



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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Introduction

One day, I received a message from one of my seniors asking me to fill out the application form for NYPDP. At that time, I was a little curious to know more about the programme. Before applying, I contacted three seniors from different colleges who had attended the training in previous years. All of them spoke very highly of the programme. They told me that it had been one of the most beneficial training programme they had ever attended. They encouraged me to apply without any hesitation and said, "You have an added advantage this year because the training is being conducted at the MANAGE campus itself. You will get much more exposure."

After receiving such positive feedback, I immediately applied for the programme. Then, I eagerly waited for the confirmation email from MANAGE. Three days passed, but I did not receive any response. By then, my seniors had already motivated me so much that I didn't want to miss this wonderful opportunity.

Finally, I decided to contact Dr. Saravanan Raj through LinkedIn. He replied very politely, saying, "Don't worry. We will nominate you. The process is going on." Reading that message filled me with happiness and relief. I became confident that I would be selected for the programme.

Now, you might be wondering, who is Dr. Saravanan Raj?

Well... before I tell you more about him, let me just say that his name represents hard work, enthusiasm, energy, and complete dedication to his profession. These are not merely my words; they are qualities I observed through his work and interactions during the programme. As this diary progresses, you will understand why he left such a lasting impression on all of us.

Our journey to Hyderabad began on 30th May 2026. It was my first visit to southern India, and naturally, I was very excited. I was eager to experience the culture, heritage, food, and especially the city that is hub to several prestigious National Agricultural Institutions.

After reaching MANAGE, we checked into Jhelum Hostel. The accommodation provided by the MANAGE team was excellent. The rooms were spacious, air-conditioned, clean, and comfortable. The campus itself was breathtaking. It was beautifully maintained, filled with lush greenery, and remarkably clean. Every corner of the campus reflected discipline, serenity, and aesthetic beauty.

Before joining this training programme, I often felt that Agricultural Extension Education, the subject in which I am pursuing my Master's degree, was considered a minor discipline with limited career opportunities. The people around me frequently made discouraging remarks such as, "Extension is a minor subject," "Extension professionals hardly have any fieldwork," and "their research can be completed simply by sitting in a room and manipulating data." Listening to such opinions repeatedly gradually affected my confidence.

As a result, I sometimes questioned my own decision to pursue Agricultural Extension Education.

However, somewhere deep inside, I hoped that this programme would help me discover the true scope and significance of my discipline.

Did this five-day training change my perspective towards Agricultural Extension Education?

Well... you will find the answer as this diary unfolds over the next few days.

Key Learnings:

Day 1

Today marked the beginning of the 13th National Young Professional Development Programme (NYPDP) on New Competencies, Career Opportunities and Research Priorities in Agricultural Extension. It was the first day of the programme, and all of us were excited to learn from highly experienced professionals and explore new opportunities in the field of Agricultural Extension.

After enjoying a healthy breakfast, we headed towards Norman E. Borlaug Hall, the venue for the inaugural sessions. As we entered the hall, the first thing that caught our attention was the neatly arranged seating with individual nameplates displaying our names and designations. Seeing my own name on the desk filled me with a sense of pride and belonging. It made me realize that I was now a part of a prestigious national-level programme.

The first session was conducted by Dr. Raahalya S, whose warm smile and calm personality immediately created a welcoming atmosphere. She introduced us to MANAGE by presenting its vision, legacy, achievements, and national impact. She also explained the journey of the National Young Professional Development Programme, which was launched with the objective of developing the next generation of agricultural extension professionals. Her presentation gave us a clear understanding of the institution and the significance of the programme.



One of the activities assigned by Dr. Saravanan Raj was to write our dreams, the competencies we wanted to develop, and the weaknesses we wished to overcome on a chart paper. We then pasted our charts on the wall of the training hall. He explained that seeing these charts every day throughout the programme would constantly remind us of our goals and encourage us to work on developing our competencies while overcoming our weaknesses. I found this activity very thoughtful, as it motivated me to stay focused on my personal and professional growth throughout the training.

The next session was delivered by Dr. Saravanan Raj. His energetic personality, confidence, and dedication immediately captured everyone's attention. Before beginning the technical session, he interacted with all the participants and enquired about our journey, accommodation, food, and other facilities, making everyone feel comfortable and valued.

