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Agrobiodiversity for Building Resilience of Drylands: Key Takeaways from Dr R S Paroda's Visionary Address at the Dryland Congress 2026

Delivered on September 11, 2026, at the National Agricultural Science Complex in New Delhi, Dr R S Paroda's visionary address during the Global Dryland Congress highlighted the critical role of agrobiodiversity in transforming dryland agriculture. Organized by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) to mark 50 years of their strategic partnership, the session framed dryland regions—which cover over 45% of the global land surface and sustain over two billion people—not as vulnerable, resource-poor ecosystems, but as dynamic opportunities for sustainable agri-food systems.

Dr Paroda emphasized that building resilience in these regions requires shifting agrobiodiversity management from passive gene-bank conservation to active field-level utilization, prioritizing naturally resilient crops like millets, sorghum, pulses, and rainfed legumes that withstand extreme thermal and moisture stresses. Alongside crop diversification, he urged a fundamental shift in agricultural metrics, advocating that systems evaluate economic and nutritional returns per drop of water rather than focusing strictly on yield per hectare, supported by scaled micro-irrigation, rainwater harvesting, and landscape-level natural resource management.



To operationalize this multi-faceted vision, Dr. Paroda invoked the holistic concept of **Sapt Rishi (the Seven Sages)**, laying out seven foundational pillars to guide the future of dryland development: genetic diversity conservation, water-use efficiency, resilient seed networks, soil health

rejuvenation, climate-smart technologies, market-policy integration, and youth and women empowerment. Framing these seven principles as an interconnected strategic framework, he stressed that only when all seven pillars move in harmony can rainfed agriculture achieve true sustainability.

To bridge the gap between scientific innovation and field practice, Dr Paroda called for modernizing decentralized, climate-resilient seed delivery networks across the Global South. Strengthening public-private partnerships will prove crucial for accelerating seed multiplication so that high-yielding, stress-tolerant varieties reach smallholder farmers rapidly. Furthermore, drawing on five decades of ICAR–ICRISAT cooperation, he underscored the need to align vision, resources, and technical expertise to support goals like *Viksit Bharat 2047* while expanding South-South and Triangular Cooperation to share technologies and germplasm across semi-arid zones worldwide.

In conclusion, Dr Paroda stressed that the golden jubilee of the ICAR–ICRISAT partnership must serve as a launchpad for the next half-century of agricultural transformation. Science, policy, and market linkages must converge seamlessly so that dryland agriculture transitions from basic subsistence to driving farmer prosperity, nutrition security, and landscape resilience, turning climate-vulnerable areas into robust engines of economic growth and ecological stability.

Full visionary address can be accessed through:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/02EiaDDL8Zw>
