

**FIVE YEARS OF AESA WEB PORTAL: A CRITICAL REFLECTION**



*As the year 2017 draws to a close, Sreeram Vishnu and Onima V. T. analyze the contents generated by the AESA web portal over the past five years (2013-2017). While the AESA web portal brought a new culture of managing knowledge on extension, a lot more could be done to improve its effectiveness, they argue.*

**INTRODUCTION**

AESA (Agricultural Extension in South Asia) Network was established initially as a virtual platform around its web portal ([www.aesa-gfras.net](http://www.aesa-gfras.net)) and its facebook group<sup>1</sup> during the late 2012. It turned into a more professional network subsequently, with its first governance meet held at Kathmandu in January 2014. Its stated mission is “Sharing, learning and networking for building effective and efficient extension and advisory services”. Over the past five years (2013-2017), the AESA Network expanded its contributions to the extension profession by strengthening knowledge management, organizing capacity development workshops, holding policy dialogues and strengthening the networking capacity at the country level. The Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) has (<http://crispindia.org/>) been hosting the AESA Secretariat since its inception.



The most visible and successful initiative of AESA so far has been its knowledge management through the AESA web portal and AESA facebook group (which has more than 19,300 members currently). The AESA web portal maintains both certified content and co-created content (Fig 1 & Fig 2). Certified contents include manuals, facilitators’ guide, working papers, updates, policy briefs and reports which

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/428431183848161/>

AESA developed as an output of workshops/seminars conducted in partnership with other institutions and are available on the web portal. On the other hand, the co-created content include those contributed by the AESA user community and published through the AESA portal and these include blogs, good practices, meeting notes, face to face interviews and book reviews. All these products are also promoted through its facebook group. Users could comment on these products either on the website or by sending an e-mail to AESA Network or in the AESA facebook group. Some of these have led to interesting discussions.

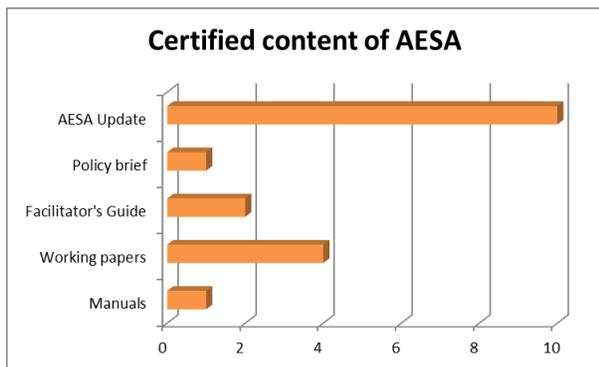


Fig 1: An overview of certified contents of AESA

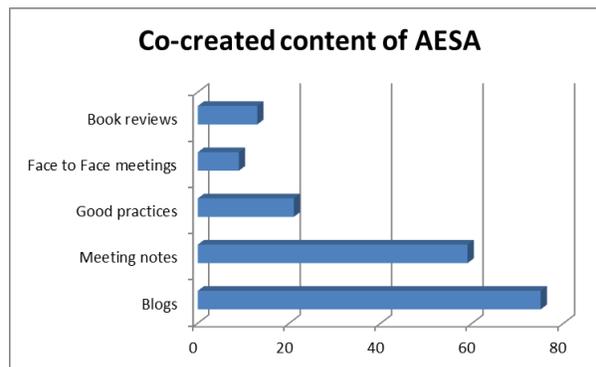


Fig 2: An overview of co-created contents of AESA

Analysis of the content contributed by various stakeholders to AESA so far and the interest it evoked among the user audience would give important insights in redesigning the AESA web portal (ongoing currently) to improve its reach. To this end, this study was framed (Box 1) to explore in detail the contributor profile, the nature of co-created content and the user response to it.

**Box 1: Methodology**

Three types of co-created content, namely, blogs, good practices and meeting notes published in the AESA web portal including the user comments were tabulated and analyzed to find out the profile of contributors, various content characteristics and user response. Word cloud of various co-created content areas was also generated using the online word art creator, Wordart.com to figure out the emerging prominent concepts under the categories. Further, Chi square test was applied to check the association between the various features of contributors and content categories with discussions generated on user contributed content.

