



**Proceedings  
AESAs Governance Board Meeting  
08 May 2021 Virtually**

**Background**

Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESAs) network was established in 2013 to meet the demand for a network of all those interested in extension and advisory services (EAS). AESAs is currently the only regional network available for extension stakeholders in South Asia to share knowledge and experiences on EAS. Over the years, it expanded its contributions to the extension profession by strengthening knowledge management, promoting new capacities, engaging in policy advocacy, strengthening research and developing networks at the regional level. AESAs is part of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS). The AESAs Secretariat is hosted at the Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP), Hyderabad, India.

AESAs 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 AESAs. The governance structure as well as the short-term and long-term priorities of AESAs were identified at this meeting<sup>1</sup>(table 1).

**Table 1: AESAs Priorities**

AESAs Short Term Priorities	AESAs Long Term Priorities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish country forums</li> <li>2. Resource generation</li> <li>3. Knowledge sharing</li> <li>4. Capacity building of extension functionaries</li> <li>5. Develop directory of extension and RAS providers</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop constitution for AESAs</li> <li>2. Hold annual meetings</li> <li>3. Develop extension certification mechanism</li> <li>4. Initiate case studies</li> <li>5. Conduct evaluation studies on extension</li> <li>6. Needs assessment and review of extension situation in South Asia</li> </ol>

Representatives from each of the South Asian countries as well as the Director of the SAARC Agricultural Centre were selected as members of the AESAs Governance Group. The first AESAs governance board meeting was held on 13 February 2016 at Peradaniya, Kandy, Sri Lanka<sup>2</sup>. Representatives from seven out of eight South Asian countries participated in this meeting. The progress of the AESAs network until then was discussed and further activities and decisions pertaining to further strengthening of the network were taken at this meeting. The second meeting of the AESAs 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 AESAs Network, and develop a capacity strengthening plan for AESAs<sup>3</sup>. Participants from five out of eight South Asian countries participated in this meeting.

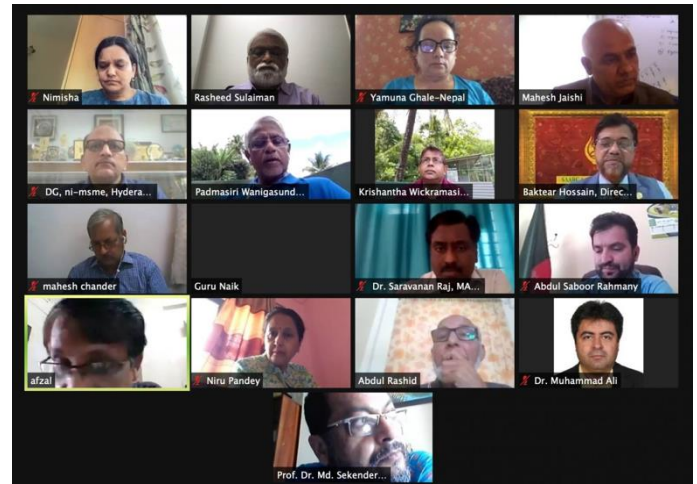
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aesanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NM3.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aesanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/PROCEEDINGS-AESA-Governance-Meeting-13-Feb-2016-R-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aesanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NM5.pdf>

The third AESA Governance Board Meeting was held virtually using the zoom meeting interface on 08 May 2021. The meeting had in total 17 participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, SAARC Agricultural Centre and AESA Secretariat (See Annexure I for the list of participants). There were no participants from Bhutan and Maldives in this meeting.

The agenda for the meeting was shared with the GB members along with the meeting invite (See Annexure I for the detailed agenda). Due to COVID-19 the face-to-face GB meeting scheduled for 2020 could not take place. Thereby, it was decided to hold a virtual meeting in early 2021. The meeting was facilitated by Rasheed Sulaiman V and Nimisha Mittal from CRISP/AESA Secretariat.



## The Meeting

### Welcome and Self-introduction

Rasheed Sulaiman V, Focal Point, AESA, formally welcomed the participants from across the region. He thanked the resource persons who were also invited along with the GB members to participate in this meeting. He outlined the purpose of this meeting was to decide on the future of AESA which made it all the more incumbent to review the past. Hence the progress of AESA and the members discussed the draft AESA Strategic Plan (2021-2026). He shared that Guru Naik, an international consultant, stationed in Afghanistan, has drafted the strategic plan for AESA 2021-26 after a few rounds of discussion with Rasheed and Nimisha from the AESA Secretariat and focal points from Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This was shared with all the participants prior to the GB meeting. Guru would be presenting the findings and priority action points in the strategic action plan in this meeting. The strategic plan will soon be finalised based on the comments and suggestions from this meeting.

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

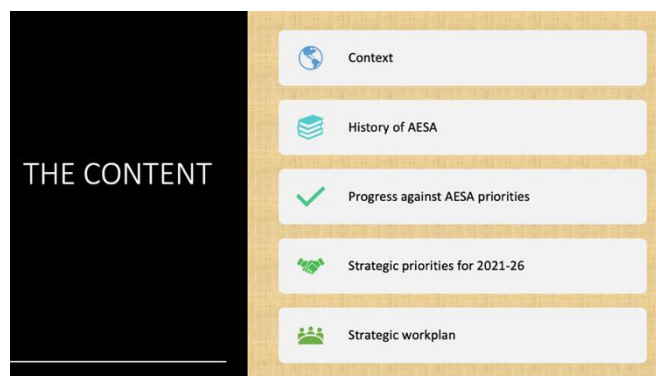
### Overview on AESA: Presentation by the Secretariat

Rasheed Sulaiman V briefed the participants, especially those who were new to the meeting on AESA and how it fit in the wider global network of the GFRAS (see annexure II for more details). AESA is now 7 and half years old since its inception-the first face to face meeting in January 2014 in Kathmandu. Some of those who are present in this GB meeting were also there in the first meeting (of the 28 participants) in which the short-term and long-term priorities of AESA (table 1) were charted along with identifying the focal points where 28 participants were there.

