

**Summary of E-Discussion  
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR  
EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICE (EAS) PROVIDERS  
4-25 June 2015**

**Context**

While everybody recognizes the need for extension and advisory service (EAS) professionals to have new capacities (also articulated in the first meeting of the Agricultural Extension in South Asia AESA Network) to deal with the emerging challenges (declining natural resource base, supporting adaptation to climate change, linking farmers to high value markets, conforming to new standards and certification norms, etc), very little is known regarding how these capacities could be really developed. AESA ([www.aesa-gfras.net](http://www.aesa-gfras.net)) organised an e-discussion on the “Capacity Development for Extension and Advisory Service Providers” during 4-25 June 2015. Twenty-four extension professionals participated in this discussion.

**Questions**

The questions posed for the e-discussion are given in Box 1.

**Box 1: Questions posed for e-discussion**

1. Do you think EAS providers need new capacities? GFRAS Position Paper: The New Extensionist (<http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications/file/126-the-new-extensionist-position-paper.html>) lists several areas where capacity needs to be developed at the individual, organisational and the enabling environment levels. What are the other areas which you think capacities need to be developed? What methods and approaches are to be followed in developing these capacities among EAS providers?
2. As you are aware, capacity development is not confined to training, though many consider training as the main strategy for capacity development. Quite often, the topics for training are often decided by the training organisations. Do you think this type of supply driven approach to training is helping capacity development among EAS providers to improve their performance? What is your experience in this regard?
3. Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) is considered as the first step in organising effective capacity development programmes. What are your experiences (methodologies/approaches) with CNA in your organisation/ sector?
4. EAS providers need new capacities at the organisational level too (<http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications/file/126-the-new-extensionist-position-paper.html>). These include capacities related to (a) strategic management functions, (b) operational capacity (relationships, processes, systems, procedures, sanctions, incentives and values), (c) human and financial resources (policies, deployment and performance), (d) knowledge and information resources and (e) infrastructure. How can we develop these capacities? What is your experience in this regard? Where to start?
5. How do you assess capacity gaps in your organisation? What are your experiences (methodologies/approaches) with CNA (both at the individual and the organisational level) in your organisation/sector? Should there be a National Policy Framework for Capacity Development of EAS providers? If so, how to implement it?
6. How do you assess the impact of capacity development programmes at the functional level? Or in other words, how do you assess the contribution of capacity development to individual and organisational performance?

A number of interesting issues related to capacity development of EAS providers were raised in the e-discussion. These are summarized below.

### New Areas for Capacity Development

Capacity development is important not only at the production/cultivation stage, but across entire value chain including processing, packaging, marketing etc. The conventional extension approaches have traditionally focused on production advice only. But with the new set of demands from the ground, farmers as well as EAS providers have to equip themselves with information related to the entire value chain. Capacity development for EAS should focus on these new knowledge demands at different levels. Capacity development of young farmers needs emphasis as they will be taking care of farming in the coming years.

The new requirements for trading/agri-business such as traceability, good agricultural practices etc, especially those requirements which have emerged after WTO agreements, have created new demands for enhanced capacities of extension personnel on these aspects. This is not going to be addressed by simply opening new Agricultural universities and research institutes but by improving the quality of education at existing institutions so that scarce funds are better utilized.

Almost every participant recognised the need for developing new capacities among EAS providers. The New Extensionist document articulates some of the major areas for developing capacities among EAS at the individual, organisational and enabling environment levels. The major areas identified in this e-discussion are as follows:

- Developing producers as effective producer groups/organisations-mobilising farmers into groups and developing forward and backward linkages,
- Management of natural resources
- Contingency crop planning to better adapt to climate change
- Capacities for partnering and implementation
- Developing value chains and sustainable farmer business enterprises
- Entrepreneurship and business management
- Support farmers to move from subsistence farming to commercial farming
- EAS providers should become more of a facilitator than disseminator of technologies
- Developing specific competencies among extension providers and certifying them as recognised advisors

However, all these competencies are not required by all EAS providers. Depending on the job profile and area of work (production, processing, marketing etc), the EAS providers should develop specific or core competencies at each level. For instance what core competencies are required at the levels of (a) field extension personnel, (b) extension research level and (c) extension educator (teachers) level? We need to identify these to really support capacity development of EAS.

