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Sharing, learning and networking for innovation

**Agricultural Extension
in South Asia**



CRISP



AESA STRATEGIC PLAN

2021-26

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN SOUTH ASIA (AESA)

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Sharing, learning and networking for innovation

**Agricultural Extension
in South Asia**

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AESA STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-26

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ACRONYMS

AESA	Agricultural Extension in South Asia
AFAAS	African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services
APAARI	Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions
APIRAS	Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services
ASCI	Agricultural Skills Council of India
BAEN	Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
CRISP	Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy
DG	Director General
DLEC	Developing Local Extension Capacity
EAS	Extension and Advisory Services
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCRA	Foreign Contribution Regulation Act
GB	Governance Board
GCNA	Global Capacity Needs Assessment
GDPRD	Global Donor Platform for Rural Development
GFRAS	Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services
IAEN	Indian Agriculture Extension Network
ICAR	Indian Council of Agricultural Research
ICT4RAS	Information Communication Technology for Rural Advisory Services
KM	Knowledge Management
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MANAGE	National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management
MELA	Mekong Extension Learning Alliance
MSc	Master of Science
NAEA	Nepal Agricultural Extension Association
NAESSL	Network of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services in Sri Lanka
NELK	New Extensionist Learning Kit
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PEN	Pakistan Extension Network
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PPP	Public Private Partnership
RAS	Rural Advisory Services
RELASER	Red Latinoamericana de Servicios de Extension Rural
SAAS	Strengthened Agricultural Advisory Services
TAP	Tropical Agricultural Platform
TBD	To be decided
ToT	Training of Trainers

CONTEXT

About 80 per cent of South Asia's poor live in rural areas, most of whom depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Agriculture and rural development are the keys to eradicate poverty and create conditions for sustainable and equitable growth. South Asian agriculture faces several new challenges – ranging from a deteriorating natural resources base, climate change, and increasing deregulation of trade. Moreover, the sector is dominated by small farmers often with weak bargaining power and limited political voice. Women constitute the majority of agricultural labour in small-scale and subsistence farming in the region. Pluralistic, demand-driven and gender-responsive extension services that offer much broader support to rural producers, is critical for agricultural development and poverty reduction in South Asia.

Though South Asian countries have a long history of organizing and reforming extension services, much more needs to be done to strengthen their capacities in order to deal with the rapidly evolving challenges in agriculture. Commitment to pluralism is central to the discussion on extension reforms as it is now widely accepted that no single actor or agency is best placed to offer the wide range of services required by rural communities. While several new approaches are being tried by assorted extension providers in the public, private, and NGO sector in different countries, these experiences are not shared due to the lack of a platform for sharing and networking among extension professionals in South Asia.

HISTORY OF AESA

Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESA) came into being in 2013 to meet the demand for a network of all those interested in extension and advisory services (EAS) articulated at some of the global and regional meetings on extension organised by the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS). In 2013, AESA organized meetings of key stakeholders of extension and advisory provision in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal followed by the first face-to-face meeting in January 2014 in Kathmandu. These meetings helped in creating awareness about AESA and GFRAS in the region. During this meeting AESA finalized its vision and mission.

Vision

Improving food and nutrition security through effective and efficient extension and advisory services.



Mission

Sharing, learning and networking for building effective and efficient extension and advisory services.



AESA has continued to be guided by this vision and mission. During this meeting AESA also identified its short-term and long-term priorities as mentioned below. These priorities served as the roadmap for AESA in South Asia.

