



It gives me immense pleasure to write a message for the First International Agrobiodiversity Congress. For me it has special significance as ICRISAT is collaborating with the Indian Society of Plant Genetic Resources to organize this important event.

This Congress is timely, as today the world is facing unprecedented challenges in the form of shrinking availability of agricultural land coupled with the adverse effects of climate change on natural resources, including agricultural biodiversity. Further, climate change will likely exacerbate the situation as increased temperatures result in reduced productivity, increased diseases and pests incidence, and adverse effects on nutritional quality. The seriousness of the situation can be gauged by the fact that currently about 800 million people suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition. To overcome these multiple challenges, agrobiodiversity is an insurance that nature has bestowed upon the global community.

The Congress will offer an opportunity to enhance knowledge through an exchange of views, ideas and experience among the participants ranging from scientists and students to farmers and representatives of government, civil society and industry. Experts in genetic resources, genetics, breeding, biotechnology, genomics, information management, bioinformatics, conservation biology, policy etc. will actively deliberate to find solutions. A holistic approach which includes both *in-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation and more importantly greater use of genetic resources in crop improvement programs is urgently required.

ICRISAT has over 124,000 accessions of six mandate crops (sorghum, chickpea, pigeonpea, pearl millet, groundnut, and finger millet) and five small millets from 144 countries conserved in our genebank at Patancheru in Telangana, India. Besides the central gene bank we have three regional genebanks in Africa, at Kenya, Zimbabwe and Niger, to support our regional partners. ICRISAT genebanks have provided over 1.44 million samples of germplasm to scientists in 148 countries. This has had significant global impact whereby 109 germplasm accessions have been released as 146 cultivars in 51 countries contributing significantly to food and nutritional security. Our national agricultural research system partners have released over 800 cultivars from breeding materials supplied by ICRISAT. Several countries which had lost their germplasm have recovered them from the ICRISAT genebank through repatriation of over 55,000 accessions to nine countries in Asia and Africa. We are focusing on identifying gaps in our collections and filling them through assembly, collection and enhancing the use of germplasm through the development of mini-core collections which represent just 1% of the entire collection. Extensive evaluation of mini-core collections and their molecular characterization has helped to identify genetically diverse trait-specific germplasm for use by the breeders to develop high yielding, climate resilient and nutritionally dense cultivars with a broad genetic base.

I wish this Congress great success in achieving its goals and in contributing to ensuring food and nutritional security for the global community by creating and an enabling environment to better maintain and utilize agro bio-diversity to support sustainable, nutritious and equitable agri-food systems.

David Bergvinson
Director General, ICRISAT

MESSAGE

Date : 5 October 2016