Rasheed concluded with his presentation and invited Guru Naik to begin the discussion on the strategic plan of AESA which is the main focus of this meeting. Sekender Ali from Bangladesh added here that what he found missing in Rasheed's presentation was that AESA has been playing a key role in handholding the country fora, providing advisory and suggestion to the country fora and continuously helping the CF in their further development. Rasheed added that BAEN is the only formal network so far and AESA has been working very closely with BAEN. Muhammad Ali added that PEN is also part of AESA and this needs to be corrected in the strategic plan. Afzal from BAEN also thanked Rasheed for his presentation. He said that it can be summarized from Rasheed's presentation is that AESA clearly faces funding crunch and the governance board should also play crucial role in raising resources for AESA.

## AESA Strategic Plan Discussion

Guru Naik thanked Rasheed for his presentation which set the context aptly for delving into the discussion of future of AESA. He said that he looked at AESA objectively as an outsider, though he is a board member of CRISP, albeit an inactive board member as he hasn't been in India for a long time. He took an external view of AESA, conducted literature review based on a number of documents shared by Rasheed and Nimisha and also had one to one discussion with many of the GB members as well as from the secretariat. He tried to develop the strategic plan based on the impressions he got based on review and discussions and might have some errors which can be corrected based upon this discussion today. Today's discussion would focus on presentation along with discussion rather than have the two separately. The draft plan has already been shared with all of the participants previously.



Guru walked the GB members through the contents of the Strategic Plan and said he would start with the progress against the AESA priorities. He said that when he started the development of the strategic plan, he didn't know what should be his starting point. However, after going through the documents, especially, the document, 'The First Six years of AESA'<sup>4</sup> he realized that in the first face to face meeting of AESA in Nepal in 2014, its members had already articulated 11 priorities, five of which were short term priorities (STP) and the remaining six were long term priorities (LTP). After holding individual discussions, he felt that AESA members still held these are important priorities and he had all the discussions against these priorities to understand the progress against each priority. In the report there are details against each priority, whereas, here it would be only a brief summary.

**STP1: Establish Country Forums:** when we speak of establishment of Country forums, we mean that are registered so that they can raise funds. In South Asia there are only two registered networks, in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The situation in South Asia is as follows:

- *Afghanistan:* No progress. No country forum has been established, mainly the reason has been the unstable environment in Afghanistan.
- *Pakistan:* Pakistan Extension Network (PEN) not registered, and are in the process of setting up the constitution, mission and vision of the network.
- *India:* Indian Agriculture Extension Network (IAEN) not registered, but fairly active and has been contributing to AESA.
- *Nepal:* Nepal Agricultural Extension Association (NAEA) not active. Major political change going on in Nepal in the agricultural sector due to which people have moved from one place to other. AESA needs to put in more work to make it more active. Membership hasn't been renewed so far.
- *Bhutan and Maldives:* Shown no interest
- *Bangladesh:* flagship networks so far, Bangladesh Agriculture Extension Network (BAEN) registered, very active, have been able to raise funds
- *Sri Lanka:* Network of Agriculture Extension and Advisory Services of Sri Lanka (NAEASSL) recently registered

Chandra Shekara raised the issue whether a formal submission to MANAGE for hosting of the Indian Extension Network has been really taken up. To this, Saravanan Raj responded that this was only informally discussed, first in the Nepal GB meeting of AESA in 2017 and then informally with the then DG, MANAGE, Usha Rani and formal approach wasn't made to MANAGE. Guru reiterated the urgency to establish CF in India fairly quickly and explore various options for either hosting or registration, if the option for MANAGE to host CF is open then this would solve the issue of registering the CF in India as this would hasten the process. To this, Chandra Sekara responded that MANAGE being a public platform, it cannot host one extension

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aesanetwork.org/the-first-six-years-of-aesa/>

society or network and ignore others, though being an extension focused organization, it extends its support to AESA and the CF in India and any other professional bodies working to boost extension in the country even if it finds itself unable to host the CF.

Mahesh Chander added that MANAGE has been very supportive of Indian Extension Network and the first meeting of this network took place in MANAGE itself. Initially in India, registration of the CF/network did not take place as this wasn't pushed forward as the country for a wanted it to be more unique and inclusive of all sectors. However, now the question is which form this network should take and these are issues which need to be flushed out and decided upon.

**STP #2: Resource Generation** – for AESA, and CF-Not much progress has taken place in last seven years, in terms of raising resources, as is evident from Rasheeds' presentation that the funds which we have been able to raise are much lesser than what we would like to have. It is the weakest area of AESA which is also clear in the capacity assessment survey in 2015. This is also an area where AESA needs to focus. Chandra Shekara also added on this issue and said that how do we generate resources as this is the greatest challenge which we have been continuously mulling since 2014 as we all are based out of different countries. Sharing something that MANAGE has recently established is a platform called 'project facilitation center' in a PPP mode for any private organization/professional body which wishes to raise resources and wants a credible platform to aim at the consultancy project which generates a lot of income and if AESA submits any proposal along with MANAGE faculty members on a revenue sharing basis. This facility is open for AESA. Guru raised the issue of whether this is also open for international programs also. However, any projects for MANAGE are routed through the Government of India, take the consent and then can submit. The platform is open for both AESA and CF in India.

Guru added here we need to reflect upon the issue of resource generation by the country forums also. He said that except for BAEN no other country level network has raised any resources. Rasheed concurred with him and said that perhaps due to the fact that only BAEN is a registered entity which helped them raise money. BAEN also has a membership base and created a live corpus. This hasn't happened in any other country. Whereas, BAEN is an independent entity with its constitution. He also added that in this region, that is, South Asia registering as a sub -regional network has been difficult due to the peculiar nature of this region, and restrictions on transferring funds across countries in South Asia makes it difficult to work with different country for a unlike the other regions of the world, and that has also been inhibiting the registration of AESA as a legal entity and its ability to raise funds. Hence, one of the important lessons has been that country fora need to raise funds for country level activities which is much easier than AESA trying to raise resources for different networks.

Chandra Shekara suggested that the registration shouldn't be delayed and better to start early especially since we are talking of 2026 in the strategic plan. MANAGE also has a Rota of consultants which can be also be utilized for consultancies and projects. Rasheed said that the only problem in registering AESA is that it is an international body with a board from all south Asian countries, hence registering in India might not be feasible under the FCRA rules and regulations. Guru suggested that whether GFRAS can set up a branch in India that is AESA from an FCRA point of view if not for a governance point of view and then it can raise resources. As Rasheed has been part of the GFRAS board, as a special case, they have been transferring money directly to Bangladesh, though they aren't very keen on doing so as they wish to decentralize these activities to the continental networks (AFAAS, RELASER, etc). Hence, we need options of registering AESA as an international organization.

