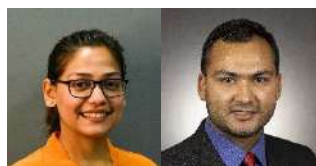




MY MEETING NOTES

The international Conference of the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education (AIAEE) University of Guelph, Canada
April 26–29, 2023



In this Meeting Note, Arati Joshi and Dharmendra Kalauni share their experiences from participating in the annual conference organized by the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education (AIAEE), at the University of Guelph, Canada, from 26 to 29 April 2023.

CONTEXT

The Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education (AIAEE), established in 1984, is dedicated to fostering connections among international extension and education professionals in order to promote collaboration and improve education and extension delivery systems (AIAEE, n.d.). It is a professional organization for agriculture and extension educators that shares a common goal of strengthening agriculture and extension education programs and institutions worldwide. The annual AIAEE conference provides a valuable platform for extension and education professionals to showcase their work, exchange ideas and connect with like-minded professionals. This conference attracts participants from various corners of the globe, including extension professionals, faculty members and students, offering an opportunity to exchange knowledge and promote meaningful collaborations.



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The recent conference, held at the University of Guelph in Canada from April 26-29 2023, focused on the theme of 'Technology, Pluralism, and Inclusiveness in Agriculture, Food, and the Environment'. The event had a significant turnout of extension professionals, faculty members and students from diverse countries, such as the United States, Canada, France, Trinidad and Tobago, India, Sri Lanka, and several others.

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

The conference commenced with a warm welcome session and opening remarks delivered by esteemed individuals, including the Honorable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Ontario; Dr Rebecca Hallet, Associate Dean of the Ontario Agricultural College; Dr Sean Kelly, Director of the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development; Dr Ataharul Chowdhury, Chair of the AIAEE conference; and Dr Mary Rodriguez, President of AIAEE.



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During the conference, Dr Pierre Labarthe, Director of Research at the National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE) of France, delivered an insightful presentation on microAKIS. This farmer-centric approach emphasizes the significance of advice in driving agricultural innovation. Dr Labarthe highlighted the crucial role of microAKIS in enhancing the exchange and utilization of knowledge and information within agricultural systems if sustainable farming practices and innovation are to be supported. His presentation shed light on the pivotal contribution that microAKIS can make toward promoting a more dynamic and resilient agricultural sector.

Another distinguished speaker, Dr David Nielson, Senior Advisor to the North American Agricultural Advisory Network (NAAAN), provided a comprehensive overview of NAAAN. This North American platform

brings together various advisory service organizations, including government extension services, with the common goal of promoting and supporting innovation, knowledge utilization, and information sharing across both rural and urban landscapes in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.



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Then, Mr Serge Buy, CEO of the Agri-food Innovation Council, spoke of the extension services available in Canada. He emphasized the presence of multiple extension service providers, who have greatly contributed to increased support for extension services in the country. Adding to the diverse range of topics discussed, Mr Gabriel Allahdua, an Activist-in-Residence from the University of Guelph, shared his insights on the significance of migrant farm workers in Canadian agriculture. He emphasized the importance of upholding farm workers' rights and described the countless challenges these workers face. These challenges include pervasive labor discrimination, inadequate protection measures, and exploitative practices. He further added that these farm workers faced even more troubles during the pandemic because of stringent regulations and lack of employment opportunities.

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

The conference featured a diverse range of research presentations – oral and poster – spanning two days.

Oral Presentations

The oral research presentations were organized into 14 different themes encompassing various areas of agricultural extension and research. These themes included: agricultural communication, needs assessment, gender studies, international extension experiences, cultural considerations, food systems innovations, methodological considerations, precision and climate-smart/resilient agriculture, organizational and leadership development, program evaluation, social media and information and communication technology (ICT), international development considerations, teaching, learning, and sustainable development goals, as well as “wicked problems”.

