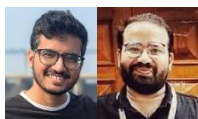




## MY MEETING NOTES

### AESA Panel Discussion on Beyond Traditional Roles: Career Options for Extension Graduates On February 27, 2025



In this meeting note, Ayush and Shakti share their experiences and key insights from organizing and participating in the AESA Panel Discussion on *Beyond Traditional Roles: Career Options for Extension Graduates*.

#### CONTEXT

The idea for this panel discussion—Beyond Traditional Roles: Career Options for Extension Graduates—emerged from ongoing discussions about the employment challenges faced by graduates in Agricultural Extension. Many rely on public-sector job notifications, which are often slow to materialize and highly competitive, leaving qualified candidates frustrated. In some cases, even those with advanced degrees (PhDs) feel compelled to accept positions typically reserved for bachelor's or master's degree holders. This situation made us question whether Extension graduates were unintentionally limiting themselves to government roles while overlooking broader opportunities in private companies, NGOs, and international organizations.



*Do you think careers in Extension are limited to the public sector? Think again.*

Panel discussion  
**Beyond Traditional Roles:  
Career Options for Extension Graduates**

AESA is bringing together a powerhouse panel of professionals who've successfully navigated their careers in the non-public sector. They'll share their journeys, challenges, and insights on what's next for extension graduates.



Scan here to  
**REGISTER YOUR INTEREST**



Upon reviewing the syllabus of Master's and Doctorate Extension programs, we realized that we were already familiar with many in-demand skills required in the non-public sector. However, a gap remains in translating theoretical knowledge into practical, real-world skills—an area where many Extension graduates feel underprepared.

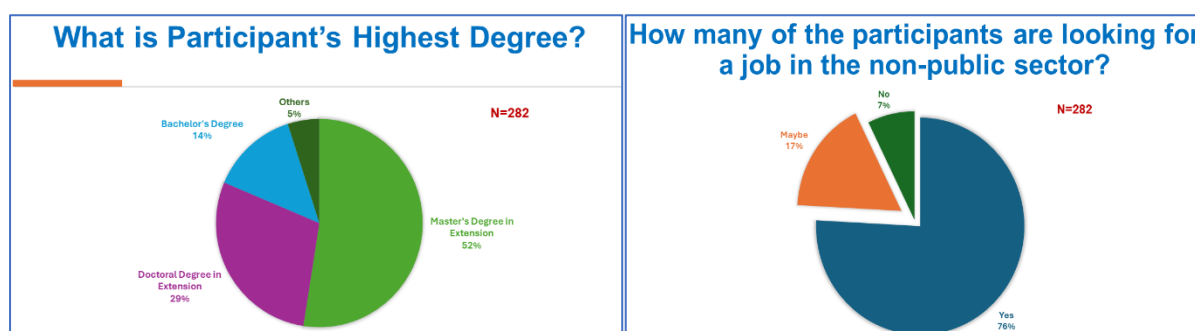
With this concern in mind, we approached the AESA team (Rasheed Sulaiman V and D. Alagu Niranjana) to explore alternatives in the extension sector beyond public-sector jobs and requested them to

consider organizing an expert discussion on this topic. Heeding to our request, the AESA team promptly organized a brainstorming session involving us, developed a concept note, and shared this with the panellists for their participation.

## PREPARATION FOR THE EVENT

During the brainstorming session, we decided to organize a panel discussion featuring individuals who have successfully navigated paths in non-public sectors. We believed that many other extension graduates sought similar opportunities. Moreover, our assumption was validated when we conducted a Google Forms survey and discovered that students from various agriculture educational institutions shared our concern. The majority of students expressed worries about their careers and uncertainty about their next steps after graduation.

We took on multiple roles to ensure the panel discussion ran smoothly and addressed participants' key concerns. First, we drafted questions based on a brainstorming session with Rasheed and Alagu, covering core themes such as career opportunities, skill requirements, core competencies, and industry expectations. To gain participant perspectives, we circulated a Google Forms survey before the event, gathering concerns about job opportunities by degree level, global opportunities, and job security. We then analysed and summarized this survey data in a PowerPoint presentation, giving panellists a clearer picture of the audience's backgrounds, motivations, and information needs.



During the discussion, we handled multiple technical aspects, including admitting participants, ensuring a smooth technical experience, moderating the chat, and curating audience questions. By organizing the Q&A segment to include both our prepared questions and participant submissions, we aimed to foster an engaging and informative discussion that addressed the real-world concerns of Agricultural Extension graduates seeking non-public-sector opportunities.

