

SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING IN EXTENSION: ARE WE DOING ENOUGH AND ARE WE DOING WELL?



Enhancing the quality of extension research is a pre-requisite for improving the quality of academic publishing in extension. Much needs to be done on strengthening drafting skills and improving the quality of peer review too, argues Dr S V N Rao, Dr K Natchimuthu and Dr S Ramkumar.

WHY PUBLISH?

Researchers aim at understanding problems and often providing solutions to address these. Some develop technologies which make human life better and easier by saving time and other resources. Through continuous research they try to address existing and expected problems and come up with technologies/practices which may replace, modify or refine the existing ones. Publications serve as one of the important windows of the research output.

Publications primarily help researchers working in similar areas to gather information on recent developments in their field of study. It also helps the authors to get feedback on their work and get motivated to pursue their research in new directions as suggested. The authors also get credit for their published work through its use as an indicator of performance in career advancement and grant of research funds. For the donors (public and private) who fund research, publications serve as a measure of accountability. Apart from all these, the publications help the wider community of knowledge users to know about the new knowledge generated through research.



EXTENSION RESEARCH

Research in extension is required to address the following issues:

1. Problem identification and prioritization of research areas as input to research stations – (Participatory research methods with the involvement of the concerned stakeholders including the scientists of various disciplines).
2. Understand the role of extension and advisory services in the emerging and dynamically changing context/ scenario of development (globalisation, privatization, food security, food safety, climate change etc.)
3. Testing of technologies – both *ex ante* and *ex post*; Identifying essential conditions for exploiting different technologies; Assessing the non- technological factors influencing the flow of technologies.
4. Analyzing different farming systems; Assessment and prioritization of the knowledge and support needs for different crop -livestock production systems.
5. Development and validation of innovative extension models.
6. Development of appropriate training modules for capacity building and policy engagement.
7. Generating information on when, where and how to produce and market; and identification of innovative methods to communicate to the concerned stakeholders including the farming community through appropriate dissemination methods / strategies.
8. Evaluation of the existing extension models and expert systems under different crop - livestock production systems; Impact assessments of programmes (both public and private).
9. Identification of best practices in different crops/livestock/fisheries sectors.
10. Focus on curriculum development and course content to address the future challenges of extension.

Though the research in extension has wider scope, it mainly focuses on adoption and diffusion of innovations and often revolves around research – extension - farmer linkages. Extension research has many such self imposed limitations and these were discussed in some of our previous AESA Blogs.

<p>Blog 4: March 2013</p>  <p>Research in Extension: New tools to reinvent its future</p>  <p><i>While research tools and techniques in core disciplines from which extension borrowed its research methods have evolved significantly, extension research still depends heavily on many of the outdated tools. Extension research has a lot to catch up if it hopes to address its declining credibility and improve its contribution to social science research, argues, Dr P Sethuraman Sivakumar.</i></p>	<p>Blog 5: March 2013</p>  <p>Research in Extension: It is time to introspect</p>  <p><i>Though the field of extension globally has moved beyond technology transfer facilitation, learning, organising and building networks, extension research in India still stuck in studying technology transfer, per se. Moreover, extension research has never received adequate attention from practitioners, managers and faculty extension. Lack of adequate field-oriented research and poor professional standards research have considerably eroded the credibility of extension research and practice. It is time to introspect and take corrective measures, argues Dr R. M. Prasad.</i></p>
<p>Blog 29: February 2014</p>  <p>Extension Research and Technology Development</p>  <p><i>Though extension scientists in the NARS can potentially engage in useful research that can influence the technology development process, they are mostly engaged in organizing training programmes, conducting events, dealing with visitors to the institute and handling documentation responsibilities. Senior extension scientists, Dr M J Chandra Gowda, Dr Sreenath Dixit, Dr R Roy Burman and Dr P N Ananth reflect on this situation here and suggest how extension research can better contribute to technology development.</i></p>	<p>Blog 39: September 2014</p>  <p>Extension Research: Random thoughts from a Well Wisher</p>  <p><i>Are we serious in undertaking research in Extension? Do we have a research agenda? As a discipline, are we using new concepts and approaches to better design our research? How policy relevant is our research? Do we only extend knowledge or do we also create knowledge? As extension professionals, we need to introspect on the status of our research and address many such disturbing questions, argues Dr R M Prasad.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Agricultural Extension in South Asia</p>

