



National Young Professionals Development Program (NYPDP)

MANAGE-University Alliance for Advancing Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services

Reflections That Cultivate Tomorrow's Agricultural Extension



Expanding the Map: Five Days That Redrew My Entire Career Horizon

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Introduction

I came to MANAGE Hyderabad on June 1st carrying a map I had drawn entirely in my head a small, familiar map with only a few destinations marked on it: an Assistant Professor post, perhaps a KVK, maybe a teaching position somewhere. It was the map that everyone around me seemed to carry too, so I never questioned it.

Five days later, I left carrying a completely different one.

The National Young Professionals Development Programme (NYPDP) at MANAGE is not a training programme in the way most of us understand training. It is, more accurately, a collision between who you are, who you assumed you would become, and who you are actually capable of being. I did not expect to be moved by it the way I was. I should have expected exactly that.

Key Learnings from Each Day

Who Are You, and Where Are You Going?

Day 1



The programme began not with a lecture but with an identity exercise — Speed Networking, called "Meet Your Tribe" where 64 participants from agricultural universities across India introduced themselves through Extension Identity Cards. It was the first signal that this programme would ask uncomfortable questions before offering comfortable answers.

Dr. Saravanan Raj's session on new competencies and career opportunities in agricultural extension was, without exaggeration, the most important professional conversation I had ever been part of. He laid out 16 distinct career areas such as Evaluation and Impact Assessment, Policy Engagement, Digital Agriculture, Gender Mainstreaming, ICT in Extension, Technology Commercialisation and for the first time, I saw how Farm Communication, my specialization, connected to all of them. Not as a side skill. As a core competency. The EDUCATE → ENGAGE → CONVINCING → INSPIRE framework he would share on Day 2 was already taking shape in my mind.

Shri Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, IAS, Director General, MANAGE, closed the day with one line that stayed: "Knowledge alone is not enough; the application of knowledge is what truly matters, and that is the most difficult part." Agricultural extension, he said, covers everything from seed to market. That evening, I started seeing my own subject differently.

How We Think, How We Research, How We Lead

Day 2

Day 2 was built around research but not in the way universities teach it. Dr. Vikram Koundinya from UC Davis made one point that immediately separated him from every research methods lecture I had attended before: plan your data analysis before you collect data, not after. Three years of observing research in my department and I had never heard this clearly. His session reframed research as purposeful, society-facing work not a mechanical exercise of collecting and submitting.



Dr. Laxmi Prasanna Kandi (Texas A&M) and Dr. Sravani Pasula (University of Georgia) showed us, in the most tangible way possible, that the path from an Indian agricultural university to global research institutions is real and walkable not a fantasy. Both had started from institutions like mine. Both had gone further than most of us had dared to imagine.

Dr. Saravanan Raj returned for the session on Research Priorities and pushed the room hard. "Our mindset is limited, we need to think different and big. Mind must change with every new function and adaptation must happen in a fraction of a second." He highlighted several underexplored areas in agricultural extension research, including the mental health and well-being of farming communities, youth engagement in agriculture and digital extension. He emphasized the need for research that is globally relevant and objective.

Dr. Aditya Sinha's session on AI tools was sharp and honest: "AI is a tool not a replacement. Academic integrity and ethical responsibility always remain with the researcher." In the context of my Farm Communication specialization, this was especially relevant that the future of extension content will involve AI, but the human judgment behind it must always belong to us.

Dr. Sandipamu Raahalya's session on Future-Proofing Your Career mapped a world most of us had not considered, such as FAO e-Learning Academy, CGIAR fellowships, World Bank Young Professionals Programme, internships at UNDP, ILRI, ICRISAT, IFPRI, scholarships like Fulbright, Erasmus Mundus, Commonwealth. These were not distant names on a list. They were placed in front of us as accessible, concrete, and waiting. Her closing thought was precise: "The future of extension is not just digital it is a digitally empowered human connection."

The pre-dinner session by Dr. Saravanan Raj informal, deeply personal, entirely honest — was where the day truly ended. He spoke about celebrating yourself when no one else does. About not waiting for the room to applaud before you decide you are worth something. That message did not leave me.

