



National Young Professionals Development Program (NYPDP)

MANAGE-University Alliance for Advancing Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services

Reflections That Cultivate Tomorrow's Agricultural Extension



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Akhilesh Beniwal

Introduction

Before joining the National Young Professional Development Programme (NYPDP), I always had many questions and doubts regarding Agricultural Extension Education and my future career pathway. Like many other students, I often heard people saying that extension is only a “minor discipline” with limited opportunities and less practical exposure. Somewhere, these opinions affected my confidence and created uncertainty regarding my future goals. However, deep inside, I always believed that Agricultural Extension has much greater potential than what people generally perceive. I hoped that one day I would find the right platform to understand the real scope, value, and global relevance of this discipline.

NYPDP at MANAGE became that platform for me. When I got selected for the program, I felt extremely excited because MANAGE is one of the premier national institutes in Agricultural Extension. I was eager to interact with experts, students from different states, and professionals working in diverse extension domains. More importantly, I wanted to understand how extension education can be connected with innovation, entrepreneurship, digital technologies, policy engagement, and global opportunities. As soon as I entered the MANAGE campus, I was impressed by its greenery, discipline, peaceful environment, and professional atmosphere. The hospitality and arrangements made by the MANAGE team were excellent. It immediately created a positive learning environment for all participants.

Key Learnings:

Professional Identity and New Career Opportunities

Day 1

The first day of the programmed completely changed my initial perception of Agricultural Extension Education. The sessions conducted by Dr. Saravanan Raj helped us understand that extension is not merely about technology transfer; rather, it is a dynamic discipline connected with human behaviour, communication, innovation, entrepreneurship, policy, research methodologies, ICTs, and rural transformation. One of the most impactful activities was writing our dreams, competencies we wanted to develop, and weaknesses we wanted to overcome.

This activity encouraged me to think seriously about my future goals and self-improvement. The interactive discussions regarding “Professional Identity” were highly eye-opening. For the first time, I realized that Agricultural Extension professionals can work in multiple domains including international organizations, NGOs, agribusiness firms, startups, development projects, research organizations, policy institutions, monitoring and evaluation systems, and digital agriculture platforms. The inaugural address by Shri Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, IAS, Director General of MANAGE, was highly motivating. His words encouraged us to continuously improve our competencies and think beyond conventional career boundaries. The alumni interaction session further inspired me because it showed how NYPDP can transform a student’s career direction and professional confidence.



Digital Competencies, AI Tools and Research Orientation

Day 2

The second day was highly informative and practically oriented. Sessions by experts from international universities provided valuable exposure regarding graduate-level research in Agricultural Extension Education and global academic standards. I learned about various AI tools and digital platforms that can improve research efficiency, academic writing, data analysis, and knowledge management.

The session on “Must-Know AI Tools for Academic Researchers” particularly attracted my interest because it demonstrated how extension professionals must adapt themselves to rapidly changing technological advancements. The session on “Future-Proofing Your Career” helped me understand that modern agricultural professionals should possess interdisciplinary competencies including communication skills, analytical ability, digital literacy, innovation mindset, and networking capacity.

However, the most memorable part of the day was the pre-dinner session conducted by Dr. Saravanan Raj. Through his life experiences, struggles, achievements, and practical examples, he completely transformed my perspective toward life, career, and extension education. It was not just a lecture; it was a deeply inspiring life lesson.

The way he explained the importance of dedication, continuous learning, and self-belief motivated me immensely. Another important achievement for me during this day was overcoming my hesitation to speak publicly. I gained confidence to express my thoughts among participants and experts, which was personally very significant for me.



Entrepreneurship, Gender Equality and Technological Exposure

Day 3

The third day focused on entrepreneurship development, gender equality, organic farming, and exposure to advanced technologies. The sessions by Dr. Mahesh Chander were highly practical and globally oriented. Through his experiences from various countries and projects, we understood how Agricultural Extension can directly contribute toward livelihood improvement, women empowerment, dairy development, and sustainable agriculture. The discussions regarding gender-sensitive extension approaches helped me realize that inclusive development is impossible without recognizing the major role played by women in agriculture and rural livelihoods.



The visit to C-DAC Hyderabad was one of the most exciting experiences of the program. We learned about Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Blockchain technology, Big Data applications, and digital innovations developed specifically for agriculture. This visit made me realize that the future of extension will be strongly connected with digital technologies and data-driven advisory systems. Apart from academic learning, the interactions with participants from different states helped me improve my communication skills, networking ability, and cultural understanding. The bonding among participants became stronger through group discussions, activities, and informal interactions.

Day 4

The fourth day emphasized innovation systems, incubation, policy engagement, and advanced extension research methodologies. The reflective activity regarding “What to Learn, Unlearn and Apply” encouraged deep self-analysis. I realized that many of my earlier assumptions regarding Agricultural Extension were limited and needed to be changed. The session on agri-innovation and startups helped me understand how innovation ecosystems are creating new opportunities for extension professionals. I learned that extension experts can play important roles in technology dissemination, startup incubation, agripreneurship development, and innovation scaling. The session by Dr. Rasheed Sulaiman on policy engagement expanded my understanding regarding the role of extension professionals in agricultural policymaking and institutional development. One of the most engaging sessions was conducted by Dr. Sethuraman Sivakumar on advanced extension research and human decision modelling.



The case study activities encouraged critical thinking, teamwork, analytical ability, and practical problem-solving skills. These sessions demonstrated how extension research should be solution-oriented and socially relevant. The final evening with fellow participants became emotional because within five days we had developed strong friendships, professional networks, and unforgettable memories.

Monitoring, Evaluation and A Transformative Experience

Day 5

The final day focused on Monitoring & Evaluation competencies and Focus Group Discussion techniques. The sessions by Dr. P. V. K. Sasidhar provided practical understanding regarding evaluation frameworks, programmed assessment, and evidence-based extension approaches. I learned that monitoring and evaluation are extremely important for understanding the effectiveness and impact of development programmes.

The Focus Group Discussion demonstration helped us understand participant interaction, moderation techniques, consensus building, and practical research implementation. The concluding activities like Commitment Cards and the Future Extension Wall encouraged us to reflect on our future responsibilities and action plans as extension professionals. Personally, NYPDP became much more than just a training programmed for me.

It transformed my confidence, thinking process, communication ability, and perspective toward Agricultural Extension Education. Before attending this programmed, I was uncertain and underconfident regarding my discipline and future career direction. But after these five days, I realized that Agricultural Extension is one of the most dynamic, interdisciplinary, and impactful fields connected with human development, innovation, policy, technology, and societal transformation.

The program also taught me the importance of networking, lifelong learning, professionalism, leadership, and self-confidence. Among all experiences, the pre-dinner interaction session with Dr. Saravanan Raj remains one of the most inspiring moments of my life. His words, experiences, energy, and dedication created a lasting impact on my thinking and professional aspirations. As I left the MANAGE campus, I carried much more than a certificate. I carried confidence, motivation, new perspectives, professional connections, valuable knowledge, unforgettable memories, and a renewed vision for my future. This five-day journey at MANAGE will always remain one of the most transformative and memorable journey of my life.



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