One of the sessions we attended was on needs assessment, facilitated by Dr John Diaz, Associate Professor & Extension Specialist at the University of Florida and current president of AIAEE. The presenters in this session shared their research findings pertaining to the needs of farmers and extension agents. Dr Vikram Koundinya, Associate Professor of Extension & Evaluation Specialist at the University of California, Davis, talked of the importance of participatory and culturally responsive needs assessment for determining research and extension priorities in crop production. He recommended prioritizing resources and supporting research and extension programs more directly so as to impact on-farm agronomic crop production that can meet the needs of all the relevant stakeholders as identified in different regions of California. Dr Matt Benge, Extension Assistant Professor at the University of Florida, discussed the competencies required for new extension professionals in Florida, emphasizing the need for agriculture-specific training to address the onboarding needs of these agents. Dr Jay Jayratne, Professor and Program Evaluation Leader at North Carolina State University, highlighted the training and competencies needed for extension agents in Uganda apropos genetically engineered crops. He emphasised the importance of capacity building beyond scientific aspects to include communication skills and indigenous knowledge perspectives.

In the session on methodology, facilitated by Dr Daniel Foster, Associate Professor at Penn State University, one of the presenters Ms Meikah Dado discussed the contradicting results obtained from common qualitative methods in an international context and emphasized the significance of prolonged engagement, reflexive journaling, and observations to address validity and credibility of research findings. She recommended prioritizing these methods in future mixed methods and phenomenological qualitative methods, particularly in international contexts, and suggests the use of member checking to validate and enrich the findings.

In two international extension experiences sessions – concurrently facilitated by Dr Usha Rani Joshua, Principal Scientist at ICAR Central Institute for Cotton Research, Coimbatore, India, and Dr Alexa Lamm, Professor of Agricultural Leadership, Education & Communication at the University of Georgia – the presenters discussed the challenges and opportunities of agricultural extension agents in Guatemala, Honduras, Taiwan, and Kenya. Extension agents in these countries encounter a range of challenges, including language barriers, limited transportation, inadequate economic resources, demoralization, communication issues with farmers, and trust-building difficulties. The study emphasized the use of social media as a training tool and the need for balanced collaboration to reduce competition among extension workers from different companies. Another presentation focused on the challenges faced in incorporating farmers' innovations and knowledge into agricultural extension service delivery in Malawi, highlighting different barriers to its implementation. The presenter explained that the consequence of limited knowledge-sharing opportunities for farmers can result in resistance towards agricultural extension services, particularly when new technologies or practices conflict with their existing knowledge and experience. This study recommended policy revisions to include farmers' roles in innovation development.

In the organizational and leadership development session facilitated by Dr Ataharul Chowdhury, Associate Professor of Capacity Development & Extension at the University of Guelph, the presenters emphasized the role of extension and advisory services in assisting farmers in Bangladesh to adapt to flash floods. It highlighted the significance of building organizational capacity to effectively address natural disasters. Additionally, Dr Sarah Bush, Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education and Communication at the University of Florida, shared insights on the diversity of perception for community viability in rural, urban, and suburban populations. Her presentation underscored the importance of recognizing and understanding the diverse perspectives within communities for promoting community viability.

In the program evaluation session, Dr Audrey King, Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education, Communication & Leadership at Oklahoma State University, shared the positive outcomes of student’s engagement in the service-learning project experiences they had in rural communities. Moreover, community members have a positive view of the program she said, and the students cherished the life experiences gained there, fostering relationships and witnessing rural resilience. Similarly, Dr Anil Kumar Chaudhary, Assistant Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education at Penn State University, discussed the challenges faced by extension agents in designing, delivering, and evaluating extension programs in urban and suburban areas of Pennsylvania. This includes a lack of resources in extension programs, gaps in understanding the actual needs of urban audiences, cultural barriers between participants and educators, lack of trust, competing needs among the participants, low compensation for the educators compared to what they put in – their time, effort and living costs in urban areas. Other complications include inappropriate location of urban extension offices, predominant agencies with similar interests and stakes as of extension, culturally irrelevant programming efforts, higher costs of attendance and others. In another presentation, Dr Chaudhary raised concerns about the credibility of extension program evaluation in urban and suburban contexts, citing challenges in the evaluation process. He explained that the evaluation tools used are not associated with these audiences, leading to irrelevant and questionable results. The evaluation focuses on attendance and satisfaction rather than on measuring change, impacting the trust between extension professionals and program partners. This study indicated a need for more relevant and trustworthy evaluation evidence in extension programs while addressing urban community needs.