The Farmer Is Not the Problem

Day 3

Day 3 began with a lesson that had nothing to do with agronomy. The Hot Seat Harvest activity — where one participant communicated to the audience purely through gestures, without a word — quietly but firmly established something I carry with me: extension begins before you even open your mouth. For someone specialising in Farm Communication, this felt like a foundation stone being placed.

Dr. Mahesh Chander's sessions on entrepreneurship, gender equality, and organic farming were delivered in a style unlike anyone else in the programme — grounded in real case studies, real numbers, real frustrations, and real hope. His self-check on entrepreneurial identity — do you have the urge to create something unique? are you genuinely optimistic about your future? — was not a personality test. It was a mirror.

The field visit to Access Livelihoods NGO in Hyderabad fundamentally shifted how I understand rural development work. The dairy model — where 1,600 women managed the entire value chain from feed to market — was not a welfare scheme. It was a system. The founder's observation about the failed poultry scheme stayed with me the most: "Don't blame the farmer. When a child doesn't study, we should look to the environment and support system around them. The same principle applies to farmers—the solution lies in improving the system, not blaming the individual." I have repeated this sentence more times than I can count since coming back.

Extension Is as Old as Human Civilisation

Day 4

Day 4 opened with Dr. Saravanan Raj doing something I did not expect — he traced extension back to nomadic humans watching birds to identify safe fruit, to clay tablets in ancient Iran, to Tamil poet Avvaiyar writing agricultural guidance for kings. His argument: extension is not a modern academic invention. It is embedded in every human civilisation, every language, every classical literature. We are not practising a narrow discipline — we are continuing something ancient and essential.



His session on agri-innovation through incubation and startups showed me an extension ecosystem that functions nothing like a textbook describes.

Startups are the new extension workers — identifying problems, building solutions, communicating them to farmers, scaling what works. Pashu Sala, the AI-based poultry feeding system, banana leather from the US-returned entrepreneur — these are extension in its most alive form. And we, sitting next to incubation centres in our own universities, have never once visited them.

Dr. Rasheed Sulaiman's session on policy engagement opened with one argument that reframed everything: you cannot change a single farmer's behaviour and call it extension.

Real impact requires systems-level change. The PM KUSUM solar irrigation example made this concrete — nine different stakeholder groups, each with different incentives and constraints, each a reason why scaling stalls. Natural farming scaling faces the same complexity — productivity transition fears, absent FPO structures, and a government simultaneously spending Rs. 8,000 crore on synthetic fertiliser subsidies while promoting chemical-free agriculture.

His message on communication was equally direct: policymakers don't read PhD theses. A four-page policy brief based on your thesis can reach the right person. Learn to write for different audiences — blogs, briefs, meeting notes, and papers are not the same document..

Dr. Sethuraman Sivakumar's session drove home a truth most extension theses never acknowledge — a research paper alone creates zero impact. Paper +Field Demonstration + Policy Brief = the chain that actually reaches farmers at scale.

His three field projects — cassava yield gap in Tamil Nadu, child malnutrition in Odisha, sweet potato market linkage in Kerala — each showed that extension research is only complete when a farmer's income improves, a child's deficiency reduces, and produce actually reaches a buyer. The live game made the logic unforgettable: integrated approach always wins. Every thesis has a user. Find them. Communicate to them. That is extension.



Unstoppable

Day 5

The final day carried the weight of everything that had come before it. The One Word recap session — where each participant distilled their five days into a single honest word — was one of the most powerful collective moments of the programme. I wrote Unstoppable on the board.

It came directly from a line Dr. Saravanan Raj had shared the previous evening: "When nobody else celebrates you, learn to celebrate yourself. When nobody else compliments you, then compliment yourself. It's not up to other people to keep you encouraged. Encouragement should come from the inside." That line, and that word, are now permanently part of how I think about my own professional journey.



Dr. P.V.K. Sasidhar's session on Monitoring and Evaluation permanently fixed a confusion that had followed me through three semesters. Monitoring is continuous and internal — catching problems while they can still be fixed. Evaluation is one-shot and ideally external — explaining why something succeeded or failed. Impact assessment measures changes that take years to manifest.

These are not synonyms. Confusing them changes how you design research, how you measure it, and how you defend it. Bennett's Hierarchy gave me the clearest framework for understanding what any extension intervention actually produces — and his practical insight that MSc students can legitimately restrict their study to Levels 1 through 5, as long as they state this honestly, is something I will apply directly in my own thesis. His final line carries its own weight: "M&E is not a fault-finding method. It is a learning activity."

