

MANAGE Agricultural Extension "Evening4Learning (E4L)" Webinar Series

Topic: "Good Practices in Agricultural Extension and Rural Advisory Services"

Schedule:
27-11-2022, 19:45 -20:30 PM

MANAGE - Center for Agricultural Extension Innovations, Reforms and Agripreneurship (MANAGE- CAEIRA)
National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad- 500 030, INDIA



About the Program

The MANAGE Agricultural Extension "Evening4Learning" Webinar Series is aimed at enhancing knowledge and professional engagement in the field of agricultural extension. The twelve-day series is structured with each day focusing on a distinct topic under a common theme, allowing participants to gain comprehensive insights into key areas of extension. The program is intended for a diverse audience, including postgraduate and doctoral students, agricultural faculty, and industry professionals. It covers broad themes ranging from entrepreneurship and sustainability to emerging technologies in agriculture.





Speaker
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About the Speaker

Dr. Mahesh Chander is Principal Scientist - Retired (Agricultural Extension) at the ICAR–Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Izatnagar, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. He has extensive experience in agricultural and veterinary extension education, research, capacity building, and the development of effective extension and advisory services. He has served as Head of the Division of Extension Education at ICAR-IVRI and has contributed to strengthening extension systems in agriculture and allied sectors. His areas of research include organic agriculture, entrepreneurship, and gender studies. Dr. Chander has also contributed to professional development initiatives for extension functionaries, particularly in the context of the changing paradigms of agricultural extension, the New Extensionist approach, and the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK). His work emphasises enhancing the capacities of extension professionals to respond to farmers' evolving needs and to promote sustainable, market-oriented, and farmer-centric agricultural development.

Background

Agricultural extension and rural advisory services play a vital role in improving farmers' knowledge, facilitating technology adoption, strengthening decision-making and enhancing rural livelihoods. Traditionally, these services have focused on disseminating improved agricultural technologies and production practices. However, the changing agricultural landscape requires a broader approach that addresses farm profitability, entrepreneurship, market access, value addition, climate resilience, gender inclusion and nutrition security.

The increasing complexity of agricultural challenges necessitates a shift towards farmer-centred, demand-driven and outcome-oriented approaches. Farmers require not only technical guidance but also support in farm management, risk mitigation, enterprise development and market linkages. Strengthening these capacities is essential to enable farmers to respond to market uncertainties, adopt sustainable practices and improve the economic viability of their farming enterprises.

In this context, identifying and documenting global good practices in agricultural extension and rural advisory services provides valuable insights into effective approaches implemented across diverse geographical, institutional and socioeconomic settings. Such practices help identify successful strategies, institutional arrangements and participatory mechanisms that can be adapted to local conditions. However, their application requires careful consideration of farmers' needs, available resources and the specific challenges of different farming systems.

An effective advisory system facilitates the exchange of information, knowledge, technologies and skills among farmers, researchers, institutions, market actors and other stakeholders. Its scope extends across agricultural subsectors and the entire supply chain, encompassing production, processing, value addition and marketing. Greater emphasis on digital solutions, entrepreneurship, collective action and public–private partnerships can further strengthen service delivery and expand farmers' access to relevant knowledge and opportunities.

Ultimately, the success of these approaches should be reflected in improved farm performance, higher net incomes, reduced vulnerability and sustainable rural livelihoods. Learning from global experiences can help institutions refine their strategies and develop responsive services that support farmers in navigating emerging challenges while ensuring the long-term viability of farming enterprises.

Changing Paradigms in Agricultural Extension

The evolution of agricultural extension involves a shift from conventional, linear and top-down approaches towards more participatory and collaborative systems. Traditionally, extension services primarily focused on transferring production technologies from researchers and extension personnel to farmers. The emphasis was largely on improving crop yields through the adoption of recommended agricultural practices.

However, contemporary agricultural challenges require extension systems to address a broader range of issues, including profitability, enterprise management, processing, marketing, value addition and risk management and increased production does not necessarily translate into higher profits. Therefore, extension professionals must help farmers make informed decisions about what to produce, when to produce, how to manage production costs and where to market their produce.

