



**Proceedings**  
**AESA Governance Meeting**  
**24 July 2017, Kathmandu, Nepal**

**BACKGROUND**

AESA (Agriculture Extension South Asia) is part of a wider global network called GFRAS (Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services). AESA, established in 2013, organised its first face-to-face regional meeting at Kathmandu, Nepal, in January 2014. This meeting was instrumental in finalising the vision, mission and functions of AESA. The governance structure as well as the short-term and long-term priorities of AESA were identified at this meeting<sup>1</sup>. Representatives from each of the South Asian countries as well as the Director of the SAARC Agricultural Centre were selected as members of the AESA Governance Group.

This was followed by a meeting of the AESA governance board on 13 February 2016 at Peradaniya, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Representatives from seven out of eight South Asian countries participated in this meeting. The progress of the AESA network until then was discussed and further activities and decisions pertaining to further strengthening of the network were taken at this meeting<sup>2</sup>.

This meeting of the AESA Governance Group was organised at Hotel Greenwich Village, Kathmandu, on 24 July 2017, to review the progress of the network, to share and validate the findings of the online capacity need assessment of AESA Network, and develop a capacity strengthening plan for AESA. Participants (See Annexure 1 for the list of participants) from five out of eight South Asian countries participated in this meeting.



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<sup>1</sup> The proceedings of this meeting could be accessed at <http://aesa-gfras.net/Resources/file/PROCEEDINGS-First%20AESA%20Meeting%2014-15%20Jan%202014-Kathmandu.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The proceedings of this meeting could be accessed <http://www.aesa-gfras.net/Resources/file/PROCEEDINGS-AESA%20Governance%20Meeting-13%20Feb-2016-R.pdf>

## Why this meeting?

### Welcome and Self-introduction

Rasheed Sulaiman V, Focal Point, AESA, welcomed the participants from across the region and outlined the objectives of this meeting to:

- Develop a capacity strengthening plan for AESA
- Present the online capacity assessment report of AESA and validate the findings
- Reflect on progress so far and challenges too
- Develop future plans
- Consult the 'governance group' to do all of the above

This was followed by a brief self-introduction by the participants.

### Progress Report on AESA: Presentation by the Secretariat

Rasheed Sulaiman V briefed the participants on the progress made by AESA Network in the last two years (July 2015-June 2017). He explained how AESA has expanded its outreach in the past two years through its web portal ([www.aesa-gfras.net](http://www.aesa-gfras.net)), social media presence, especially the Facebook group<sup>3</sup>, and also through initiating GFRAS country forums in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

AESA has been vibrant on networking and knowledge promotion. It has emerged as a virtual network used by many (AESA Facebook Group: 18,983 members as on 24 July 2017). AESA web portal has now evolved as a one-stop information source on what is happening in extension and advisory services in South Asia. Updates on trainings, conferences, links to new publications and news related to EAS are posted by the Secretariat daily.

AESA has made tremendous progress on knowledge management. It has published 72 blogs, 19 good practice notes, 50 meeting notes, 9 interviews, 10 book reviews, 3 working papers and 9 AESA updates (half-yearly) until July 2017. It also successfully organised two e-discussions; one on producer organisations and extension in the India dairy sector and the other on capacity needs assessment of EAS providers<sup>4</sup>. There has been inclusion of additional publications to the portal based on thematic and country-wise listing.

Establishment of country fora has been as follows in the South Asia region:

India: India Extension Network (26 August 2014)

Bangladesh: Bangladesh Extension Network (1 September 2014)

Pakistan: Pakistan Extension Network (1 September 2015)

Sri Lanka and Nepal: Professional Extension Associations in Sri Lanka (SLAEA) and Nepal (NAEA) are yet to emerge as country fora, though these organisations are interested to do so.

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<sup>3</sup> AESA facebook group : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/428431183848161/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.aesa-gfras.net/aesaeventscategoryinner.aspx?id=30&title=Summary%20of%20the%20AESA%20E-Discussion,%204-25%20June,%202015&category=E-Discussions>

AESA organised workshops on Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) of Extension and Advisory Service Providers in India (October 2015), Sri Lanka (February 2016), Bangladesh (February 2016) and Nepal (May 2016). The AESA network created a link on its web portal where it published the proceedings of all these workshops along with the list of participants, image galleries and presentations. As an output to these workshops, it developed a Facilitators' Guide for Capacity Needs Assessment for Extension and Advisory Services (EAS). It was able to identify capacity needs of EAS in four countries and published these as a policy brief<sup>5</sup> in July 2016.