Though the extension science globally has moved beyond technology transfer to facilitation, learning, organising and building networks, extension research in India is still stuck in studying technology transfer (Prasad, 2013). While research tools and techniques in core disciplines from which extension borrowed its research methods have evolved significantly, extension research still depends heavily on many of the outdated tools (Sivakumar, 2013). In most cases, extension research looks at farmers or extension personnel as subjects and crop/farming system as settings of the study. The concept of 'research' in extension needs to be broadened, recognising that beyond the public research and extension organisations, a range of actors have important and vital roles in the generation and dissemination of agricultural innovation (Prasad, 2014).

Though extension scientists in the NARS can potentially engage in useful research that can influence the technology development process, they are mostly engaged in organizing training programmes, conducting events, dealing with visitors to the institute and handling documentation responsibilities (Gowda et al, 2014). Lack of clarity on the role of extension scientists (extension work Vs extension research) has also contributed to this situation. Though participation in extension related activities provide lot of scope for conducting research and publishing them, academic publishing is a low priority in extension.

Many extension practitioners are involved in extension work but they rarely publish research articles, may be due to their lack of need/ interest for such publications or capacity to write articles from their work experience. Very rarely we find research articles from our colleagues working in 637 KVKs in the country. Same is the case with many NGOs involved in field extension work. In fact we are losing much of the excellent "work experience" gained especially by the field functionaries working in different production systems by not sharing it through publications. It is a big loss to the extension profession. It is important to harness such useful experiences in different crop livestock production systems and make them accessible to others through publications, one of the important ways to share them.

ACADEMIC PUBLISHING IN EXTENSION

Most of the current research in extension is from students' thesis work and their compulsion to publish their work either for acceptance of their thesis or for improving their chances for employment. Extension scientists/teachers in research centers, colleges and training centers have to either obtain resources from within or seek external funds to do their research. Requisite resources for research in extension are always in short supply mainly due to lack of clarity between extension research and extension work. Lack of capacity to formulate and submit multi-disciplinary research projects under competitive grants also adds to this challenge.

Academic publishing in extension has suffered mainly due to these limitations in quantity and quality of extension research. There are no two opinions about the necessity and urgency to improve the quality of our existing extension journals, which are in fact suffering from three failures.

- a. Lack of willingness and capacity to take up quality research to produce quality output
- b. Lack of capacity to prepare quality research papers (drafting skills/articulation/language) and
- c. Lack of serious review of submitted papers by the Journal editorial committee/reviewers

The low rating/score given to extension journals by NAAS (National Academy of Agricultural Sciences) is a reflection of all these three failures.

Research: First of all quality of extension research needs improvement. This is a pre-requisite to have good publications in extension in quality journals. A lot was written in the earlier AESA blogs about the current status of extension research and how it could be improved. Usually three categories submit their research findings for publications in either printed or on line journals. These are students, faculty/ teachers of academic institutions, and extension practitioners. Although there are two options for the researchers to present their findings, the students and faculty usually choose the printed journal (s) with good rating rather than on line journals as the former is given more weightage for their assessments/promotions/career advancement.

Selection of appropriate journals is always a challenge for researchers. In the case of extension, the number of extension journals (having the word extension in the title) is few. Though there are a number of non extension journals (social science and general agriculture related) which also publish extension articles, many researchers are not aware of these. To address this issue, AESA has done a marvelous work of compiling a list of journals which are relevant for extension researchers. This could be accessed at <http://aesagfrs.net/Resources/file/Where%20we%20can%20publish%20extension%20research%20-%20Final%20Note.pdf>

 Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy  Agricultural Extension in South Asia <small>Sharing, Learning and Networking for Innovation</small>		Details of Journals where extension research could be published						
<p>Where can we publish extension research?-A Note</p> <p>The following questions bother many who are keen to publish their research on extension.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we publish our papers only in journals having "extension" in their title? • Which are the other journals where we could publish findings of extension research? • Why many other social science journals that publish articles related to extension not being considered for career advancement purpose by organizations like ICAR and SAUS (in India)? • As professionals, should we do something to include many more professionally rated-high impact social science journals in indices which are used for judging professional achievement? • But are we sufficiently aware of the wide range of available journals where we could publish our work? 	S.N	Jrnl ID	ISSN	Name of the Journal	NAAS ¹ Rating	Other Rating	Publisher Details	
	Extension Journals							
	1.	A222	0971-3115		Asian Journal of Extension Education (Maharashtra Journal of Extension Education)	2.93		
	2.	1041	0537-1996		Indian Journal of Extension Education	3.26		Indian Society of Extension Education, Division of Agricultural Extension, IARI, New Delhi Website : www.isee.org.in
3.	1082	0972-2181		Indian Research Journal of Extension Education	3.92		Dr. Jitendra Chauhan Secretary, Society of Extension Education, Agra 810, Paschim Puri, Agra (UP.)- 242007, India Web: http://www.seea.org.in/irjee.html	

The few who know about the scope of these non-extension journals also refrain from submitting their papers in these journals as most of these are not considered/included by NAAS in their rating system. Low quality of extension research also affects its publishing in quality journals. Though many universities insist post-graduate and doctoral students to have at least two articles from his/her research work in journals of repute (before submitting thesis to the concerned university), this is not enforced strictly. Similarly, field practitioners who submit their theses rarely publish their articles from the thesis as their career prospects are not linked to the number and quality of publications.

A lot needs to be done to improve training on research methodology at the post-graduate and doctoral levels. New research methods (both quantitative and qualitative) are yet to find a place in extension curricula. The students and faculty also do not have access to latest books and journals due to budgetary restrictions in academic institutions. Low budgetary allocation to social science text books and journals is also a reflection of the poor image of extension discipline among administrators and others who take these decisions.

Writing skills: Writing a research paper is an art and requires skills which many researchers (students and faculty) are lacking. These skills could be inculcated among the researchers through conducting appropriate training workshops. But this hasn't received any attention from the numerous professional societies in extension which we often find them at loggerheads. There are more than 10 professional societies for extension in India. There is no synergy among these bodies and in fact they compete for the articles to be published and also for getting grants for organizing workshops or seminars every year. Each of these societies publishes their own extension journals. However, none of these journals have rating above 4.0.

Article Review: Our systems for screening and review of research papers need real improvement. The editorial committee which is responsible for publishing each journal as per the frequency and time lines set for it often fails to enforce quality. Many a time, it fails to bring out the journals in time due to several reasons that include, less number of articles received, poor quality of the articles received, lack of commitment on the part of the reviewers in sending their comments on the articles on time, inadequate funds to maintain the editorial office and lack of interest on the part of the editorial committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding for professional improvement and enhanced access to new knowledge: It is necessary for the faculty to understand the dynamic changes happening in extension through trainings, reading journal articles and books. We need to make sure that sufficient funds are available within the different organizations to organize such trainings and subscribe to relevant journals and books.

Reorient professional societies to play new roles relevant for the future of the discipline. These include enhancing skills related to:

- Formulating good projects
- Employing various research tools
- Identifying new areas of research
- Writing research articles – presentation skills
- Accessing new research grants

Professional societies must jointly organize workshops for the benefit of the interested students, faculty and field practitioners on payment basis (no loss no profit basis). There are quite a good number of extension professionals available to deal with the identified topics. This of course, needs lot of ground work to plan and execute.

Review quality of existing journals and expand the number of journals (social science and agricultural related) used for career advancement considerations. There is a lot of scope for improving the quality of the extension journals and the purpose shouldn't be to criticize but to provide constructive criticism to enable the editorial committees to improve the quality standards of their respective journals.

Promote list of latest books on extension and related disciplines and sharing of abstracts or links of extension research papers published in different journals. AESA web-portal (www.aesa-gfras.net) has made a good beginning on this.

References

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