



## MY MEETING NOTES

Developing the NextGen Extensionists  
National Young Professionals Development Program on “New Frontiers in Agricultural Extension” April 22-26, 2024 | MANAGE, Hyderabad, India



Jason Arockiam shares his insights and experiences from the National Young Professionals Development Program on “New Frontiers in Agricultural Extension” training in this meeting note.

### CONTEXT

The evolving challenges in agriculture, such as climate change, rising food demands, and nutrition security, demand new roles and better competencies from extension professionals. Developing these new competencies will open global opportunities and scope for new jobs in Agricultural Extension. To address these needs, the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) organized the “National Young Professionals Development Program on New Frontiers in Agricultural Extension” training from April 22-26, 2024, in Hyderabad. The program brought together 46 young professionals, including PG & Ph.D. scholars and two young faculty members in Agricultural Extension. The training aimed to explore the scope of Agricultural Extension, identify global job opportunities, and develop essential skills and competencies. Here, I share my reflections on the most intriguing observations and learnings from our training at MANAGE.



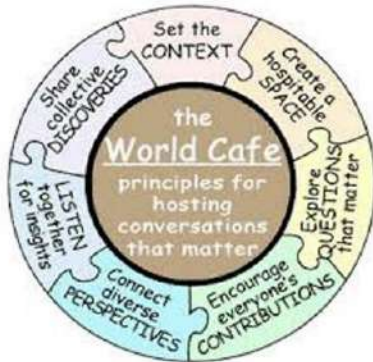
The training participants with the program organizers

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

#### Dialogues on ICAR BSMA Syllabus

We discussed the opportunities in the new ICAR BSMA syllabus for PG and Ph.D. students using the World Café methodology, a conversational process designed to engage participants in meaningful dialogue in a relaxed, café-like setting. The new syllabus focuses on emerging issues such as climate

change, disaster management, sustainable livelihoods, and the development of individuals in society. It opens many doors to global job opportunities. However, the challenge is that current staff in the agricultural extension domain need orientation on the new syllabus to help students acquire the required competencies.



Participants discussing the ICAR BSMA Syllabus using the World Café methodology

### Gender Research in Agricultural Extension and Policy Engagement

A gender approach in agriculture must focus on both men and women, ensuring benefits for all. Participants were divided into five groups to design projects that ensured Gender Equality, Youth, and Social Inclusion (GEYSI). Our group designed a project to involve women in decision-making, focusing on water scarcity due to climate change, based on a case from my village, Puliadithammam, in the Sivagangai district of Tamil Nadu.



Our group presenting their project design, emphasizing the inclusion of GEYSI



We discussed the importance of continuous learning, acquiring new skills, and reading to access wider job opportunities in Agricultural Extension. Essential readings include “New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK),” the “Manual on Good Practices in Extension Research and Innovation,” “50 Publications Every Extension Professional Should Read,” “Extension Science” by Niels Roling, and “Enhancing Agricultural Innovation” by the World Bank. A key session highlight was understanding the importance of engaging extension with policies, which is essential for large-scale impact and recognized as a core competency for extension professionals.



Dr. Rasheed Sulaiman V (Director, CRISP) shared his insights with the participants. He emphasized that to secure a job in international institutions, developing technical, interpersonal, and personal competencies is crucial.

#### **Field Visit to Access Livelihoods and C-DAC**

We visited Access Livelihoods, a renowned NGO in Hyderabad, where we learned about the challenges of working with marginalized communities, especially women, to improve their livelihoods. They focus on women-owned producer enterprises in primary sectors to create equitable and sustainable livelihood opportunities. At C-DAC Hyderabad, a premier R&D organization under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), we explored technological solutions like the Internet of Things (IoT) to address practical problems faced by farmers. C-DAC has developed the Paddy Expert System and Coconut Expert for Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU). They offer PG Diploma courses and formal training programs in AI, Big Data Analytics, IoT, Advanced Computing, and more.

#### **Advances in Social Science Research**

Research in Agricultural Extension should aim to grow the discipline and create knowledge aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, FAO's initiatives, and national research priorities, such as climate change, digital innovations, natural farming, advisory methods, and capacity development. We discussed the application of machine learning and multi-attributive communication models to better understand complex agricultural systems and decision-making processes among farmers and stakeholders. The session also covered potential job opportunities for Agricultural Extension graduates, including roles like Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist, Communication Specialist, Research Specialist, Policy Analyst, and Knowledge Management Specialist.



**Dr. Sethuraman Sivakumar (Principal Scientist, CTCRI) sharing his thoughts with the participants**

### **Agricultural Extension Strategies to Climate Change and Policy Imperatives**

Participants were encouraged to think of extension as a network node focused on transforming food production into food systems to address climate change challenges. The increasing pressure on natural resources, urbanization, and malnutrition necessitates a shift from food production to interfacing with community, market, and policy. Monitoring and Evaluation emerged as a key strategy in shaping policies related to climate change.



**Dr. Saravanan Raj (Director, Agricultural Extension, MANAGE) interacting with the participants**

### **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT MANAGE**

The conducive learning environment at MANAGE greatly enhanced our experience. The informal discussions with experts, various activities, and the overall support from faculty fostered a motivating atmosphere for learning.



### MANAGE Library

We visited the MANAGE library, a resource-rich space with multiple sections and books. Faculty members engage in group reading sessions every Saturday afternoon, where each member reads and reviews a chosen book. This practice was inspiring and promoted collective learning.



Reading at MANAGE Library

### Indian-Indonesian Cultural Extravaganza

The training concluded with a vibrant cultural event and a grand dinner, featuring participants from NYPDP and international attendees from North Sumatra, Indonesia, who were part of the “Agri Tech Startups for Enhancing the Agri Value Chain” training at MANAGE. The event stood out as a highlight, celebrating the richness of cultural diversity and the power of collaboration.



Group performance by the Indonesian participants

## LESSONS LEARNED

We recognized the importance of adopting new curricula and enhancing skills and competencies to address global agricultural challenges and access diverse job opportunities. Embracing continuous learning and exploring online courses will pave the way for successful careers in Agricultural Extension. Through this journey, we discovered various e-learning platforms, such as the FAO eLearning Academy and [openlearning.cgiar.org](http://openlearning.cgiar.org), which helped broaden our knowledge.

Personally, this experience significantly changed my perspective. I shifted my focus towards enhancing my skills to fit evolving job roles in Agricultural Extension, rather than pursuing traditional paths like becoming an Assistant Professor or joining the Agricultural Research Service (ARS).

Overall, the program had a profound impact on our views on Agricultural Extension, empowering us to contribute effectively to the field and explore untapped job opportunities.

## SCOPE OF IMPROVEMENT

The program duration could be extended to ten days to allow more focused attention on each identified training area. Incorporating more intensive learning sessions with interactive activities will help enhance learning and foster collaboration among participants.

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