**FINDINGS**

**Blogs**

AESA Blogs are a reflection of the realities, perceptions and opinions of those interested and involved in extension and advisory service provision. Researchers, research scholars, senior managers/professionals and faculty engaged in extension teaching and training, mainly contributed to the blogs. We categorized the blogs into six unique thematic areas and a miscellaneous section. For a better understanding on the contribution of various content and audience interest towards it, AESA blogs were explored in depth. The results are presented and discussed below.

Table 1 and 2 provides an overview of blog contributions according to the institutional affiliation and type of contributors respectively. It could be seen that professionals from research organizations have contributed the maximum number of blogs. They were followed by faculty in universities. We also analyzed the profile of the contributors as well. In general, researchers working at various levels and positions were the leading content contributors followed by faculty from various universities.

**Table 1: Blog contributions from various institutions\***

SI no	Institutional background of AESA contributors	Blogs	Percent
1	Research Organizations	32	42.67
2	Universities	25	33.33
2	Ministry of Agriculture	6	8.00
3	International Organizations	5	6.67
4	Non-Governmental Organizations	4	5.33
6	Farm Science Centers (KVKs in India)	2	2.67
7	Private Organizations	1	1.33
	Total	75	100.00

**Table 2: Category of contributors\***

SI no	Content Contributors	Blogs	Percent
1	Researchers	31	41.33
2	Faculty (Education/Training)	19	25.33
3	Senior Professionals	16	21.33
4	Research Scholar	2	2.67
5	Other Professionals	7	9.33
	Total	75	100.00

\*Tabulation is made based on the affiliation of the lead author of the publication

Besides it is encouraging to see that, senior professionals have also contributed to AESA, thus sharing their rich experience and valuable knowledge to their fellow professionals. Analysis of the nature of content and comments received for the blogs are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Thematic area wise AESA blog, comments received and number of comments per blog**

SI No	Thematic Areas	No. of blogs	No. of comments	No. of comments/blog
1	Research in Extension (RIE)	11	51	4.64
2	Extension Approaches (EA)	16	34	2.13
3	ICTs and Extension (ICTE)	11	17	1.55
4	Livestock Extension (LE)	13	30	2.31
5	Policy Issues in Extension (PIE)	8	34	4.25
6	Producer organizations in Extension (PO)	2	2	1.00
7	Other Themes (OT)	14	34	2.43
	Total	75	202	2.69

It could be seen that most number of blogs were written under the theme, EA (16) followed by OT and LE (14 & 13 respectively). However the trend in the number of comments received for the blogs under each theme followed a different pattern. The theme, RIE received most number of comments (51) followed by EA, PIE and OT (34 each). On analyzing the number of comments received per blog, it was found most comments (4.64 per blog) were received under the theme RIE. It is worthwhile to point out here that the blogs on research in extension and the subsequent discussion it generated led to AESA organizing a Workshop on Good Practices in Extension Research and Evaluation and a Manual was developed on this theme in partnership with others. Blogs under PIE (4.25) and OT (2.43) were the other themes that received more comments. Blogs categorized under OT had the content on various important topics like Climate Change, Natural Resource Management and Forestry. In general, each blog was found to be getting 2.69 comments, irrespective of its thematic category.

### Good Practices

A good practice is simply a process or a methodology that represents the most effective way of achieving a specific objective. For AESA, a good practice is one that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore worthy of closer analysis to draw principles behind its apparent

success. The essence of identifying and sharing good practices is to learn from others and to re-use knowledge.

Good practices were contributed by professionals from diverse background. The analysis of the contributors based on their institutional affiliation is presented below (Table 4). It can be seen that research professionals including those from Farm Science Centers (FSC) were leading contributors of good practice notes. They were followed by professionals from various universities and non-governmental organizations. Like in the case of blogs, only the lead authors profile was the focus. Further it was revealed that researchers followed by other professionals (from NGOs, senior research fellows etc.) and faculty from universities contribute the maximum number of good practice notes (Table 5).

**Table 4: Good Practice contributions from various institutions\* Table 5: Category of contributors\***

SI No	Content Contributors	Good Practices	Percent
1	Farm Science Centers (KVKs in India)	7	33.33
2	Universities	6	28.57
3	Non-Governmental Organizations	5	23.81
4	Research Organizations	2	9.52
5	Ministry of Agriculture	1	4.76
6	International Organizations	0	0.00
7	Others	0	0.00
	Total	21	100.00

SI No	Content Contributors	Good Practices	Percent
1	Researchers	8	38.10
2	Other Professional	7	33.33
3	Faculty(Education/Training	5	23.81
4	Senior Professionals	1	4.76
5	Research Scholar	0	0.00
	Total	21	100.00

\*Tabulation is made based on the location of the lead author of the publication

Most of the good practices (Table 6) were from the areas of agriculture and animal husbandry. However the number of comments per Good Practice was found to be 1.04, lowest among all the content categories.