The valedictory by Dr. Saravanan Raj was less a speech and more a quiet reckoning. He told us about his private conversation in Jamaica — a promise made between two people that neither would reach the end of their life saying "I had the potential but I didn't use it." He told us about the 250-seat auditorium he had imagined, and the 64 who came. He said he would try again. Not for ego. For extension. For agriculture. For us.

And the lines I will carry longest:

"We are the product of our own thinking, our own choices — not the system."

"Fall in love with your own subject — at least today, if you haven't already."

"Declare here — I want to be one of the best extension professionals. Not a New Year resolution. A MANAGE declaration."

"This second is good. Don't wait for good days — THIS is a good day."

A Five-Day Experience

Five days is not a long time. It is also, depending on what happens inside it, enough time to permanently alter the direction you are walking in. What NYPDP does that most training programmes don't is refuse to stay at the surface. It does not give you information to memorize — it gives you experiences to integrate. The morning recap activities each day were not warm-ups; they were architecture. The field visit was not a break from learning; it was learning in its most honest form. The pre-dinner sessions were not optional add-ons; they were often the most important conversations of the day.



For me, the most significant moments were never the ones planned on the schedule. They were the whiteboard where 20 different people wrote 20 different single words that together described one collective transformation. They were the conversation at Access Livelihoods where the founder's transparency about failure taught me more than his success did. They were the evening Dr. Saravanan Sir spoke about his dream of 250 people, and I realised I was sitting inside that dream.

Change in Perspective

Before NYPDP, I understood Agricultural Extension the way most MSc students do — as an applied discipline that moves technology from research institutions to farmers. Important, useful, necessary — but bounded. The map was small.

What NYPDP dismantled and replaced, was that smallness.

I now understand extension as the science of upscaling. Extension professionals are the people who identify what society actually needs, build the evidence for it, communicate it across stakeholder groups, and ensure it reaches the people who need it most. That is not a narrow role. That is one of the most consequential roles in agricultural development.



Before NYPDP, extension was a subject I studied because it was part of my course. After NYPDP, it is something I want to live — because now I understand what it actually means. That shift — from obligation to identity — is the most personal change these five days produced in me.

I also understood something about Communication that I had never articulated before. I had always seen communication as a tool within extension — something you use to deliver a message. NYPDP made me see it differently. Communication is not a tool inside extension. It is the mechanism through which extension itself works. Without it, no technology reaches a farmer, no innovation scales, no research creates change. EDUCATE → ENGAGE → CONVINCING → INSPIRE is not a framework I will use occasionally. It is the sequence that sits at the centre of everything I intend to build.

And the most lasting shift was this: when I sit down to work now, the first question is no longer what my examiner will think. The first question is whose life this will reach — and how. That change in the starting point changes everything that follows. MANAGE did that quietly, without making a ceremony of it — and it will stay with me far longer than any certificate ever could.

I came with a map. I leave with a compass. The destination is still being written — and for the first time, I am genuinely excited about that.

Sixty-four of us walked in. Sixty-four different, larger versions walked out. That is what MANAGE does — quietly, completely, without making a ceremony of it.

The Training Environment

MANAGE does not feel like a venue hired for a conference. It feels like a place that takes what it does seriously — in the physical design of its spaces, in the quality of its resource persons, in the care visible in every session's design.

The environment was genuinely participatory. No session was a lecture where a speaker talked and an audience sat passive. Every morning opened with a reflection activity. Every speaker engaged with questions as seriously as they engaged with their content. The seating was arranged so that different participants from different institutions sat together — an architectural choice that kept the conversations from becoming comfortable and predictable.

What I appreciated most about the environment was that it made honesty easy. It was a room where admitting you didn't know something felt safer than pretending you did. That is rarer than it sounds, and it is what allowed the learning to go deeper than it otherwise would have.



What I Appreciated Most

The most valuable thing about NYPDP is not any single session. It is the cumulative effect of five days in which every element — speakers, activities, field visit, peer interactions, evening sessions — is aimed at the same thing: expanding how you see yourself and your field.

