food Grains Review Mission of the World Bank has also emphasised the imperative need for strengthening the scheme by providing additional assistance for augmentation of resources for this scheme. It is time more attention is devoted to this matter.

8. In regard to agricultural production statistics we have still a long way to go in achieving reliability and comprehensiveness to the desired degree. The complete enumeration method has been recently adopted and under this scheme, it is expected that within the next 5 to 6 years, it will be possible to obtain full coverage of data on land and its uses, crops grown, cropped area, yield rate and total production. Some have expressed doubt about the shift from sample survey to complete enumeration. I venture to suggest to them that the largeness of the land area, the multiplicity of its use and above all the heterogeneity call for this shift and a sample survey method pure and simple may not serve the purpose in all circumstances. I do hope that with the implementation of the timely reporting scheme, the primary reporting and supervisory agencies will be adequately strengthened. Of course, the working procedure may vary from State to State. The Government of India authorities should ensure that uniformity in concepts and definitions, estimation procedure, fore-casting procedure is maintained in all the States and the State Government Authorities are requested to ensure full accuracy of the data collected and should also see that scientific evaluation of the impact of various inputs on the yield and quality of crops is made. Timeliness in the matter of reporting agricultural statistics is an inseparable item.

9. The most essential input for agricultural operation is water not only for providing protection against drought but for extending

facilities for intensive production. Substantial proportion of our resources has been invested over different plan periods in various Major, Medium and Minor Irrigation Projects. However, 25% only of India's cultivated area is covered by irrigation and what is more disturbing is that fuller utilisation of irrigation facilities built up with such a heavy cost is not being made. Some of your studies to which the Planning Commission have referred in the Fifth Plan document show that the estimated elasticity of gross cropped area with respect to gross irrigated area for the country as a whole is only 0.20. I think, the Agricultural Statisticians will do well to probe into this problem of low utilisation of irrigation facility and suggest the lines for further action.

10. I find the topics you have chosen for discussion in this conference include 'Regional Imbalance in Economic Development With Special Reference to Agriculture'. This is particularly appropriate for your venue and the planners and policy makers of Orissa will, I am sure, benefit from your deliberations. I sincerely hope that your recommendations will be of real help in reducing regional imbalances.

11. With these words and with great pleasure, I inaugurate the 30th Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics and wish its deliberations all success.