**Table 6: Analysis of the content of Good Practices (sector-wise)**

SI no	Thematic Areas	Frequency	Percentage
1	Agriculture	12	57.14
2	Animal Husbandry	6	28.57
3	Apiculture	1	4.76
4	Natural Resource Management	2	9.52
	Total	21	100.00

## Meeting notes

Meeting notes are the written or recorded documentation that is used to inform attendees and non-attendees about what transpired during a meeting like workshop, conference, farmer fairs etc. The participants describe the happenings, their own impression and unique experiences about the event.

**Table 7: AESA contribution from various institutions\***

SI no	Content Contributors	Meeting Notes	Percent
1	Research Organizations	24	40.68
2	Universities	23	38.98
3	Ministry of Agriculture	5	8.47
4	International Organizations	3	5.08
5	Non-Governmental Organizations	2	3.39
6	Others	2	3.39
	Total	59	100.00

**Table 8: Category contributors\***

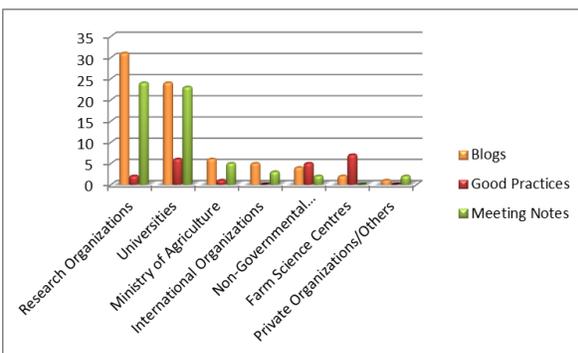
SI no	Content Contributors	Meeting Notes	Percent
1	Senior Professionals	15	25.42
2	Researchers	15	25.42
3	Research Scholar	12	20.34
4	Faculty (Education/Training)	11	18.64
5	Other Professional	6	10.17
	Total	59	100.00

\*Tabulation is made based on the location of the lead author of the publication

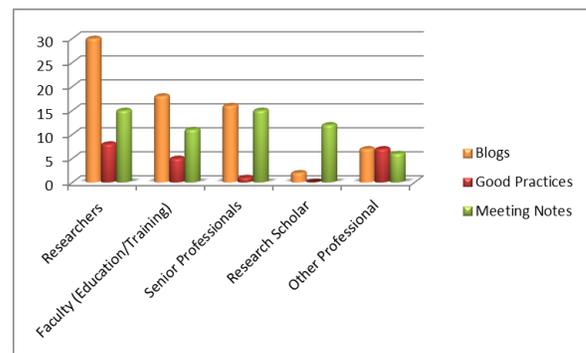
The overall trend remained the same, with the contributors being from research organizations and universities (Table 7). However there is a different pattern seen in the profile of the contributors here. Senior professionals followed by researchers and research scholars contributed most of the meeting notes (Table 8). However, number of comments per meeting note was comparatively low (1.47) than blogs (2.76). Events related to Agriculture received most number of comments per blog (1.88) followed by events on extension (1.72). Majority of the meeting notes were from events related to extension. Also it received a greater audience interest as implied by more number of comments (Table 9).

**Table 9: Analysis of the content of Meeting notes**

SI no	Thematic area	Number of Meeting Notes	No. of comments	Average no. of comments
1	Agricultural/Veterinary Extension	29	50	1.72
2	Other topics	14	12	0.85
3	Agriculture	9	17	1.88
4	Veterinary	4	8	2
5	Social Science/Economics	2	0	0
6	Soil Science	1	0	0
	Total	59	87	1.47



**Fig 3: Institutional affiliation of AESA contributors**



**Fig 4: Profile of the AESA contributors**

The Fig 3 and 4 summarize the co-created content contributions, based on the institutional background and profile of the contributors respectively.



profile into attribute variables. The results indicated that discussions happened under various content categories irrespective of the contributor profile. Also, the contents with one or multiple authors had no influence on the discussions. However a significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ) was observed between the category of content and the occurrence of discussion. This was already evident, as indicated by the more number of comments received for the content category - blogs, than for meeting notes or good practices.