The ‘wicked’ problems session featured insightful presentations on diverse topics. Dharmendra Kalauni (the co-author of this Note) discussed findings from mixed method needs assessment about wildlife-friendly landscaping among Florida residents, highlighting gaps and opportunities to promote public engagement. Dr Suanna Windon, Assistant Professor of Youth and Adult Leadership at Penn State Extension, addressed the stress experienced by farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the importance of extension support and resources for their mental well-being. Additionally, Ms Carrie Baker, graduate student at the University of Florida, explained community attitudes toward mental illness, providing valuable insights into this important social issue.

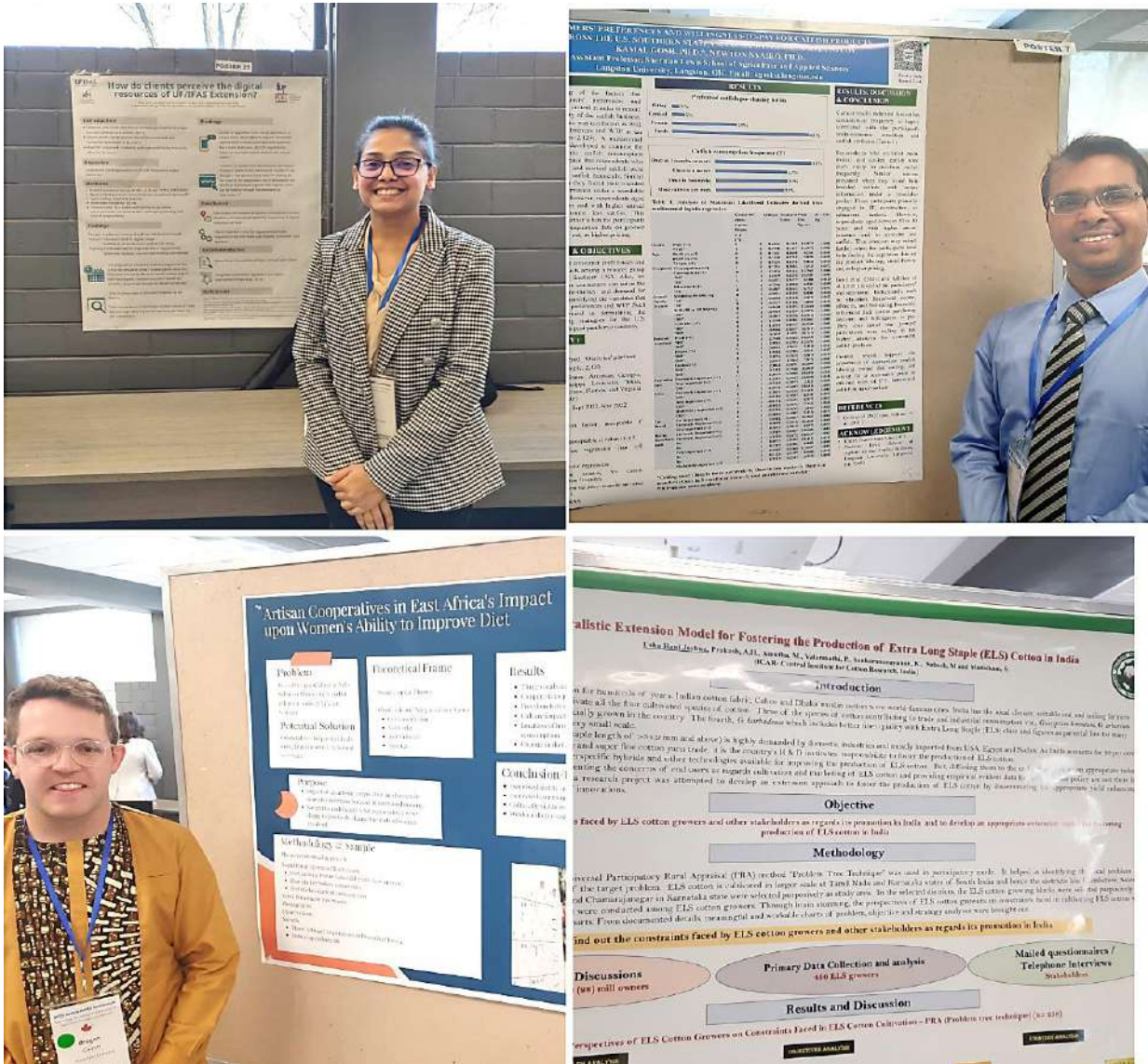


The details of other presentations can be found here: [Final April 26-29 2023 \(aiaee.org\)](https://www.aiaee.org/2023/04/final-april-26-29-2023/)