## THE PANEL DISCUSSION

Our discussion featured three distinguished panellists from various institutions:

- **Dr. Suchiradipta Bhattacharjee (Researcher, IWMI)** – A leader in policy analysis, climate change adaptation, and digital agriculture with extensive experience in participatory governance, water management, and smallholder prosperity. Her contributions to India's Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy 2020 underscore her expertise.
- **Dr. Krithika Sundaram (Manager, Shroffs Foundation)** – An expert in rural development, research, communication, and stakeholder engagement. With a Ph.D. in Agricultural Extension and a background in national journalism, she skilfully blends storytelling with development to create lasting impact.

- **Dr. Archana Bhatt (Scientist, MSSRF)** – A specialist in qualitative social research, Indigenous Technical Knowledge (ITK), and food security. Her work in conserving traditional rice varieties in Wayanad reflects her deep commitment to sustainable agriculture and community resilience.




## Panel discussion Beyond Traditional Roles: Career Options for Extension Graduates

*Our Speakers*



**Suchiradiptha Bhattacharjee**  
Researcher, Water Governance  
International Water Management Institute



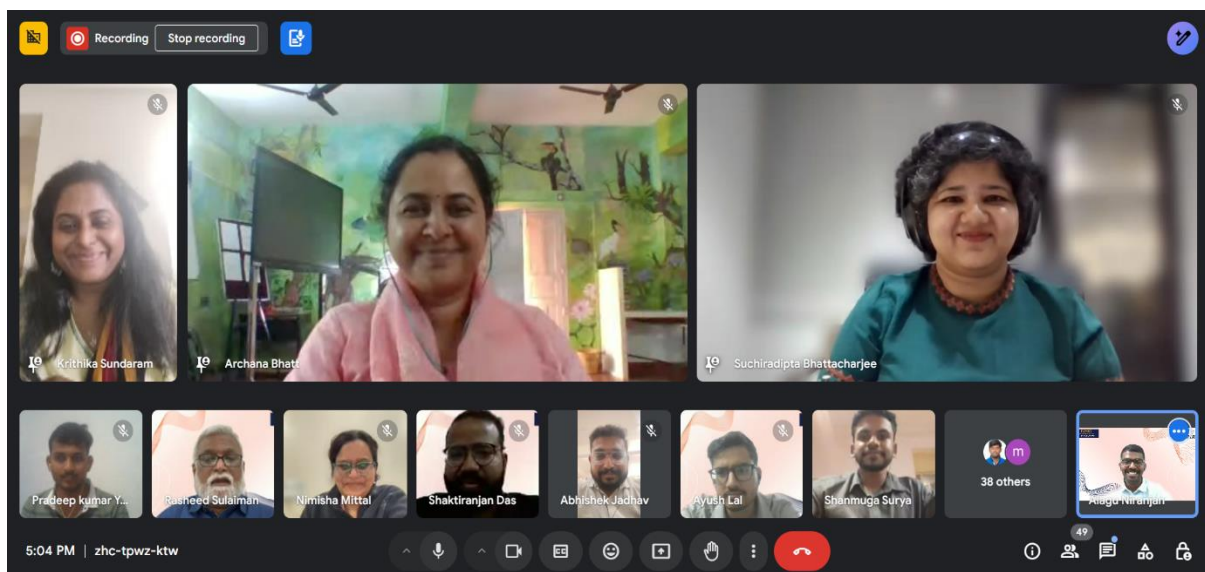
**Krithika Sundaram**  
Manager, Social Research & Documentation  
Shroffs Foundation



**Archana Bhatt**  
Scientist, Community Agrobiodiversity Centre, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation

 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025  
 03:30pm (IST)  
 Google Meet  
<https://meet.google.com/zhc-tpwz-ktw>

The event began with Rasheed's opening remarks, emphasizing that job opportunities for extension graduates extend beyond the traditional public sector. He explained that many students face anxiety and uncertainty upon graduation due to slow job notifications, competitive vacancies, and an overreliance on public-sector employment. His remarks set the stage for exploring new career paths and encouraged graduates to develop skills suited to a wider job market. Throughout the session, Alagu played a crucial role as the moderator, guiding the discussion with insightful questions, simplifying detailed answers, and prompting deeper conversations when critical points arose. His efforts ensured the panellists' responses were comprehensive and kept the discussion engaging and solution-oriented.



## Key Discussion Points and Highlights

### 1. **How did the panellists transition into their current roles?**

Panellists discussed their experiences transitioning from completing academic programs to their current roles, highlighting the initial anxiety and lack of guidance. They emphasized that developing diverse skills through field experience and internships was critical in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and the practical demands of the job market.