Short-term priorities

Establish country forums



Develop directory of extension and RAS providers



Resource generation



Capacity building of extension functionaries



Knowledge sharing



Long-term priorities

Develop a constitution for AESA



Needs assessment and review of extension situation in South Asia



Hold annual meetings



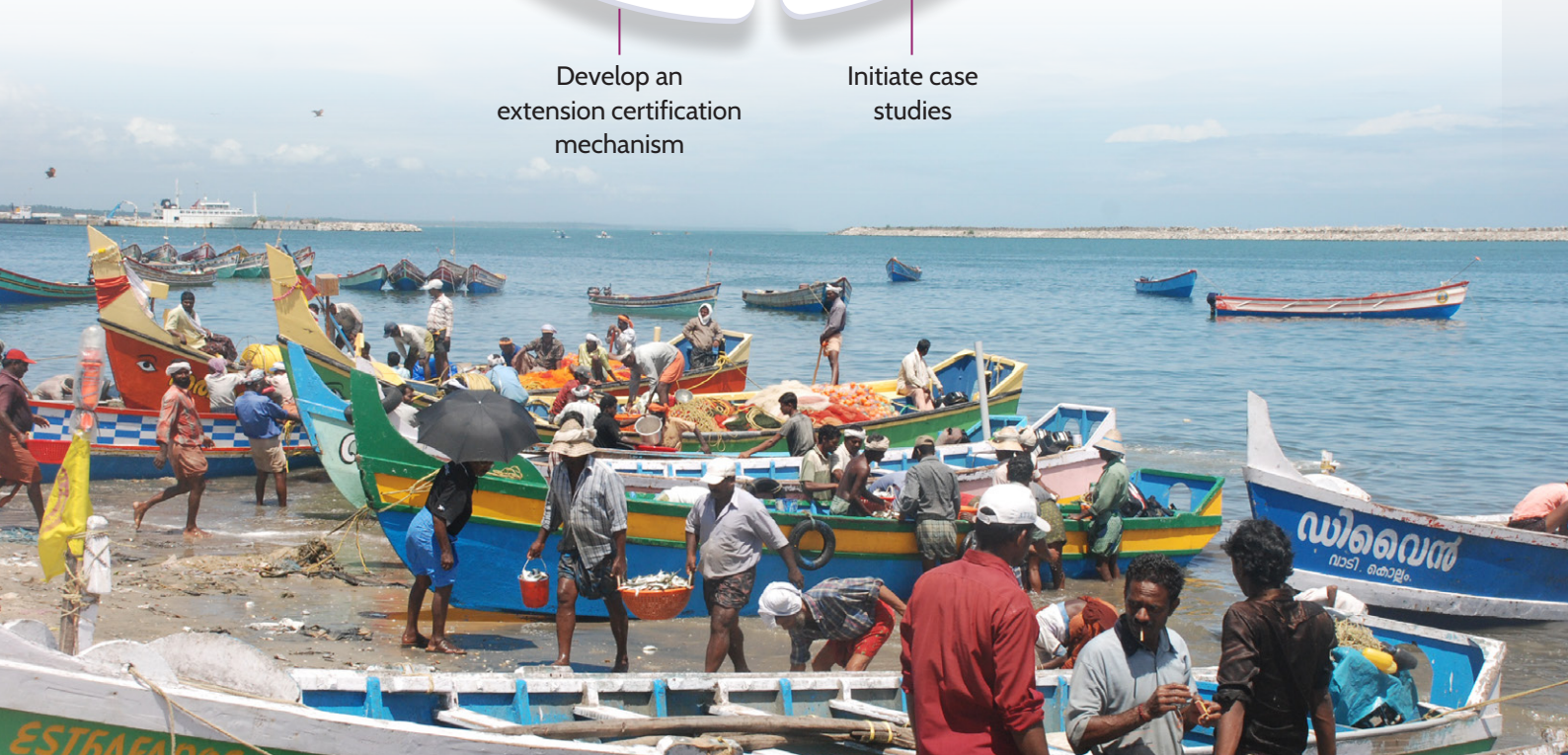
Conduct evaluation studies on extension



Develop an extension certification mechanism



Initiate case studies



PROGRESS AGAINST AESA PRIORITIES

Hosted by the Centre for Research on Innovation in Science Policy (CRISP) in India (<https://www.crispindia.org/>), AESA was established as a virtual platform around a website and a Facebook group named as 'Agricultural Extension in South Asia'. Seven years have passed since AESA was formed and its priorities were identified. AESA has achieved mixed results with these priorities. AESA stakeholders strongly feel that the eleven priorities it had identified at the start of AESA are still highly relevant, even today. At this time, AESA should consolidate areas where it is doing well, and remove obstacles where the achievements are not satisfactory. Below is an analysis of the status of these eleven priorities.

Establish country forums

The South Asia region consists of eight countries, which are: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Current status of each country network is as follows:

Afghanistan: Representatives from Afghanistan have been participating in some of the network meetings of AESA (two face-to-face meetings, one in 2014 and then at the 2016 Governance Board meeting). The Director General of Agriculture Extension in the Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) is the focal point for Afghanistan. The former DG was replaced and the new DG who joined recently attended the AESA Governance Board (GB) meeting in May 2021. Politically, and in terms of governance, Afghanistan is quite unstable right now. Peace negotiations are ongoing and nothing is very clear as to what will happen. Till the time peace and political stability prevails in Afghanistan, it may be difficult to establish an extension network.

Pakistan: Pakistan already has a network, called Pakistan Extension Network (PEN), which is part of the AESA network. PEN is in the process of formulating its constitution and articulating its vision and mission. Members of PEN will initiate registration of the network once this process is completed. There was a feeling on having various chapters for different provinces instead of having a single network at the country level. The Government of Pakistan is also in the process of developing a new strategy on agriculture extension.