AESA participated in policy dialogues, GFRAS annual meetings, development of the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK), ICT4D Conference, Global Donor Platform on Rural Development, MELA (Mekong Extension Learning Network) annual meeting, training on Good Practices in Extension Research and Evaluation, Strengthening Extension Policy Interface, IFAD-SEARCA project Inception and also Consultation and Planning Meeting, to name a few during this period.

AESA has been engaged in a new initiative called Supporting Smallholder Farmers in Asia and Pacific-Islands Region through Strengthened Agricultural Advisory Services.

### **Supporting Smallholder Farmers in Asia and Pacific-Islands Region through Strengthened Agricultural Advisory Services**

**Regional Focus:** Asia-Pacific

**Country Focus:** Bangladesh, Philippines and Fiji

#### **Objectives**

Strengthen individual and organisational capacities of agricultural advisory service stakeholders in target countries and at regional and sub-regional level

Facilitate the availability and accessibility of appropriate and up-to-date knowledge and evidence on innovative advisory services from a range of sources in the APR region and worldwide

#### **Activities**

Undertake capacity needs assessment and strengthening of country fora and sub-regional networks

Improve individual capacities of AAS

Develop a regional portal/hub as a repository of information

Engage in high-level policy dialogue and other policy processes

**Implementing Agency:** APIRAS/SEARCA, The Philippines

**South Asia:** AESA (86 K USD for 3 years) - More details on page 8 of the report

BAEN (136 K USD for 3 years)

### **Capacity Assessment of AESA Network**

Nimisha Mittal, Programme Manager, CRISP, presented the purpose and the process adopted to assess current capacities of AESA Network to enable capacity strengthening as mandated by GFRAS and supported by IFAD Project. Nimisha explained how AESA used the online survey as an instrument for undertaking capacity assessment of AESA Network.

Google forms were designed for individuals familiar with AESA Network, using the template provided by GFRAS (based on methodology developed for GFRAS by L. Brandt and

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.aesa-gfras.net/admin/kcfinder/upload/files/Policy%20Brief\\_Jul%202016\\_Final.pdf](http://www.aesa-gfras.net/admin/kcfinder/upload/files/Policy%20Brief_Jul%202016_Final.pdf)

Company). She described how the template had been customized based on how AESA was functioning at the present moment.

Initially, all the country focal points were contacted to get a list of names and email ids of the active members of the network in the region and time was allotted for respondents to submit their responses. Respondents were also provided with sufficient handholding if they were facing any difficulties in accessing, filling up and submitting the forms.

Assessment of AESA Network was carried out on five major capacity themes:

- Organisational and Institutional Functioning
- Knowledge Management
- Use of ICTs
- Professionalisation of EAS
- Policy Advocacy

A brief outline of some of the findings from the Online Capacity Assessment that were discussed and validated in this session is given below:

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Networking, linking and connecting	Lack of AESA recognition at national level
Knowledge and information sharing	Inadequate funding, dependency on inadequate funding
Staffing	Inadequate communication/linkages among the countries
Devoted leadership	
Rapid growth	
Bringing professionalism to RAS	

*Suggestions to improve the AESA network that emanated from the respondents:*

- More advertising, more branding: **VISIBILITY**
- Institutionalisation through proper governance, engagement of members and setting targets: **PLAN OF ACTION**
- Must focus on capacity building of extensionists to cope with the problems of clientele: **PRIORITY SETTING**
- Steps should be taken to inspire the country focal points; there should be necessary staff in each country with necessary funds: **FUND RAISING**
- More funding and staff are required to expand activities in other countries of the region
- More outreach programmes
- Cross visits, sharing strategy of EAS, core team development, more involvement of policy makers is required
- Focal points of all the countries are not active and hence, they must be motivated and made active. Youngsters must be motivated to be a part of the network.
- Aggressive lobbying for policy attention and funding. Reach out to last mile extension professionals.

- Policy level advocacy, and MoU with GOs, NGOs, national/international universities, agro-business extension providers
- AESA should run a few online courses as well
- AESA to promote exchange visits among the member countries
- AESA should conduct several workshops, trainings, and discussions for the professional who are directly engaged in field extension.
- AESA IS DOING WELL in limited funds and capacity along with spreading its wings day by day since its inception

## Ways Forward

The governance board deliberated on the strategy for capacity development of AESA Network, making a road map for filling capacity gaps and promotion of country fora. Capacity development was scrutinised on the five parameters as discussed in the earlier section. These are described below:

### *Organisational and Institutional Functioning*

In order to enhance the organisational functioning of the network and to bring more rigour to its functioning, deeper penetration and reach the last mile extension worker/professional it was suggested that points of contacts (POC) should be developed at the local level in all the participating countries based on their internal situation:

