



National Young Professionals Development Program (NYPDP)

MANAGE-University Alliance for Advancing Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services

Reflections That Cultivate Tomorrow's Agricultural Extension



Dr. Afshan Jabeen

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 **Afshan Jabeen**

Introduction

NYPDP was a programme I had been eagerly waiting to attend for the past two years. However, due to my PhD commitments, I was unable to participate earlier. After completing my PhD and my tenure as a Teaching Associate, I found myself searching for career opportunities and trying to understand where I fit within the field of Agricultural Extension. The challenges of limited experience and rejections often left me feeling uncertain about my future and uncertain about the opportunities available in agricultural extension. It was during this phase that I came across the NYPDP advertisement on LinkedIn and immediately applied for it. Something about the programme resonated with me, and I immediately decided to apply. Fortunately, I was selected, and that decision marked the beginning of a transformative learning journey.

The Beginning of New Perspective

Day 1

The first day of NYPDP at MANAGE felt less like a programme and more like beginning of an unexpected journey. A journey of curiosity, self-discovery, learning and understanding where I truly belong.



Walking into the hall and seeing participants from different backgrounds, all gathered with a common purpose, felt inspiring. During an activity facilitated by Dr. Raahalya S, we were asked to draw or write about our dream careers; little did I know that this simple activity would encourage me to rethink my goals and directions.



The sessions by Dr. Saravanan Raj, Director (Agricultural Extension), MANAGE, on Our Professional Identity and New Competencies and Job Opportunities for Agricultural Extension challenged many of my existing assumptions about the discipline. I realized that Extension is much more than technology transfer and that career opportunities extend beyond conventional pathways such as teaching and research. The Human Career Mapping exercise and participant presentations encouraged us to reflect on our strengths, aspirations, and future competencies.

The inaugural remarks by Shri Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, IAS, Director General, MANAGE, left a lasting impression by emphasizing the importance of applying knowledge for societal impact. The day concluded with insights from Mr. Sunnyrudh Singh, NYPDP alumnus, whose journey demonstrated how Extension competencies can be applied in diverse professional settings.

“Extension is not merely a subject, it is a platform that connects people, knowledge, innovation and opportunities”.

Curiosity Meets Opportunity

Day 2



The second day focused on research competencies, digital transformation, and future career pathways in Agricultural Extension. Sessions by Dr. Vikram Koundinya (University of California, Davis), Dr. Sravani Reddy (University of Georgia), and Ms. Laxmi Prasanna Kandi (Texas A&M University) provided valuable insights into graduate-level research, mixed methods, International research opportunities and the competencies required for successful research careers, felt especially meaningful to me, as these were questions that I myself had been searching for answers to.

Dr. Saravanan Raj highlighted emerging research priorities in Agricultural Extension and emphasized the need for curiosity-driven research that addresses contemporary challenges and why digital skills are becoming essential in today's world.

The session by Dr. Aditya Sinha introduced participants to AI-powered research tools such as Consensus, Elicit, Research Rabbit, Chat PDF, and Google Colab, demonstrating how artificial intelligence can support academic research and learnings in today's AI driven era.

A highly relevant session by Dr. Raahalya S, on Future-Proofing Your Career in Agricultural Extension introduced various certification platforms and strategies for continuous professional development. The day concluded with alumni interactions featuring Ms. Juno Ashok and Mr. Revananath Pratap Kokate, whose stories reflected how confidence, initiative, and perseverance can shape professional growth.

"Future-ready Extension professionals must combine research skills, digital competencies, adaptability and lifelong learning and NYPDP is slowly helping me rebuild confidence that I felt I was losing".

Beyond Boundaries

Day 3

Day three broadened my understanding of Agricultural Extension through session focusing on entrepreneurship, gender equality and organic farming by Dr. Mahesh Chander, Principal Scientist, IVRI, shared valuable insights on how Extension can support entrepreneurship development, gender-responsive interventions, and organic farming initiatives. Through interactive exercise, he helped us realise how often we are influenced by routines and preconceived notions without noticing. His professional journey highlighted the importance of resilience, innovation and creating opportunities from challenges. Some of his words stayed with me "Teaching must inspire" and "You are brand" these simple yet powerful words encouraged us to think differently.

Session by Mr. Krishnagopal G, CEO of Access Livelihood, the visit made us to learn about their work with women, farmers, tribal communities. It demonstrated how extension can create real impact on people's lives by building capacities and empowering communities.

“Extension has a critical role in empowering entrepreneurs and integrating emerging technologies into agricultural development and more importantly NYPDP is helping me to see possibilities where I once saw only questions.



The Day Extension Became Bigger

Day 4

The fourth day expanded my understanding of Agricultural Extension beyond traditional boundaries. Dr. Saravanan Raj conducted a session on Agri-Innovation through Incubation and Startups, emphasizing how innovation ecosystems, incubation centres, and entrepreneurial ventures are transforming agriculture, it broadened my understanding of how innovation and entrepreneurship can create opportunities in agricultural extension.



