

Published: November 28, 2010 02:23 IST | Updated: November 28, 2010 02:23 IST

Swaminathan: marry traditional wisdom with scientific knowledge

Staff Reporter

By marrying traditional wisdom with scientific knowledge, India needs to create dynamic, location-specific content, and build the capacities of local people to make meaningful use of communication technologies for rural development, M.S. Swaminathan, chairperson the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), said here on Saturday.

He was speaking at the '7th Convention of the Grameen Gyan Abhiyan – Rural Knowledge Movement' on Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Food, Health and Livelihood Security in an Era of Climate Change, being held at Mumbai University.

Pointing to insufficient spending on capacity building, Dr. Swaminathan said: "Content creation and capacity building are critical. We need knowledge centres, which convert generic content into location-specific information and build the capacities of local people. Unless this is done, you will have a room with an unused computer," he remarked.

In the context of climate change, he suggested appointing one man and one woman in each village as climate risk managers. "The women in Koraput know better how to manage climate change than us," he said.

He felt that more and more scientific leaders were now concerned about whether the benefits of their innovations reached the local people.

The MSSRF worked on ICT, biotechnology, space, nuclear and eco technology. But despite the emphasis on rural areas, they lagged behind, Dr. Swaminathan said.

India's poor show on many of the human development indicators, despite the raft of schemes, constituted "the Indian enigma," he said. For instance, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) was started in the early 70s, but still 45 per cent of our children were malnourished and underweight.

R. Chidambaram, Principal Scientific Adviser to the government of India, released a report on 'Designing Rural Technology Delivery Systems for Mitigating Agricultural Distress: A study of Wardha district.'

He stressed on innovation, using local skill sets and raw materials. He said innovations in the rural areas "diffused" after 50 to 100 km unlike branded products. Concept transfer and re-innovation of technologies at area-levels could widen the reach of concepts. Since food processing added value to agricultural produce, rural development went beyond agriculture.

Independent villages Farmers' leader Vijay Jawandia said neither technology nor agriculture would be feasible without policy support and political will. As the report on Wardha highlighted, "Vidarbha once grew jowar on 40 per cent of land, through non-irrigated farming, but does not have even 2 per cent of land under that crop now.

"Imagine if Punjab and Haryana farmers stop growing paddy and wheat; what will happen to the one-billion country? Today, we import 50 per cent edible oil and pulses; we are still not self-sufficient. To change this, we need policy and technological support and political will. We need to create independent village and country," he said.

Anil Kakodkar, Professor, Homi Bhabha Chair, Department of Atomic Energy, envisioned a knowledge pool on the lines of the open source database Wikipedia, which could be accessed by all, irrespective of language.

"We can think of a similar huge open database of knowledge, specific to rural development. Access to this knowledge should be possible regardless of what language one spoke, through the use of some user-friendly symbols. Minimum literacy should be enough. That will be the real power of ICT," he said.

Keywords: [climate change](#)