India: In India, a network – the Indian Agriculture Extension Network (IAEN) – was formed in 2014, which is yet to be registered. The first meeting of IAEN was held at the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, India. Initially in India, since there are many other professional societies it was decided not to register IAEN as another professional society. Moreover, registering a society in India and securing FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) registration to be eligible to access foreign funds is quite a complicated process. Apart from this, a society needs to be three years in existence before it can even apply for FCRA registration. MANAGE in India has been working very closely with AESA (both being based in Hyderabad and aligned on promoting the professionalization of extension). They have collaborated and co-organized several programs in India. AESA had approached MANAGE informally a couple of years ago with the request to host and manage the Indian extension network. However, MANAGE being a public institution expressed its inability to currently host a network, but went on to reiterate its commitment to working together on promoting extension in close collaboration with AESA and IAEN.

Nepal: Recently, Nepal went through a major political and governance transformation, and the process of institutional adjustments is still going on. Major activities are being decentralized and moved from the central level to local/provincial level. Many of the extension officers who were located at Kathmandu are now being relocated to the provinces and there is a paucity of sufficient technical staff in all provinces. This transition is still going on and the government in Nepal is formulating a new agricultural policy. This is an opportunity to influence policy makers so as to put more focus on capacity development of extension and advisory services providers. The Nepal Agricultural Extension Association (NAEA), has existed for quite some time and has been engaging with AESA since the latter was conceptualized. It is a registered society. However, the decentralization in Nepal and COVID-19 have both adversely affected the functioning of NAEA. NAEA is a membership-based organization in which members renew their membership every year and this hasn't happened in the last two years. The Nepal Focal point, who has been nominated from NAEA to the AESA GB, has been transferred from the central level to a provincial level, which has affected her communication with AESA as well as her ability to operate at the national level.

Bhutan: Although representatives from Bhutan were present in the first face-to-face meeting of AESA in Kathmandu, there hasn't been much response from Bhutan with regard to joining AESA GB meetings or in establishing an extension network.

Bangladesh: Bangladesh has a country forum called the Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN). BAEN is a legally registered entity. It has more than 600 members from government departments, research institutions, academic institutions, private companies, farmers' organizations, private individuals and NGOs. BAEN has a small corpus fund derived from the membership fees which has been collected at intervals. BAEN has also been able to raise funding through several projects, both locally from the Department of Agriculture Extension, Bangladesh, and also from international donors.

Maldives: Representative from Maldives were present in the first face-to-face meeting of AESA in Kathmandu as well as at the GB meeting in Sri Lanka in 2016. But Maldives hasn't shown interest in forming an extension network or actively engaging in AESA activities.

Sri Lanka: Registering a new NGO is not easy in Sri Lanka as local policies are not favorable for NGOs. Due to persistent efforts of AESA and the Sri Lankan focal point, Network of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services in Sri Lanka (NAEASSL) has been recently established in Sri Lanka. Registration papers have been submitted to the government. As per the registration procedures in Sri Lanka, a paper advertisement was put out and the one-month time limit has passed which is observed for ascertaining that there is no objection from anybody. Since, there was no objection to the paper advertisement, now the registration should be about to be granted.



Resource generation

Resource generation has been the weakest area of AESA, both at individual country level as well as at the sub-regional network level. Bangladesh is the only network which is fully registered in the country and very well-recognized. It has been quite successful in raising funds locally from various government departments. Other than Bangladesh, no other country forum has been successful in establishing itself in registering as a formal entity. Without proper registration no donor would give funds to any agency. Therefore, no other country has been able to raise any funds.

AESA has been able to raise a small amount of funds through CRISP, but it is way below what it needs to have. Not being formally registered, AESA is unable to approach any in-country donor agency. Also not having an FCRA registration AESA has not been able to approach international donors. CRISP has been able to raise a small amount of funds on individual consultancy assignments that it spends for AESA activities. There is a small IFAD project that is providing very limited funds for AESA for Knowledge Management (KM), but this is not sufficient to meet the costs of KM, and CRISP is covering this deficit. But this won't work in the long run. AESA undertook a capacity assessment survey in 2017, where Resource Generation came up as AESA's biggest weakness.

Knowledge sharing

Knowledge management (as it was later known) has been the strongest component of AESA. Since its inception, AESA has focused on knowledge management through its website and Facebook group. The first face-to-face meeting of AESA - held in Nepal in 2014 - for formalizing the network identified knowledge sharing and management as one of its short-term priorities. AESA has a multipronged approach to knowledge management.