- Provincial level in Nepal (7 provinces)
- Provincial level in Pakistan (5 provinces)
- Focal points from different EAS providers in Sri Lanka (commodity boards, universities, civil society actors, etc)
- Bangladesh-BAEN Executive Committee members would be the point of contact
- India-IEN would consist of points of contact from all the 29 states-to further expand it into points of contact from all districts in India/allied departments/NGOs in the future

Roles and responsibilities expected from the point of contacts would be drafted by the Secretariat in August 2017 and circulated/shared with all the country focal points

### *Knowledge Management*

To enhance flow of information and exchange of knowledge from all countries, it was suggested that:

- AESA should broadcast on its Facebook page the call/demand for new blogs, good practices, meeting notes, news and events from time to time.
- All the focal points should send relevant pictures to the Secretariat members on a monthly basis.
- Video blogs of 2-3 minutes on farmers' organisation, farmers' queries and innovations should be promoted to make the AESA web portal more knowledge intensive for extension professionals, especially those who are not keen on reading blogs, etc.
- More communication between the participating countries and focal points is the need of the hour and it should be a two-way traffic.

### *Use of ICTs*

- Enhance offline outreach with network members.
- Send manual copies/relevant publication to MANAGE as it's a nodal centre for all the South Asian countries.

### *Professionalisation Capacity*

- Assess the existing extension/training curricula to enhance the capacity of the extension workers at different levels in the countries.
- Promote the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK) in the region. State POC to attend these NELK to enhance their own capacities and perspectives.
- AESA Network to provide guidelines for review of existing curricula. This should be conducted as a joint/collaborative activity.

### *Policy Advocacy*

- Network members to undertake active engagement with policy makers
- Engage with Deputy Director General (DDG Education of ICAR in India/respective counterparts in other countries.
- For curricula reform make a case on lacuna in current curricula and what should be alternative curricula. Regional workshops should be conducted for consultation to carry out revision of the curricula.
- Publishing of policy brief to promote NELK
- Develop a knowledge management strategy

### *Funding*

- Look for alternative funding from external sources, access funds under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), private sector funding sources
- Raise resources through joint trainings/chargeable programmes
- Joint proposals to be developed for raising external funding. Examples like BAEN being funded by IFAD
- Try to raise country-level resources by the country fora

### *Legality of Network*

Explore options for a more legal structure for a South Asia network than the one at present.

### **Reporting from the region: Presentations by the country representatives**

#### *Bangladesh:*

Md Sekender Ali, Secretary General, Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN), shared the vision, mission and objectives of BAEN. BAEN has an executive committee comprising all the major stakeholders in EAS provision in Bangladesh.

Mr Ali also shared the achievements of BAEN since inception. BAEN has finalized BAEN Logo, developed its website (<http://www.baenbd.net>) and started a Facebook page. It is currently funded from:

- IFAD-funded Project on “Supporting Smallholder Farmers in Asia and Pacific through Strengthened Agricultural Advisory Services
- DANIDA funds for the Integrated Farm Management Component (IFMC) of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Ongoing activities of BAEN include:

- Continuing identifying, documenting, disseminating and rewarding of good agricultural practices and extension approaches
- Conducting activities of the Project ‘Supporting Smallholder Farmers in Asia and Pacific through Strengthened Agricultural Advisory Services’ in collaboration with AESA, SEARCA funded by IFAD

### *India*

P Chandrasekhara and Mahesh Chander, both focal points of AESA from India, presented the status of the Indian Agricultural Extension Network (IAEN) and how it is actively supporting the knowledge management functions of AESA and GFRAS through some of the following steps:

- Initiated a WhatsApp Group of Active Members of Indian Extension Network to update all the members on day-to-day developments and for keeping the flock together
- AESA link is placed on the MANAGE website
- Huge database of extension professionals (more than 15,000) shared with AESA for dissemination of information
- IAEN contributed to AESA by mobilizing meeting notes, face-to-face meeting notes, Good Practices, blogs, Facebook AESA Group Members, book reviews, distribution of AESA Updates and regular updates to AESA, GFRAS and Agricultural Extension in India through its Facebook page
- It popularized the ideas mentioned in ‘New Extensionist’<sup>6</sup> about new roles, new challenges and solutions were highlighted in important forums like National Academy of Agricultural Sciences/meetings/major conferences.
- The concept of Agricultural Innovation system (AIS) was promoted through publications, meetings and conference presentations.
- Contributed to GFRAS Good Practices Notes
- IAEN members were part of various professional development activities( for example, the workshop hosted by AESA on Good Practices in research and extension in Hyderabad)

### *Pakistan*

Muhammad Ali, AESA focal point from Pakistan, briefed the participants on the first meeting of the Pakistan Extension Network (PEN) and how PEN is emerging as a country fora. PEN has participated in activities/workshops hosted by AESA, GFRAS and other EAS fora at the global level. It is keen to formalise and strengthen the network and develop strategies for

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.g-fras.org/en/157-the-new-extensionist>

resource generation and identify its priorities. PEN is trying to create awareness among extension professionals in Pakistan, deliberating on change of its name (more catchy!), framing the constitution, registration of the network, have a membership drive and raise resources for conducting program related activities. Lack of funding, lack of Secretariat facilities and staff are few of the challenges currently hindering progress.