Afzal added that if AESA secretariat is shifted to Bangladesh, then it might be possible to register in Bangladesh as a regional network. Maybe this kind of option needs to be explored like the Women South Asia Association are registered in Bangladesh and they are collecting funds from other countries. Similar options can be explored., for example, organisations like BRAC. AESA is open to exploring these opportunities to facilitate fund management. Let us put this as a priority and explore this option. Guru also added that Bangladesh is the most flexible country in this region. AESA Secretariat along with BAEN would further explore this.

Chandra Shekara also suggested that we should probably explore the mechanism through which international organisations have been registered in India and operate in multi countries, and he said he would speak to their Chartered Accountant to figure out how such organisations operate. These all are possible ways forward for resource generation.

**STP #3: Knowledge Sharing:** this is the strongest area of AESA. As Rasheed has shown in his presentation that AESA has published several knowledge products: Blogs, My meeting notes, Good practices notes, Book reviews, Face to face, Working papers, Reports, Manuals & facilitators guide, Updates, Policy briefs, Proceedings and SAAS good practice notes. This is the area that AESA has to maintain and further grow in the future.

**STP #4: Capacity Building:** good progress has been made under this short-term priority. This includes:

- AESA developed a Facilitators Guide for assessing capacity needs of EAS providers
- AESA contributed to GFRAS for the development of the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK)
- AESA started promoting NELK
- Conducted online user survey, to identify what are the areas where capacities need to be built

Probably a little more needs to be done, but at the same time fairly good progress has been made.

**STP #5: Extension Directory:** though developing this directory has been parked for the moment till a dedicated person is available for carrying this out. At the same time, AESA Facebook group that has 20,879 members which has the following distribution by country; India 84%, Nepal 6%, Pakistan 2%, Bangladesh 2%, Sri Lanka 0.3%, etc. Even though Bangladesh is fairly advanced in terms of activities, but its members in the Facebook are only 2% and very low percentage from Sri Lanka.

Rasheed added that in 2015 AESA started developing the directory, which had a lot of issues with respect to the database and the response was very poor which was later deleted from its website. However, GFRAS has started the community area (<https://www.g-fras.org/en/community/community-area.html>) on its website which was launched recently through a DLEC grant. It is a global directory where one can put their picture and their area of specialization and that is something that can be accessed across the globe and we will promote this in the coming months though it has some technical glitches at present. AESA Facebook group is the most important contribution of AESA as a network, as we have been posting important links on it almost every day, on what has been happening in the region, related to vacancies, events, publications relevant to extension. We need active co-operation from the countries to promote the Facebook group. Even though Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India country fora have their Facebook groups but these have very little participation and we need more active response from a more members. We leave this to the country focal points and resource persons from each country.

We need a greater number of focal persons, as at present we have been dealing only with one-two focal points, whereas what we need is a country working group of 5 members, which we can put under different WhatsApp groups and we need photographs and email ids of these persons and we would be reaching out to them for more interaction and lead some of the activities at the country level. Nimisha also added that we have been also contemplating having theme based working groups in the region around issues such as gender, youth, nutrition, etc., which might interest people differently and link it to knowledge products as so far there have been mostly knowledge products from India only and very little numbers from Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka and none from other countries. For that we need more active collaboration from other country networks where we can have joint logos on publications/knowledge products and contribute to each other. Rasheed asked if these two ideas resonated with everyone, one, to form country working groups and two, to have thematic groups in the region.

Mahesh Jaishi from Nepal gave his assent to this idea. Chandra Shekara also found this a good idea to have a core committee of 5 persons from each country, however, he felt that the size of the country should also be kept in mind while making these groups as India and Maldives are not comparable in terms of size and population and number of extension professionals. Rasheed also called upon the SAARC Agricultural center to connect AESA with its wider community and networks. The director of SAARC Agricultural center also agreed to collaborate and conduct programmes together for agricultural development in this region. Afzal

suggested that there should be more frequent meetings in the region or on themes which would help promote more interaction. Nimisha from AESA appreciated this suggestion and expressed readiness on part of AESA Secretariat to facilitate these interactions through zoom interface, though, she added that the secretariat would leave it up to the groups to take up the issues and take this forward, co-ordinate among themselves and take more initiative than they have so far (more of a pull than a push).

**LTP #1: Constitution of AESA:** this is very closely linked to the registration of AESA. Once we decide to register AESA then we would need to know how it is going to function and what is going to be the role for each country as it is a regional network. It is time that this activity should start and we need to discuss on how the network should function and put it into the registration document, whether it is memorandum or any other such document. So far, the status of this priority has been as given below;

- This activity hasn't started,
- Governance board has met twice since the first face to face meeting at Kathmandu, Nepal, and
- One scheduled meeting in 2020 delayed due to Covid-19.

**LTP #2: Hold annual meetings:** this is much lesser priority than more important/bigger priorities so far and funding crunch has affected so far this priority. Nevertheless, several meetings have been held in different countries. Though, some of the scheduled meetings didn't take place due to lack of funds and Covid-19 also posed a major challenge. Having said that, COVID-19 has also brought forth online mechanisms such as zoom which do not require that many resources and can be used for meeting virtually more frequently which has provided opportunities to meet.

**LTP #3: Extension Certification:** this hasn't started yet even though everyone believes it is very important especially so for those who don't have formal degrees and are still doing very good work and should be part of our networks. Rasheed added that this discussion started when the idea of professionalizing extension started -at the GFRAS level. There was a conversation on bringing standards and certification in extension- GFRAS took up global good practices/policy document on certification, though only very few countries have been successful in this. This is practiced in South Africa and countries in Europe are also very strong on this, where you need a minimum number of credits and get certified as an extension professional to continue in service. In India, this is work in progress, though the certifications are national. From AESA's perspective this is something which is yet to start, this doesn't mean that we would provide certification but we would promote this activity by promoting a discussion on extension certificate and try to promote standards and sharing good practices/experiences around this and it is an important and emerging area for AESA.