One of the most impactful sessions was delivered by Dr. Rasheed Sulaiman, Director, CRISP, on Policy Engagement for Agricultural Extension. Before this session, I had only limited understanding of what policy actually meant and why it is important but this session clarified the role of policy, how evidence informs policymaking and the opportunities available for Extension professionals to contribute to policy processes. Learning about AESA further reinforced the importance of participatory and evidence-based approaches in agricultural development.



The sessions by Dr. P. Sethuraman Sivakumar, Principal Scientist, ICAR-CTCRI, on Advances in Agricultural Extension Research and Human Decision Modelling encouraged participants to think critically about problem-solving, decision-making and advanced research approaches. Through group activities, I realized the value of collaborative thinking and diverse perspectives.

The day concluded with an engaging Research Ethics Café led by Dr. P. V. K. Sasidhar, IGNOU which was the most engaging and thought-provoking session, through a simulation exercise as Institutional Ethics Committee members, participants gained practical understanding of research ethics, ethical review processes and the responsibilities of researchers toward participants.

“Good research requires not only technical competence but also ethical responsibility, critical thinking, and policy relevance”.

More than a certificate, a new beginning, a gratitude and a sense of responsibility

Day 5



The final day focused on monitoring and evaluation, facilitation skills, and future commitments. Dr. P. V. K. Sasidhar conducted sessions on Monitoring and Evaluation and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Techniques. The practical demonstration of FGDs provided participants with hands-on experience in facilitation, moderation and participatory data collection. Volunteering as an Assistant Moderator helped me transform theoretical understanding into practical learning.

The Head, Heart and Hand exercise encouraged participants to reflect on what we learned, what inspired us, and what we intended to apply in the future. Through the Future Extension Wall and Commitment Cards, we translated our learning into action plans.

The valedictory session marked the conclusion of an enriching journey. While participants received certificates, the most valuable outcomes were confidence, clarity, meaningful friendships, professional networks and a broader understanding of Agricultural Extension.

“Learning becomes meaningful only when it is translated into action”

Key Learnings:

At the end of every session, I was feeling that I have learnt something new. Every day challenged my assumptions, expanded my understanding of Agricultural Extension, and introduced me to new possibilities in research, policy, entrepreneurship, digital technologies, and development. Most importantly, it helped me rebuild a confidence that I felt I was gradually losing.

Five-Day Training Experience

I would describe NYPDP as a journey of learning, reflection, and self-discovery. Every sessions were engaging and interesting and every session has something to learn and get inspired. I really made good colleagues.



Change in Perspective

Of course, in many ways, I couldn't think beyond the conventional career paths of assistant professor or ARS but after training I got to know about so many other options that will help me stand out of the line.



Training Environment

The atmosphere was energetic, welcoming and inspiring. It never felt like a conventional training programme. The sessions encouraged curiosity, discussions and active participation. Beyond academics, the warmth of the faculty, staff, and participants created a sense of belonging that made learning enjoyable and meaningful, and the food was really good and cherry on top was those tea breaks where everyone would sit and interact.



What I Appreciate

What I appreciated most was the passion of the resource persons and the genuine effort they put into shaping young professionals. Their stories, experiences, and willingness to interact with participants made every session engaging. I also appreciated how the programme focused not only on knowledge but also on personal growth and confidence building. What impressed me most was an activity conducted by Dr. Raahalya, where we were asked to reflect on what we wanted to unlearn, learn, and apply in our lives. Many participants openly shared their vulnerabilities and acknowledged areas they wished to improve without any hesitation. Their honesty, self-awareness, and willingness to grow deeply inspired me. It made me realize that extension professionals have the courage to recognize their weaknesses and work towards overcoming them.



Networking

The peer interactions were one of the most valuable aspects of NYPDP. Listening to people from different universities and backgrounds helped me see new perspectives and opportunities. We arrived as strangers but left as an Extension community connected by shared learning, curiosity, and purpose.



Main Takeaway

My biggest takeaway was realizing that Agricultural Extension is much broader and more dynamic than I had imagined. The programme taught me that success is not limited to one career path. Opportunities do not always come to us; we must actively seek and seize them. Honesty, discipline and self-reflection are essential for personal and professional development.

Action Plan



I plan to apply the knowledge gained in my research, teaching, and future professional engagements. I will use the digital tools, research approaches, policy perspectives, and communication skills learned during the programme. I also hope to share these learnings with fellow students and help them explore the possibilities within Extension

My MANAGE NYPDP Journey

NYPDP was more than a training programme; it was a turning point. It gave me clarity where I had questions, confidence where I had doubts, and possibilities where I saw limitations. I came back not only with knowledge but with a renewed belief in myself and my discipline.

NYPDP to me is “New learnings, perspectives, Direction and Possibilities” “I came with questions, found direction, rebuilt confidence and discovered possibilities I had never imagined”.



Dr. Afshan Jabeen

Ph D (Agricultural Extension)

UAS, Raichur

Karnataka

e-mail: jabeenafshan95@gmail.com

MANAGE - Center for Agricultural Extension Innovations, Reforms and Agripreneurship (MANAGE- CAEIRA)

National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)

Rajendranagar, Hyderabad- 500 030, INDIA

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