### *Sri Lanka*

P Wanigasundara, AESA focal point from Sri Lanka talked about recent developments of EAS in the food crop sector, livestock sector and the plantation sector in Sri Lanka. He briefly outlined the capacity needs of EAS in Sri Lanka identified during the national workshop on capacity needs assessment of EAS providers (conducted by AESA) in February 2016 in Kandy, Sri Lanka. He also described some of the steps which are being undertaken at the country level for capacity development of the EAS personnel based on this exercise, such as strengthening education and training curricula in extension, developing a directory of EAS providers, regular consultations of the Sri Lankan agricultural extension association (SLAEA), policy engagement/influencing policy through hosting policy dialogue, etc. However there is very little progress on all these aspects. The biggest challenge for the country for a is how to share experiences with other AESA colleagues for motivating extension providers, enhance exchange of resource persons within the region and to access resources for conducting joint research/extension/human resource development.

### *Nepal*

Niru Dahal Pandey, AESA focal point from Nepal, briefed the participants on the socio-economic characteristics of Nepal, its agricultural scenario and showed a diagrammatic simplified organisational structure of extension system in Nepal. The Nepal Agricultural Extension Association (NAEA) is the only national-level organisation championing the cause of extension in Nepal. National Workshop on Capacity Needs Assessment of Extension and Advisory Services Providers in Nepal was organised jointly by AESA and NAEA on 31 May–01 June, 2016 at Kathmandu. It saw participants from the government/non-government sector, universities, private sector and the NAEA. More details of this can be accessed in the proceedings<sup>7</sup> of the workshop.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks by Nimisha Mittal, Programme Manager, AESA. She thanked all the participants for their commitment to AESA and for the time spent on travel and participation in this meeting.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.aesa-gfras.net/Resources/file/Report%20on%20the%20Capacity%20Needs%20Assessment%20of%20Extension%20and%20Advisory%20Service%20\(EAS\)%20Providers%20in%20Nepal.pdf](http://www.aesa-gfras.net/Resources/file/Report%20on%20the%20Capacity%20Needs%20Assessment%20of%20Extension%20and%20Advisory%20Service%20(EAS)%20Providers%20in%20Nepal.pdf)



## Annexure 1

Sl. No	Name of participants	Country	Designations	Organizations	Email Ids
1	Mahesh Chander	India	Principal Scientist and Head, Division of Extension Education	ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Izatnagar	<a href="mailto:drmahesh.chander@gmail.com">drmahesh.chander@gmail.com</a>
2	Mohammad Sekender Ali	Bangladesh	Professor and Director (Students' Affairs) ; Secretary General, BAEN	Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University	<a href="mailto:msa_sau@yahoo.com">msa_sau@yahoo.com</a>
3	Muhammad Ali	Pakistan	Lecturer, Department of Agricultural Extension	PMAS-Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi, Shamsabad, Muree Road, Rawalpindi - Pakistan.	<a href="mailto:muhammadali@uaar.edu.pk">muhammadali@uaar.edu.pk</a>
4	Nimisha Mittal	India	Programme Manager	Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP)	<a href="mailto:nimisha61@gmail.com">nimisha61@gmail.com</a>
5	Niru Dahal Pandey	Nepal	Program Director	Directorate of Agricultural Extension	<a href="mailto:cottonladynp@yahoo.com">cottonladynp@yahoo.com</a>
6	P. Chandrashekara	India	Director (Agricultural Extension)	National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)	<a href="mailto:chandra@manage.gov.in">chandra@manage.gov.in</a>
7	Padmasiri Wanigasundera	Sri Lanka	Professor in Agricultural Extension, Department of Agricultural Extension	University of Peradeniya,	<a href="mailto:wanigasundera@gmail.com">wanigasundera@gmail.com</a>
8	Saravanan Raj	India	Director (Agricultural Extension)	National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)	<a href="mailto:saravananraj@hotmail.com">saravananraj@hotmail.com</a>
9	Rasheed Sulaiman V	India	Director	Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) & AESA Focal Point	<a href="mailto:rasheed.sulaiman@gmail.com">rasheed.sulaiman@gmail.com</a>