Muhammad Ali from PEN added that this is closely linked to the registration of AESA. He felt that this should be part of the short-term plan rather than a long-term plan. And the constitution of AESA should be moved to the short-term priority and should be given more importance. Rasheed agreed with him and said that now it is a super priority for AESA. Rasheed also added that MANAGE also has experience on certification. He asked Chandra Shekara to add to this. Chandra Shekara explained how MANAGE has certified more than 1000 farm advisers (especially in different disciplines-like super specialist doctor-for example in millet growing area) as well as livestock advisers and these are pitched at three levels, 1<sup>st</sup> level being basic knowledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> level specialized skills and 3<sup>rd</sup> level field knowledge. This is also been linked to one district one crop programme. Agricultural skills council of India (ASCI) is a national level certification body and have qualification packs and in extension MANAGE is also party to that-extension supervisors, etc. Rasheed felt after hearing from MANAGE experience that we should have a webinar in collaboration with MANAGE in the next three months so that everyone in the region can learn from them on certification. Afzal also reiterated that he had also mentioned to Guru that certification is necessary as demand is changing as agriculture policy is also changing. He also felt that joint certification based on certain criteria can be helpful within and outside the country as well outside country as people keep on migrating from one country to other, especially if it is around a common template.

Wanigasundera also felt that certification is something important in the Sri Lanka context, as this was also discussed within their network members and this should be from a regional body which would add more value than a national certification, due to the multiplicity of organisations and pluralistic nature of extension. Yamuna from Nepal also added that in Nepal is facing a big challenge in technical staff at the municipal level



due to the federal structure in place. She felt this is a great idea to have more extension workers, and ministry is revising the agricultural policy and there is an opportunity to influence them on post production as the extension so far has been on production. Rasheed agreed that we will take a lead in organizing a webinar in the coming months. Muhammad Ali asked how this certification would be different from those offered by the educational institutions. Rasheed responded that in extension this hasn't been there unlike research which makes sure the kind of credits that need to be accrued to have certain promotions. However, these need to be approved at the national level. Which is something which South Africa has adopted. He said that let us have this discussion in the webinar on this and we will let all of you know when we would have it and we will try to get people from South Africa also on this. Muhammad suggested to have participants from Europe especially Germany.

**LTP #4: Initiate Case Studies:** AESA has made very good progress on this priority. 44 case studies of good practices documented and published in AESA website as we speak in this meeting. This is one activity that has been done well and should continue to go on in same way.

**LTP #5: Evaluation studies on extension**

- AESA published manual on good practices in extension research and evaluation in 2017
- Conducted several workshops on developing capacities of researchers and practitioners on conducting evaluation studies on extension

Nimisha added that the idea behind this priority was also to commission and publish evaluation studies which would add evidence from the ground to build the prestige of the profession. However, this has yet to take place as this would be something to be done at the country level.

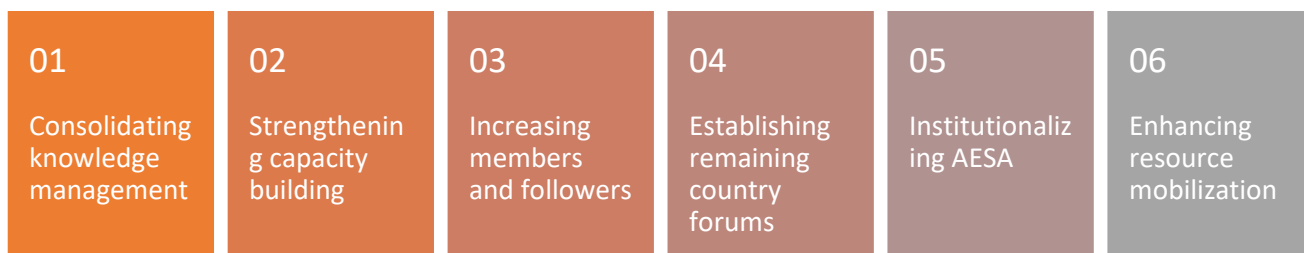
**LTP #6: Needs assessment and Review of extension situation**

- AESA has conducted needs assessment and review of extension situation in Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh and Nepal
- AESA has written 5 Working papers and published in AESA website

Rasheed said, that we wanted to do it in all the eight countries but due to limited funds we could only do in four countries. If funding allows, then we can do it for other countries. For example, in Bangladesh we developed the status paper, conducted capacity needs assessment and then formed four working groups, developed four training modules. But this could happen only because there was an active country forum which could generate demand within the country. Mahesh Jaishi also added that these types of publications are a good resource for extension and research fraternity. He also added a suggestion to start a journal. Rasheed said that this could be taken up probably in the long term, though it doesn't seem feasible because it needs resources and time of professionals to run it. Mahesh Chander from India also added that even established journals are struggling to survive at present. Chandra Shekara felt that AESA blogs, good practices are very good resources at present and in the future maybe the option of running a journal might be contemplated. Rasheed agreed that we should park this issue for future perusal.

**Strategic priorities for 2021-26**

Guru added that based upon the review and discussions, these are suggestions from him on six Strategic priorities for AESA 2021-26:



**SP #1: Consolidating Knowledge management**

1. Increase knowledge product contribution: AESA will encourage its members to spend time in developing and sharing such knowledge products.

2. Add YouTube videos: AESA will encourage its members include extension professionals in the field to develop videos of good practices from their area and post them on AESA YouTube channel with an AESA branding.
3. Continue curricula reforms: AESA and country forums will continue this initiative in all countries and also work with the universities to adopt the revised curriculum

Guru said that Knowledge products are quite skewed as of now, some have contributed many whereas some have contributed none. Rasheed added that we have 85 percent from India, followed by Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka and no knowledge products from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives. We need more active participation and commitment from all the network members than what it has been so far. AESA has been investing its time on technically editing these knowledge products. Nimisha added that AESA already has a YouTube channel. Rasheed added that we will try to strengthen it. Rasheed said that we are very keen to work with countries on curricula reforms, we have a good team in India including Mahesh and Saravanan who have worked in India and would be happy to extend this learning to other countries provided there is a demand from them. Nimisha also added that we can even organize webinar on curricula reforms if there is a demand. Muhammad Ali added that there is a process through which curricula can be reformed in Pakistan. Rasheed said that each country has that process in place but if you develop a pressure group who provide an alternate curriculum and start advocacy then it would take place even if it might take time. Hence having an active country fora and linked activities are quite important.

