

## MANAGE Internship: Cultivating Experiences for Future Professionals



### From Theory to Transformation- Reflections on my MANAGE Internship

I am Holy Mercy Divina Matla, from Kerala and currently pursuing Ph.D. in Agricultural Extension Education at College of Agriculture, Kerala Agricultural University (KAU), Vellayani, Kerala



As a Ph.D. scholar in Agricultural Extension, I was eager to gain practical exposure and hands-on experience in knowledge management, innovation dissemination, and policy implementation, areas critical to my academic and research pursuits. MANAGE, being a premier national-level institution in agricultural extension and management, offered a unique opportunity to engage with experts, real-time projects, and grassroots-level case studies. With my specific interest in tribal livelihoods, indigenous food systems, and sustainable agriculture, this internship was an ideal platform to deepen my understanding, refine my research skills, and contribute meaningfully to my ongoing PhD work.

I aimed to gain hands-on experience with global agricultural extension frameworks, including the implementation of government schemes and innovative approaches. I also hoped to learn about participatory tools for stakeholder engagement and enhance my research and analytical skills through fieldwork and evaluation. Furthermore, I sought to understand MANAGE's role in shaping national-level policies and training programs for extension professionals, while receiving guidance to refine my PhD research. Overall, I viewed this internship as a critical bridge between theory and practice, an opportunity to transform academic knowledge into actionable solutions while aligning with MANAGE's mission.

## Internship Experience

At MANAGE, I undertook several responsibilities that strengthened my research and professional abilities. I collaborated with mentors to refine my study titled "*Nourishing Traditions: Pathways to Sustainable Indigenous People's Food Systems.*" The project focused on factors contributing to the erosion of tribal food systems and identified how interventions can reverse this trend. I conducted a systematic literature review on tribal agriculture, analyzed state policies impacting tribal diets, and assessed the gaps in extension services for *Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups* (PVTGs). I developed and presented a detailed research proposal and designed participatory surveys administered to over 100 tribal households in Kerala. Data analysis using Excel and SPSS allowed me to uncover meaningful trends in food reliance and policy awareness.

Fieldwork included surveys and focus group discussions with over 120 tribal households, which helped me identify on-ground implementation challenges compared to policy goals. The project led to a methodological shift in my PhD work, moving from surveys to ethnographic tools like participatory storytelling and co-designed programs. This shift changed my mindset from “researching tribals” to “learning from tribals.” I now see fieldwork not as data collection, but as ethical engagement where communities are co-creators of knowledge.



Managing the internship while juggling PhD deadlines was intense. The compressed timeline of 12 weeks required juggling proposal development, literature review, fieldwork, and policy documentation. To stay productive, I used a "90-Minute Sprint" work model, incorporated digital detox Sundays, and relied on peer support and shared chai breaks for mental resilience.

## Learning Environment

The learning environment at MANAGE was enriching, collaborative, and field-oriented, perfectly aligned with both my research goals and personal growth. Regular interactions with faculty offered invaluable insights into research design and extension delivery gaps. The open atmosphere encouraged peer learning and interdisciplinary exchange, which broadened my perspective on the complex dynamics of agricultural extension and rural development.

My supervisor and co-interns played a crucial role in refining my research approach. With their guidance, I was able to narrow down my focus from "tribal food systems" to a more targeted and impactful study. Internship co-ordinator helped me identify critical gaps, suggested culturally sensitive revisions to my survey tools, and provided detailed feedback on research drafts, transforming vague ideas into concrete outcomes. Her support in field planning, networking with stakeholders, and methodological feedback was instrumental. My colleagues also offered emotional support and technical help during challenging phases of fieldwork, making the journey truly collaborative.

## Skills and Knowledge Gained

Working on 'Sustainable Tribal Food Systems in Kerala' at MANAGE gave me practical insights and deepened my methodological understanding. Expert interactions, workshops, and discussions with extension officers helped shape my analytical framework and inspired me to integrate grassroots realities into academic research.

More than just acquiring technical skills, the experience rewired my approach to research. Before MANAGE, I saw research as a linear process, hypothesis, data, and conclusion. I prioritized metrics over narratives, saw fieldwork as routine, and treated my PhD as a personal milestone. After MANAGE, I learned that proper research requires ethnographic humility, stakeholder immersion, and a deep inquiry into the gap between policy intent and ground reality. I no longer view my PhD as just a degree, but as a platform to amplify community voices. The internship taught me that research and advocacy go hand in hand.

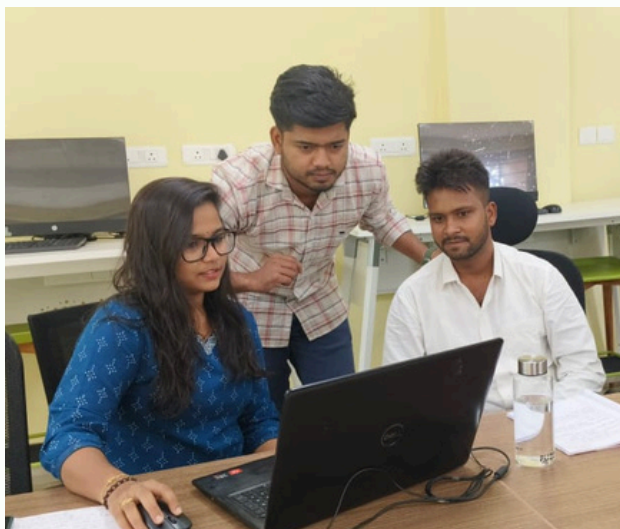


The most unforgettable part of this internship was the people. The director and co-ordinators weren't just administrators, they were mentors and motivators who shaped my outlook. The director's words, "*Who stops us?*" pushed us to challenge templates and think systemically. Weekly reflections, late-night mentoring, and constant encouragement gave this program a human touch I'll never forget. This internship fundamentally redefined my identity as a researcher. I now walk beside tribal communities as both a co-learner and an advocate. I've learned that impactful research isn't about publishing, it's about listening, analyzing, and acting with accountability. The skills I gained will guide my PhD research and influence my long-term goals in agricultural extension.

## Takeaways and Action Plans



*"The Director: A Mentor Who Redefined Leadership. The Coordinators: Pillars of Support. The Internship: Professional Guidance with a Personal Touch."*



MANAGE offered more than just a professional platform, it created a nurturing ecosystem of curiosity, collaboration, and growth. From warm tea breaks to midnight research sessions, from pep talks to peer proofreading, the human connections shaped this experience into something unforgettable. While I expected exposure to webinars and training coordination, I received far more, an immersion into participatory research that exposed policy gaps and offered real-world lessons in co-creating solutions. The only shortcoming was the time, three months felt too brief to explore all ideas, but the mindset and relationships I built will continue to influence my academic and professional path for years to come.

At MANAGE, I learned that research can be exhausting, but with curiosity and respect, it becomes addictive. I also learned that we don't study people, we learn from them. And that real growth begins when we step outside our academic comfort zones. For all this and more, I am deeply grateful.

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