

Inaugural Address¹

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Dr. Mangala Rai, Dr. Nawab Ali, Dr. SD Sharma, Dr. VK Gupta, illustrious guests, distinguished delegates from India and abroad, friends from the Media, ladies and gentlemen!

I am happy to extend a very warm welcome to all the guests and the delegates to this inaugural function.

This International Conference on "Statistics and Informatics in Agricultural Research" is being organized by the Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute (IASRI), New Delhi. It is as a commemoration of the successful completion of the 60 years of foundation of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics. I understand that the conference would be ornamental with several Plenary talks by eminent scientists on topics of current interest and would give directions for future research. The conference is also decorated by about 50 Invited talks and about 200 Poster presentations. I hope the delegates would not only enjoy the deliberations of conference but also the cuisine and hospitality shown upon them by the organizers.

It is my privilege to be associated with this big event of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics, which was formed on 03 January 1947 on the advice of Sir CV Raman, with the then Agriculture Minister Dr. Rajendra Prasad as its founder President. Dr. Rajendra Prasad continued to preside over the activities of the Society for 16 years even after he became the President of India.

It was the vision and wisdom of this great luminary that laid the strong foundation of this Society on which

it has grown over the years. The Society was nurtured by the legendaries, high dignitaries, notable personalities under whose able guidance, supervision and direction, the Society has been gaining strength to cover new horizons in time. Today, on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Society, I salute all its founders and congratulate all its members for achieving this milestone. I am sure - the Society would continue with its concerted efforts towards furthering its goals.

I have been heading the Indian Official Statistical System during the last eleven months. "What are official statistics?" Official statistics are collected by the government to inform debate, decision making and research both within the government and by the wider community.

They provide an objective perspective of the changes taking place in national life and allow comparisons between periods of time and geographical areas.

Open access to official statistics provides the citizens with more than a picture of society. It offers a window on the work and performance of the government itself, showing the scale of government activity in every area of public policy and allowing the impact of public policies and actions to be assessed.

Reliable social and economic statistics are fundamental to "...open government (and) it is the responsibility of the government to provide them and to maintain public confidence in them."

In considering what official statistics are, it must always be remembered that politicians the world over have a love-hate relationship with official statistics, and hence with statisticians. This is perhaps not surprising because official statistics are used by governments both

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for support and for illumination, and by others to judge the performance of governments and their programs.

"If there is a problem to be solved, seek statistical advice instead of appointing a committee of experts. Statistics can throw more light than the collective wisdom of the articulate few." said Prof. CR Rao.

Knowing the importance of Statistics for proper planning and informed decision making process, the UPA Government, headed by Dr. Manmohan Singh has been providing encouragement and support to the statistical system of our country. The Government has already set up the National Statistical Commission (NSC), as per the recommendations of Dr. Rangarajan Commission. The Government has placed ISS officers at Senior Administrative Grade levels in the State capitals. They will interact with the State Governments and provide the requisite technical guidance and support to the state statistical systems.

India is proud of its heritage of eminent statisticians who contributed significantly to the welfare of humanity in India and abroad. Today my heart gets filled with ecstasy when I think of towering statisticians like PC Mahalanobis, PV Sukhatme, CR Rao, RC Bose, SN Roy, KR Nair, SS Shrikhande, RR Bahadur, and many more to name a few, and their immense contributions in the field of Statistics. Many contributions, original and important, have been made by the Indian statisticians throughout the world. But this effort has to continue with charged new zeal, vigour and dedication to enter new emerging areas and help other sciences in improving the quality of research. The statisticians should also devote their time and effort to evolve innovative, efficient in time and precision, methodologies to help the Statistical System.

The UPA government is also showing interest in developing Core Statistics and Research activities. We not only fully fund the ISI but have also instituted awards and fellowships to encourage research and contributions in the field of Statistics.

A plan scheme, namely, "Awards and Fellowships for Outstanding and Meritorious Research Work in Statistics" is being implemented by my Ministry to encourage high quality research in the field of Applied and Official Statistics. Besides two National Awards and one International Award in Statistics, the scheme provides financial assistance for Travel Grants, Doctoral Research

and Research collaboration in the field of Applied or Official Statistics.