In its website, <http://www.aesaneetwork.org> AESA has three streams of knowledge - AESA publications, resources on EAS, and useful links. AESA has published several knowledge products, which include Blogs, My meeting notes, Good practices notes, Book reviews, Face to face, Working papers, Reports, Manuals and Facilitators guide, Updates, Policy briefs, Proceedings, and SAAS Good practice notes. The resource section is organized thematically on 14 themes

The screenshot shows the AESA website homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the AESA logo and the text "Agricultural Extension in South Asia". Below the navigation bar, there is a main banner image showing a group of people sitting on the ground in a rural setting. To the right of the banner, there is a text box that reads: "A well-trained and incentivised cadre of women para extension workers can encourage and support rural women in strengthening their livelihoods." Below the banner, there are several content sections: "Blogs" with two blog posts, "Good Practices" with two articles, "My Meeting Notes" with two articles, "Face to Face" with two articles, "Book Review" with two articles, and "News & Events" with several news items. There is also a "Welcome to AESA" section on the right side of the page.

- Concepts and practices, Extension and innovation, Information and communication, Value chain/markets, Gender, Climate change, Private sector, Livestock, Guide/tools/manuals, Nutrition, Producer organisations, Monitoring and evaluation, Policy, and Capacity development. AESA has provided useful links to countries (India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Nepal), allied organizations, networks, new publications, and news and events.

AESA has also established a system for ensuring the smooth flow of knowledge management materials. The AESA team compiles and organizes all physical and digital materials and links. AESA works with young website designers to improve access to all knowledge products. AESA also uses social media platforms actively. All documents are made available on the AESA Facebook group, AESA LinkedIn, and AESA Twitter handle. Beyond the digital platform, AESA has also used human interaction to share knowledge and experience across the region. It has tried to use AESA as a space where people encounter and interact with others having similar professional interests or face similar professional challenges.

Capacity building of extension functionaries

AESA has organized workshops on capacity needs assessment of extension and advisory services in four countries (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal) with the objective of identifying capacity gaps among EAS providers and to finalize a methodology for undertaking capacity needs assessment. There was huge interest in these workshops. One hundred and twenty participants from 68 organizations participated in these workshops. Based on the inputs received in these workshops, AESA developed a Facilitators Guide for assessing capacity needs of EAS providers. In January 2018 AESA published a policy brief on Capacity and Needs of Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) in South Asia. It is available through the following link: <https://www.aesanetwork.org/policy-brief-no-1-capacity-needs-of-extension-and-advisory-services-eas-in-south-asia/>

Agriculture has gone through a sea change in the last several years. However, extension and advisory services continue to remain the same. GFRAS had prepared a position paper that discusses new capacities for rural advisory services to address the current challenges in agriculture. AESA contributed to GFRAS in the development of the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK). It is based on the 'New Extensionist' - Roles, Strategies and Capacities to strengthen extension and advisory services. The kit focusses on functional skills and is available for self-directed, face-to-face or blended learning.

AESA, in collaboration with CRISP, Indian Agricultural Extension Network (IAEN) and National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), organized a workshop in India in October 2017 to promote NELK. In March 2018, AESA also organized a similar workshop in collaboration with Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN), in Bangladesh to promote NELK and on writing Good Practice Notes on extension and advisory services. Working papers, blogs and reports on the AESA website and Facebook page are rich sources of information on agriculture. EAS practitioners constantly use them to improve their own knowledge and capacity.

AESA conducted an online user survey in January 2021. An overwhelming 252 users of AESA knowledge management products responded to this survey. While the users were quite satisfied with these products for their capacity building, they also made some recommendations for improvement. Some



recommendation made by the users which are quite relevant to this section are:

- Focus on future workforce in extension;
- Include more publications on climate change;
- Include more videos on extension dialogue;
- Start a YouTube channel and share content on Twitter frequently;
- Organize an interactive platform for extension fraternity for mutual experience and knowledge sharing; and
- Organize seminars, workshops and trainings frequently.

Develop directory of extension and RAS providers

AESA tried with an online directory, but the response was lukewarm. Hence AESA has parked it for the time being. AESA is waiting to have a dedicated human resource setup for undertaking this.

However, in the meantime, a large number of people have joined the AESA Facebook page. As per the last report published by AESA, 20,879 members have voluntarily joined the AESA Facebook page, and the details are shown below:



It is interesting to see that 71% of the members are from the age group of 25-44 years. This means EAS providers in this age group are taking interest in AESA activities. But it is unfortunate to see that most of the members are from India (84%). Membership from other countries is very low – Nepal 6%, Pakistan 2%, Bangladesh 2% and Sri Lanka 0.3%. Even though the Bangladesh country forum is the most advanced, very few from that country look at the AESA Facebook page.