The emergence of the Agricultural Innovation System (AIS) approach highlights the importance of collaboration among farmers, research institutions, extension agencies, input suppliers, private enterprises and development organisations. Such collaboration facilitates the development, adaptation and dissemination of innovations that respond to farmers' needs.

Concept and Characteristics of Good Practices

Good practices are not merely activities considered useful by practitioners; they are approaches that have demonstrated effectiveness through research, evaluation, testing and validation.

A good practice should produce desirable results and offer the potential for replication, adaptation and wider application. The following characteristics were highlighted:

- **Effectiveness**: Demonstrates measurable and desirable results.
- **Sustainability**: Is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.
- **Gender sensitivity**: Recognises gender-specific needs and promotes equitable participation.
- **Technical feasibility**: Can be implemented under prevailing technical and institutional conditions.
- **Participation**: Encourages the active involvement of farmers and other stakeholders.
- **Replicability and adaptability**: Can be modified and applied in different geographical and socioeconomic contexts.
- **Evidence-based validation**: Is supported by research, practical experience, evaluation or documented outcomes.

Successful practices should be systematically documented so that they can be shared, assessed and adapted by other extension organisations.

Community-Based Extension through Rural Resource Centres

Rural resource centres and one-stop service delivery models are effective means of improving farmers' access to agricultural information, inputs and advisory services.

Examples included Kisan Samriddhi Kendras, Rythu Bharosa Kendras in Andhra Pradesh, Common Service Centres and Agricultural Technology Information Centres established by agricultural research institutions and universities.

These centres provide platforms through which farmers can access agricultural inputs, technical advice and other services without having to approach multiple institutions. The discussion highlighted the importance of reliable input supply, interaction between farmers and technical experts, and the timely resolution of agricultural problems. Integrated service delivery mechanisms can reduce transaction costs, improve convenience and strengthen relationships between farmers and extension institutions.

Agripreneurship Development and Enterprise-Oriented Extension

Agripreneurship development was identified as an important component of contemporary agricultural extension. Farmers require support to transform farming into viable and profitable enterprises.

Agribusiness incubators established by ICAR institutes and agricultural universities play an important role in supporting aspiring agripreneurs through technical guidance, business development support and enterprise linkages.

Extension professionals should develop the capacity to guide farmers in business planning, product differentiation, branding, processing, packaging, certification and marketing. Advisory services should increasingly adopt a partnership-based approach rather than maintaining a conventional provider–client relationship.

Pluralistic Extension and Private Sector Participation

Pluralistic extension systems involve public institutions, private companies, non-governmental organisations, farmer organisations and other service providers working together to meet farmers' advisory needs.

Private enterprises often provide specialised advisory services tailored to particular crops, quality requirements and market specifications. Examples include contract farming arrangements in which companies provide production guidance and other support to farmers to help them meet specific processing or market requirements.

The private-sector extension contributes significantly but also has its limitations, including the risk of excluding smaller farmers or prioritising commercial interests. Therefore, effective coordination among different service providers is essential to improve the reach, relevance and effectiveness of rural advisory services.

Professionalisation of Rural Advisory Services

The professionalisation of agricultural extension is an important requirement for improving the quality and credibility of advisory services. Extension professionals are increasingly expected to respond to complex questions concerning markets, entrepreneurship, certification, value addition, climate risks and emerging technologies. These expectations require specialised competencies, formal education, practical experience and continuous professional development.

The importance of clearly defining the professional identity of extension personnel, strengthening competency-based education and training, and exploring appropriate mechanisms for professional recognition and accreditation should be emphasized. Extension professionals should continuously update their knowledge and skills to remain relevant in a rapidly changing agricultural environment.

Curriculum Development and Capacity Building

There is a need to modernise agricultural extension curricula at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in response to emerging agricultural and rural development requirements. This includes incorporating entrepreneurship, business communication and other contemporary themes into academic programmes.

Efforts should also be made to reduce unnecessary overlap between postgraduate and doctoral curricula, strengthen practical learning and improve faculty members' capacity to teach emerging subjects.

The changing agricultural landscape requires continuous curriculum improvement. The introduction of new courses should not be avoided solely because institutions require additional teaching capacity. Instead, faculty development and institutional capacity-building initiatives should accompany curriculum reform.

