



PROCEEDINGS

AESA Governance Meeting

13 February 2016, Sri Lanka

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, during January 2014. This meeting was instrumental in finalizing the vision, mission and functions of AESA. The governance structure as well as the short-term and long-term priorities of AESA was identified at this meeting¹. Representatives from each of the South Asian country as well as the director of the SAARC Agricultural Centre were selected as members of the AESA Governance Group.

AESA Vision:

Improving food and nutrition security through efficient and effective extension and advisory services

AESA Mission:

Sharing, learning and networking for building effective and efficient extension and advisory services
Functions

AESA has made tremendous progress on many fronts since then. This meeting of the AESA Governance Group was organised at Peradaniya, Kandy, Sri Lanka, on the 13 February 2016 to review the progress, to reflect on the short-term and long-term priorities identified at Kathmandu, Nepal and to plan a new roadmap and activities for AESA. Participants (See Annexure 1 for the list of participants) from seven out of eight South Asian countries participated in this meeting.

THE MEETING



¹ The proceedings of this meeting can be accessed at <http://aesA-gfras.net/Resources/file/PROCEEDINGS-First%20AESAs%20Meeting%202014-15%20Jan%202014-Kathmandu.pdf>.

Session I: Where are we now?

Welcome and Self Introduction

Rasheed Sulaiman V, Focal Point, AESA welcomed the participants and introduced the objectives of this meeting. He also thanked the Sri Lankan Agricultural Extension Association (SLAEA), for hosting this meeting at Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. This was followed by a brief self introduction by the participants.

Presentation: Progress Report (2013-2015)

Rasheed Sulaiman V, briefed the participants on the evolution of AESA and the progress made during the past 2 years. Rasheed explained how AESA has expanded its reach in the past two years through its web portal (www.aesa-gfras.net), social media presence, especially the Facebook group² and also through initiating country level forum in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.



AESA web portal has now evolved as a one stop information source on what is happening in the extension and advisory services (EAS) in South Asia. AESA Facebook group has more than 14000 members. AESA has published 54 blogs, 13 good practice notes, 22 Meeting Notes, 6 interviews, 4 book reviews and 2 working papers until December 2015. 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 providers³. So far, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan have established country level networks of EAS providers. AESA organised successive workshops on Capacity Needs Assessment of Extension and Advisory Service Providers in India (6-7 October 2015) and Sri Lanka (10-11 February 2016). Similar workshops in Bangladesh and Nepal are scheduled towards the end of February 2016 and later part of April 2016 respectively. AESA has also produced a draft Facilitator's Guide for Capacity Needs Assessment of Extension and Advisory Services.

² AESA facebook group : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/428431183848161/>

³ [http://www.aesa-](http://www.aesa-gfras.net/aesaeventscategoryinner.aspx?id=30&title=Summary%20of%20the%20AESA%20E-Discussion,%204-25%20June,%202015&category=E-Discussions)

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

AESA Secretariat undertook a self-assessment of the progress of AESA and this was also presented in the meeting (Box 1).

Box 1: AESA Secretariat-Self Assessment on Progress of AESA

What we did very well

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND VISIBILITY

- Web Portal-Blogs, Good Practices, Working Papers, Meeting Notes, Face to Face Interviews, Book Reviews and Publications on EAS (country wise/theme wise), News and Events
- Social Media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) and Email List
- E-Discussions
- Regular AESA Updates (every six months, Update 1-6)
- Representing EAS in National, Regional and Global Platforms and initiatives and bringing visibility
- Several people are accessing the AESA website - (anecdotal evidence).

What we did well

RESOURCE GENERATION

- Generated one more year of additional support (June 2015 – May 2016) from SDC for AESA, including support for organising the AESA Governance Meeting
- Generated resources from GFRAS for developing a Facilitators guide for CNA and identifying capacity gaps_in four countries
- Developed a proposal with APIRAS and got IFAD support for strengthening advisory services in Asia (project starting in April 2016). Country level support restricted to Bangladesh only, but will have some limited resources to organise 2-3 network level events.

What we couldn't do well

COUNTRY LEVEL INITIATIVES

- Only the Bangladesh network (BAEN) has moved really forward
- India (IEN) and Pakistan (PEN) networks are launched, but we have not made much progress
- SLAEA that could potentially act as a country forum has become active only recently
- In Nepal, potential exists, couldn't exploit fully
- Renewed efforts are needed in Bhutan, Maldives and Afghanistan.

The presentation also covered some of the challenges AESA faces which are as follows:

- Obtaining relevant content from different countries to be widely shared through the AESA Portal
- Very poor feedback on the blogs, good practices and meeting notes published and shared widely
- Resource Generation at the AESA level (beyond May 2016) and country level
- Difficulties in getting core funds for managing the network (time, communication, human resources)
- Very limited engagement by South Asian extension professions on several interesting GFRAS initiatives.

The presentation highlighted the need for more active and direct engagement by the country focal points with the AESA Secretariat.