Develop constitution for AESA

This activity hasn't started yet. AESA has a Governance Board which has only met twice since the launch of the network. One meeting was scheduled to take place in 2020 but got delayed due to COVID-19.

Hold annual meetings

Several meetings have taken place in different countries, though scheduled annual meetings haven't taken place. Lack of sufficient funds, and now the COVID-19 pandemic have played a major role in thwarting the organizing of such meetings.

Develop an extension certification mechanism

This hasn't started yet even though everyone believes it is very important, especially so for those who don't have formal degrees and are still doing very good work and should be part of our networks. At the GFRAS level this discussion started when the idea of professionalizing extension started. There was a conversation on bringing standards and certification in extension and GFRAS took up a global good practices/policy document on certification, but only very few countries have been successful in this. This is practiced in South Africa, and countries in Europe are also very strong on this, where you need a minimum number of credits and get certified as an extension professional to continue in service. In India, this is a work in progress, though the certifications are national.





Initiate case studies

There has been very good progress on this, with significant contributions from various countries. Forty-four case studies of good practices have been documented and published on the AESA website. All these good practice case studies are available through the following link: <https://www.aesanetwork.org/category/good-practices/>

Conduct evaluation studies on extension

AESA published a manual on good practices in extension research and evaluation in 2017 and conducted several workshops on developing capacities of researchers and practitioners on conducting evaluation studies on extension.

Needs assessment and review of the extension situation in South Asia

AESA has conducted a needs assessment and review of the extension situation in Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. AESA has written five Working Papers and published them in the AESA website. These working papers are available through the following link: <https://www.aesanetwork.org/category/aesa-publications/working-paper/>

GLOBAL ROLE OF AESA

Over the years AESA has also played a significant role in global networks and institutions of Agriculture.

GFRAS

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) was established in 2010 to strengthen pluralistic demand-driven EAS by promoting policy advocacy, learning and networking (www.g-fras.org). GFRAS previously had a Steering Committee, whereas now it has a Board and General Assembly. It has been hosted at Agridea, Switzerland (<https://www.agridea.ch/en/>).

AESA has been represented in the Board almost since the beginning. GFRAS has networks all over the globe, including in the big continental networks such as AFAAS in Africa (<https://www.afaas-africa.org/>), APIRAS in Asia-Pacific and RELASER in Latin America (<https://relaser.org/>). AESA is a sub-regional network in South Asia. AESA is a member of the GFRAS Board and Rasheed Sulaiman V is currently representing AESA in GFRAS. Rasheed was the Chair of the GFRAS Steering Committee from 2014-2020. AESA contributed to the evolution and strengthening of GFRAS through participation in the GFRAS Steering Committee, shaping its New Strategic Framework (2016-2025), development of the GFRAS' 5-Year Operational Document and several other GFRAS initiatives related to Policy Advocacy, New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK) Development, and ICT4RAS Working Group of GFRAS. AESA represented GFRAS at several global and regional meetings as mentioned below.

- 2nd meeting of the Mekong Extension Learning Alliance (MELA) held in Myanmar in June 2016.
- Annual General Assembly of the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development (GDPRD), held at Brussels (1-2 February 2017), Belgium.
- ICT4D 2017: From Innovation to Impact, held at Hyderabad, India (15-18 May 2017).
- Steering Committee of Tropical Agricultural Platform (since 2019).
- FAO-GFRAS Working Group on Nutrition.

APIRAS

AESA is a member of the Asia Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network (APIRAS). Rasheed Sulaiman V and Md Sekender Ali from BAEN are currently representing AESA in the APIRAS Steering Committee. APIRAS was established in 2010, but the activities couldn't really move forward. It was earlier housed in the Philippines and after the project (SAAS) funded by IFAD got over in 2019, AESA has become the temporary caretaker of the APIRAS network. AESA is currently maintaining the Knowledge Management of APIRAS (www.apiras.net) network. It has redeveloped its website and updated it with several resources so as to offer more information on the Asia-Pacific region.

FAO-TAP

AESA was recently included as a member of the FAO-Tropical Agricultural Platform (TAP) in 2020 and AESA is a member of the TAP General Assembly (<http://www.fao.org/in-action/tropical-agriculture-platform/en/>). In Asia-Pacific, AESA is working with the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) on how to build the innovation capacity in agricultural research and extension in the Asia-Pacific (<https://www.apaari.org/>).