Poster presentation

The conference featured an impressive array of 45 poster presentations on a wide range of topics and findings. Among these presenters, Arati Joshi, (co-author of this Note) had the opportunity to share her study on the perception of clients regarding the digital resources of extension. Her presentation shed light on the challenges that clients encounter when utilizing digital resources and their need for improved extension outreach through digital platforms. The study revealed the difficulties extension clients experience while accessing information via the website, and highlighted the need for website updates and greater user-friendliness.

Details of other poster presentations can be found here: [Poster Presentation AIAEE](#)



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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

The conference offered a diverse range of professional development sessions and provided attendees with valuable opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge in various areas of agricultural extension and research. Dr Vikram Koundinya led a professional development session that addressed strategies for building the evaluation capacity of extension professionals who are not trained in evaluation by training them, providing resources, and mentoring over the evaluation process period. Another session focused on the use of Q methodology in research, with presenters from Virginia Tech, Penn State, and Texas A&M providing an introduction to Q-methods and engaging participants in data collection using this approach.

Details of other professional development sessions are given here: [Final April 26-29 2023 \(aiaae.org\)](https://www.aiaae.org)



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CAMPUS RESEARCH STATION TOURS

The conference started with an engaging research station tour at the University of Guelph, where we had the opportunity to visit the dairy and beef research stations, as well as the soil research unit. During the tour, we observed the Black Angus cattle used for meat production. Our knowledgeable guide provided insights into various aspects, including feeding practices, manure collection, sanitation, bedding materials for the cows, procedures for culling sick animals, veterinary care, and the process of selling cattle for slaughter. This firsthand experience allowed us to understand the comprehensive care and management practices involved in meat production. Similarly, we had an opportunity to observe the Holstein cows in the dairy section. The tour guide explained the intricacies of dairy cow breeding, the care provided to pregnant cows and calves, and the milking process utilizing Artificial Intelligence. We also gained insights into the sale of milk and value-added dairy products, and observed the complexities of the dairy industry.

At the soil research unit, our guide emphasized the vital role of soil in protecting vegetation and supporting microorganisms. To enhance our understanding, the guide facilitated a hands-on experiment where we buried a piece of cloth in the soil to observe the activity of microorganisms. The guide also showed examples of cloth previously buried by participants, demonstrating how it had been completely decomposed by microorganisms, thus providing tangible evidence of the soil's dynamic ecosystem.



To further promote networking and knowledge exchange, a student social event was arranged, offering students a valuable opportunity to expand their networks, learn from their peers, and enjoy delicious food while participating in entertaining games and activities.

The conference also hosted an Awards Reception and Dinner, dedicated to acknowledging and celebrating outstanding contributions in research presentations, journal articles, and exemplary theses and dissertations. During this event, among other awardees, we both had the honor of being recognized and awarded. Arati Joshi got a distinguished poster presenter award together with Colleen Gariton, Glenn Israel, and Sebastian Galindo for their study - 'How do clients perceive digital resources of UF/IFAS Extension?. Dharmendra Kalauni and John Diaz received a distinguished paper award together with Laura Warner, and Massed Yazdanpanah for 'Relating social norms and definitions of the self to understand the culture of water conservation'.

OUR EXPERIENCE

Participating in our first AIAEE Conference was an exceptionally enlightening experience for us. It allowed us to engage with extension faculty, professionals, and students from diverse backgrounds and broadened our perspective on Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) worldwide. The research presentations introduced several innovative and emerging concepts in EAS which swamped us with several ideas for research pursuits. The professional development sessions were instrumental in expanding our knowledge of research and extension practices. Besides these, we gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by extension professionals and clients on access and use of extension services. This motivated us to explore potential solutions and identify ways to leverage existing opportunities so as to enhance Extension Services and outreach.



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Beyond the educational aspects, the social events provided a delightful and significant opportunity to establish meaningful connections with fellow participants. These relationships will undoubtedly contribute to our personal and professional growth in the long run. Overall, the conference was a valuable experience that expanded our knowledge, fueled our motivation, and fostered meaningful connections within the larger extension community.

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