Country level presentations

Bangladesh:

Md Sekender Ali, Secretary General, Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN), traced the evolution of BAEN over the last one year and shared the vision, mission and objectives of BAEN. BAEN has an executive committee comprising all the major stakeholders in EAS provision in Bangladesh. It is currently funded from the DANIDA funds for the Integrated Farm Management Component (IFMC) of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE). BAEN is hosted by the DAE. Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Society is also part of the BAEN. BAEN has drafted its bylaws and the Executive Committee has recently approved its annual work plan.

India

P Chandrasekhara and Mahesh Chander presented about the status of the Indian Extension Network (IEN) and how it is actively supporting the Knowledge Management functions of AESA and GFRAS. IEN led the development of the review paper on EAS through producer organizations in milk sector in India for AESA/GFRAS. It has also shared email IDs of key extension personnel and has also contributed blogs, good practices and meeting notes for AESA. The presentation also covered some of the challenges related to membership and need for institutional linkages and resource generation.

Pakistan

Muhammad Ali briefed the participants on the first meeting of the Pakistan Extension Network (PEN) and the priorities the meeting identified for PEN. PEN needs resources to promote its activities and as such there is no national platform in the country where those interested in extension can come together. Lack of an extension policy and very limited research on extension are two important challenges in strengthening extension and PEN is keen to work with AESA on addressing these issues.

Sri Lanka

R S Wijesekara and W A D P Wanigasundara talked about the current extension setting in Sri Lanka and some of the challenges extension is facing in the country. The Sri Lanka Agricultural Extension Association (SLAEA) is taking a lead in policy advocacy for strengthening extension and it recently organized a National Conference and Policy Dialogue on Agricultural Extension in collaboration with AESA. SLAEA and AESA jointly organized a workshop on Capacity Needs Assessment of Extension and Advisory Service Providers in Sri Lanka in February 2016. SLAEA is keen to work with AESA on developing an agricultural extension policy for Sri Lanka.

Nepal

Niru Dahal Pandey briefed the participants on the current challenges in extension in Nepal and how organizations in different sectors are performing. The Nepal Agricultural Extension

Association (NAES) is the only organization at the national level, championing the cause of extension and they would like to have the Nepal Extension Network (NEN) as a Nepal chapter of AESA under NAES. NAES has nominated members to be part of the NEN. They are keen to organize a workshop on Capacity Needs Assessment of Extension and Advisory Service Providers in Nepal with AESA.

Maldives

Muhammad Rihvaan raised the importance of presenting AESA among the policy makers in Maldives. There is a need to review the existing extension situation in Maldives, organizing a capacity needs assessment workshop and exchange programmes for extension staff in countries in the region. All these activities need funding support.

Afghanistan

Munir Ahmad Sidiquee presented the current situation of extension in Afghanistan and some of the recent extension initiatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). MAIL is keen to develop the country fora of extensionists in the country. However, awareness about AESA and GFRAS in Afghanistan and visibility for Afghanistan in AESA Publications are necessary. A lot could be shared from some of the recent experiences in this regard.

Session II: Current Challenges

Decision on the organisational structure of country fora:

How formal the organizational structure should be? Both formal and informal structures have different implications. There is no ideal structure and each country has to decide what would work for them in the long run depending on several factors. Based on a review of experience from the different countries, the governance group reflected on the structures' implications on resource generation, functions and ease of network functioning.

- *Resource generation:* Networks need resources to organize meetings, activities and having at least one full time dedicated personnel to generate content and also to link with AESA and GFRAS for various activities.
- *Hiring a full time staff:* Without a full time programme officer attached to a country level organization, country fora wouldn't gain visibility and membership
- *Activities/Programmes:* Need an annual work plan for the country fora
- *Relationship with other professional organizations:* How to co-exist and collaborate with other professional organizations that are vying for the same space, though they perform only a set of narrow functions. A clear articulation on this at the regional level would help.

Increasing visibility and recognition to extension profession

In order to bring visibility and recognition to extension profession, engagement in policy dialogue at the country level by the country networks including development of extension

policy is necessary. Most countries in South Asia, with the exception of Bangladesh, lack an extension policy.

Curricula Reforms

Advocacy is also needed for reforms in extension curricula at the academic institutions and training centre level. The existing curricula need to be reviewed against the new capacities that are needed.



Session III: Where do we go from here? (Roadmap 2016-2018)

The meeting reviewed the short term and long term priorities of AESA that were identified at Kathmandu in 2014 and found that these are still relevant. The following decisions were taken at this meeting to further strengthen AESA:

Knowledge Management

- *AESA publications:* AESA blogs, good practices and meeting notes are accessed by several extension professionals and students who are finding it valuable. There is nothing similar to AESA portal in South Asia and the activities in this line should be continued. However, the AESA website should have relevant content from all regions and there are a lot of interesting experiments in EAS delivery happening in the region. The country focal points should identify and encourage those who can write blogs, good practices, book reviews and meeting notes from their countries. This is important to bring recognition for extension.
- *Email list:* The AESA email list needs to be expanded to include more emails of extension professionals from all countries. Country focal points to provide AESA Secretariat with email lists of those interested and involved in extension from each country.

