



MY MEETING NOTES

International Extension Education Conference on 'Role of NGOs in Extension Services: Opportunities and Challenges', Banaras Hindu University (BHU) Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh (UP), India December 27-30, 2020



Mahesh Jaishi, Pragma Goswamy, Sravan Kumar Tamminana and Pratibha Karki share their experience of participating in the 2nd International Extension Education Conference (IEEC-2020) on 'Role of NGOs in Extension Services: Opportunities and Challenges' held at Banaras Hindu University from 27 to 30 December, 2020.

CONTEXT

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are increasingly being recognized globally as effective agencies for social change. The recently organized virtual International Extension Education Conference held during 27-30 December 2020, focused on exploring the role of NGOs in Extension Services. The main objectives of this conference were to redefine the role of NGOs in agricultural extension in the current context and assess their advocacy and community empowerment efforts. The conference brought together more than 200 participants from different countries, including USA, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Iraq, etc., representing government agencies, civil society, academia, voluntary and non-government organizations. The four-day conference had four major themes and the deliberations were organized under nine sessions.



PROGRAMME

Introductory Session

The conference was inaugurated by **Prof. Rick D Rudd**, Director, Workforce Education and Development, Center for International Research Education and Development, Community Viability Chair, Virginia Tech, USA. In his address, 'Extension as an instrument of Change', he stressed innovation propagation among farmers through NGOs for the sake of national development across the world. He threw light on the role of extension as an instrument for change and connected that change to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He also reiterated that 50 percent of the current workforce in the world needs to be re-skilled. **Prof. Jack Elliot**, Professor, Texas A&M University, USA, and Regional Director for Africa, Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture and Development, Texas emphasized the provision of right opportunities at right times to achieve practical changes.



Dr V V Sadamate, Former Advisor, Agriculture, Planning Commission, Government of India (GoI) talked about 'Innovative Agricultural Extension Reforms for Efficient Programme Delivery: Challenges and Way Ahead for Self-Reliant Agriculture (*Atmanirbhar Krishi*)' emphasizing a pluralistic approach in extension with the effective collaboration of input support agencies, extension departments, cooperatives and NGOs. He drew attention to the key role played by local NGOs in promoting demand-driven extension. **Dr P Chandra Shekara's**, Director General, National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, presentation on 'Policy Reforms and Impact on Agricultural Extension' provided an extensive overview of the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020. He focused on shifting the role of extension from transfer of technology to empowerment and from production to income generation. He further laid stress on the necessity to align national products with international consumer product standards.

Key Deliberations: Insights and Outcomes

NGOs in the Present Context: Theme 1

Dr SK Dubey, Principal Scientist, ICAR-Agricultural Technology Application Research Institute (ATARI), Kanpur, highlighted NGO-based initiatives for enhanced technology outreach and production system

efficacy, and talked about the role of NGOs in market-led extension. Dr Senthil Vinayagam, Principal Scientist, ICAR-National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM), Hyderabad, spoke on 'Participation of Youth in Agriculture - A macro level perspective', and Mr Manas Satpathy, Integrator, PRADAN, an NGO based in India, spoke on the 'Role of NGOs for inclusive growth'.

The major highlights of the paper presentations were:

- In most of the countries, such as Nepal, India and others, NGOs play major role as welfare service providers, implementers, catalysts and partners in development.
- They mainly involve in training farmers, promoting community based organizations, mobilizing targeted beneficiaries, identifying locally viable agro enterprises, in order to take action for their own upliftment.
- Mapping the activities of NGOs, training and human resource development is required if NGO workers are to impart effective training to farmers, and to also help the government in framing suitable policies, such as nutrition policy and others.
- The initiatives of NGOs – such as community radios – had significant impact on community needs and aspirations, which then attract the structured investment of government into programme production and community participation processes, especially in the case of community radios across the country.
- Major constraints that NGOs face are: non-sustainable financial base, weak coordination, monitoring, and evaluation systems. These challenges need to be addressed through strategic interventions, only then can the influential role of NGOs be realized better.
- The role of 'FPOs in empowering the farmers' as well as novel initiatives such as 'Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan' that is used to promote agriprenurship among migrant laborers in India were also highlighted in the presentations.
- Amongst a number of papers, one review paper in Hindi on the topic '*Bharat mein Gair Sarkari Sangthanome Nirnaya Nirman ki Bhumika*' gathered much appreciation. The paper focused on the role and importance of decision making in NGOs.

