

Inaugural Address of Chief Guest
His Excellency Shri Syed Sibtey Razi, the Governor and
Chancellors of Universities of Jharkhand in the
32nd Annual Convention of Indian Agricultural
University Association delivered on 20th December, 2007 at
Birsa Agriculture University Kanke

Smt. Chand Farhana, First Lady of Jharkhand, Dr. M P Yadav, President Indian Agricultural University Association, Dr. N.N. Singh, Vice Chancellor, Birsa Agricultural University, Sri Amit Khare, Principal Secretary to Governor, Dr. R.P. Singh 'Ratan', Director, Extension Education, Birsa Agricultural University, all the Vice Chancellors' of Agricultural Universities from different corners of the country, other delegates, scientists, press and media persons.

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to be with all of you this morning to address this august body of agricultural scientists, who have gathered here on the occasion of 32nd Annual Convention of Indian Agricultural University Association, to discuss on the topic of Diversification in Indian Agriculture. As Chancellor of the Universities of Jharkhand I feel proud that such a conference is being organized by the Agriculture University of my state and I congratulate the Vice Chancellor Dr. N. N. Singh and his colleagues for organizing the same.

Poverty in India is predominantly a rural phenomenon. About 70% of the population, and about 75% of the poor, live in rural areas and most of them depend on agriculture. Agriculture provides livelihood to 60 percent of the rural people and remains vital for food security. In recent years, the slowdown in agricultural growth has become a major cause for concern. In the past few decades India has seen a sustainable growth in food production and incomes

along with growing diversification both in consumption and production. Food security and sustainability has been one of our major goals to keep agriculture sector out of a danger zone seems to be have been fulfilled. But this feel good factor seems to be a myth as we see new and bigger challenges emerging in this most vulnerable sector. Share of agriculture in country's GDP has in fact declined from 48.7% in 1950 to 24.4 % in 1996-97 and further 18.7% in 2007.

The increasing economic integration of the Indian economy with global processes has also brought considerable challenges at the door of its agricultural sector. These challenges have arisen from two broad sets of problems. In the first place, a number of major crops have been witnessing a decline in productivity growth, in particular over the past decade. Second, and perhaps more important from a short run perspective, is the fact that Indian agriculture faces unfair competition from cheap imports, which poses an enormous threat to the livelihoods of the farming communities. It is quite clear, therefore, that a comprehensive framework needs to be evolved, one that addresses the specific problems that the agricultural sector faces at the present juncture.

Agriculture sector is the backbone of country's development and lifeline for 60-65 per cent of the population based in rural areas and approximately more than 58 percent of the population still dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Besides this to achieve an ambitious rate of growth for the country of as high as 9-10% in the eleventh five year plan, the country needs a strong pull-up support to agriculture sector which should grow at least at the rate of 4 per cent per annum, all the more since in 2005-06 the growth in agriculture was a mere 2.2% which is expected to go even negative next year.

Besides basic food grain production, diversification on other agricultural activities like livestock, fisheries, horticulture, organic farming commercial crops, agro processing are the new avenues in the agricultural sector will lead us in the next phase of agricultural development. Along with this it is important to efficiently use the existing agriculture setup and upgrade it to reap the best results. The prevailing policy instruments need to be re-looked, re-defined, re-written and efficiently implemented to take care of the prevailing loopholes. One such important factor is the linking of the domestic and international markets through efficient supply chain. There is a need for public private partnership, not only in investment but also in the research, extension and policy implementation. Agriculture sector reforms should be initiated at war-footing, to bring together all the best that is available and make agriculture an organised unit to give farmers the maximum benefits. Turning agriculture into an organised business with the farmer as the entrepreneur should be the key to the second green revolution and for the much desired evergreen revolution in India. Farming should be taken up with the motive of profit making rather than just making a subsistence living. With huge diversity in the number and variety of crops that we produce, variations in agro-climatic conditions, soil type, prevailing inequalities in the state growth levels, it is essential to implement the plans through micro level initiatives and with proper coordination between all the stake holders.

Since the first green revolution in 1960's, the food grain production in our country has increased significantly from 82 million tonnes in 1960-61 to 129 million tonnes in 1980-81 and 213 million tonnes in 2003-04, to meet out food security and attain self sufficiency specially in the production of our staple food rice and wheat. Green Revolution introduced the use of improved inputs-fertilizers, pesticides, seeds and irrigation facility. But the impact of green

revolution was mostly evident in areas with irrigation facilities. In late 1980's, the country saw another set of reforms initiated by broad trade liberalisation and depreciation of exchange rate, which made the terms of trade in favour of agriculture. These reforms were focused on liberalisation of export trade mainly due to some surpluses created in rice and wheat. But overall, in recent year's our economy has seen a decline in the rate of growth of agricultural sector and also its share in GDP.

Strengthening of agriculture will not only help in upliftment of the farmers but also benefit the larger section of the rural poor who are directly engaged in agriculture or indirectly linked with agriculture as consumers. Efficient way of production, stabilized prices, higher income from agriculture would create a more conjugative environment in the country for the development of the economy as a whole and of rural population in particular. An important component of the much needed reforms is not only implementation of the policy in time but also simultaneous review and evaluations of the impact of the policies and taking immediate steps to rectify the negative impacts if caused by any of the policies. Inter sectoral linkages and organisation of the agricultural sector needs to be taken up. Sustainability is another key issue. In the present context sustainability with natural resource management has become more relevant. The visible institutional changes with new models of marketing and cultivation should be supported by government policies too. Priority areas for investment need to be identified and worked on without loss of time. Risk management and incentive based system will motivate farmers to efficient agriculture. Empowerment of the small and marginal farmers through education, reforms and development will ensure a better, efficient and strengthened Indian agriculture. Motivation regarding new models in production and marketing along with creating awareness and imparting education to small farmers will help in

development of the sector and more importantly improving the economic status of poor farmers. The action plan to strengthen agriculture in India needs to focus on domestic reforms and while on the hand, government intervention in the market economy should be reduced on the other hand state government must play a major role as evaluator and implementation of the policies, increased investment and prioritizing the area to invest, parallel action plans in this direction are needed in research to increase productivity and irrigation and water management.

Never did Indian Agriculture, after attaining Green Revolution, receive so much attention as now. There is now an urgent need for a paradigm shift in agricultural policy to address the problems facing the agricultural sector in the new economic environment, domestic and global. Diversification of Agriculture (DOA) has been adopted as a strategy for enhancing incomes of the farmers in different parts of the World. Diversification of Agriculture (DOA) as a strategy would, to a large extent, open up opportunities for value addition in agriculture and enhanced income earning opportunities for the farming community.

I am quite confident that after two days of discussion by the galaxy of Agricultural Scientists, many issues will come to the fore front, which will be basis for policy makers to plan in such a way that growth rate in agricultural sector should increase on a sustainable basis not only for the benefit of 70 per cent poor peasants of this country but also for the sustainable economic development of the country.

With these words, I inaugurate this 32nd Annual Convention of Indian Agriculture Universities and extend my best wishes to all the participants for the success of this Convention as also for a very happy new year.