The discussion also raised the issue of capacity development of researchers and faculty in extension. The areas suggested include the following:

- Research methodology
- Impact evaluation
- Designing, testing and evaluation of new modes of EAS delivery
- Development of intrinsic motivation to participate in e-discussions, webinars etc.

## Challenges in Identifying the Capacity Gaps

- *Lack of role clarity:* If the roles of EAS providers are not clear and if different stakeholders have different expectations of EAS, how can they self assess their capacity gaps?
- *Focus only on individual capacity:* More focus on addressing individual capacities and low or no emphasis on addressing capacity gaps at the organisational and enabling environment *level*
- *No mechanisms to undertake capacity needs assessment* that should ideally determine the content of the capacity development programmes. Sometimes individuals are asked to identify their training needs, but that alone cannot determine the capacity development requirements at different levels
- *Low personal motivation:* There is neither a desire to provide or acquire new competencies nor the ability and willingness to pay for it, both from the trainer and trainee side.
- *Different EAS providers need different types of capacities:* Requirements of public sector EAS providers which focus more on free advice vary with those from the private sector where the cost of services is directly or indirectly paid by the farmers.
- *No framework or specific manpower for providing EAS* in the livestock sector and so no effort to identify the capacity gaps of EAS

## Limitations of Existing Programmes for Capacity Development

- Mostly restricted to training individuals
- More focus on sharing knowledge and less emphasis on developing skills
- Mostly supply driven and not based on the analysis of capacity development needs
- Learning objective is not set and the contents are not decided based on meeting specific learning objectives
- Training organisations in most cases decide on the training topics (mostly title of the lecture only and leave the rest to the available faculty)
- Trainings are evaluated based on number of participants and expenditure utilised. However, these trainings are not evaluated based on the behavioural changes that are brought about.
- Trainers are not exposed to other forms of capacity development.
- Content, duration and purpose of training are inconsistent in many cases
- Seminars and workshops are often attended by researchers and teachers and only a few field professionals participate in such events
- While designing training and capacity development interventions, gender perspective is ignored or underrepresented

## Varying Perception on Capacity Development

There is no clarity on the use of the term “capacity development” and people have different perceptions on this topic. Capacity development is not merely training individuals and it is more about organisational development. We need to do more to make our research and extension managers aware about the role of capacity development in organisational development. There is also a need to address rivalry among different layers of the organisational hierarchy (eg: Para veterinarians vs veterinary doctors) in having specific types of knowledge, keeping in view the interest of the sector.

Capacity development is a long term process. Therefore, there should be a strategy for continuous capacity development for EAS including KVKs & ATMA that lead extension provisions at the district level.

### Training vs Other Forms of Capacity Development:

- Capacity development is an organic process of developing new competencies through experimentation and continuous learning. There is a need to recognise that participation in one or two trainings is not enough.
- Trainings (including workshops, seminars, conferences etc) in most cases only help in building awareness and less in developing analytical and decision-making capacities.
- Apart from building awareness, capacity development should also include, exposure visits, documentation of good practices, networking, dissemination of relevant information, programmes for self-paced learning etc
- To be effective, EAS providers should be exposed to real field problems through placing them in farms, farmer organisations, *mandies* (markets), retail chain aggregation points, contract/corporate farming enterprises, agri business outlets, implementation sites of NGOs and development departments etc
- Need to build the capacities of training organisations to organise effective capacity development programmes
- Partner with NGOs and organisations in the private sector to support capacity development on soft skills
- Undertake nation-wide survey on capacity development needs of EAS providers (differentiated by their role- example; KVKs, agri-business companies, ATMA, NGOs, producer organisations, agripreneurs etc)
- Other methods might include (a) organising intensive Focus Group Discussions to elicit capacity gaps, (b) using self-assessment questionnaires(c) monthly review meetings, (d) suggestion boxes and(e) discussions on the current challenges and limitations in project management meetings.
- Development of a competency framework for Extension personnel (similar to competency framework for Civil Services in India)
- Undertake research on effective methods of capacity development
- Use of distance education – web-based interactive learning to support capacity development among EAS providers
- Linking of promotions with capacity development
- Development and use of a database (Management Information System) for a systematic selection of trainees (e.g., who has participated in which type of training and when?)

Capacity development is required not just for delivering information related to technology, but on the enabling processes as well. Design of a training course for maximum impact, conflict resolution, negotiation skills, formation and management of farmer producer organizations etc are some areas to be paid attention too. It is also important to introduce paid training courses to improve trainee and trainer commitments.

Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) happens to be a key agency at district level responsible for overall management of agriculture extension system including preparation of Strategic Research and Extension Plan (SREP). ATMA personnel, including Project Director, Deputy Project Director, Block Technology Managers, Assistant Block Technology Managers and Farmer Friend, should be targeted for continuous capacity development.

### Lack of Supporting Environment

A “supporting environment” is required to take advantage of enhanced knowledge and skills gained by individuals through training. Quite often, lack of supporting environment such as lack of facilities in the host organization constrains those trained in new approaches and methods to put new

knowledge into use. In some cases, lack of clear directions or thinking at the organisational level can be a disabling factor.

### **Lack of Efforts to Match Individual Competencies with Organisational Outputs**

Lack of systematic efforts to identify the individual and organisational capacity gaps leads to mismatch of individual competencies and output. Most of the programmes are supply driven. The programmes often come with specific budget allocations for training in areas which are less important and the schemes are mostly funded centrally. Efforts aimed at linking or skilfully matching individual competence with organisational output are few or non-existent especially in the agricultural sector. This often gives freedom to individuals to choose their own interests not necessarily linked to enhancing knowledge, but linked to places of their interest to visit for personal reasons.

### **Biased Selection of Training Topics**

A lot of training in animal husbandry unit is organised for the field veterinarians. The focus of these trainings is on advanced disease diagnostic methods, though under real field conditions (with limited field facilities), which is not practical. Though there is an increasing demand for extension training, only few programmes are organised. In India, many veterinarians need training in “group dynamics” as this knowledge is important for implementing government schemes such as “dairy/poultry venture capital fund” that involves selection and organisation of beneficiaries into groups. Similarly “computer based expert system in animal husbandry” is required if Kisan Call Centres (KCCs) have to effectively answer the queries on animal husbandry.

### **Lack of Capacity among the Training Organisations**

Many training organisations lack capacity to train farmers or village youth in matters related to entrepreneurship development, value chain development or linking farmers to markets (e.g., *Krishi Vigyan Kendras* in India). Much of this knowledge is available with the private or NGO sector and the people in the sector should be invited to train the extension staff. Training in some of the new areas which are critical for extension (the core competencies) needs to be outsourced. Therefore, a strategy for capacity development of EAS at the organisational level is necessary. The strategy should focus on areas and organisations with different expertise and ways of accessing the knowledge and services.

“Anyone can be a trainer?” This is the kind of perception many managers have. While staff at the training institutes have to be highly motivated and intellectually strong, the staff should have capacities to execute training programmes, posting at the training centres is often considered as a punishment posting (depending on the location of the training centre too). It is felt that unwanted and incapable staff members are posted at the centres. Most of the staffing in the training centres is based on seniority and not on skills or aptitude needed for training. This adversely affects the quality of trainings.

Poor competency of extension personnel is a reflection of poor standards of agricultural education system in the country. This leads to incompetent institutions including teachers and scientists. The capacity development can be effectively dealt with through qualified and experienced internal staff and by outsourcing. New training processes and methods like experiential learning, travel workshops and, mentored sessions need to be explored and standardized for different situations. The titles of training courses should be attractive. For example, “How to produce 100 tonne sugarcane from one acre” is better than “Improved sugarcane cultivation practices”.

## Policy on Capacity Development of EAS

Every organisation involved in agricultural development should have a capacity development policy. Some areas for prioritized attention towards enhanced capacities of EAS providers are as follows:

- Moving capacity development sessions out of the classrooms
- Reducing emphasis on numbers while stressing on quality
- Reducing pressure on training institutes by de-emphasising on quantitative outputs
- Phasing out supply driven training courses
- Designing customized training/capacity development courses
- Building capacity of extension professionals to articulate current agrarian policies and generate evidence on the implementation of these policies

Different sectors viz fisheries, horticulture and livestock have varying requirements for capacity development. EAS in the aquaculture sector is generally very weak. It has fewer human resources and lacks infrastructure facilities to organize extension activities. Majority of public extension service providers in aquaculture are often engaged with implementing welfare and other schemes rather than providing information, knowledge and skill to fish farmers. In order to improve fish production scenario, EAS in fisheries/aquaculture sector must be strengthened.

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