This section concluded with remarks on the instrumental role played by NGOs in the present context and encouraged students to take up research in the context of NGOs. Hence this session had concentrated on the role of NGOs in establishing infrastructures, promoting value chains and partnerships, building leadership, encouraging marginalized community participation in the process of development, and promoting self-help.

NGOs in Agriculture and Allied Sectors: Theme 2

In his presentation, Dr Jack Elliot elaborated on how the African Union Commission collaborated with regional economic communities, member states, international standard setting bodies, the United Nations system, development partners and NGOs in implementing the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Policy Framework for Africa. He highlighted the investment being put into Extension and the role of Extension professionals in bringing about grassroot level changes in SPS framework.

The major highlights of the papers presented in this session are as follows:

- Farmer-to-Farmer extension should also be promoted along with the public extension system. Government (GO) and NGO-based Hybrid model (GO-NGO Model) worked better in adoption of green fodder for enhanced milk production. Linkages with research institutes – for example, ICAR-CRIJAF with NGO (SEVA) – may be considered for GO-NGO partnerships.
- Public Private Partnership is another very important area where academicians, researchers and policy makers could invest more attention. The successful case of a partnership between Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) and Participatory Rural Development Foundation (PRDF)

for assessment and promotion of Wheat HD 2967 in eastern Uttar Pradesh, India, has shown how private and public extension mechanisms can bring about grassroots level changes by out-scaling appropriate technologies.

- There is need for an alternate and supplementary approach in the form of Public Organization-Voluntary Organisations (VOs) partnership. One such innovative model is the IARI-VO Partnership model where 28 reputed VOs are engaged with IARI for transfer of technology since 2008. Since then, this model has been running effectively and now it is an integral part of the IARI Extension mechanism. Under this model, major IARI wheat varieties HD 2967 and HD 3086 were disseminated through VOs and the spread of these varieties has increased drastically. Likewise, for other major crops such as sugarcane and vegetables it has worked very effectively. Such partnership models should be adopted by agricultural universities. This will create an alternative Extension Delivery model which will be very effective at the grassroots level.
- Women play multiple roles from sowing to harvesting. In states like Uttarakhand, India, women play a major role in agriculture. Majority of women face health-based problems due to the high degree of drudgery involved in agricultural operations. The problem can be addressed by female farmer-focused NGO initiatives, such as organizing farm women targeted meetings, training programmes, demonstrations, field trips, and by involvement in harvest and post-harvest activities. They could exert more decision-making authority, autonomy over their own income and household expenses, freedom of choice and mobility.
- NGO-based interventions can also boost the spirit of entrepreneurship among young farmers. SHG-based sericulture activity has huge potential in North East India. Identification of locally viable agripreneurship areas, and then training farmers for those areas via NGOs is the need of the hour.

Thus, this theme concluded that in the context of agriculture and allied sectors, NGOs have an important role to play with respect to mobilization of farmers for FPO formation, instilling entrepreneurial spirit, and farmwomen-specific trainings. Moreover, partnership between agricultural institutions and NGOs is highly desirable, redesigning and rethinking of value chain of extension is imperative and market-led extension should be emphasized.

New Dimensions of NGO Involvement: Theme 3

Dr Debashish Sen, Director, People's Science Institute (PSI), Dehradun, talked about the contribution of NGOs towards Sustainable Development in the context of his experience with PSI, a non-profit research and development organization. He stated that NGOs can play a significant role in diverse fields of grassroots development and gave the example of the pioneering work of PSI in the fields of community-led watershed-based livelihoods development, environmental quality monitoring, disaster-safe housing, and dissemination of appropriate technologies.

