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THE AGRI ENTREPRENEURS' SERVICE CENTRE (AESC) FOR PROMOTING AGRIPRENEURSHIP



In this Good Practice Note P Alagesan and M Siva throw light on the Agri Entrepreneurs' Service Centre (AESC) established at the ICAR-KVK, Erode, for promoting agripreneurship. They explore the need for investing in skill training and promoting active convergence of community resource institutions for engaging youth in agripreneurial activities.

CONTEXT

As with all the Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) established under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), the ICAR-KVK (functioning under MYRADA) based in Erode district of Tamil Nadu conducts skill-based training programmes for farmers, rural youth and entrepreneurs on a regular basis. Between 2019 and 2022, 284 such training programmes were conducted in which more than 7,250 persons participated. The programmes covered a range of subjects that included organic farming, mushroom growing, honeybee farming, poultry and livestock management and value addition of farm produce. Experienced training institutions are well aware of the fact that not everyone who participates in such programmes practices the skills learnt. Some farm as a matter of habit and some love to connect with their lands and livestock but few take farming to a professional level where it becomes a viable business despite its varied risks and challenges. For those who are inclined to take this plunge, professional handholding support is essential to navigate the complicated path. ICAR-KVK-MYRADA has conceptualized and promoted the Agri Entrepreneurs' Service Centre (AESC) to provide such support through which entrepreneurs networks can be established and enterprises can be sustained (Box 1).



Box 1: Agri Entrepreneurs' Service Centre (AESC)

AESC is an institution established by the KVK to provide handholding support to farmers and entrepreneurs. The centre extends mentoring support to budding entrepreneurs so as to sustain their enterprises with appropriate services via collective action. The KVK trains and handholds interested farmers in their endeavour at becoming agripreneurs, and they in turn will serve as mentors of KVK to train other budding entrepreneurs.

AESC provides the following services:

- Skill-based training in agriculture and animal husbandry
- Linking new and budding entrepreneurs to established and successful entrepreneurs
- Develop bankable project proposals
- Link with resource institutes/departments/regulatory bodies
- Honouring outstanding entrepreneurs
- Publishing impactful experiences and popularizing that in print and electronic media

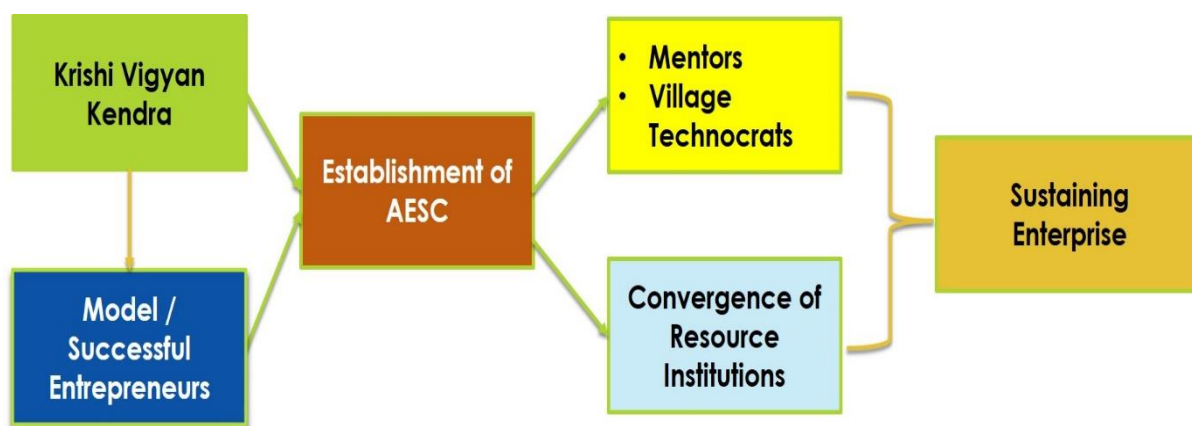
RATIONALE

As mentioned earlier, many of the participants who undergo skill-based training programmes do not practice the skills learnt. The reasons include:

- Lack of information on resources and marketing institutions
- Lack of mentoring support for budding entrepreneurs
- Lack of networking among youths to develop enterprises
- Absence of grassroot level institutions for sustaining their initiatives

HOW IS IT ORGANISED?