He then initiated an interactive discussion by asking each participant, "What is the general perception of people around you about Agricultural Extension Education?" Almost everyone shared similar experiences. Many of us had heard that Agricultural Extension Education is a minor discipline with limited career opportunities, and with less fieldwork.

After patiently listening to every participant, Dr. Saravanan Raj began addressing these misconceptions one by one. Through practical examples and detailed explanations, he introduced us to the vast scope of Agricultural Extension Education. He explained that extension professionals can build careers in research methodology, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation, impact assessment, organizational behavior and development, gender mainstreaming, ICTs for agricultural extension, global extension systems, policy engagement and extension, entrepreneurship development, rural innovation, and many other emerging fields.

Until that session, most of us believed that the only career options after pursuing Agricultural Extension Education were becoming an Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientist or a university professor. However, that single session completely changed our understanding of the discipline. It was the first time I realized that Agricultural Extension Education offers diverse career opportunities across research organizations, development agencies, government departments, international organizations, NGOs, agribusiness firms, startups, and policy institutions.

The programme was formally inaugurated by Shri Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, IAS, Director General of MANAGE. During his inaugural address, he motivated all the participants to continuously upgrade their knowledge and competencies to meet the changing needs of Indian agriculture. We also had the opportunity to interact with him, and his inspiring words encouraged us to think beyond conventional career paths and prepare ourselves for future leadership roles.

The evening session was equally inspiring. It was delivered by Mr. Sunnryudh Singh, an alumnus of the National Young Professional Development Programme from Punjab Agricultural University, who is currently pursuing his research at California State University, Fresno (Fresno State University). He shared his personal journey and explained how participating in NYPDP helped him broaden his perspective, develop professional networks, and ultimately secure the opportunity to pursue higher studies abroad. Listening to his experiences made me realize how a single programme can shape one's career when the learning is applied with dedication.

Tea session with Director.



Day 2

The second day of the National Young Professional Development Program (NYPDP) was highly informative, engaging, and inspiring. We had the opportunity to interact virtually with distinguished experts, including Dr. Vikram Koundinya, Associate Professor at the University of California, Ms. Sravani Reddy, Postdoctoral Research Associate at The University of Georgia, and Ms. Laxmi Prasanna Kandi, Ph.D. Scholar at Texas A&M University, USA. Through their insightful sessions, we learned about conducting graduate-level research in Agricultural Extension Education and gained valuable knowledge about various research methodologies.

We were also introduced to several AI tools, such as Chat.z.ai, Google Colab, and Google AI Studio, and learned how these technologies can significantly improve efficiency and help accomplish tasks within seconds. In addition, an intern from MANAGE shared practical experiences and insights, helping us better understand the real-world applications of agricultural extension and research.

One of the most memorable highlights of the day was an inspiring session by Dr. Saravanan. Although it was an optional session, attending it proved to be one of the best decisions of the program. Through his powerful storytelling and personal experiences, he took us on a journey filled with motivation, learning, and self-reflection. He openly shared both the achievements and challenges of his professional life, including several emotional moments that deeply resonated with the audience. The session lasted for nearly three hours, yet it felt much shorter due to its engaging and thought-provoking nature. Listening to the experiences of such a distinguished personality filled us with enthusiasm, inspiration, and a renewed sense of purpose.



Another significant achievement for me on this day was overcoming my fear of public speaking. I gathered the confidence to stand up and speak in front of all the participants, and I could feel my hesitation and fear gradually fading away. This experience boosted my self-confidence and encouraged me to express my thoughts more openly. After dinner, we had a group introduction session at the hostel, where all the trainees interacted with one another. Participants, including students and assistant professors from 13 different states, shared their backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, and strategies for overcoming personal and professional challenges.

The interaction was enjoyable, enriching, and provided me with valuable exposure to diverse viewpoints and ideas. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn from others and build meaningful connections with fellow participants from across the country.