At this juncture I would like to remind all the statisticians that basic research, which generally people tend to call as theoretical research, in Statistics is very important realizing the usefulness of the subject of Statistics as applicational science in all other disciplines like physics, chemistry, biology, sociology and agriculture, etc. I would urge upon all the statisticians present here to undertake basic research in new emerging areas. It does not matter if the research does not have an immediate application. It would certainly find an application because Statistics itself is an application science. I have a very strong feeling that one can not become a good applied statistician unless he is a very good theoretician also.

Further, statistical issues related to bio-diversity, computational biology, and genomics of plant, livestock, fishery, flora and fauna, etc. need to be understood and researched. The intertwining of Statistics and Informatics in these areas is very essential. Every year the country suffers losses due to floods and droughts and also by onset of pest and disease. Statistics and Informatics together would prove very useful in the statistical modelling, forecasting and early warning for agricultural systems.

For an effective policy planning, there is a need to obtain estimates of production of important agricultural crops at Gram Panchayat level. Similarly, the crop insurance scheme has to be implemented at Gram Panchayat level. For obtaining precise estimates at Gram Panchayat level, small area estimation techniques have to be developed for this purpose.

Most of the farmers in our country are small and marginal. As a group, they are the biggest investors in agriculture. They also have derisory or insecure access to food themselves. If the farming is made profitable to them, they would feed their families throughout the year and reinvest in their farms by purchasing fertilizer, better quality seed and basic equipment.

A new model, therefore, for cooperation between the public and private sectors in rural development needs to be evolved. The model may have the features like

1. bring together producers and agribusiness
2. establish and enforce grades and standards

3. improve the investment climate for agriculture
4. provide essential public goods such as rural infrastructure
5. market channels and avenues and
6. means for value addition to the produce

Such a model would play a crucial role in kindling agricultural growth and dramatic benefits to agriculture and poor rural households can be expected.

It is in this spirit I consider the present conference to be of paramount importance for the field of Agricultural Statistics. The main spirit of the conference on "Statistics and Informatics in Agricultural Research" is very appropriate and contemporary. Gender inequality, food, nutritional and livelihood security, socio-economic indicators, indicators of development, projections of agricultural produce, food processing, value addition and marketing, natural resources accounting, rational utilization, etc. are some of very crucial aspects of rural development. I am happy to see that these issues would be deliberated in this conference. It gives me a ray of hope that the recommendations emerging from deliberations of this conference would pave a way for the happiness of the rural population, particularly the farming community.

Informatics in conjunction with Statistics has a very important role to play. For sustainable integrated farming system, it is absolutely essential that there is a fusion of technologies through network. It is, therefore, important to generate databases of technologies developed so that such a network could be established. To this end, all disciplines of agricultural sciences should join hands for creation of a database of technologies. It would also be desirable to develop an intelligent network of agricultural scientists for sharing scientific and technical intelligence. Several databases for crops, animals, horticulture, fisheries etc. should be developed and brought under intelligent network. Use of modern technologies like Remote Sensing, GIS, GPS, etc. should be important for decision support system, agricultural intelligence, market intelligence, knowledge management, etc. Such systems would be of paramount importance to rural

population in general and farming community in particular.

One very serious problem being faced by the policy makers is inadequate, inefficient and unreliable estimates of interest. Several agencies provide estimates of the same parameter. But the estimates provided by them are not matching. Each estimate provided by an agency is subjected to sampling and non-sampling errors. There should be uniformity in the estimates provided by various agencies. This brings us to the issue of quality of data. The statisticians gathered here may like to introduce a course on Statistical Quality Data.

The second most important issue is the timeliness. Generally, the estimates are made available very late. Timeliness and accuracy are the key words for a very effective and proper policy planning. The country looks at the statisticians to help in this aspect.

I am very sure that during these four days all of you would join together and come out with recommendations that would help in improving the quality of rural population and bring a smile on the face of teeming millions.

I declare the Conference open. I fervently hope that the deliberations of this Conference would pave way for research in newer emerging and challenging areas of Statistics and Computer Applications that would help in improving the quality of agricultural research and strengthen the Statistical System. I compliment Dr. SD Sharma and his dedicated team for organizing this International Conference and wish this Conference a grand success.

I conclude with a famous quote from Arthur Conan Doyle:

"While the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will be up to, but you can say with precision what an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but percentages remain constant. So says the statistician".

Thank you!