With the cooperation of successful entrepreneurs and mentors trained by the KVK, AESC was initiated informally with 36 founder members. Later it was legally registered as a society under the Society Registration Act of Tamil Nadu. At present, it has 436 successful entrepreneurs/mentors. It is headed by the President, who is managing the organization, together with a Secretary who runs the day-to-day activities of AESC. It has two other staff members – one for office administration and another to look after marketing and liaising with other stakeholders.



Organogram of AESC

SUCCESSFUL CASES

BANANA ENTERPRISE

Banana enterprise is a successful functional model in AESC, where the below mentioned support is extended from the KVK and mentors for its sustenance.

- Technological interventions
- Capacity development
- Input support-banana special
- Exposure visit to NRCB, Trichy
- Support for establishment of value added production unit
- Innovative product development
- Validation of products
- Support for networking with markets

Products developed

- Banana fibre extraction
- Ropes, handicrafts and pith blocks made from fibre
- Bio growth promoter for crops and cleaning material for floor and cloth wash from sap water
- Banana special which is a micronutrient mixture prepared by the entrepreneurs with the support of KVK and marketed through AESC.

Table 1 provides the numerical figures of skill building activities carried out through AESC.

Table 1: Skill building in banana enterprises (2017-18 to 2021-22)

Year	No. of training	Total participants	No. of youths
2017-18	14	684	172
2018-19	12	598	151
2019-20	18	84	258
2020-21	22	1127	317
2021-22	28	1456	409
Total	94	4711	1307

Totally 1307 youths were covered, and 37% banana value added products developed.

Box 2 provides an example case of a mentor who is a sustained banana entrepreneur.

Box 2: Case study of mentor Mr M Prasath

Place: Madeshwaran Kovil Street, Gobi-638452,

Expertise in: Banana fibre, fibre mat, pith, block, sap water, natural dye and handicrafts

Brand name: SP GRACE Natural

Experience: Eight years

Mr Prasath is a young entrepreneur residing in Gobichettipalyam. He was trained on banana fibre extraction in 2008. Starting with a production of 150 kg fibre, his production expanded to 1 ton per month. From fibre, he developed rope and handicraft materials; and from pith he developed banana pith blocks. From sap water, he is producing a bio growth promoter for crops as well as cleaning material for floors and clothes.

He is a member of AESC. Initially he marketed banana fibre and its by-products at local markets. Later, he started marketing these abroad with the brand name of SP Grace Naturals. Quality analysis was done for his products by scientific institutions. He participated in state and national level exhibitions and melas.

He is earning Rs. 45000/month through this enterprise. He gets invited as a master trainer on banana fibre-based products by various universities, research, and skill-based institutes.

Outcome and impact

- At cluster level three production units were established. Cluster here means a group of trained persons (15 to 20 persons) running an enterprise at the same location for easy implementation and follow-up of the enterprise.
- With his support 174 new entrepreneurs entered into banana fibre production and 16 tons of value-added banana fibre was extracted in total by these 174 entrepreneurs.
- 6000 liter/year SAP water-based value-added items were produced.
- Mat produced and marketed by youths - 40000 Mt/year.
- 2000 Handicrafts/year produced and marketed. Network with international market outlets (Japan, Sri Lanka).
- Provides technological expertise to farmers in other districts.



Handicrafts made from Banana Fiber, SAP Water products & Sanitary Pad

MILLET ENTERPRISE

Under this functional model, the following support was provided by KVK and mentors to entrepreneurs and village technocrats. (The technocrats are the trained Community Resource Persons promoted by KVK. They disseminate technologies and services at the grassroots level on bee keeping, organic farming, millet value addition, banana value addition, artificial insemination, etc.).