But if I had to name one specific thing — it would be Dr. Saravanan Raj. Not just his sessions, not just his frameworks, not just the 16 career areas he mapped for us on Day 1. It was the way he showed up — every single day, in every single session, carrying the same conviction that this subject matters and that the people in front of him matter.

He lost sleep over 64 participants when he had imagined 250. He shared his private dilemmas, his reframed regrets, his unfinished list — openly, honestly, without performance. He said "you are living inside my dream" and meant every word of it. In a world where most authority figures protect their image, he chose to share his humanity instead. That is the rarest thing a teacher can give — and it is what made everything he taught land so deeply.

I also appreciated the focus on what is genuinely emerging — policy engagement, digital extension, innovation incubation, agripreneurship — areas that most university curricula have not yet caught up with. NYPDP didn't teach us what extension was. It showed us what extension is becoming — and trusted us to be ready for it

Peer Interactions and Networking

I came to NYPDP from SHUATS, Prayagraj. Over five days I had substantive conversations with MSc and PhD scholars from Different universities across India, including institutions that I had previously known only through the reference sections of research papers.

What emerged from those conversations was something I did not expect: a shared diagnosis. Across institutions, across states, we had all arrived carrying the same small map. And across five days, we were all updating it in real time.

The connections I built here are not contacts in a phone book. They are people who understand the same field, are facing the same questions, and are now walking parallel journeys that will intersect again — in conferences, in collaborations, in research citations, in WhatsApp groups that will stay active long after this programme is a memory.



Most Significant Takeaway

The single most significant thing I am taking from NYPDP is this: the field is not small. My thinking was small.

Agricultural Extension — if understood fully, engaged with seriously — touches policy, research, digital communication, entrepreneurship, gender equity, international development, and rural livelihoods. It is a profession with real power to shape how knowledge moves from laboratories to lives.

My second most significant takeaway is personal rather than professional: celebrate yourself when the room is silent. Encouragement that depends entirely on external recognition is fragile. The work I will do in Farm Communication, in digital extension, in bridging the gap between research and farmers — that work has to be driven from the inside. NYPDP gave me the conviction to start doing that.



Applying it Forward

The gap between knowing something and doing something is where most training programmes end. I intend to close that gap deliberately.

In my academic work — I will design my research with its user in mind from the first day, not the last. My thesis will have a policy brief attached to it. My findings will be communicated in formats that policymakers and practitioners can actually use, not just in a dissertation that sits on a shelf.

In my professional identity — I will build my presence in Farm Communication and Digital Extension consistently and publicly. Extension content that is genuinely human — that educates, engages, convinces and inspires — is something this field needs urgently and has too little of. I will work on that.

In my network — I will stay connected with the peers, mentors and practitioners I met here. Networks built on shared purpose compound over time. I intend to give this one the time it deserves.

In my institution — I will take what I learned back to SHUATS and share it with juniors who have not yet had this exposure. The extension mindset applies to learning too: you receive knowledge, and you spread it.

My MANAGE NYPDP Journey

On Day 5, Dr. Saravanan Sir said something that I have thought about every day since:

"You are not here because you paid money and came for training. You are living inside my dream."

He imagined 250 students in that room. 64 came. He worried about it for four days. And then he decided he would try again — not for ego, but for extension, for agriculture, for the students who hadn't arrived yet.

I came to MANAGE carrying a small map. I left carrying a much larger one — and the clarity that the size of your map is not determined by the size of your subject. It is determined by the seriousness with which you choose to engage with it.

My one word for these five days was **Unstoppable**.

Not because I have become invincible. But because I now understand that the only thing that can stop me is choosing not to start. And I have chosen to start.

MANAGE was not just a programme. It was a reminder that I am part of something larger than a degree, larger than a career, larger than a single dissertation. Agricultural Extension — done honestly, done well — is one of the most important connective tissues in the development of this country. I want to spend my career strengthening it.

Thank you, Dr. Saravanan Raj. Thank you, Dr. Sandipamu Raahalya and Thank you the entire MANAGE team — every person who set up a room, coordinated a speaker, organised a field visit, arranged a meal, prepared a resource, and showed up with full energy from the first morning to the last evening. You did not organise a programme. You created an experience that will travel back with each of us — into our classrooms, our research, our conversations with farmers, and the futures we are only beginning to imagine.



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