

Important learnings and issues from the 3-day interface

My dear learned friends,

Let me begin by thanking you all and congratulating each one of you for making it possible to run an intensive 3-days, interface with the faculty. Why do I think so, and articulate in such a manner?

- * I realize and appreciate that the quality of theses of ISEC is very high. One of the best in the world. Equally impressive is the quality of research of the faculty and the magnitude of books, papers published in scopus-indexed journals, and also books written.
- * Congratulations to all of you. I also express my gratitude to all the past faculty and management who sowed bold seeds and created a culture of excellence, during their times.
- * We highly appreciate the initiative of all our predecessors since 1972. They include Board of Governors, Chairpersons, Directors, Professors who have created a corpus of knowledge, served government priorities, produced Ph.D scholars of high caliber, and created several platforms in the institute. All these initiatives have created a niche for ISEC as a national institute of high standard. We, the present team of Board of Governors, Director and faculty are committed to carrying forward the healthy tradition of service and offer the warranted response to the contemporary times, which are vulnerable, as never before, to cataclysmic changes.

- * Shifting the gear, I would like to share with you all the “Karnataka State Environment Award, 2024-25” conferred upon one of our colleagues.

Every awardee wins Rs.100,000 cash and a certificate of honour.

Dr Krishna Raj has been awarded the prestigious recognition for Southern Region of Karnataka, this year.

We all congratulate him and thank him for bringing credit to ISEC.

- * Next, I congratulate Dr Lakshamna who as the Director In-charge organized “Clean Plastic Campaign” on the occasion of World Environment Day. It did catch the attention of Media. He did this during his short period of incumbency and at a short notice.
- * I place on record the contribution of Dr D. Rajasekhar, former Director, Dr C.M. Lakshmana, former Director In-charge, Dr Parmod Kumar, Acting Director, Dr S. Manasi, Dr Indrajit Bairagya, Dr Sobin George and Dr A.V. Manjunatha, all of whom helped in organising this 3-days interface. I also thank Mr Satish Kamath and Mr Vinod Chandra Rai who have ensured glitch-free virtual interface apart from taking care of recording the sessions partially, and capturing the session proceedings through the lense.

* There are many more to be thanked, which I do in silence, and now, I shift to share with you my own learnings that I benefitted from your presentations, inputs from illustrious experts, and general deliberations. I share with you some bullet points that I could punch into my mobile as I drove to the Institute this morning from my home.

1. All the Centres and faculty have a clear strategy and have engaged themselves with a lot of work across the domains.

2. In order to deploy your high intellectual caliber, you need to prioritize the energy and time investment among different domains of activities - research, academics, workshops (organising & participating), publications, book writing, writing of general interest articles, other outreach programs (accepting invites for talks, etc.), besides carrying out responsibilities as head or member of intra-mural committees. The Heads of Centres (HoCs) need to engage their centre staff and draw up an optimal annual action plan so that as a Centre, you are using your collective time optimally, while simultaneously, fulfilling your individual aspirations. The Heads of the Centres will need to be extremely sensitive in allocating different responsibilities to different members of their respective Centre to ensure an optimal outcome. We need to draw the best from each faculty member based on his/her strength and aspirations.

3. I see that each member is in a way heavily loaded with a kaleidoscope of assignments. The Institute therefore needs to focus on filling up all vacant positions. We may need to redesign the minimum threshold standards without diluting the essential qualifications in recruiting the new staff. A

group of professors may be constituted to suggest changes needed. Simultaneously, we shall take care of your promotions (CAS).

4. Apropos the institute's research domain, there have been suggestions by the experts invited to the deliberations, that we should optimize the outcomes in a balanced manner across different domains - evaluation studies, empirical studies, longitudinal studies, and developing theoretical framework. While evaluation studies are also important as our support to governments (state and union), we need to be as circumspect as possible. Of course, the revenues that these generate cannot be forgotten, besides, the benefits that the governments derive from our studies. Simultaneously, we must be left with reasonable time to work on empirical studies and constitutional studies around larger issues that are impacting our society in multiple ways, besides attempting theoretical frameworks. While doing so, we should try to tap finances from multiple sources including international agencies.

Developing theoretical framework that challenge conventional models should also be attempted. Global institutions like Harvard, Stanford, Cambridge, etc. have gained a pedestal because of their contributions to theoretical framework. Let's try too and create our own niche. After having listened to your presentations, I am hopeful of ISEC foraying into this esoteric domain. As an institution we should be adding to the stock of global knowledge.

