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Saina Nehwal lauds ICRISAT's efforts

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India's ace badminton player and Olympic bronze medalist Ms Saina Nehwal recently visited the Hyderabad-based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). Ms Nehwal was there on the institute's invitation to help spread the importance of the genetic conservation in the global fight against hunger and poverty.

Ms Nehwal described her experience after touring the institute's facilities, particularly its RS Paroda Genebank, as delightful and an eye-opener. She said, "ICRISAT's plant genetic conservation initiatives illustrate the value and use of biodiversity in the fight against hunger and poverty, and its impact on the livelihoods of millions of smallholder farmers in the dryland tropics."

ICRISAT has been conducting research-for-development initiatives with global partners for the past 40 years to increase agricultural production in the semi-arid regions of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. ICRISAT's genebank, one of the world's largest public-funded genebanks, preserves seeds of more than 120,000 accessions of pearl millet, sorghum, chickpea, pigeon pea, groundnut and small millets (finger millet, foxtail millet, barnyard millet, kodo millet, and little millet), that are kept as in-trust collections on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN), for the benefit of the present and future generations. It has also distributed more than 1.4 million seed samples to 146 countries, restored about 55,000 germplasm lines to 9 countries, and released over 830 cultivars in 79 countries from its germplasm and breeding materials.

Ms Newhal added that, "Nature has truly blessed us with a rich genetic diversity, which is unique and important in sustaining life in this planet. This visit gave me a better understanding of the importance of plant genetic conservation in sustaining and using genetic diversity for global food security."

About the Genebank, Dr William D Dar, director general, ICRISAT, said, "ICRISAT's RS Paroda Genebank is a treasure trove of genes which are useful for crop improvement for sustainable food production and improved livelihoods, particularly in marginal environments, and the genes that can provide climate resilience to future crop varieties through increased drought, heat and salinity tolerance, and pest and disease resistance."

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Ms Nehwal was recently honoured with a doctorate degree by Mangalayatan University, Uttar Pradesh to commemorate her achievement in the world of sports.

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