**Table 10: Association between the happening of discussion and contributor profile**

Sl No	Categorical variables	p value
1	Contributor being Senior Professional	0.886 <sup>NS</sup>
2	Contributor being Researcher	0.283 <sup>NS</sup>
3	Contributor being Research scholar	0.462 <sup>NS</sup>
4	Contributor being High level professional	0.950 <sup>NS</sup>
5	Contributor being Academician	0.523 <sup>NS</sup>
6	Contributor being Other professionals	0.156 <sup>NS</sup>
7	Having multiple authors for the content category	0.502 <sup>NS</sup>
8	Categories of content	0.048**

\*\* Significant at 5 percent level, <sup>NS</sup> Non-significant

## CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted with an objective to analyze various content categories of AESA web portal, in terms of the contributors and audience interest towards the content. We could draw the following conclusions from this analysis.

**Content:** Analysis of various content categories showed that, maximum number of blogs was written on extension approaches. Major areas of contributions under the good practices category were Agriculture followed by Animal Husbandry and Extension Management. Maximum number of meeting notes was reported on agricultural/veterinary extension related events followed by specific events on topics like climate change and entrepreneurship.

**Contributors:** Maximum number of blogs was contributed by the researchers from the research institutes including KVKs followed by academicians from the agricultural universities and professionals from various international organizations. Leading contributors of good practice notes were research professionals from the research institutes including KVKs followed by professionals from various international research organizations and academicians from the agricultural universities. Researchers, research scholars, academicians and high level professionals (director/joint director) took most interest in sharing the meeting notes. An overview of the country wise contribution revealed that most of the contents are from India followed by Bangladesh. The contribution from other South Asian countries is marginal at present and has to be improved.

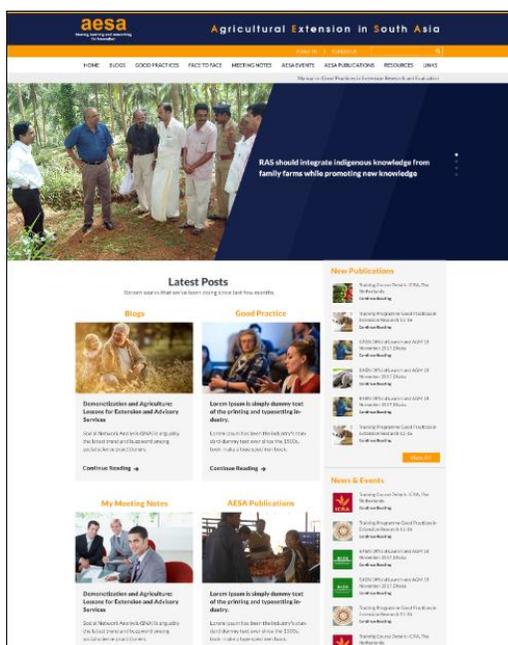
**Comments:** Overall, average number of comments was found to be highest for blogs (2.69) followed by meeting notes (1.47) and good practices (1.04). Under the blogs, the theme Research in Extension (4.64) generated most audience interest as indicated by the average number of comments followed by Policy issues in Extension (4.25). In case of meeting notes, it was for events related to agriculture (1.88) followed by agricultural/veterinary extension (1.72).

Interestingly, there is no difference among the audience in engaging in a discussion depending upon the profile of the contributor. Also having multiple or single authors for the content also made no difference to the audience in terms of engaging in further discussion on the content. However, significant difference was observed for their interest to engage in discussion, depending on the category of the content.

## IMPLICATIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

Though lot of people are accessing the co-created content from AESA web portal and AESA facebook group (which has more than 19,300 members) very few are willing to comment on the content and engage in a discussion. Certainly this is something which needs to be improved.

AESA is using the results of this analysis in the development of its new web portal (to be launched in January 2018) and we hope to see more number of professionals from diverse backgrounds from more countries contributing to the AESA co-created content in the coming years.



In 2018, we hope more among us will take time to provide feedback and comments on the content and engage in fruitful discussions so that together we can enhance the capacities of extension and advisory services in South Asia to serve its clients better.

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