### **SP #2: Strengthening capacity building**

1. Roll out NELK: AESA and country forums will organize more workshops to popularize NELK
2. Develop training modules: AESA will develop several such training modules and conduct Training of Trainers (ToTs)-recommendation came up from the AESA survey
3. Collaborate with Governments for capacity building: AESA and country forums will proactively collaborate with Government Agriculture departments at the national and provincial/state level and ensure NELK is rolled down to the frontline extension professionals
4. Develop extension certification: AESA and Country Forums will facilitate mechanism for recognizing their contribution, provide them with formal extension certification and bring them into the extension network

### **SP #3: Increasing members and followers**

1. Launch membership drive: AESA and country forums will launch a membership drive. Special effort will be made in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka
2. Develop EAS directory: AESA will develop an online form and request members to fill the details. AESA will start from the members in the Facebook page and then expand
3. Broad-based AESA membership: AESA will embrace from any sector as long as they are engaged in Agriculture extension. In addition to Government and Academics, AESA and country forums will make deliberate efforts to reach out to the Corporate Sector, Special boards, NGOs and Rural banking etc.

Rasheed said that instead of the directory, the community area of GFRAS should be promoted as shared earlier.

### **SP #4: Establishing the remaining Country Forums**

1. Follow-up activation and registration of PEN in Pakistan
2. Follow-up activation of NAEAS in Nepal
3. Register a new society in India and apply for FCRA
4. Encourage Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives to join, and start their country forums

Guru and Rasheed invited members to share their views on activation and registration of the CF and what is feasible or doable. Muhammad Ali shared that in Pakistan they are still in the process of formulating their constitution and articulating the mission and vision for PEN and they believe they need to do it really well and have a proper mission, vision and outline activities for raising resources. PEN have brainstormed already and some of the senior members agreed to support the registration of the network. They have also decided to have a website once the constitution is formed. PEN had a meeting in 2020, but due to COVID-19 they faced a lag. Hopefully, should be able to register and have website in a year or so. Rasheed suggested that



they should have PEN Facebook group. Muhammad Ali added that they already have a group. Rasheed requested them to send a link so that AESA can also start posting material in that. Mahesh also added that we need to encourage more faculty members from Pakistan to trigger content for AESA. Muhammad Ali said that one of the faculty members from Pakistan couldn't access the content on the AESA website and tried to register but was unsuccessful which was quite demotivating for them. Rasheed said that we don't know what might have been the issue. If people write on our email or on AESA email id we have been responding and that is how we have been communicating with people from all the countries. Nimisha added that on Facebook we approve the content once someone posts it.

In Nepal, Niru Dahal Pandey added that due to COVID-19 haven't renewed it in the last two years, though it is already a registered society which would be the de-facto country forum for Nepal. She committed that they would renew it and become more active. Nimisha added that we need more representation from this society to have more active participation to which Niru agreed to connect them soon.

Rasheed said that for India, we need to quickly need to work towards the registration, concentrate on Indian funding and then apply for FCRA once the three years are up.

Sri Lanka network is now registered. Krishantha, is the current president of the network and added that now they would be developing an integrated extension approach in agricultural institutions in the plantation sector (coconut and spices sectors) and have sent a concept note on the same to the ministry and have got a green light on the same. We will be starting this programme in the next couple of months and we will also share with AESA. Wanigasundera also told that many contents of the NELK modules have been translated in Sinhalese and customized by adding the local flavor to these.

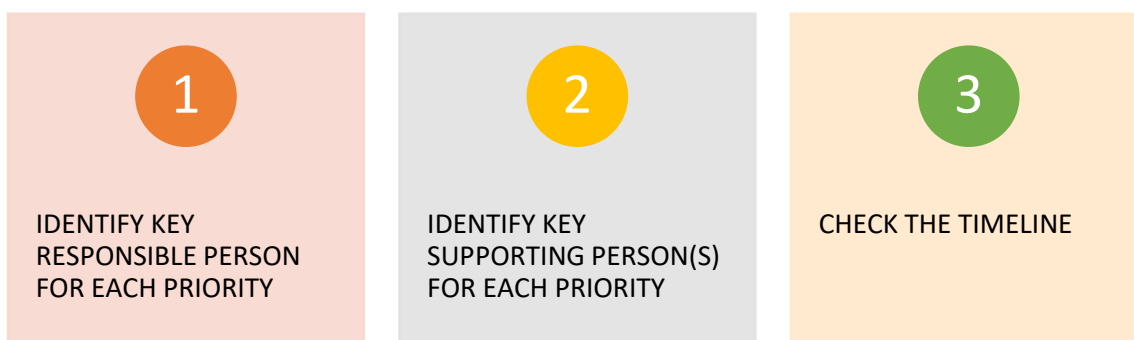
#### **SP #5: Institutionalization of AESA**

1. Register AESA: AESA will review the three legal options and consult with other people and register itself under one of these options. Till that time the current legal arrangement will continue.
2. Develop constitution of AESA: AESA will organize a wide-ranging consultation with its key stakeholders and develop its constitution.

#### **SP #6: Resource generation**

1. Identify sources of funds: Each country forum will discuss internally and identify specific donors under each category with their specific funding schemes (if applicable) that are relevant to Agriculture or AESA
2. Identify programme ideas for fund raising
3. Support each other in raising funds:
  - AESA and country forums will support each other in raising funds
  - AESA could identify international opportunities and pass them on to individual country forums
  - AESA will also identify multi-country funding opportunities and write joint proposals
  - AESA will also support country forums in writing proposals
  - Country forums will also pay AESA for services they could receive from AESA

**Strategic Workplan:** Nimisha showed the excel sheet with the GB members and said that we would be sharing it with all the members using the google sheets where they can put their inputs. This can be later on used for review in 2026 and help in planning for future activities. AESA would take a lead in filling this up and all of the members can add their inputs and this would go into the final strategic plan as an input.



### **Wrap up and Vote of Thanks**

Afzal said that he found the whole discussion quite stimulating and this is what is needed in the pandemic times to keep all of us motivated to contribute better and how can we arrange for online capacity development and be active. Baktear from SAARC Agricultural centre found this deliberation excellent which can propel the region into better extension systems for agricultural development and poverty alleviation and reiterated his committed to work together with AESA. Sekender Ali also added that BAEN and SAARC agricultural centre would collaborate in the future. He also added that there was not much time to talk about BAEN activities which also reflects the contributions and credentials of AESA. Rasheed thanked all the GB members for attending a prolonged two and a half hour zoom meeting, this would be followed by the proceedings and fix up the next meeting in November 2021.

