



MY MEETING NOTES

MANAGE Team Study Visit Michigan State University (MSU) 11-16 September 2017



The MANAGE team led by Mrs.V.Usha Rani, I.A.S, Director General, MANAGE, comprising of Dr. V.P.Sharma, Director, Knowledge Management Centre, and Dr. Srinivasacharyulu Attaluri, Program Officer, visited Michigan State University (MSU) during September 11–16, 2017. Mrs. Usha Rani shares her experiences from this visit here.

CONTEXT

The MANAGE team made a study visit to Michigan State University (MSU) with an objective to explore long-term collaboration between MANAGE and MSU for improving agricultural extension through partnership programmes and enhancing the knowledge base on extension education. The study visit was also aimed to learn lessons and good practices from MSU Research and Extension Systems and some of the successful programmes (Box 1) in order to implement the same at MANAGE; Moreover, it could help recommend suitable practices relevant to other institutes for improving the agricultural extension ecosystem in India.



Box 1: Michigan State University (MSU) Extension



For over a 100 years, Michigan State University (MSU) Extension has been helping people improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities and businesses. MSU Extension is part of the national cooperative extension network that is housed at land-grant universities across the country. Michigan State University Extension and MSU AgBioResearch link the issues of concern in local communities with the research and teaching communities. County Extension councils identify

and prioritise issues, seek collaborations and resources, and communicate to others the importance of extension's educational programming. Advisory councils help establish research priorities at the state's 14 AgBioResearch centres located throughout the state.

The MSU Extension and AgBioResearch Council serves as a liaison between county councils, field station advisory groups and state agencies and organizations. Members are able to communicate to others (policy makers, organisations and agencies, university administrators, etc.) the importance of educational programming and applied research from Michigan's land-grant university. MSU Extension is funded through a partnership of federal, state and county governments, and works with individuals, businesses, organisations and communities to identify and address Michigan's existing and emerging priorities. MSU Extension and AgBioResearch use university resources to address Michigan's key economic issues. From preparing young people for higher education and career readiness through programmes like 4-H, to developing critical processes that will power the agri-food industry and bio-economy based businesses, these two entities are inextricably linked in work that will guide Michigan's future. MSU Extension and AgBioResearch faculty members conduct work that is improving human, animal and plant nutrition and health that will not only enhance life in Michigan but also across the nation and around the world.

PROGRAMME

MANAGE delegation met the leaders of MSU Extension, AgBioResearch, MSU Business College and held interactive meetings to understand extension, research and agri-business education at MSU to explore possible collaboration between MANAGE and MSU. Mr. Patrick Cudney, Associate Director, MSU Extension; Dr. Douglas Buhler, Director, MSU AgBioResearch; Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Dean, Eli Broad College of Business; Dr. Keith Bezant Niblett, Assistant Director, The James B. Henry Center for Executive Development, MSU; Dr. Karim Maredia, Director of MSU South Asia Partnership participated in the meeting.



I made a presentation on 'Building Agricultural Extension and Innovation Capacities through Partnerships' in a public seminar wherein faculty members and research scholars from MSU Extension, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Asian Studies Center, MSU, participated. The presentation highlighted the Indian agricultural research, extension, education and marketing systems; Indian agricultural extension system – ATMA reforms; role of MANAGE in improving extension system; current activities of MANAGE; and the Government of India's initiatives such as Soil Health Card, Skill Development in India, eNAM, farmers' portal, mKisan etc. The presentation emphasised areas and activities for collaboration.



The MANAGE team made extensive field visits to Research Centers, MSU Product Center, Incubation Centers, Sugar Cooperative (Sugarbeet), Food Processing and Innovation Center and interacted with extension experts, scientists and farmers to study and understand the comprehensive role of MSU research, extension and outreach activities. MANAGE delegates had the opportunity to learn the strengths of the MSU extension system through interactions with MSU extension educators on specialty crops (apple, sugarbeet and dry bean etc.) and focus on problem-solving approach in research. The role of common incubation centers for agripreneurship and response of extension in marketing with a focus on developing local markets and promoting local foods/products is noteworthy. Interactions with the 4-H Program volunteers gave insights into MSU extension and outreach activities targeted at children and youth through health and nutrition programmes.



