



# FACE-TO-FACE

April 2019



*“In all of my long career spanning 40 years, I strongly believed that inducing commitment and passion in community work leads to utmost satisfaction. Doing such community work needs continuous and consolidated efforts, even as the work itself may not seem to be bringing short-term personal benefits”.*

Professor WADP Wanigasundera  
Department of Agricultural Extension  
Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka  
[wanigasundera@gmail.com](mailto:wanigasundera@gmail.com)

**After putting in more than two decades of glorious service, Professor WADP Wanigasundera is retiring this month from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Speaking to Dr Rasheed Sulaiman V, Focal Point AESA, recently, he detailed his professional achievements and experiences, and shared his post-retirement plans. Excerpts from the interview.**

**Could you kindly share a few words about your professional experience teaching at the Department of Agricultural Extension, University of Peradeniya?**

I have been here for 26 years. I graduated in 1977 from this very Faculty with a Bachelors’ degree in Agriculture and worked for a year as a temporary lecturer. Then I joined the Tea Research Institute of Sri Lanka as an Advisory Officer and have been there for over 16 years. I was awarded a PhD in 1987 from the University of Reading and was promoted to Senior Advisory Officer and then headed the Advisory & Extension Division. In 1994 I rejoined the Faculty of Agriculture University of Peradeniya. Part of a small team, but the academic program of the Department was expanding into related disciplines.

Ever since, I have been teaching almost all of the courses offered by the Department. The list is quite long and includes Agricultural Extension and Communication to Natural Resource Management to Organizational Behaviour. I was appointed the Head of the Department within a short span; lucky enough to be the only one to reach the position in as early as five years that too in the permanent cadre. I am more of a generalist in the fields of Extension Communication and Rural Development, and my research work also cuts across several sub disciplines.



University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Since 1992, I was involved in the teaching panel and the Board of Study of the Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture. I also served as a UNDP local consultant to develop the Masters' degree in Organizational Management, which has become one of the most popular programs over the years. I was responsible for developing services of the Audio Visual Unit of the Department and we produced several high quality video documentaries and training material for various stakeholders in Agriculture sector.

I played a key role in reviving the Sri Lanka Agricultural Extension Association (SLAEA) through which several national and international programs were organized. My research work was mostly related to developing extension models and development communication approaches. I have also evaluated several rural development projects implemented locally and elsewhere. In 2013, I was awarded a fellowship by the European Union to pursue a post-doctoral research program on climate change communication at University of Minho, Portugal. I served as a research supervisor for over 15 MPhil and PhD students and supervised over 50 final-year Bachelors' research projects.

### How different was teaching from your experience serving the tea sector?

There are a few similarities and also differences. At TRI I was involved mostly in technology transfer functions. I used to visit tea plantations and advise managers on how to adapt scientific solutions to various field-level problems. I also conducted many farmer training programs for managers and all levels of employees in tea plantations. Based on my doctoral research findings related to the knowledge systems in tea plantations, I have introduced some innovative extension training programs and audio visual aids. I also guided the extension team of the TRI to engage in monitoring and evaluation of the extension programs.



**Tea Research Institute, Sri Lanka**

The type of administration I had to deal with was very different from that of the University. Many senior scientists found it difficult to manage their R & D work. Adding to it were my health issues and I moved out of TRI and rejoined the University. In my case, I was the first full-time extension worker to complete a PhD, despite the opposition by my superior who felt that Advisory officers need not do doctoral research. Thanks to my professors from Reading University who managed to convince the top management of the Tea Board in Colombo and helped me complete my PhD.

I am happy that the situation has changed since and many senior Advisory and extension Officers not only from TRI, but also from other extension services are now allowed to go for their PhDs. Since I joined the Faculty, my working environment became more pleasant and dealing with staff and students became my passion. I have contributed to many committees in the Faculty and University and also engaged in student counseling and advisory work.

### **A little about your contributions to the University and also to the Tea Sector in Sri Lanka?**

I am satisfied on the contributions I have made to Sri Lankan tea sector. Even after leaving the TRI, I have been serving in technical committees of the TRI as well as of the Tea Smallholdings Development Authority. I have conducted a good deal of extension research in the tea sector. During my University career of over two decades, I got involved in development work of the Faculty and the University, particularly related to the Development Communication and Organizational Management disciplines and outreach activities of the Faculty.

### **How do you plan to continue your scholarly activities post retirement?**

I hope to do some teaching and supervising students' research at the Post-Graduate Institute in Agriculture. I plan to work more closely with the Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF), which is an unique organization engaged in research, training and development projects related to Development Communication. I currently serve as the Chairperson of SDJF and hope to engage more actively in the R & D functions undertaken at SDJF.

### **You facilitated setting up the Network of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services in Sri Lanka. How do you like to strengthen this fledging network post-retirement?**

I am glad that my involvement in the activities of the Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESAS) for the last seven years has given me opportunity to organize several useful actions to uplift the professionalism of our extension services. I facilitated organizing the Workshop on Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) of Extension and Advisory Services in Sri Lanka in February 2016 with AESAS and SLAEA (Sri Lanka Agricultural Extension Association). We also organized a National Conference and Policy Dialogue in 2016 in collaboration with AESAS.



**Participants at the CNA workshop**



**Policy Dialogue- 2016**

The setting up of the Network of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services in Sri Lanka (NAEASSL) is probably the most important development. In October 2018 AESAS in collaboration with NAEASSL, the Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) organized a Policy Dialogue in Sri Lanka on the Role of EAS in Scaling-Up Climate Smart Agriculture. I hope that SDJF would be interested in related programs enabling my continued involvement in the Network.

## Does the future point to an active role in community media (radio/video) for you?

Yes. I strongly believe that communication for development cannot totally depend on conventional mass media to support development of our country or for that matter in the entire Asian region. A journalistic approach using community media and interactive multi-media formats needs to be introduced and further strengthened. A good deal of my recent research was about developing such communication approaches. I would like to promote this discipline among young academic and development workers. I like to develop effective development communication tools and apply those to uplift the needy communities all over the country and the region.

Blog 92: January 2019

Agricultural Extension in South Asia

COMMUNITY RADIO IN SOUTH ASIA– POTENTIAL FOR SHARING COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND CONNECTING PEOPLE



*Community radio (CR) is a remarkable mass media that could give voice to the voiceless in rural and urban societies. In this blog Prof. WADP Wanigasundera and Mr MC Rasmin explore the current status of CR and its contribution to the development of the rural economy, largely based on their recent visits to several CR stations in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal.*

<http://www.aesanetwork.org/blog-92-community-radio-in-south-asia-potential-for-sharing-community-information-and-connecting-people/>

## Your message to the young faculty and students who are passionate about agricultural extension in Sri Lanka?

I strongly feel that commitment and passion towards community work lead to utmost satisfaction. I still remember how I helped many rural communities and students groups. Doing such community work needs continuous commitment, even though it may not seem to be bringing short-term personal benefits. I always advise my students: *“Try to do something you have never done before and try to do it in way you have never tried before and that alone is the way to reach your full potential”*.

*Dr Rasheed Sulaiman V is the Director, Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) Hyderabad, India ([rasheed.sulaiman@gmail.com](mailto:rasheed.sulaiman@gmail.com))*

**AESA Secretariat: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP),  
Road No 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India  
[www.aesanetwork.org](http://www.aesanetwork.org)      Email: [aesanetwork@gmail.com](mailto:aesanetwork@gmail.com)**