Nimisha formally thanked all the participants for attending and contributing to this meeting. This meeting had a full quorum with all the members committing and being present in the meeting. She wrapped up the main discussion points, which were on exploring the options of registration of AESA i) in Bangladesh as suggested by Afzal Bhuiyan from BAEN, and ii) as an INGO in India as suggested by Chandra Shekara and expressed that AESA would call upon them to help explore these two options. AESA would also follow up on the working groups, and webinar on extension certification as discussed today. She also suggested that the GB members should discuss some of the concerns which were raised in the meeting today and deliberate upon how would they contribute to the development of AESA within the priorities which were listed and discussed, especially on the people they would like to add to the extended AESA country working groups for more vibrant functioning of AESA.

## Annexure I

### List of participants

1. Nimisha Mittal, Lead Researcher, Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP), Hyderabad, India (AESAs Secretariat),
2. Rasheed Sulaiman V, Director, CRISP (Focal point AESA),
3. Sekender Ali, Secretary General, Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN), Bangladesh (Focal Point, Bangladesh),
4. Md. Afzal Hossain Bhuiyan, LMP Co-ordinator, BAEN, Bangladesh,
5. Md. Baktear Hossain, Director, SAARC Agricultural Centre, Bangladesh,
6. Saravanan Raj, Director (Agricultural Extension), National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, India (AESAs focal point)
7. P Chandra Shekara, Director General, MANAGE, India (Focal point, India)
8. Mahesh Chander, Joint Director (Extension Education), ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Izatnagar, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India (Focal point, India)
9. Muhammad Ali, Pakistan Extension Network (PEN), Pakistan (Focal point, Pakistan)
10. Abdur Rashid, PEN
11. Niru Pandey, Department of Agriculture (DoA), Ministry of Agriculture, Nepal (Focal point, Nepal)
12. Padmasiri Wanigasundera, Retired Professor (Agricultural Extension), Department of Agricultural Extension, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka (Focal point, Sri Lanka)
13. Krishantha Wickramasinghe, Network of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services - Sri Lanka (NAEASSL), Sri Lanka
14. Mahesh Jaishi, Assistant Professor at Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science, (IAAS), Tribhuvan University, Lamjung, Nepal
15. Yamuna Ghale, Nepal
16. Saboor Rahmany, Afghanistan
17. Guru Naik, Consultant, Afghanistan

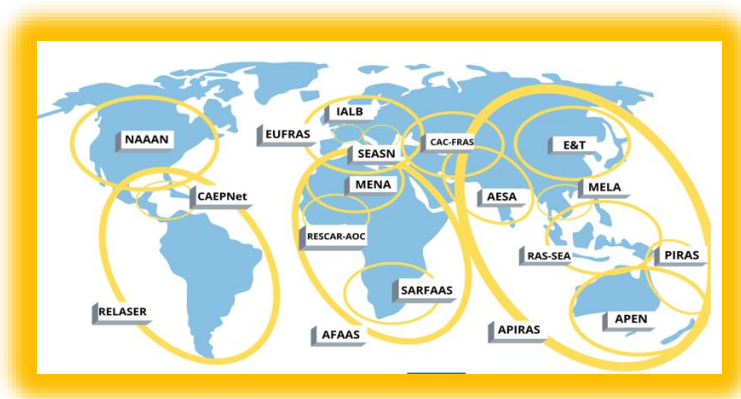
### AESA GB Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome and Self-introduction (Rasheed Sulaiman V, Focal Point, AESA) 5'
2. AESA- What we achieved in 7 years (Rasheed Sulaiman V) 15'
3. Presentation of the draft Strategic Plan for AESA (Guru Naik, Consultant) 30'
4. Discussion on the Strategic Plan (Q& A, Inputs from participants) 30'
5. Strengthening AESA including Country Networks- Next Steps: Actions, Lead, Time Frame 20'
6. Key Recommendations/Decisions and Vote of Thanks (Nimisha Mittal, AESAs Secretariat) 10'
7. Any other Business 10'

## Annexure II

### Overview on AESA

AESA is now 7 and half years old since its inception-the first face to face meeting in January 2014 in Kathmandu. During the initial years (2013-16) AESA received funding from SDC including the first face to face meeting. Rasheed Sulaiman V briefed the participants, especially those who were new to the meeting on AESA and how it fit in the wider global network of the GFRAS. GFRAS was established in 2010 to strengthen pluralistic demand-driven EAS



through promoting Policy advocacy, learning and

networking. It has been funded mainly by SDC, and USAID, along with grants from donors like IFAD (with more funds at

the regional level), GIZ, and EU. GFRAS Previously had a Steering Committee, whereas now it has a Board and General Assembly. It has been hosted at Agridea, Switzerland so far and would be hosted by FiBL, Switzerland in the coming

years. AESA is represented in the Board almost since the beginning. GFRAS has networks all over the globe, big continental networks like the AFAAS in Africa, APIRAS in Asia and RELASER in Latin America, and AESA as a sub-regional network in South Asia.

*Establishment of Country Fora:* AESA initially started through a website and a Facebook group. AESA website has been revised three times in the last six years ([www.aesanetwork.org](http://www.aesanetwork.org)). In 2014-15, AESA started to have conversations around the establishment of country fora. The progress so far in the South Asia region on the status of CF is illustrated in table 2.

**Table 2: Status of CF in South Asia**

Countries	Year of formation	Country Fora/ Network	Formal/Informal	Website/ Facebook page/ group
BANGLADESH	1 Sept 2014	Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN)	Registered	<a href="http://www.baenbd.org">www.baenbd.org</a>
INDIA	26 August 2014	Indian Extension Network	Informal	Facebook group
NEPAL	2015	Engagement with the Nepal Agricultural Extension Association (NAEA)	Registered but not active	None
PAKISTAN	1 Sept 2015	Pakistan Extension Network	Informal	None
SRI LANKA	In 2019 NAEASSL emerged as a network	Network of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services - Sri Lanka (NAEASSL)	Registration process going on	Facebook group

