

Speech of Shri Chandra Sekhar Sahu, Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India, at the 16th General Session of Afro-Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO) Conference on 6.1.2009 at Banquet Hall, Hotel The Ashok, New Delhi.

H.E. Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Minister of External Affairs, Government of India,

H.E. Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, Minister of Rural Development, Government of India,

H.E. Dr. Adel Safar, President of AARDO,

My Colleague Smt. Suuryakanta J. Patil, Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India,

H.E. Mr. Abdalla Yahia Adam, Secretary General, AARDO,

Dr. Rita Sharma, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Observers, Members of Diplomatic Corps,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and privilege for me to extend a warm welcome at the opening ceremony of 16th AARDO Conference.

We are deeply indebted to our Visionary Leaders who have founded AARDO and provided a platform for understanding the challenges of eradication of rural

poverty and thus uniting us to channelise our policy direction and resources towards that goal. Since its inception from 1962, AARDO is devoted in developing understanding among members for better appreciation of each others' problems and exploring collectively opportunities for coordinating of efforts for eradication of poverty, illiteracy, diseases etc. from the rural people. I recall the landmark New Delhi Declaration adopted by the member countries which has become a torch bearer for the AARDO in its future growth.

Excellencies, you all agree that Poverty eradication is the central theme of development of all member countries of AARDO and the millennium development goals (MDGs) too lay emphasis on reducing all forms of poverty. In fact, one need not overstate that alleviation of poverty is one of the prerequisites for sustainable and inclusive growth. An estimated 1.0 billion people are in the extreme poverty and most of them inhabit Asia and Africa accounting for about 90 per cent of the poor. Of these nearly 620 million poor people belong to AARDO member nations and as many as 14 AARDO member nations belong to low income group. This underscores the need to make economic growth strategies more inclusive. The areas and sectors which the poor pursue for their livelihoods are the ones that should receive overriding priority in our policies and programmes.

It is heartening to note that most of us made significant progress in some of the areas such as the universalisation of primary education and provision of drinking water etc. However, our achievements in regard to sanitation, afforestation,

control of diseases, reduction of maternal mortality and better gender equality have been found not much encouraging. Therefore, social and human development concepts in the AARDO member countries should be given special attention by this august body.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Rural development calls for a multidimensional approach and, therefore, in India, besides Ministry of Rural Development, various other Ministries such as Ministry of Agriculture & Cooperation, Health and Family Welfare, Human Resource Development, Women & Child Development, Social Justice & Empowerment, Minority Affairs etc. are engaged in the development of rural people in general and the poor in particular.

During the past decades, Africa and Asian countries have mobilized and organized considerable resources to meet the requirements of their development strategies resulting in increased per-capita incomes and remarkable achievements, particularly in the field of social development including reduction in infant mortality rates and population control. However, we have to tread a long way to fulfill our goals.

I am sure that this conference will deliberate on the common challenges that our countries face. While the member countries represent different peoples, they have kindred souls. We are bound by our common concerns, common endeavours and shared experience for rural development and in addressing issues of equity and

inclusion so that weak and vulnerable among us are not by-passed by the processes but can be active and vibrant participants in the arena of development.

I am confident that as a result of our rich experience and fruitful deliberations, the AARDO member countries will be able to evolve a joint vision based on a deeper understanding of the invaluable benefits of close cooperation as we move forward together to achieve common and shared goals of rural development.

Thank you, Jai Hind