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2021-26

It was only seven years back, in 2014 that AESA started its journey in Asia. Although the need for having efficient and effective Extension Advisory Services (EAS) is very high in Asia, the legal situation in Asia is highly complex with regard to registering a new society/institution and raising funds. Despite the funds limitation AESA has performed extremely well, though it could have probably done much more if it had adequate funds. This has happened primarily because of the dedication of its founding members to keep moving against all odds. Today AESA is very well-known within the agriculture extension fraternity. Its knowledge management products are highly appreciated.

AESA's founding members strongly feel that the time has now come to take a leap and achieve much more – systematically and sustainably. These founding members strongly feel that the priorities that were identified in 2014 are extremely good and are valid even today. Taking these priorities into the next six years, AESA needs to consolidate what it does well and find ways to achieve what it hasn't been able to achieve yet. Analyzing the current status of the priorities, strength and weakness of AESA, in the next five years AESA will focus on the following strategic directions:

1. Consolidating knowledge management;
2. Strengthening capacity building;
3. Increasing members and followers;
4. Establishing remaining country forums;
5. Institutionalizing AESA;
6. Enhancing resource mobilization; and
7. Continuing with its global contributions on extension and advisory services.

The details of these strategic directions are:

Consolidating Knowledge management

1. **Increase knowledge product contribution:** AESA has a large number and variety of knowledge products on its website. While AESA has been able to generate lots of knowledge products, the load of developing such knowledge products is resting on just a few individuals. Contribution from member countries has not been equal. Some countries regularly contribute these knowledge products, while contribution from some other countries have been quite limited. AESA needs to encourage its members to spend time in developing and sharing such knowledge products.
2. **Add YouTube videos:** This came as a very good recommendation from AESA users in the February 2021 online survey. Recently YouTube has become a very popular medium for sharing videos and is being used in several sectors. Even in the field of agriculture, several dynamic individuals are making videos of good practices and posting them on YouTube. Many new-age farmers are also watching such videos. AESA could also have its dedicated YouTube channel. AESA ought to encourage its members, including extension professionals in the field, to develop videos of good practices from their domain and post them on the AESA YouTube channel with an AESA branding.
3. **Continue curricula reforms:** In the current phase AESA is initiating reform of the Agriculture extension curriculum in India at both graduate and master's level. Nepal and Bangladesh have also shown

interest in reforming their Agriculture extension curriculum. This is a very important initiative. AESA and country forums will continue this initiative in all countries and also work with the universities to adopt the revised curriculum.

Strengthening capacity building

1. **Roll out NELK:** During 2017-18, GFRAS developed the New Extension Learning Kit (NELK) to equip extension professionals with the latest developments in agriculture. NELK was shared with various member countries and a few workshops were held to promote it. Some of these modules are understood to be a part of the new extension curricula in India (waiting for final approval of ICAR). In Bangladesh, BAEN and AESA have together customized one of the NELK modules (Facilitation for Development) to the Bangladesh context. (<https://www.aesanetwork.org/news/baen-aesa-gfras-training-module-on-facilitation-for-development/>). NELK was also promoted in Sri Lanka by the Coconut Cultivation Board by organizing a training program for its field officers in 2019. However, there is not much information on how it is being used by extension professionals in the field in different countries. AESA and country forums will organize more workshops to popularize NELK. AESA will also follow-up and monitor how many extension professionals are using them and benefiting from it.
2. **Development of GCNA Methodology:** AESA led the development of the FAO-GFRAS Global Capacity Needs Assessment on integrating Nutrition into Extension and Advisory Services Programs and Policies. It also organized the pilot testing of this methodology in India. (<https://www.g-fras.org/en/gfras/1116-full-publication-global-capacity-needs-assessment-gcna-methodology-integrating-nutrition-objectives-into-agricultural-extension-and-advisory-services-programmes-and-policies.html>)





3. **Develop training modules:** CRISP has developed four training modules: (1) Enabling extension and advisory services for Climate Smart Agriculture; (2) Training module on value chain extension; Designing and Delivering Gender-Responsive Extension and Advisory Services (EAS); and Facilitation for Development. However, these were specifically developed for the Government of Odisha. Such training modules on specific topics are quite useful and would be quite handy for extension professionals to train farmers. AESA can develop several such training modules and conduct Training of Trainers (ToTs).
4. **Collaborate with governments for capacity building:** National and state/provincial governments are the largest employers of agriculture professionals, who are primarily responsible for development of agriculture in their area. In most cases, they need updated information and techniques in extension. Experience shows that things may not move if they are not pushed in government systems. AESA and country networks need to proactively collaborate with the government's Departments of Agriculture at the national and provincial/state level
5. **Develop extension certification:** From AESA's perspective certification is yet to start, but it is an important and emerging area for AESA. This doesn't mean that AESA will provide certification but it would promote this activity by promoting a discussion on extension certification and try to promote standards and sharing good practices/experiences around this. MANAGE has certified more than 1000 farm advisers (especially in different disciplines, such as super specialist doctor, for example in millet growing areas) as well as livestock advisers and these are pitched at three levels: 1st level is basic knowledge, 2nd level specialized skills, and 3rd level field knowledge. This is also been linked to the 'one district one crop' program. Agricultural Skills Council of India (ASCI) is a national level certification body and have qualification packs; MANAGE is also party to that for extension - extension supervisors, etc.