*Capacity Needs Assessment:* AESA's first activity in 2015 was to organise Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) of Extension and Advisory Service Providers in the four countries-India (October 2015), Sri Lanka (February 2016), Bangladesh (February 2016) and Nepal (May 2016). It was able to identify capacity needs of EAS in four countries at different levels and published these as a policy brief<sup>5</sup> in July 2016. AESA also published **Facilitators Guide for CNA of EAS Providers**<sup>6</sup>. One of the emerging needs identified was to train young research scholars/Faculty on Good Practices in Extension Research and Evaluation. AESA published a **Manual on Good Practices in Extension Research and Evaluation**<sup>7</sup> and started to strengthen capacities in this regard.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aesanetwork.org/policy-brief-no-1-capacity-needs-of-extension-and-advisory-services-eas-in-south-asia/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aesanetwork.org/assessing-capacity-needs-of-extension-and-advisory-services-a-guide-for-facilitators/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aesanetwork.org/manual-on-good-practices-in-extension-research-and-evaluation/>

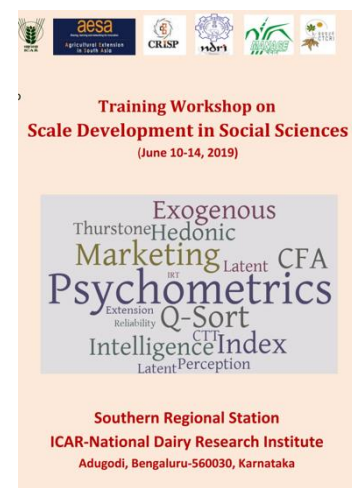
AESA held its GB Meeting on 13 Feb 2016 Kandy, Sri Lanka where it reviewed the progress of AESA and took several decisions to strengthen AESA. This was supported from the SDC funding.



From 2016-2019, AESA received support from IFAD in a project called Supporting Smallholder Farmers in Asia and Pacific-Islands Region through Strengthened Agricultural Advisory Services (SAAS). 3 Networks under APIRAS including AESA received funding support under this project. This coincided with the end of support from SDC. This project focused on three countries. These were, Bangladesh, Fiji and Philippines. AESA had Bangladesh as country fora under this project and had limited funding support to engage in a few focused activities. These were Capacity Assessment of Network, Capacity Strengthening of EAS, Knowledge Management and organising Policy Dialogues. AESA undertook Capacity Assessment of AESA as a network through an Online Capacity Assessment (CA) of AESA in 2017. It validated the findings of CA at the AESA governance board meeting, Kathmandu, July 2017. CA Report and Proceedings of the Governance Board Meeting are available on AESA website.

*Network strengthening:* AESA initiated many activities under this activity. Since BAEN was registered as a network and Bangladesh was also part of the SAAS project as a focus country, AESA conducted many activities with BAEN such as BAEN Consultation and Planning Workshop Bangladesh (April 2017). AESA also initiated the 1st meeting of the National Network of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services in Sri Lanka (November 2017) and participated in the year end SAAS Project Review in Bangladesh (July 2018).

*Partnerships and collaborations:* though the funding was restricted to Bangladesh under the SAAS project, AESA developed a number of partnerships in the region, especially with regional institutions such as National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), IRRI South Asia Regional Centre, and South Asia Institute of Advance Studies (SIAS). Though the budget was limited but AESA's strength was in engaging in partnerships with a number of organisations. Some of these collaborations are illustrated in Table 3.



**Table 3: Partnerships and collaborations in South Asia**



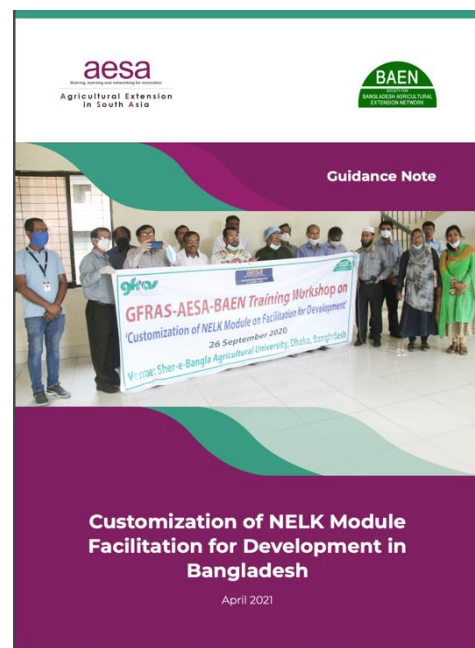
Partner	Collaboration/ Event	Country
MANAGE, India	Promotion of the NELK, Curricula development for Indian Universities	India
MANAGE/ICAR-CTCRI/SM Sehgal Foundation	Trainings on strengthening research in extension	India (also had participation from Nepal)
IRRI South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC)	Policy Dialogue-I- CSA and EAS, October 2018, Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka (regional event)
SIAS, Nepal, NPRN	Policy Dialogue -II-Extension under federal Nepal, April 2019, Nepal	Nepal
BAEN, Bangladesh	Customization of NELK Module Facilitation for Development in Bangladesh, September-December 2020	Bangladesh

Improved Individual Capacities: AESA worked on improving the individual capacities, initiated Curricula Reforms (AESA- MANAGE-ICAR development of new extension curricula during July 2018-March 2019,) in India, undertook NELK Promotion (Hyderabad, India, 5-6 Oct 2017 and Dhaka, Bangladesh, 10 March, 2018) as NELK is an important GFRAS product aimed at building capacities at individual level, organised training on Writing Good Practice Notes on EAS (Bangladesh), and trainings on Research Methods in Extension-3 out of 4 during SAAS project (29 November -2 December 2016, Hyderabad, India;7-12 August 2017, Trivandrum, India; 4-8 March 2019, Delhi, India and 10-14 June 2019, Bangalore, India). In the Delhi workshop participants from Nepal were also there including Dr Mahesh Jaishi who is present in this GB meeting as a resource person. In 2020, AESA received a small fund from GFRAS for customization of NELK module on Facilitation for Development in Bangladesh<sup>8</sup> and it also developed a guidance note<sup>9</sup> on how we can customise a generic module to a specific country context.

Activities in Sri Lanka: AESA engaged in many activities for mentoring NAEASSL. Some of these are given below:

- First country meeting of Sri Lanka National Network of Agricultural Extension and advisory Services, Peradeniya 22 November 2017,
- (NAEASSL) Workshop on Adoption of New Extensionist Approach in Advisory and Extension Services in Sri Lanka: In Collaboration with Coconut Cultivation Board (CCB), Sri Lanka, GFRAS and AESA (31 October 2019). This workshop was also used to identify the governance board members of the NAEASSL , and Krishantha is representing the NAEASSL in this GB meeting of AESA, and
- NELK Training for officers of CCB, Colombo 28-30 October 2019. This activity was funded by the CCB.