### 2. **Did they find their degree in Agricultural Extension helpful in securing their current jobs?**

The panellists reflected on how their academic qualifications provided a foundation, but real-world job performance required additional on-the-job learning. While extension degrees build the basics, true upskilling comes from engaging with communities and understanding practical challenges. They highlighted that a background in Agricultural Extension offers an advantage, especially in technical aspects, participatory methods, and community engagement. However, graduates have not effectively tapped into these opportunities.

### 3. **Are we job-ready?**

A significant portion of the discussion revolved around the need for continuous learning and the importance of internships. The panel stressed that building competencies in research methodologies, data analysis, project management, data visualization, and effective communication is crucial. They encouraged graduates to read widely and actively seek opportunities by thoroughly examining job descriptions rather than focusing solely on job titles.

### 4. **Is job security a myth or reality?**

When asked about job security, the panellists acknowledged that while no career is entirely secure, staying relevant through continuous skill enhancement can lead to growth and long-term stability. They urged graduates to view calculated risks as opportunities to broaden their career prospects rather than being confined to a limited public-sector mindset.

The panel discussion addressed our questions while also challenging, motivating, and encouraging us to think differently. A few powerful words shared by our panellists are,

*"I've learned the hard way. What I tell myself is—let others reject you before you reject yourself. Do not comment and decide on the specialization that you have; let the recruiters decide you have the specialization. Just apply."*

-Suchiradipta Bhattacharjee

These words helped us regain confidence in facing competition when applying for jobs in these sectors, reminding us not to self-reject before even trying.

*"Instead of asking whether the job is secure, ask yourself how you can make yourself indispensable to the job. That is what is very important. Your degree is a passport, I would say, but it's how you upgrade your skills, diversify your skills, adapt to the job market, and build your technical expertise that truly matters."*

-Krithika Sundaram

This perspective dispelled our doubts about job security, a common concern that often deters us from exploring opportunities beyond the public sector.

*"Success in the NGO or CSO sector requires both research and development-oriented skills, which differ significantly. Development work demands strong capacities related to community mobilization, networking, and the ability to communicate in simple language to varied stakeholders. Additionally, skills related to project cycle management is crucial, as NGOs operate in a project-based mode—from planning and implementation to evaluation and impact assessment".*

-Archana Bhatt

We also realised that learning some of these additional skills is important to pursue a career in the NGO sector.

### Key Takeaways for Extension Graduates

From these discussions, several key takeaways emerged for Extension graduates looking to expand their career prospects. They are,

- Do not limit yourself to public-sector jobs; explore opportunities in private firms, NGOs, CSOs, research organizations, and consultancy roles.
- Develop research-oriented skills, including qualitative and quantitative analysis, digital tools (e.g., SPSS, STATA, Canva), and adaptability to different environments.
- Improve writing and communication skills for diverse audiences.
- Acquire digital skills for social media management to effectively express research ideas and build professional networks.
- Look beyond job titles and carefully examine job descriptions to identify relevant opportunities that may not explicitly mention "Agricultural Extension."

### PERSONAL REFLECTION AND ENDNOTE

As a member of the organizing team, we found the panel discussion to be an eye-opening experience that resonated deeply with the challenges faced by extension graduates. The candid discussions about the gap between academic training and real-world job demands reinforced the need for proactive skill development and the pursuit of diverse career pathways. We were particularly inspired by the emphasis on internships, the importance of reading beyond job titles, and the encouragement to take calculated risks. This event not only broadened our understanding of the employment landscape but also taught us how to better organize webinars by assessing participants' needs and bringing in the right resource persons who can effectively address those needs.

You may access the recording of this event [here](#).

*Ayush Emmanuel Lal is a Research Intern at the Centre for Research on Innovation in Science Policy (CRISP). He holds a postgraduate degree in Agricultural Extension and Communication from Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology, and Sciences, Prayagraj. His research interests are adoption behaviour and gender issues in agriculture. He can be reached at [ayushlal0712@gmail.com](mailto:ayushlal0712@gmail.com).*

*Shaktiranjan Das is a Research Intern at the Centre for Research on Innovation in Science Policy (CRISP) and a PhD scholar in agricultural extension at Visva-Bharati University. His doctoral research focuses on the agripreneurial ecosystem. He can be reached at [shaktiranjandas92@gmail.com](mailto:shaktiranjandas92@gmail.com).*

**AESA Secretariat: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP)**

**Road No 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India**

**[www.aesanetwork.org](http://www.aesanetwork.org)**

**Email: [aesanetwork@gmail.com](mailto:aesanetwork@gmail.com)**