Increasing members and followers

1. **Launch membership drive:** AESA currently has 20,800 members in its Facebook page. While 20,000 is a good number, it is not such a high number given the population of South Asia. At the same time out of this 80% (17,642) are from India. There are very few members from Nepal (1,296), Pakistan (479), Bangladesh (135) and Sri Lanka (71), which surely needs to increase. AESA and country forums need to make deliberate attempts (by launching a membership drive) to increase membership number, so that more and more extension professionals could benefit from the efforts of AESA. Special effort must be made in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as their membership number is too low at present.
2. **Develop EAS directory:** GFRAS has started the community area (<https://www.g-fras.org/en/community/community-area.html>) on its website which was launched recently through a DLEC grant. It is a global directory where one can put their picture and their area of specialization, and that is something that can be accessed across the globe and AESA will promote this after resolving some technical glitches it has at present.
3. **Broad-base AESA membership:** For some reason the impression has gone around that AESA is an exclusive network for extension professionals with an Agriculture degree (MSc or PhD) and working in government or universities. AESA stakeholders strongly feel this impression needs to be changed and AESA should embrace people from any sector as long as they are engaged in Agricultural Extension. In addition to government and academics, AESA and country forums have to make deliberate efforts to reach out to the Corporate Sector (agriculture input and marketing companies), Special boards (Coffee Board, Coconut Board, etc.), NGOs and Rural banking and invite members.





Establishing remaining country forums

1. **Follow-up PEN in Pakistan:** Pakistan already has a network called Pakistan Extension Network (PEN), which is not registered. The AESA lead in Pakistan must follow up on this to engage it and submit papers for registration.
2. **Follow-up activation of NAEA in Nepal:** Nepal also already has a society called Nepal Agriculture Extension Association (NAEA). It is not active but is already registered. The AESA lead in Nepal has been transferred from central level to provincial level, so it will be difficult for her to activate it. She needs to identify someone within NAEA, stationed at Kathmandu, who could take the lead in Nepal and work to activate the society as well as work closely with AESA.
3. **Register a new society in India:** India already has a network called Indian Agriculture Extension Network (IAEN), which is not yet registered. AESA will find out if IAEN can work as the country forum and then help them in registration. If this option doesn't work, AESA will form a new forum and submit papers for registration under the Societies Registration Act. After three years of its formation, AESA can apply for registration under Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA).
4. **Encourage Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives to join:** Currently these three countries have not joined AESA. AESA should reach out to the Agriculture Department of these countries and convince them to join AESA. After that, AESA can start working with them to begin the process for formation and registration of country forums.

Institutionalization of AESA

AESA currently operates as a virtual platform hosted by CRISP. It is working perfectly fine for this purpose. However, this arrangement is not working for the purpose of Fund Raising. It is not possible to raise funds

from Indian sources for AESA, as it is a regional network. Therefore, it has now become essential to register AESA and get FCRA.

1. **Register AESA:** The following options exist for AESA to register
 - **Register as a Society under the Societies Registration Act:** This Act is most suited for NGOs in India and most NGOs in India have been registered as a society. A minimum of seven members are needed to register a society. Societies are eligible to apply for FCRA and income tax exemption under section 80G. Societies are eligible to receive grants.
 - **Register as a not-for-profit (Section-25) company under the Companies Act:** NGOs who wish to have any business type of activity (e.g., income generation program) prefer to register as a Section-25 company, as it allows manufacturing and marketing. Section-25 companies are also eligible to apply for FCRA and income tax exemption under section 80G. Section-25 companies are also eligible to receive grants.
 - **Register as a for-profit company (Private Limited Company) under the Companies Act:** Most consultancy companies prefer to register under this act, as it is run like a company. Pvt. Ltd. companies are not eligible to apply for FCRA and income tax exemption under section 80G. These companies are not eligible to receive grants. But they can receive income for service rendered and pay tax.
 - **Register in Bangladesh as a South Asian network:** Bangladesh has a very favorable environment for NGOs in the region. Some of its NGOs – such as Grameen and BRAC – are registered in Bangladesh but operate in other countries too. AESA can also explore to see if AESA could similarly be registered in Bangladesh and operate in the region.
 - **Register as an international NGO in India:** AESA can also explore if it might be possible to register AESA in India as an international organization.



