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ABIDAT

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“The wilderness and the desert will rejoice, and the desert will shout for joy and blossom”
[Isaiah 35:1; The Holy Bible]

Greetings to each and every one of you aspiring Students of ABIDAT's 2nd Batch (2023-24)! It is truly gratifying that 100% Students of PGCDS Program 1st Batch (2022-23) have secured a Full Post-Graduate Fellowship from BGU, Israel for the session 2023-24, as all of them have been selected by the distinguished Professors (Scientists) within their respective Research Projects, which is definitely a significant milestone for the fledgling ABIDAT.

Quality education is a keystone of the foundation of civilization's edifice, such that the building up of nations continues on the right path, especially in a constantly changing scenario. Innovation and adaptation are bases to true advancement and necessitates that every challenge or constraint can be turned into a prospect for a way forward. Agriculture in this sub-continent is both a livelihood and lifestyle for millions of Indians. Consequently, strengthening the farming sector unwaveringly leads to the fortification of the country, which has been proven through the metamorphosis of the nation from a food-deficit to a food-surplus nation. The contribution of the agriculture sector towards the national GDP has always been on the increase. However, the downsides that have become so blatantly obvious in the unsustainability of large swathes of farming area and communities, warrant a renewed perusal at the problem areas and development of distinctive solutions through a dynamic and adaptive FSR approach.

The constraints faced by the populace in general and farming community in particular, in the dryland tracts are intensifying due to various factors, which seem to make it impossible to attain acceptable levels of sustainable agricultural productivity. Stakeholders belonging to the Nations, States, Zones or Regions with tracts which fall under the dryland farming (mean annual precipitation of 750 to 1150 mm) &/or dry farming (mean annual precipitation of less than 750 mm) classification definitely need a positive impetus. Hence, ABIDAT expects that concerted efforts through mutual cooperation can pave the way forward to ensure tangible benefits for all stakeholders.

Concerted efforts of several scores of Farmers and some of the enthusiastic and highly motivated stakeholders in many regions have created an “oasis-like” landscape even on wastelands. Hence, the need of this century and millennium is to multiply such an approach and offer incentives to ‘start-ups’ or entrepreneurs in a participative mode to transform the desertifying, degraded, uncultivable lands of the planet, especially towards sustainable ecosystems for livelihood security with intensified focus on enhanced quality of food, nutrition, energy coupled with a holistic development and make rejuvenation a reality, instead of an insurmountable nightmare!

ABAN India in collaboration with Ben Gurion University of the Negev (BGU), Israel have together conceived ABIDAT – an Institution which endeavours to assist students/scholars to develop a specialized understanding and appreciation of the complex phenomena in the known and unknown spheres, such that they will be able to realize their full potential to solve the problems of a variety of ecosystems, including drylands and deserts.

ABIDAT offers an interactive mode of coaching and scholarship, stimulating the passion for a ‘persistent research orientation’ to look for innovative sustainable alternatives and surmount the existing challenges in agricultural production systems in general, with a focused view on rainfed and arid ecosystems, which is the need of the hour, at the same time to venture for rejuvenating the degraded ecologies. ABIDAT seeks to build human capacity that yearns to serve stakeholders that consist the farming communities and beyond, in the context of climate change, water scarcity, desertification, degradation, etc.

BGU Israel, offers a PG Certificate in Dryland Studies (PGCDS) program with a 1 Year (2 Semesters) duration through ABIDAT. Thus, this collaboration envisages that its graduating students would be a ‘Scientist-cum-Development Specialist’ with an aptitude for innovating feasible solutions. This is enabling the scholars to keenly analyse a specific constraint or a set of limitations and recommend or work out suitable solutions. Additionally, he or she would be able to convey to a Team of Scientists, the potential answers or thrust areas for research. Most of all, it is anticipated that he or she would be eminently employable, besides being competent to become an entrepreneur, which could result in employment generation.

In these times of uncertainty, it may yet be propitious for those who choose to believe that ‘the sky is the limit’, there is always light at the end of the tunnel. Further, instead of focusing only on enhancement of productivity, extending a broader and holistic support is the prerequisite. Hence, considering the risks, which are dynamically emerging under the climate-change scenario, along with the threat to the soil by way of degradation, biodiversity loss, groundwater depletion, farmers’ health hazards, unstable food and nutrition security, proactive steps towards building the long-term health of both, ecosystems and the populace is the urgent target.

I congratulate the 1st Batch PGCDS graduates, who have been the harbinger for an unique international endeavour! At the same time warmly welcome each of the prospective scholars to join hands with us, with a sense of commitment and integrity to serve the nation(s) and fulfil the vision of the Institute: “*To transform lives through sustainable and holistic rejuvenation of fragile dryland and desert ecosystems*”!

May each of you be empowered to achieve the goals of your life even as you venture through the portals of ABIDAT!

[**Thomas Abraham**]