Day 3

The third day of the National Young Professional Development Program (NYPDP) was filled with valuable learning experiences, meaningful interactions, and exposure to real-world development initiatives. We had the privilege of interacting with Dr. Mahesh Chander, Principal Scientist at the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), who possesses more than 25 years of professional experience and has visited over 50 countries. Through his session, he shared his extensive knowledge and experiences related to agricultural extension, entrepreneurship development, and gender equality.



He discussed various national and international projects he had been involved in, particularly highlighting dairy development initiatives and how dairy-related projects are being implemented in different countries. His practical insights and global perspective helped us understand the broader role of extension in improving livelihoods and promoting inclusive development.



The day also included an engaging activity in which one participant wrote a word or phrase on the board while others had to guess it through hand gestures and non-verbal communication. This interactive exercise encouraged participation, teamwork, and communication skills, while also creating a lively and enjoyable learning environment.

Later, we visited Access Livelihoods NGO, which proved to be one of the most eye-opening experiences of the day. The visit demonstrated how dedicated efforts and a genuine intention to support rural women can bring meaningful changes to their lives and livelihoods. Learning about the organization's initiatives and impact on communities gave us a deeper appreciation of grassroots development work and social entrepreneurship.

In the evening, we visited the Telangana Secretariat, where we spent quality time with friends and explored the surroundings. The visit provided an opportunity to observe an important administrative institution and understand its significance. We then proceeded to the Birla Temple, where we admired its beautiful architecture, peaceful atmosphere, and cultural significance. Along the way, we also witnessed several heritage landmarks and historical structures, making the day both educational and memorable. Overall, the third day offered a perfect blend of academic learning, field exposure, cultural exploration, and meaningful interactions with fellow participants.

While returning from the Telangana Secretariat, we had a wonderful time in the bus. Everyone showcased their unique talents and skills. Mohan impressed us with his energetic dance performance on a South Indian song, while Sanmay entertained everyone with his beautiful singing. The bus journey became full of fun, laughter, and enjoyment. These moments made our training experience even more memorable and helped strengthen our bond as friends.

Day 4

The fourth day of the programme began with a healthy breakfast, after which we gathered on the lawn for the first activity of the day. Dr. Raahalya gave each participant three sheets of paper and asked us to write down three things: what we had learned, what we needed to unlearn, and where we could apply the knowledge and skills gained during the programme. This reflective exercise encouraged us to identify the areas where our thinking had been limited, recognize the misconceptions we needed to overcome, and explore how we could apply our new learning in our academic and professional lives. It was an excellent activity for self-reflection and personal growth.

Following this, Dr. Saravanan Raj, introduced us to the concept of innovation in agriculture. He explained the importance of innovation in addressing the emerging challenges of the agricultural sector and encouraged us to develop an innovative mindset as future extension professionals. He also recommended several important books that every Agricultural Extension professional should read to strengthen their knowledge and broaden their perspective.

After the tea break, we attended an insightful session by Dr. Rasheed Sulaiman V., Director, CRISP, who spoke on how Agricultural Extension professionals can actively engage in agricultural policy and contribute to policy formulation and implementation. His session helped us understand that extension professionals have a significant role not only at the field level but also in influencing policies that shape the future of agriculture.

After enjoying a delicious lunch, the afternoon session was conducted by Dr. Sethuraman Sivakumar. It was one of the most engaging sessions of the programme. He began by discussing the latest advances and innovations in agriculture, highlighting how technological and institutional changes are transforming the agricultural sector.

Following the tea break, he organized an interactive case study exercise. All the participants were divided into five groups, and each group was assigned a real-life agricultural extension problem. We were asked to analyze the situation and propose the most practical and relevant solution. The groups presenting the most appropriate and innovative solutions were awarded higher credit points.



The activity encouraged us to think critically, discuss different perspectives, and work collaboratively as a team. After each group presented its solution, the other participants were invited to raise counter-questions and provide constructive suggestions. This process helped us refine our ideas and arrive at more comprehensive and practical solutions. In my opinion, this was one of the best methods of learning because it not only enhanced our problem-solving and analytical skills but also demonstrated how real-life extension problems can be addressed through teamwork, discussion, and logical reasoning.

As it was the last night of the training programme, we decided to spend the evening together by organizing a few fun activities. Some participants sang beautiful songs, while others showcased their dancing skills. Everyone enthusiastically participated, creating a lively and joyful atmosphere. We laughed, cheered for one another, captured countless memories, and enjoyed every moment together.