- Skill training
- Varietal demonstrations
- Exposure visit
- Establishment of value addition unit
- Standardization of value-added products

- Convergence with resource institutions
- Product development from millets (developed primary products such as grains from millets secondary products such as flour, nutria mix, biscuits, flakes and other confectionaries)
- Maintenance of quality standards of value-added products (grading, branding, certification)



A case of a successful mentor in millet enterprises is presented in Box 3.

Box 3: Case study of mentor Mrs E Kavitha

Place: Anupparpalayam, Sadhumugai post, Sathy taluk,

Expertise in: Millet-based products

Brand name: AARA

License: FSSAI

Experience: Five years

Recognition: TNAU TBI-Ideathon Award

Outcome and impact

- Millet processing unit: There are three units at KVK; six units under FPOs; and 11 units managed by young entrepreneurs individually;
- Market outlet: 18 individual youths established outlets; 82 value-added products in millet produced by youth.



HONEY ENTERPRISE

Like the banana and millet enterprises, honey enterprise is also one of the proven successful agripreneurship models promoted by AESC. Table 2 has the details.

Table 2: Cluster promotion through honey enterprise

Cluster area	No. of youths	No. of boxes	Average production/month
Gobichettipalayam	7	240 boxes	205 kg
TN Palayam	9	102 boxes	87
Anthiyur	4	60 boxes	35 kg
Perundurai	2	30 boxes	23 kg
Total	22	432 boxes	350 kg

To scale up this model, the mentors and the KVK have extended support to village technocrats, farmers, and entrepreneurs in the form of skill training, exposure to model bee farm, support with bee boxes and accessories, technical follow up and advisory services, value addition and marketing, standardization of value-added products, together with convergence with resource institutions. It has also promoted product development (honey and other value-added honey products), branding and certification. Box 4 shows the case of a successful mentor under this model.

Box 4: Case study of mentor Mrs Manjula Parthiban

Place: Kolapalur post, Gobi taluk, Erode District

Expertise: Honey, value-added products, accessories manufacturing

Brand name: Manjari

License: EO License, FSSAI approval, approved trademark

Experience: 12 years

Recognition: Member of National Bee Board

Value-added products developed from honey are: honey storage tank, pure honey, honey with dry fruits and nuts, honey amla candy, honey wax, honey chocolate, and bee pollen.

Outcome and impact

- 27 units established in the district which covers 1200 boxes;
- 32 branded value-added products developed;
- Six model farms established for providing training and technical guidance;
- Promoted 22 youths as mentors in bee rearing for budding youth entrepreneurs in various districts;
- Technology disseminated through national level exhibitions;
- Promotion of bee keeping activities to other districts through technical expertise services;
- Boxes supplied to other districts – Krishnagiri (75 boxes supplied); Dharmapuri (25), Vellore (100), Thiruvannamalai (120), Exhibitions and stalls (890).





DESI BIRD ENTERPRISE

The desi bird enterprise has proven to be a sustainable livelihood model for youth, which is promoted through AESC offering the following support.

- Technological interventions/approaches
- Skill training (desi bird rearing techniques)
- Demo units (desi birds; azolla, EVM; termite production)
- Extension activity (publications, SMS, exhibitions, advisory services);]
- Supply of quality chicks (desi chicks)
- Support for establishment of units (hatchery unit, feed mixing unit)
- Dissemination of farm innovations (low-cost incubator and egg embryo detector)

Table 3: KVK's interventions

Name of the intervention	Method of approach	No. of units established	No. of youths covered
Hatchery unit	Group	3	75
Feed mixing unit	Group	2	60
Azolla/termite production	Demonstration/individual	110	110
Egg embryo detector	Individual	-	75
Ethno veterinary garden	Demonstration/individual	6	30
New varietal-desi chicks	Demonstration	40	40
Desi bird production	Individual	75	75