The major highlights of the papers presented in this session are as follows:

- NGO involvement in '*Promotion of jute production technologies and enterprises*' was identified as a potential prospect in West Bengal, India. It is fetching good remuneration for those involved in it.
- It was also shown that the extent of participation by self-help group members in entrepreneurial activities plays an important role in strengthening various enterprises promoted by NGOs.
- The NGO, Yuva Mitra, is working with a keen sense of belongingness and ownership which shows a unique approach of working as a linkage between FPOs and private organizations.
- The Sujala-III project running in 11 district of Karnataka State, India, is a collaborative programme involving multiple institutions with a mechanism involving integration of science through Geographic Information System- (GIS) based Land Resource Inventory (LRI) preparation and micro watershed based Detailed Project Report (DPR) preparation. Implementing para LRI

Extension friends, capacity building of LRI managers, and greater involvement of recognized NGOs can redefine the role.

- Skill-based lesson plans, diverse teaching methodologies, more field visits/ethnographical approach by teachers may be put into practice for competency enhancement. There is a need for collaboration of NGOs with teachers for promoting better education.
- Role of NGOs in promoting agritourism was also pointed out, and it was indicated that agritourism has the potential to emerge as one of the key focus areas for grassroot organizations, especially NGOs.

Hence, various new dimensions of NGO involvement – promotion of cash crop-based technologies and enterprises, acting as linkage between FPOs and private organizations, agritourism as a focus area, etc. – were discussed in the session.

NGOs in Basic Rural Development Issues: Theme 4

Dr Thomas Archibald, Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Leadership and Community Education (ALCE), Virginia Tech, USA, spoke on 'New Directions in Extension Evaluation'. Dr Chandana Jayawardena, Head, Dept. of Agril. Extension, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, delivered a talk on 'The Characteristics of Extension' and Dr Asha H Shayo, Graduate in Agricultural Leadership and Community Education (ALCE), Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, USA, spoke on 'The Role of NGOs on Youth Career Development in Agriculture'.

The key recommendations from Ms. Shayo were as follows:

- NGOs may develop community centers for youth programmes and implement the programmes in schools that focus on agricultural literacy from the lower levels of education.
- They can work with colleges to design programmes that will allow students from various universities to collaborate not only among themselves, but also with farmers and other agricultural entrepreneurs.
- NGOs may work with community leaders to influence change in perceptions by focusing more on the positive aspects of agriculture.

The major highlights of the paper presentations are given below.

- NGOs have played a substantial role in promoting and implementing the concept of SHGs at the grassroots level. It is important to mention their role in both formation of SHGs as well as in ensuring their sustainability.
- NGOs have empowered women in varied domains, such as politics, economy, health and hygiene, education, entrepreneurship, etc.
- Strengthening of FPOs by providing them better access to finance, skill development and other supportive abilities is appreciated and may be further promoted so as to reduce the migration of rural youth in search of jobs by utilizing local produce for better financial gain.
- Use of digital innovations and ICT tools by NGOs is an important area of focus as it can lead to more effective results from NGO involvement.
- The role of NGOs in addressing education, poverty, social justice and human rights issues, etc., during the COVID-19 pandemic was also highlighted. NGOs put up a strong fight against various socio-economic problems. NGOs have been working tirelessly in providing critical services to vulnerable groups. They have been instrumental in supporting the government in identifying high-risk coronavirus areas. They have created awareness on precautions that can prevent COVID-19 and on educating people about social distancing, sanitization and its importance. The fight against COVID-19 has been a collaborative effort between government, private companies and NGOs, and their response to the pandemic shows the power of partnerships.

- Cases of effectively promoting SRI technique and *Saat Din Saat Kyaari* Nutritional Kitchen Garden were also presented to emphasize the capability of NGOs in promoting new innovations and technologies.

Thus NGOs were depicted as having significant importance in terms of catering to basic rural development issues related to education, health, sanitation, livelihood generation, agriculture and much more. In addition, they have been instrumental in supporting the government in its fight against COVID-19.