- *Useful contacts:* Country focal points to provide information (website links) to organizations relevant for extension professions in their respective countries so that this could be added to the relevant (country-wise) sections in the AESA portal.

Networking

- *More advice on networking:* It would be useful to know more about best practices in networking and governance of networks so that country fora could work more effectively. GFRAS has currently initiated a capacity needs assessment exercise for its networks and in South Asia. This is an important activity under the IFAD project with APIRAS.

Resource Generation

- Both AESA and country fora need resources to continue and strengthen their activities. Resources are needed to establish a website and support the travel and meeting costs of the country focal point, holding annual meetings and salary costs for a full time programme officer.
- At the country level, discussions need to be initiated with the Government, especially the Ministry of Agriculture to support the formation and sustenance of networks. There is a need to explore country level funding for country fora activities.
- AESA might also consider providing advice/consulting and other professional services to different countries in the region. AESA could also link human resources to opportunities for extension support that arise in the region through several bilateral and multi-lateral programmes.
- Though AESA Directory was initiated with this idea also in mind, very few have registered in the site so far. AESA has made the registration process simpler and we need to create more awareness about this.

More Legitimacy/Visibility

- AESA might also consider signing MoUs with Government organizations in different countries as this might provide more legitimacy for holding policy level engagements in these countries.
- Create profiles of AESA focal points/governance board members with a brief paragraph that illustrate their expertise and photos and put this on AESA portal

Governance

- *Secretariat:* AESA Secretariat to remain at the Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) so as to maintain continuity, flexibility of functioning and to keep the momentum of the AESA activities.

- *Governance Group*: Continue with the small board as it exists now for ease of functioning, reduce costs and ensure co-ordination
- *Representation in GFRAS Steering Committee*: Rasheed Sulaiman V will continue to represent AESA in the GFRAS Steering Committee for the next 2 years.

Proposed Activities

- *Exchange Programmes*: AESA should strive for organizing exchange programmes of young extension professionals in the region
- *Training*: AESA through the country fora should organize training programmes for enhancing capacities in the area of extension research and programme evaluation.
- *Studies*: Undertake regional studies to generate systematic evidence base on extension
- *Internship*: It should also provide opportunities for internship to students from the region.
- *Annual Meetings*: Organise Annual Meetings on specific themes which also act as a forum for interaction among the country fora
- *Extension Policy*: Create a section within AESA portal on Extension Policy aspects
- *Linking AESA Portal*: Link AESA Webportal to the websites of major organizations involved in extension (as done by MANAGE in India)
- *Annual Activity Calendar*: Both AESA and the country fora should have their Annual Activity Calendar with quantifiable outputs and outcomes. Country fora should develop the list of activities under two headings:
 - That needs no funds (using existing human resources)
 - That would need funds
- Develop a 2-year work plan with budget that also takes into consideration the demands from the country fora

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.



Annexure 1

S.No.	Name of participants	Countries	Designations	Organizations	Email Ids
1	Mahesh Chander	India	Principal Scientist and Head, Division of Extension Education	ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Izatnagar	drmahesh.chander@gmail.com
2	Mohamed Rihvaan	Maldives	Assistant Director-Training, Extension & Adaptive Research Section	Agriculture and Forestry Services Division, Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture	mohamed.rihvaan@fishagri.gov.mv
3	Mohammad Sekender Ali	Bangladesh	Professor and Director (Students' Affairs) ; Secretary General, BAEN	Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University	msa_sau@yahoo.com
4	Muhammad Ali	Pakistan	Lecturer, Department of Agricultural Extension	PMAS-Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi	muhammadali@uair.edu.pk
5	Munir Ahmad Sidiqee	Afghanistan	Adviser/M&E and Reporting Change Management Specialist (CBCMP-II)	General Directorate of Agricultural Extension, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock	munir.sidiqee@mail.gov.af , munir.sidiqee@gmail.com
6	Nimisha Mittal	India	Programme Manager	Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP)	nimisha61@gmail.com
7	Niru Dahal Pandey	Nepal	Program Director	Directorate of Agricultural Extension	cottonladynp@yahoo.com
8	P Chandrashe kara	India	Director (Agril. Extn.)	National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)	chandra@manage.gov.in

9	W A D P Wanigasund era	Sri Lanka	Professor in Agricultural Extension, Department of Agricultural Extension	University of Peradeniya,	wanigasundera@gmail.com
10	R S Wijesekara	Sri Lanka	Director Extension & Training	Department of Agriculture, Peradeniya	rswijesekara@yahoo.com
11	Rasheed Sulaiman V	India	Director	Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) & AESA Focal Point	rasheed.sulaiman@gmail.com