OUR OBSERVATIONS

Addressing local problems and accountability to stakeholders

The team observed that the university plays a key role in extension by taking the lead while officers of provinces play a regulatory role. The University, through its 14 research stations, generates a lot of locally required science. The research is primarily focused on

solving the farmers' problems and in suggesting suitable varieties and agronomic practices for specific situations. The research station has close links with farmers as well as with industries. This is because of the fact that although it is funded in part by the University, the research station has to earn a portion of the budget. This has made them more dynamic and practical. Similarly, the University has to earn from the projects, students' fees etc., and this factor has made universities grow and branch out to various sectors and earn a considerable portion of their budget. This ecosystem has made themes of research more useful for the farmers as well as for industries, while also creating good linkages between farmers and industries.

Can we make our universities more accountable? Instead of funding them 100%, why not have them earn some portion of the budget?

Students pursuing studies are made part of the research projects; this gives them practical knowledge. The education is constantly changing based on needs of farmers and industry. MSU Extension has a close partnership with MSU AgBioResearch, which has a network of research centres where scientists conduct research that is critical in keeping Michigan's agriculture industry competitive in the global economy. The two organisations often work together, and many researchers have dual appointments in MSU Extension and MSU AgBioResearch. Their research and outreach efforts help keep the public and farmers informed of the latest technology and management practices.

Can our agriculture syllabus be reoriented towards fieldwork rather than a classroom ritual?

Entrepreneurship is the key

Farming is no longer a family profession; decisions should be based on profits. Farmers' Associations play a crucial role in analysing probable market prices at the end of the season, which is driving the cropping pattern. Farmers, apart from farming, are also involved in enterprises like seed production, value addition and even running restaurants of local and natural foods. This makes farming on par with other professions.

Linking every farmer to at least one enterprise could be the big answer in our effort to Doubling Farmers' Income. In a typical rainfed situation wherein a farmer takes only one crop, he/she is occupied for only 30 days (engaged in all farming operations) in a year and rest of the time is relatively idle. Promoting farm enterprises in rural areas can provide additional income.

Universities promote incubation

MSU has developed incubation centres in food processing which help entrepreneurs produce quality food as per FDA standards. This helps even a small entrepreneur to pay a reasonable rent for high quality equipment. Such initiatives enrich the outreach activities of the University.

Every university should have an incubation centre which can be used even by students who are interested in entrepreneurship.

Extension corner

The University has started a small 'Extension Corner' displaying a lot of literature about agricultural knowledge, programmes etc. An extension educator is posted at these 'Corners' to educate farmers through films etc. Such information centres are located at all farmers'

markets and other places where farmers regularly visit. Branding of information services, products, publications and every activity of MSU with “Spartan” logo emphasises a clear communication strategy to reach the clients.



Recently MANAGE suggested that all input dealer shops should display information needed by farmers. This includes knowledge about pesticides, spraying techniques, personal safety measures and information about pests and diseases.

SAMETI and ATMA can develop locally relevant agricultural literature and display it in marketplaces and other locations where farmers regularly visit (e.g. banks, input shops etc.). However, it is important that a proper communication strategy in the local language/dialect should be developed professionally.

Agriculture to nutrition



Human health depends on soil health and the type of crops grown. It is observed that there is a change in attitude of people preferring natural or whole foods instead of processed foods and foods bought from distant places. Organic foods have become the order of the day. It is inspiring to see the traceability of food up to the farmer's level. Farmers' address and photo are printed on products. Consumers are aware about safe food; in parallel, farmers are also educated to reach out to

consumers with safe food. On milk packets, one sees printed a farmer's pledge that he has not used hormones for animals.

In India and perhaps in other developing countries, there is little or no emphasis in extension on the production and consumption of safe food. Farmers often use lot of hazardous chemicals etc.

There is a need to enlighten extension educators about safe food and opportunities to explore niche markets for farmers by linking with private players.

FINAL WORDS

To protect the interests of both producers and consumers, Governments both at the central and state level should strengthen extension services in the public sector especially in the line departments and also among the private and NGO sectors. In a country like the United States, role clarity, dedication, commitment, and self-regulation by extension officials is contributing immensely towards extensions' performance. MANAGE and SAMETIs should focus more on training programmes that enhance the functional skills that bring about attitudinal changes among extension professionals.

Mrs V Usha Rani IAS is Director General, National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), (An Organisation of Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Government of India, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, India (dqmanage@manage.gov.in))

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