Integrating Gender into Rural Advisory Services

Gender integration was highlighted as an essential component of effective agricultural extension. Women play significant roles in agricultural production, livestock management, household food security and rural livelihoods. However, their access to extension services and opportunities for participation may remain limited. There is a need for increasing women's participation in extension delivery and ensuring that advisory services address their specific needs.

There is also a need to involve men and boys in nutrition awareness and household food-related decisions. Engaging male family members can help promote shared responsibility for household nutrition and improve the effectiveness of nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions. Inclusive and gender-responsive extension approaches should recognise the roles of all household members in agricultural and nutritional outcomes.

Digital Videos and ICT-Enabled Extension

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are playing an increasingly important role in agricultural extension, particularly in addressing the limited extension worker-to-farmer ratio.

Digital videos, mobile phones, WhatsApp groups, social media platforms and online knowledge repositories can help disseminate practical information to a larger number of farmers. Reliable sources of agricultural videos need to be identified and relevant content should be shared according to farmers' specific information needs. The development of educational videos by students and faculty members was also discussed, demonstrating the potential of locally produced digital content.

However, the effectiveness of digital extension depends on the quality, relevance and practical usefulness of the information shared. Extension professionals must be able to respond to farmers' questions and provide context-specific advice rather than merely forwarding generic information. Professional social media groups and digital platforms should be used for knowledge exchange, networking and the dissemination of successful extension experiences.

Radio and Community Media for Agricultural Extension

Radio continues to serve as an important extension medium when supported by innovative and participatory communication formats.

Interactive radio programmes bring together extension experts, progressive farmers and radio personnel to discuss agricultural issues and share practical experiences. Opportunities for farmer participation and interaction make these programmes more engaging than conventional one-way broadcasts. Community radio was also recognised for its potential to strengthen local participation and enable communities to discuss issues relevant to their agricultural and livelihood contexts.

Traditional communication channels should be used alongside contemporary digital platforms to meet farmers' information needs rather than being abandoned altogether.

Farmer Producer Organisations and Collective Action

Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) were discussed as important institutional mechanisms for improving farmers' bargaining power, strengthening market linkages and enabling collective action. Individual smallholders often face constraints in accessing markets, procuring inputs and negotiating remunerative prices. Collective organisation can help farmers achieve economies of scale, aggregate produce and explore opportunities for processing, branding and value addition.

Extension agencies, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and state agricultural departments have important roles in supporting the formation and development of FPOs. However, the effectiveness of FPOs depends not only on their establishment but also on their ability to provide sustained benefits to their members.

Extension professionals should therefore focus on strengthening FPO management, collective marketing and enterprise development rather than treating the formation of organisations as the sole objective.

Farmer-to-Farmer Extension

Farmer-to-farmer extension was presented as a promising approach for strengthening knowledge dissemination and peer learning, particularly where public extension resources are limited.

Farmers who successfully adopt a technology can be trained to share their experiences with others. Examples included lead farmers demonstrating improved fodder cultivation practices and progressive farmers sharing knowledge about specialised agricultural enterprises.

This approach builds on the credibility and practical experience of farmers who have tested technologies under local conditions. It can also improve the acceptance of innovations because farmers often relate more readily to the experiences of their peers. In addition, appropriate training in communication skills and facilitation techniques can strengthen farmers' capacity to disseminate knowledge effectively.

Farmer Field Schools and Farmer Study Circles

Farmer Field Schools were discussed as participatory learning platforms through which farmers and extension professionals jointly observe field conditions, identify problems, evaluate alternatives and develop solutions.

Originally associated with integrated pest management, this approach has been applied to a wider range of agricultural issues. Farmer Field Schools encourage experiential learning, observation, experimentation and collective problem-solving.

Farmer study circles were also highlighted as useful forums for bringing farmers together to discuss shared challenges and exchange experiences. These approaches can strengthen local knowledge systems, encourage participation and improve farmers' capacity to make informed decisions.

Innovation Platforms and Extension Campaigns

Innovation platforms act as mechanisms for bringing farmers, researchers, agribusinesses and service providers together to identify challenges, exchange knowledge and develop new solutions.

