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MY MEETING NOTES

8th GCRA International Conference on
"Innovative Digital Applications for Sustainable Development"
Global Communication Research Association (GCRA),
University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru, India
5-7 January, 2016

GCRA organised its 8th International Conference in collaboration with UAS, Bangalore, in January 2016. Dr. Lenin Venu, who participated in this Conference, shares his personal impressions here.

CONTEXT

The Global Communication Research Association (GCRA), Sydney organized its 8th international conference in collaboration with the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru, India during 5-7 January 2016 (http://www.uasb.in/). Eighteen organizations, including Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) sponsored the event. The purpose of the conference was to bring together the scientists working in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), exchange their ideas, experiences and evolve future strategy for the welfare of the farmers. Around 200 delegates congregated in Bengaluru and discussed various ICT dimensions.

PROGRAMME

Inaugural Session

Shri. Siddaramaiah, Honourable Chief Minister, Government of Karnataka, India, while inaugurating the conference dwelled up on the need for empowering the farmers through ICTs. Shri. Krishna Byre Gowda, Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Government of Karnataka, in his presidential address emphasized that ICT should directly connect farmers with consumers and

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dissipate the several layers of intermediaries who are siphoning off the major share of consumer's rupee. Dr. Indrajit Banerjee, Director, Knowledge Societies Division, UNESCO, in his keynote address, spoke about UNESCO's Youth Mobile Initiative and special services to marginalized people. Dr. A. K. Singh, Deputy Director General (Agricultural Extension), ICAR, New Delhi, in his Guest of Honour address, emphasized the need of framing policy guidelines for content development in multiple languages and content management.

Technical sessions

There were two types of sessions, namely, presentation by lead speakers and presentation by delegates. Lead sessions were of plenary type where all delegates assembled in the Auditorium and around four speakers presented papers each of 15 minutes duration followed by 5 minutes discussion. Four such sessions were held during the three days.

Presentation by lead speakers: Dr. Naren Chitty, Inaugural Director of the Soft Power Analysis and Resource Centre, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia; Dr. Venkataraman Balaji, Director of Technology and Knowledge Management, Commonwealth of Learning, Metro Vancouver, Canada and Dr. H. Philip, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, India delivered their lead papers through Skype. Dr. Balaji gave an account of Massive Open Online Courses. Dr. Philip narrated the e-extension activities of his organization including TNAU Agritech Portal. Mr. Rikin Gandhi, CEO, Digital Green, New Delhi, India, demystified high-end videos by giving camera in the hands of rural people who shot videos on the content owned by them and later edited by Digital Green. Experts validated these videos and were subsequently shown to neighbourhood people through battery operated low cost projectors. Dr. Arun Balamatti, Programme Coordinator, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Mysuru, India, was concerned about the large number of farmers who are yet to be reached through ICT.

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Presentation by delegates:

There were eleven sessions of presentation by delegates.
The presentations by delegates were categorized as follows:

- Application, role and innovations in agricultural extension and rural development
- Digital communication strategies for rural development and natural resource management
- Recent advances in information technology and its application in agricultural knowledge and information system
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- Modern media in agricultural communication; traditional media: role, relevance and innovations
- Expert systems, decision support systems, software development and programming for agricultural extension and communication
- IT Acts and policy framework: concerns, issues and challenges.

These presentations were of concurrent nature conducted at three halls. Delegates made oral presentation for 8 minutes followed by two minutes discussion.

Most of the presentations were research studies conducted in their respective organizations, research findings from post-graduate students and ICT initiatives of the organizations in transferring their technologies through ICT tools. A few presentations were based on review and some were conceptual in nature. The importance of research studies was manifest in the discussion which revolved around the methodologies, implementation, impact, scaling up and sustainability. Conceptual and review papers presented a larger picture of the ICT efforts.

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MY IMPRESSIONS

Participation: The conference received 333 abstracts, 24 lead papers and 2 key note papers . These were published in the form of a compendium and a souvenir and the delegates received these publications on their arrival.

Young critical mass: Young scientists and students made oral presentations and eminent scientists listened, interacted and conducted the session. The median age of the conference may be approximately around thirty. Youth and eminence mixed well imbibing the experience and vibrancy by both. Delegates were motivated by awarding best presentations in the valedictory function.

Networking: The conference offered an opportunity for the delegates in finding new research partners and donors.

Capacity building: Many researchers could identify the experts facilitating the ways for enhancing expertise in their areas of research.

Research-Theory mix: Mixing research paper presentations and conceptual papers drew criticisms by the delegates in the audience. Conceptual and review papers may be segregated as separate sessions for the benefit of theoretical scientists.

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Effective use of ICT in conducting the conference: Abstracts were submitted by the delegates online. PowerPoint presentation files and full papers were uploaded in the conference website well in advance. A proceeding of the conference was uploaded in the form of full papers of the delegates during the conference. Those who could not attend the conference delivered their speech through Skype.

International participation: The attendance of international delegates and dignitaries was thin. Efforts should be made to explore the strategies to attract the delegates from more countries and continents.

Logistics: Breakfast, lunch and dinner were served at the venue facilitating more hours of interaction among the delegates. South Indian delicacies satiated their taste buds.

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Revival of Traditional media: A good initiative of reviving traditional media which our forefathers used for communication and enriching with agricultural content and delivery through ICT was the highlight of the conference.

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