6. We shall focus on longitudinal and long-term studies spread over decades is common in agricultural sciences. Given the stability and multi-

disciplinary approach of ISEC, such studies are possible. As part of long-term studies let us identify a couple of villages, collect baseline data and information, including pictographic; and evaluate, as also document the changes that occurs from year to year. This study should extend over decades and even centuries.

7. Some experts have suggested the need for working on greater presence for ISEC in the public domain, and earning a status at the national level on par with institutions like IISc, and first generation IIMs and IITs. We however, need to balance between easy publicity and genuine outcome based recognition.

8. The youngsters need to be mentored by the seniors by engaging with them formally and informally. They can be supported to upgrade their skills in research, teaching, writing and oral communication. We shall soon organize a two-days orientation program for the newly appointed Assistant Professors.

9. We can in this regard consider deputing faculty members for short courses in specific domains like research methodologies, mathematical & statistical applications, fundamentals in identified subjects, etc.

10. Let us emphasize more on interdisciplinary research as contemporary society is getting more complex and is being influenced by several factors simultaneously. The influences are both domestic (local & national), as also global. I would like to draw your kind attention to the influences that go beyond economics. The importance of disciplines like Sociology,

Psychology, Political science, etc., is that they enable us to consider life on earth in a more wholesome manner. Ecosystems approach is critical to our research and academics. I already see that some of you are extensively engaged with each other across your domains. Let's make this more visible and a norm. We can go beyond our institution, and partner with other institutes within and outside the country.

11. Sharing of research studies with others whenever a staff is appointed as a committee member, he/she can seek relevant information from others, if already certain findings and recommendations exist. For example, a Professor nominated as a member of traffic management committee, could seek inputs from Centre for Research in Urban Affairs (CRUA) which has Ph D studies, on related topics.

12. Since gathering primary data in social sciences is not always easy, let's tap multiple sources of secondary data that are accessible and take up meta analysis, based on which critical contemporary issues can be identified. This is, however, not to undermine the importance of collecting primary data which should remain a part of our research.

13. Build strong professional networks across the country and the world. Meet known professionals when attending conferences, hold virtual meetings to discuss on critical topics, and adopt such other approaches.

14. Create a robust academic and research ambience on the campus by organising and participating in various institute programs and events -

presentations by Ph.D. students, seminars of different Centres, conferences, and MONTHLY THIRD THURSDAY TALK (MTTT).

15. Weekly Monday Morning Meet - Director to invite all staff for half an hour informal chat every Monday at 9.30 am over a cup of tea. This will help in breaking ice and gaining support of one another at the mind and heart levels, facilitating in consequence total support in professional tasks. We can exhibit restraint and maturity in both personal and professional interactions

16. Let's cheer each other. I find that a large number of you have been winning awards, and are being invited to serve as members of different committees at state, national, and international levels. This is a great credit to you as individuals and to the institute. We must recognize these and celebrate by congratulating (letters from the Chairman, and Director), by hosting on the website, and releasing to the press in important cases. The individuals earning such a recognition may bring this to the notice of a PRO to be nominated by the director.

17. Some of the Centres with just one or two staff members need strengthening. We shall pay attention to this.

18. Setting up new Centres - Centre for Quantitative Analytics and Centre for Capacity Building are the two being considered for now. Two committees may be constituted to suggest how this need can be realised at the earliest. All our research across the domains would benefit from

application of quantitative techniques. The research would stand upgraded to global standards.

19. Two compilations are required and are in the interest of our institute. These are :

- i) Compilation of all Policy Briefs into a book. We can share thus with governments;
- ii) Compilation of different works carried out by various Centres - projects, Ph.Ds, evaluation studies etc. This will let others know the corpus of work turned out by our institute over the years, since 1972.

20. Create a corner of ISEC Books published in the library. Set up a display space for each to exhibit books etc. turn by turn. Each can exhibit for a week or so.

21. Each of the centres may deliberate and prioritize 3 to 5 themes on which they would like to work as a long term strategy. We can compile these into ISEC PRIOROTY AGENDA.

22. Discipline, diligence, and punctuality. These traits add charm and a special character to our institute, and help youngsters, particularly the Ph.D. scholars and interns to acquire right professional qualities for their life. We shall believe in self-discipline than in enforced discipline.

23. Each of the Centres may submit the main decisions taken during the interface and the director may compile the same and bring up.

24. Let's all work together as true professionals and as ISEC TEAM. Let us plan to meet at regular intervals. One of the suggestions from our expert is that the faculty should sit through all presentations.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank you all on behalf of the Board of Governors, while also assuring each one of you of our whole hearted support and facilitation.

Thank you one and all.

Ashok Dalwai
Chairman, Board of Governors, ISEC
20th June, 2025, Friday