

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
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AT THE INAUGURATION OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH
CONFERENCE ON 'FROM RESEARCH TO IMPACT:
TOWARDS JUST AND RESILIENT AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS'
HOSTED BY CGIAR GENDER IMPACT PLATFORM AND ICAR**

New Delhi, October 9, 2023

I am really delighted to be a part of the international conference which is attended by eminent personalities and distinguished scientists from all over the world. I welcome all of you to New Delhi. It gives me great satisfaction to inaugurate this conference which focuses on bridging the gap between research and impact in order to achieve resilient, equitable and just agri-food systems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I understand, the theme for this conference, "From Research to Impact: Towards Just and Resilient Agri-food Systems", is quite profound. The evolution of human beings from hunting primates to food cultivators sums up a fascinating civilisational journey. The irony is that as we enter the modern age, we are still grappling with the challenge of attaining "just and resilient agri-food systems". Each word in this theme is not only desirable, noble and ambitious, but also showcases the need of the hour.

A society, irrespective of its prosperity, will cease to exist if it is devoid of justice. Any system of thought, any institution or any arrangement will be untenable if it is unjust. But when it comes to gender justice, agriculture, which is known as the oldest science, is found wanting even in the modern times.

Let me remind you that the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected industries and services. In these trying circumstances, agriculture gives hope. Humanity cannot survive without food grains. However, the pandemic has also brought to the fore a strong correlation between the agri-food systems and structural

inequality in society. As compared to men, women suffered more job loss in the pandemic years that triggered migration.

At the global level, we have seen that women have been kept outside the agri-food systems for long. For example, women are unpaid workers, tillers and farmers in the field but not the owners of the land. They form the bulk of the lowest pyramid of the agriculture structure, but they are denied the opportunity to climb the ladder to assume the role of decision-makers.

Women sow, grow, harvest, process and market our food. They are indispensable in making every grain reach from farm to plate. But still, across the world, they are held back and stopped by discriminatory social norms and barriers to knowledge, ownership, assets, resources and social networks. Their contribution is not recognised, their role is marginalised and their agency is denied in the whole chain of the agri-food systems. This story needs to change. In India, we have been witnessing those changes with women getting more empowered through legislative and governmental interventions. There are many stories of women turning into successful entrepreneurs in this sector.

Modern women are not “abla” but “sabla”, that is, not helpless but powerful. We need not only women's development but women-led development. Hence making our agri-food systems more just, inclusive and equitable is not only desirable but also crucial for the well-being of the planet and humankind.

I am elated to know that the Gender Impact Platform of the Consultative Group of International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) is working on putting equality and inclusion at the heart of food systems research by focusing on women not as the objects of transformation but as the agents and drivers of the transformation. I extend my congratulations as well as best wishes to the CGIAR-ICAR which together are addressing the important issues of gender and social inclusion in the agri-food systems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The crises of Covid-19, conflict and climate change have aggravated

the challenges and problems faced by the agri-food systems. Climate change is an existential threat. The clock is ticking and we need to act now, act fast and act swiftly. On one hand, climate change, global warming, melting ice caps and extinction of species are disrupting the food production. On the other hand, the agri-food cycle is not sustainable and eco-friendly. It is hindering climate action and causing an increase in greenhouse gases.

Hence, our agri-food systems are stuck in a vicious cycle. We need to break this “chakravayuh”. At the same time, we need to increase biodiversity and restore ecosystems so that food and nutritional security can be assured through the agri-food systems along with a more prosperous and equitable future for all.

Ladies and Gentleman,

The Indian Government has given the call for “vocal for local”. We need to adapt this in the agri-food systems too. We need to change our consumption patterns. We need to go local not only for the sake of our health but for the health of the planet. We also need to diversify our diets to include a variety of food. We need to move away from the rice-wheat system to end the hidden hunger. In this context, we can all remember the Global Conference on Millets, also called Shree Anna, which was held in this very auditorium in March this year. After persistent efforts by India, the year 2023 was declared the International Year of Millets by the United Nations.

While the pandemic showed the fundamental strength of agriculture, it also exposed the sector’s worst vulnerability. Agriculture cannot be promoted solely on commercial considerations. This sector’s social obligation is critical to the survival of humanity. Similarly, the ongoing conflicts in some parts of the world have impeded the upstream and downstream processes of the agri-food systems, whether it be the availability and the price of key intermediate inputs or the supply or marketing of the output.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For ecologically sustainable, ethically desirable, economically

affordable and socially justifiable production, we need research which can enable conditions to reach these goals. We need a systematic understanding of how to transform the agri-food systems. And I hope that this conference and this esteemed community will take all the measures and steps to achieve these milestones.

The agri-food systems should be resilient and agile so that they can withstand shocks and disruptions to make nutritious and healthy diets more accessible, available and affordable for all. At the same time, they should be more just, equitable and sustainable. Today, the best of the minds in this field are here. I hope and wish that during the next four days, in your deliberations, you will consider all the issues and will pave the way for positive transformation of the agri-food systems.

I will end my speech on the same note with which I started. I said at the beginning of this address that each word in the theme of this conference is desirable, noble and ambitious. I would make an addition, that it is actually achievable if we work collectively towards that end; if we harness the potential of research to create an approach which is just and inclusive of all voices.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!

Jai Bharat!