*Policy dialogues:* AESA organized two policy dialogues in 2018-19 (South Asia policy dialogue on Role of EAS in Scaling-up Climate Smart Agriculture, 5 October 2018, Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Policy Dialogue on Extension under federal Nepal, April 2019, Nepal). Nepal was going through decentralization at that time and the policy dialogue was organized to look at what are the challenges which are involved in reorganizing extension.



<sup>8</sup> [http://baenbd.org/uploads/post/pdfs/2021-04-23\\_6082484048d4d.pdf](http://baenbd.org/uploads/post/pdfs/2021-04-23_6082484048d4d.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.aesanetwork.org/news/guidance-note-customization-of-nelk-module-facilitation-for-development-in-bangladesh-aesa-and-baen-april-2021/>





**Extension Curricula Reforms:** AESA led the curricula reforms in collaboration with the ICAR Broad Subject Matter Committee -(Agricultural Extension) and MANAGE and has been instrumental in developing new curricula for MSc and PhD in Agricultural Extension in Indian Universities (to be implemented from 2021 academic year (22<sup>nd</sup> June and 12 July 2018). Hopefully this would generate traction in other countries and can be replicated and promote the new curricula.

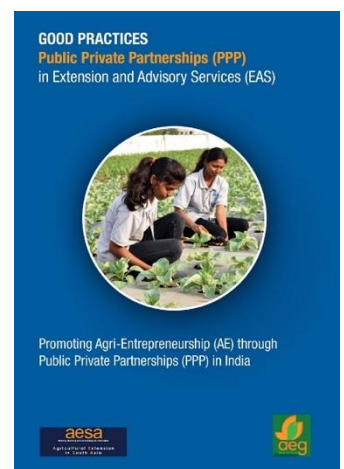
**Webinars:** due to COVID-19 our modus operandi changed a bit, activities reduced a bit and also due to funding constraints. AESA organized two Editor Talk Series in collaboration with ICAR-CTCRI; MANAGE, and CRISP, (14 July and 29 July 2020) to strengthen future capacities for research in extension in the region.

**Knowledge Management:** this is something which AESA has been doing very well from the beginning as is visible from the below numbers. During the COVID-19, we started a special series on COVID-19 and EAS and had contributions from Nepal and Bangladesh also. We produced 24 field notes and 12 blogs on the role of EAS in helping farmers cope with COVID-19/. These were appreciated globally and were used as reference points by many organisations(IFAD, FAO) when they were organising workshops.

#### AESA Knowledge Products

- Blogs -144
- My Meeting Notes -91
- Good Practice Notes -45
- Book Reviews-29
- Face to Face-15
- Working Papers-5
- Policy Briefs-3
- Proceeding- 15
- SAAS Good Practice Notes-2
- Guidance Note-1
- Special series-COVID-19 and EAS
- AESA Updates-17

**AESA Facebook Group**  
 >20900 members  
 Daily updates on trainings, conferences, links to new publications and news related to EAS



The AESA website is the face of AESA. We updated AESA website with new features, developed, used and shared widely on social media (especially on Facebook where we have a good number of followers). Easily Downloadable is equipped with Google analytics Virtual Network.

AESA is currently maintaining the Knowledge Management of APIRAS ([www.apiras.net](http://www.apiras.net)) network as well. APIRAS was established in 2010, but the activities couldn't really move forward. It was earlier housed in Philippines and after the project (SAAS)funded by IFAD got over in 2019, AESA has become the temporary caretaker for the APIRAS network. We have redeveloped its website and updated it with several resources to give more information on the Asia-pacific region.

**Secretariat/Project coordination:** CRISP has been hosting AESA so far. We were previously supported under the SAAS project for organising events, language editing, posting publications, website Upgradation etc. Currently only limited funding from the LMP project (IFAD funded) to pay for the time cost of a communication person as a human resource element and for everything else CRISP pays for the cost of secretariat time(included time of Rasheed and Nimisha and recently joined by Bhuvana).



**Workshops/webinars:** in the last one-year, AESA Co-organized several events including webinars along with regional and global partners (networks, donors, organisations) such as, FAO, IFAD, GFRAS, APAARI, etc. AESA recently has been included to become a member of the FAO-Tropical Agricultural Platform (TAP) where we are part of the governance board and we are working together with APAARI on how to build the innovation capacity in agricultural research and extension in the Asia-pacific.

In 2020, AESA led the development of the methodology on Global Capacity needs assessment on integrating of nutrition into extension and advisory services as nutrition is a priority at all levels (global, regional, local) and we have been trying to promote it locally as well globally.

**Future Plans:** of AESA depend on resource availability and managing other challenges. Though some of the priorities are;

- Handhold/Mentor/existing and new country fora
- Continue/Strengthen KM
- Organise Training of Trainers/ Promote NELK/
- Support curricula reforms in other countries, and ground those in India
- Engage in policy consultations on new challenges which are emerging in the region
- Respond to increasing demands for support
- Raise more resources
- Organise governance meetings (at least once in two years) or do more online meetings.

**Current funding support:** AESA has a very limited funding support, as illustrated in table 4.

**Table 4: Funding Support under the Last Mile Project for 2021**

Particulars	Amount (USD)
Part time Communication Officers time for managing AESA and APIRAS websites, adding extension relevant content and populating on social media	6000 (@500 per month)
Operationalising SRN/ RN and Technical Supervision of CF and participation in LMP (We are using this for language editing, designing publications)	6000 (@500 per month)
Zoom Subscription(yearly)	156
Training/Webinar with sharing costs	1500 (lumpsum)
AESA and APIRAS web portal upgradation (maintenance and updated in sync with newer priorities and features)	500

Even with this limited funded, many of AESA community, especially some of those who are present in the GB meeting have been contributing voluntarily to many AESA knowledge products.

**Challenges:** some of the challenges faced by AESA are given below:

- **Sustainable Financing:** Difficulties in getting core funds for managing a network ( cost of time, travel, communication, human resources).
- **At least one full time staff:** Need a full time programme officer to realistically cost the running costs of the network.

**Not sure how far the existing arrangements will work.** AESA with host (CRISP) support and cost sharing with other organisations