AESA ought to review these options and consult with the relevant people and strive to register itself under one of these options. Till that time the current legal arrangement can continue.

2. **Develop constitution of AESA:** This is an activity that has been pending since 2014. When AESA was small (with fewer members), it was possible to run AESA as an informal network. But as AESA grows in size with new members joining and for long-term sustainability, it becomes necessary for AESA to have a properly developed constitution for its governance and operations. AESA must organize a wide-ranging consultation with its key stakeholders and develop its constitution.

Resource generation

1. **Identify sources of funds:** It is important to do a proper survey and identify sources or opportunities for raising funds at each Country forums level, and at the network level of AESA. Broad categories of funds are:

- Membership fee;
- Government funds;
- CSR funds;
- In-country international donors;
- International donors.

Each country forum will discuss internally and identify specific donors under each category with their specific funding schemes (if applicable) that are relevant to Agriculture or AESA. This needs to be further discussed at the AESA level and then pursued.

2. **Identify program ideas for fund raising:** To be able to raise funds, it is important to identify program ideas which AESA or country forums can deliver and that matches with the donor priorities or interest. This can be further discussed at AESA level and finalized.
3. **Support each other in raising funds:** AESA and country forums need to support each other in raising funds. At the sub regional network level AESA could identify international opportunities and pass them on to individual country forums. AESA may also identify multi-country funding opportunities and write joint proposals. AESA will also support country forums in writing proposals. Country forums could also pay membership fees to AESA. Country forums will also pay AESA for services they could receive from AESA. Country forums will also build-in some costs for receiving Technical Assistance from AESA.

Continue global contribution on extension and advisory services

1. **GFRAS:** AESA will continue to be a part of the GFRAS general body and will support GFRAS activities in future. While Dr Rasheed Sulaiman from AESA is no longer the Chair of the GFRAS Board after serving in that position for six years, some other member of AESA may become a member of GFRAS board.
2. **APIRAS:** Though AESA will continue to be a part of APIRAS in the future, it is trying to fix up an arrangement for a proper host for APIRAS so that the network can emerge as an independent network and work towards capacity development and advocacy of RAS in Asia.
3. **FAO-TAP:** Dr Rasheed Sulaiman from AESA is a member of the TAP Board. He will continue in this position and explore opportunities of mutual importance and promote innovation systems at that level.



STRATEGIC WORKPLAN

The following workplan provides broad guidance to AESA over the strategic plan period. Although the details cannot be fixed at this time, it can be used as a reference tool for the future.

S.N.	Strategic priorities	Key responsible person	Supporting person(s)	2021-22					
				Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
					J-S	O-D	J-M	A-J	A-J
1.1	Increase knowledge product contribution	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x	x	
1.2	Add YouTube videos	TBD	TBD			x	x	x	
1.3	Continue curricula reforms	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x	x	
2.1	Roll out NELK	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x	x	
2.2	Develop training modules	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x	x	
2.3	Collaborate with governments for capacity building	TBD	TBD			x	x	x	
2.4	Develop extension certification	TBD	TBD			x	x	x	
3.1	Launch membership drive	TBD	TBD			x	x	x	
3.2	Develop EAS directory	TBD	TBD						
3.3	Broadbase AESA membership	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x	x	
4.1	Follow-up activation of PEN in Pakistan	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x		
4.2	Follow-up activation of NAS in Nepal	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x		
4.3	Register a new society in India	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x		
4.4	Encourage Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives to join	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x		
5.1	Register AESA	TBD	TBD		x	x	x		
5.2	Develop constitution of AESA	TBD	TBD	x	x				
6.1	Identify sources of funds	TBD	TBD			x	x		
6.2	Identify program ideas for fund raising	TBD	TBD			x	x		
6.3	Support each other in raising funds	TBD	TBD	x	x	x	x	x	

* TBD – To Be Decided

2022-23			2023-24				2024-25				2025-26			
Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
J-S	O-D	J-M	A-J	J-S	O-D	J-M	A-J	J-S	O-D	J-M	A-J	J-S	O-D	J-M
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
x														
x														
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

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Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESAs) is a network of all those who are interested and involved in Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) in South Asia.

Our vision is to improve food and nutrition security through efficient and effective EAS in South Asia. Our mission is to promote sharing, learning, and networking for building effective and efficient EAS.

AESA is part of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS).

The Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) hosts the Secretariat of AESA. CRISP conducts policy-relevant research on agricultural extension and rural innovation.