Valedictory Session

Dr US Gautam, Vice-Chancellor, Banda University of Agriculture and Technology (BUAT), UP, India, was the Chief Guest, and Dr C Satpathy, Former Vice-Chancellor, Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT), Odisha, India, was the Guest of Honour. Prof. Ramesh Chand, Director, Institute of Agriculture Sciences (IAS), BHU, Varanasi, UP, India; Prof. AP Singh, Dean Agriculture, IAS, BHU, and other illustrious faculty members from the institute including Dr B Jirli, Professor & Head, Extension Education and Dr Kalyan Ghadei (Organizing Secretary, IEEC-BHU), Professor, Extension Education also graced the occasion. Dr Gautam and Dr Satpathy congratulated the entire organizing team for conducting the International Conference successfully even amidst the pandemic through the online platform. The dignitaries greatly appreciated the relevant theme and the intense efforts made to organize such a programme that brought together a wide range of experts from Social Sciences and Extension from almost all the agricultural universities and research institutes of India as well as from international institutions. Apart from the experts and scientists, research scholars, social activists, etc., also participated in large numbers. The conference ended with the presentation of awards for NGO Excellence, Best KVK Scientist, best oral and poster presentation.



Dignitaries at the Valedictory Session

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

- NGOs should focus on income enhancement rather than only being engaged in production.
- Focus should be laid on developing Community Centers for youth-related programmes.
- Pluralistic extension systems with the collaboration of different organizations and businesses is the immediate need.
- Importance must be given to farmers' feedback and then meeting their demands.

- Thrust must be laid on farmer owned and farmer centric models for meeting the goals of extension.
- Formulation of a job chart for extension personnel focusing on farmer mobilization so as to form Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).
- There is an urgent need for extending the value-chain and linking farmers to the market system.
- Need for a strategic mechanism to address Sustainable Development Goals (07, 11 and 14) so as to chart out the future course of action of NGOs.
- Government should not treat all NGOs on the same scale through a nationwide act. However, a team may review the funding of NGOs on a case-by-case basis.
- NGOs should diversify their funding resources through donations, and other innovative ways such as linking with good NGOs, etc.
- New evaluation models – blue marble, global, equitable and adaptive models – can be used for effective evaluation. The blue marble evaluation framework with special reference to developing countries (like India) may be followed.
- There is a need to evaluate upcoming extension systems for the branding of Agriculture.
- Transforming extension into a dynamic extension system is worth pondering over.

OUR IMPRESSIONS

This conference was one of a kind as it took place at an international level with a core focus on discussing NGOs and other voluntary organizations that serve the community for agriculture and rural development within the framework of holistic growth. The conference acted as a platform that shared experiences, inspired people, built networks, and threw light on the constraints and challenges faced by grassroot level organizations. It was a momentous experience for us. The themes were relevant given the time and situation, and the keynotes were insightful. We got to learn much about the NGOs in India as well as the emerging concepts worldwide. A pluralistic extension system wherein all the stakeholders including public, private and voluntary organizations, all come together, plan and collaborate for providing demand driven and holistic services to farmers, emerged as the best and sustainable extension mechanism. We came to understand that extensionists need to work in tandem with NGO staff in planning, executing and evaluating extension services. The conference provided a common platform for scientists, academicians and students to discuss and deliberate. The meticulous effort of the organizing committee, on-screen and off-screen, is commendable. Kudos to the team for pulling off the international conference successfully.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank Dr Kalyan Ghadei, Professor, Extension Education, IAS, BHU, Varanasi, UP and Organizing Secretary, IEEC; Dr V Kamalvanshi, Associate Professor, Agricultural Economics, IAS, BHU, Varanasi; Dr Dheeraj Mishra, Assistant Professor, Agricultural Extension, BUAT, Banda, UP; Dr Neha Upreti, Extensionist, Uttarakhand; and Dr Girijesh Singh Mahra, Scientist, Division of Agricultural Extension, ICAR-IARI, New Delhi, for the inputs provided by them. Finally, we acknowledge with gratitude Dr Mahesh Chander, Head, Div. of Extension Education, ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute, for his encouragement and for motivating us to write this Meeting Note.

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