Extension campaigns are used to address specific agricultural problems through multiple communication and outreach activities. Examples included campaigns promoting improved fodder varieties and other agricultural technologies through demonstrations, farmer meetings, radio broadcasts, print materials, field visits and digital communication.

Successful campaigns require clear objectives, coordinated stakeholder participation and the use of multiple communication channels to achieve wider outreach and encourage technology adoption.

Mobile Phones and Digital Advisory Services

Mobile phones are versatile tools for delivering agricultural advisory services and reducing the time and costs associated with accessing technical assistance. Farmers can share photographs of crop or livestock problems with specialists to obtain preliminary guidance. Such digital interactions can reduce unnecessary travel and facilitate faster communication between farmers and experts.

Mobile-based advisory services should be integrated with reliable technical support, appropriate diagnosis and timely follow-up to ensure that farmers receive accurate and context-specific recommendations.

Nutrition-Sensitive Agricultural Extension

Integrating nutrition into agricultural extension is an emerging priority where agricultural production should contribute not only to food availability but also to improved dietary quality and household nutrition.

Extension services can support nutrition awareness by promoting diverse food production, nutritious food choices and the consumption of nutrient-rich foods. Campaigns and community outreach activities can help communicate the importance of nutrition to rural households.

There is also a need to strengthen the engagement of both women and men in nutrition-related interventions to promote shared responsibility for household food security and nutritional well-being.

Field-Based Learning and Engagement with Progressive Farmers

Agricultural extension professionals and students must maintain strong connections with farming communities. Field visits, demonstrations and direct interactions with farmers provide valuable opportunities to understand emerging needs, observe innovations and learn from practical experience.

Progressive farmers with substantial technical knowledge, business experience and market connections are increasingly engaged in specialised crop production, organic certification, export-oriented enterprises and partnerships with private companies. These examples illustrate the growing complexity and commercial orientation of contemporary farming.

Extension professionals must therefore move beyond conventional advisory roles and act as facilitators, knowledge brokers and partnership builders. Field-based learning is essential for improving professional competencies and understanding the changing realities of agriculture.

Implications for Agricultural Extension Professionals

The changing agricultural landscape necessitates a fundamental shift in the roles and responsibilities of extension personnel. The emerging priorities include:

- Transitioning from technology transfer to enterprise-oriented and value chain extension.
- Developing partnerships among farmers, researchers, private enterprises and development organisations.
- Strengthening digital communication skills and the ability to identify credible agricultural information resources.
- Facilitating FPO development, collective marketing and agribusiness linkages.
- Integrating gender and nutrition considerations into extension programmes.
- Improving professional competencies through continuous learning, field engagement and curriculum reform.
- Documenting successful practices and assessing their effectiveness before recommending wider adoption.

Key Highlights

- **Changing Paradigms in Agricultural Extension:** The transition from conventional technology transfer to farmer-centred, demand-driven and outcome-oriented extension, focusing on profitability, enterprise development, value addition and market access should be emphasized.
- **Identification and Documentation of Good Practices:** Identifying, validating and documenting effective extension practices based on effectiveness, sustainability, gender sensitivity, technical feasibility, participation and adaptability to local contexts should be given importance.
- **Strengthening Pluralistic and Collaborative Extension Systems:** Collaboration among public institutions, private enterprises, research organisations, NGOs and farmer organisations is needed to improve the reach and effectiveness of rural advisory services.
- **Promoting Agripreneurship and Collective Action:** Enterprise-oriented extension, agribusiness incubation, FPO development, collective marketing and value chain linkages are needed to enhance farmers' profitability and economic viability.
- **Leveraging Digital and Participatory Extension Approaches:** ICT-enabled advisory services, digital videos, mobile phones, radio, Farmer Field Schools, farmer-to-farmer extension and innovation platforms play an important role in strengthening knowledge dissemination and farmer participation.
- **Enhancing Professional Competencies and Inclusive Development:** There is a need for continuous professional development, curriculum reform, field-based learning, gender-responsive advisory services and nutrition-sensitive agriculture to address farmers' evolving needs and promote sustainable rural livelihoods.

YouTube Link:
https://youtu.be/a3u4GbaNxDk?t=1474

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