Box 5: Case study of mentor Mr Natarajan

Place: Uthandiur Post, Bhavanisagar, Sathy taluk

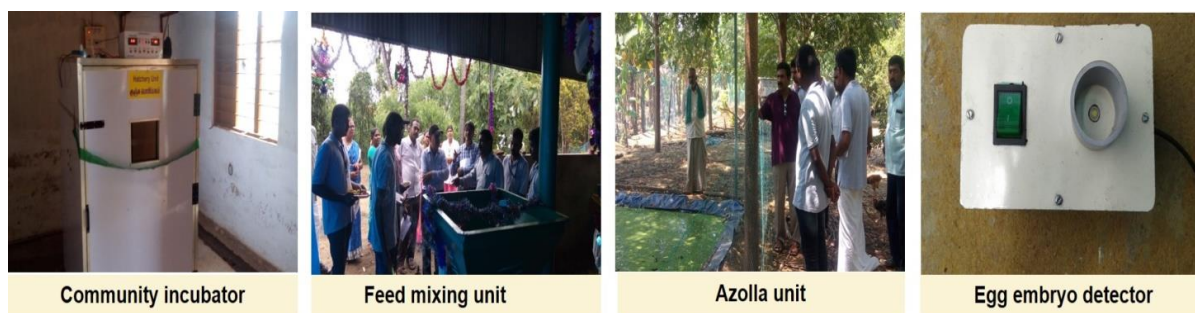
Expertise: Egg, meat, desi bird rearing, dog breeding, azolla cultivation, hatchery unit

Experience: Six years

Recognition: Mahindra Samriddhi Award

Outcome and impact

- 465 youths got involved in desi bird production enterprises in Erode district;
- Community incubator in three clusters - 310 rural youths benefitted and sustain their desi bird production
- 47 youths providing employment and mentoring support for budding entrepreneurs
- Feed mixing unit in two clusters - 85 youths benefitted. Additional income of Rs. 12000 to Rs. 15000/month realized by individual youths.



IMPACT

The AESC has 436 members in three categories: (i) Farm-based enterprises (143 members); (ii) Livestock enterprises (82 members); and (iii) Value-added products enterprises (211 members). Among these enterprises, KVK has developed 84 mentors who train and provide handholding support to budding entrepreneurs.

- 84 mentors developed by AESC are spread across the state (not restricted just to Erode district).
- 26 mentors received awards and recognition from TNAU and other reputed private companies for their achievements and replication of their models.
- AESC supported 17 members to showcase their products in social media, such as Krishi Jagran, Pasumai Vigadan and Aval Vigadan (especially for women entrepreneurs) for their business expansion.
- Agripreneurs participated in 23 Exhibitions organized by government departments and colleges. They invite AESC for wider reach so as to promote entrepreneurs among farmers and youth.
- AESC conducted 35 skill-based capacity building programmes for farmers, entrepreneurs of Erode and other parts of the district with technical support from KVK. Totally 1257 members attended and benefitted.
- Created networking among mentors and members for exchanging their ideas, and raw materials for individual enterprises development.
- AESC supported its mentors with bankable projects for the amount of Rs. 1,20,00,000/- for 15 members for dairy farming, goat rearing and fisheries.
- Due to the facilitation and networking of AESC, members could realize enhanced income ranging from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 85,000/per month based on the enterprises.
- AESC paved a platform for ARYA members to expand their business opportunities.

LESSON FROM IMPLEMENTATION

KVKs across the country – if they are keen on promoting entrepreneurs in the field of agriculture – can replicate this functional model with the necessary adaptations. Identification and handholding of mentors in varied sectors is crucial for promoting agripreneurs. Stakeholders in the agriculture and allied sectors can make use of this platform to support budding entrepreneurs by converging their ongoing programmes/services in the district. Recognition, awards and resource support through

ongoing schemes could be used to motivate agripreneurs, but they also need new business ideas, technological innovations and publicity to strengthen their enterprises. Bankable projects in different enterprises can be developed and compliance carried out by the institution to support the members to get the necessary financial linkages from banks and government departments.

Many KVKs organize skill training on different aspects. To help these trainees to apply these skills, handholding support is important, and this should be provided. Only through the development of centres such as AESC can we ensure sustainability and further development of new enterprises.

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