At the same time, there was a sense of emotion in the air. It was hard to believe that the five-day journey was coming to an end. The friendships we had built, the experiences we had shared, and the memories we had created made us realize how special this programme had become. While we were enjoying the evening, many of us quietly felt emotional, knowing that this would be our last night together at MANAGE. It was a perfect blend of happiness, gratitude, and nostalgia that made the evening truly unforgettable.

Day 5

There was a mixture of happiness and sadness among all the participants. We were happy because we had gained immense knowledge, confidence, and unforgettable memories, but at the same time, we were emotional because it was time to leave a place that had become like a second home within just five days.

What impressed me the most throughout the programme was the dedication and commitment of the entire MANAGE team. From the camera crew to the organizing team, everyone performed their responsibilities with sincerity and professionalism. I was especially inspired by Dr. Saravanan Raj, Dr. Rahalya, and every member of the organizing committee, whose hard work and attention to every small detail made the programme a grand success.

For me, MANAGE became much more than just a training venue. It was a place where my entire perspective towards Agricultural Extension Education changed. Before joining the programme, I had many doubts about my discipline and often hesitated to ask questions or speak in front of a large audience. However, these five days transformed my thinking completely. They gave me the confidence to ask questions without hesitation, express my ideas openly, and interact freely with experts and fellow participants. I believe that effective communication and confidence are among the most important qualities of an extension professional, and this programme helped me develop both.

The day began with an interesting reflective activity in which each participant had to describe the entire five-day programme using a single word. When my turn came, I chose the words "Dr. Saravanan Raj." Although it was the name of a person, to me it represented much more than that. It symbolized hard work, boundless energy, enthusiasm, punctuality, dedication, commitment, leadership, and a passion for helping young professionals grow. I realized that if I wanted to become a successful extension professional, I had to adopt these qualities in my own life.

The morning technical session was delivered by Dr. P. V. K. Sashidhar, Professor, School of Extension and Development Studies, IGNOU, New Delhi. He explained the concepts of monitoring and evaluation and demonstrated how these tools are used to assess the effectiveness of government programmes and policies. He also shared valuable insights into career opportunities in monitoring and evaluation, including opportunities to work on national and international development projects.

Later, Dr. Sashidhar conducted a practical Focus Group Discussion (FGD) exercise. He explained that participants should be informed about the date of the FGD well in advance but should not be told the discussion topic beforehand, as prior preparation could influence their opinions and introduce bias into the findings. One participant was selected as the moderator to facilitate the discussion, while another recorded the participants' responses, constraints, and suggestions. Dr. Sashidhar himself acted as the Assistant Moderator, guiding us throughout the exercise. Each participant first ranked twenty statements individually, after which the group discussed them collectively until a consensus was reached. This activity provided a practical understanding of how Focus Group Discussions are conducted in research and extension studies.

In the evening, the valedictory and certificate distribution ceremony was held. Each participant received a certificate from the hands of Dr. Saravanan Raj, making the moment even more memorable. Receiving the certificate was not just a formality; it symbolized five days of learning, self-discovery, and personal growth.

After the certificate ceremony, participants shared their experiences and expressed their gratitude. I was also given the opportunity to deliver a vote of thanks. Speaking for nearly ten minutes in front of the audience made me realize how much my confidence had improved during the programme. The atmosphere in the hall was calm, emotional, and filled with gratitude as everyone reflected on the wonderful journey we had shared.

Before concluding the programme, Dr. Saravanan Raj delivered a heartfelt message. He encouraged us to continue learning, work with sincerity, and always strive to give our best in whichever field we choose. His final words touched everyone's heart:

"From now onwards, you are members of the MANAGE family."

Those words made us realize that although the training programme had officially ended, our journey as young agricultural extension professionals had only just begun. As I left the MANAGE campus, I carried with me not only a certificate but also renewed confidence, lifelong friendships, valuable lessons, and a completely transformed perspective towards Agricultural Extension Education. This five-day journey will always remain one of the most memorable and life-changing experiences of my academic and professional life.





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