

The 15th GFRAS Annual Meeting
Rural Advisory Services in Higher Education and in Agricultural Policies and Programs
10- 13 November2025, Dakar, Senegal



More than 400 participants from 40 countries and diverse sectors attended the 15th GFRAS Annual Meeting, which explored the challenges and opportunities in rural advisory services, higher education, and agricultural policy. Dr. Mahesh Chander shares his reflections on the experience.

CONTEXT

The [15th GFRAS Annual](#) Meeting was held from November 11–13, 2025, in Dakar, Senegal, with side events on November 10. The event was organized in collaboration with the Agence Nationale de Conseil Agricole et Rural (ANCAR) and the Réseau des Services de Conseil Agricole et Rural d'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre (RESCAR-AOC). It offered a platform to share knowledge and experiences on the Rural Advisory Services' role within education, policy, and agricultural strategies.

The program included sessions, visits, dialogues, panels, and an exhibition. The GFRAS network and partners discussed the theme: 'Agricultural Advisory Services in Higher Education and Policies.' They examined the skills, training, and systems needed to integrate Rural Advisory Services (RAS) effectively. In countries like the U.S., rural advisory education and research are well-established, exemplified by land-grant universities with a triple mandate of teaching, research, and extension. Similar models exist in India and elsewhere. In contrast, many Francophone African nations have limited RAS-focused research and curricula, with few specialists in advisory methods. Many rural advisors start as technicians before moving to advisory roles. New curricula are emerging but face resource constraints. This institutional diversity enriches RAS practices worldwide.



The Dakar meeting examined these issues through four key thematic areas:

- Research and Education on RAS
- Role and Position of RAS in Agricultural Development Policies and Strategies
- Role and Position of Country Fora in Agricultural Development Policies and Strategies
- Institutional Anchoring and Governance of Rural Advisory Structures

THE INAUGURATION

The conference was inaugurated by Dr. Mabouba Diagne, Senegal's Minister for Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Livestock, who expressed hope and highlighted the importance of agricultural higher education in advisory services. He called this a step towards sustainable, inclusive, resilient agriculture, supported by support from President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko. Agriculture and livestock are becoming pillars of economic sovereignty with a budget of 130 billion FCFA. Prof Daouda Ngom, Minister of Higher Education, announced the establishment of a Centre of Excellence in Agriculture and Rural Council to boost skills and innovation. With AFD's annual support of over 1.5 billion euros, Senegal leverages the Agricultural Council for development. The leaders' efforts inspire other countries, especially in the global south. Representatives from GFRAS, ANCAR, RESCAR-AOC, and AFD emphasised the importance of integrating agricultural advisory services into higher education. The opening speakers hope the meeting marks a shift from reflection to action to build a sovereign, efficient, and prosperous agriculture.

COUNTRY FORA DISCUSSION

Country Fora (CF) are national multi-stakeholder platforms uniting actors involved in rural advisory services (RAS), enabling them to exchange information, share lessons, and collaborate to improve services. They aim to evolve into leading institutions that guide RAS development in their countries.

As foundational units of regional networks, Country Fora enable two-way information exchange—sharing country-specific realities with regional and global levels—and serve as an entry point for international initiatives aimed at enhancing RAS and rural livelihoods. Their role is therefore crucial in anchoring diverse and responsive advisory systems.

During the Dakar meeting, GFRAS Country Fora from [Nigeria](#), [Uganda](#), Jordan (part of AFRAS), and [Madagascar](#) shared their experiences. They highlighted insights from their respective regions:

- How Country Fora serve as mechanisms for coordinating and governing rural advisory services.
- How they might be adopted or customised in countries where they are not yet present.
- The types of official acknowledgement they obtain, such as legal recognition, funding structures, and their integration into public institutional systems.
- Their role in enhancing collaboration among RAS actors and in meeting the specific needs of end-users, particularly farmers.

Among these, the Nigerian Country Forum (NIFAAS) is one of the most active and organised, followed by the Uganda Forum for Agricultural Advisory Service (UFAAS). NIFAAS partners with the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS), Ahmadu Bello University, the Federal Department of Agricultural Extension (FDAE), and the Agricultural Extension Society of Nigeria (AESON).

These collaborations have strengthened NIFAAS's institutional base and enhanced its operational effectiveness. The UFAAS, a professional network in Uganda, connects AEAS actors and is part of [AFAAS](#).

An important recommendation from the discussions was updating the GFRAS New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK). Participants suggested developing "NELK 2.0" to reflect new competencies and institutional needs in the evolving extension landscape. One proposal was for NELK to include a practical guide on creating and managing Country Fora to help countries establish or strengthen these platforms.

Can a medical doctor practice without completing an internship? If not, how can someone join agricultural advisory services without proper qualification and internship?

- Beatrice Luzobe, CEO, Uganda Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (UFAAS)

The side events were organised on 10th November and mainly showcased key demand-driven and inclusive approaches of RAS in Agroecology, youth engagement, digitalisation of RAS, and mainstreaming women in RAS.

MY PARTICIPATION

I presented a keynote titled "Governance of Extension and Advisory Services," Which was well received due to common challenges in rural advisory coordination across the Global South. Many participants asked, "What are the solutions?" I highlighted the need for a Department of Coordination within national extension systems to harmonise efforts, prevent duplication, and optimise resources, thereby enhancing rural development impacts.



Additionally, I participated in the GFRAS Write-shop on 8–9 November 2025 as part of the GFRAS Extension Strategy Task Force for 2026–2036. After months of online planning, this in-person event fostered deeper discussions and collaboration, advancing our strategy development.

FIELD VISITS

Participants were divided into groups of 40 to 50, organised by language (French-speaking and English-speaking). Each group was assigned a dedicated bus to visit four different field sites:

- APMK Cooperative Society
- Processing Unit of the Keur Moussa Women Producers and Processors Network
- Market Garden Farm of a Young Agripreneur
- Farmer's House (ANCAR–OCP Initiative)



A facilitator accompanied each group to guide discussions and ensure adherence to the one-hour time limit at each site. Interpreters supported the English-speaking groups by providing on-site translation. To optimise time, meal packs were provided on board for coffee and lunch breaks during travel between sites.

APMK Cooperative Society

The office bearers shared that the society, active in production, marketing, input supply, and storage of market garden products (especially potatoes), was established in 2001. It has 1,200 members and operates 1,500 ha. Member services include distribution of potato seeds, fertilizers, and fuel for irrigation; purchase of about 1,500 tons of potatoes; use of cold storage for 1,000 tons to defer marketing and secure better prices; and advisory services for capacity building, production monitoring, adopting good practices, innovations, and market access. A good practice was the regular renewal of governance bodies and conflict resolution by elders respected for their honesty.

Processing Unit of the Keur Moussa Women Producers and Processors Network

It was active in processing local products like mango, grapefruit, lemon, and cereals. The network included 16 village-based women's groups (GIEs) with 1,037 members. It operates two units for cereals, fruits, and vegetables, supported by agricultural advisory services from Italian NGOs and projects (AICS, PIESAN, PROVALE-CV). These services helped strengthen management and market access. The women shared experiences in product valorization. Despite infrastructural challenges, the network addressed women's needs in advisory support, partnership, and improving working conditions and income. Notably, they used solar energy for processing in an area lacking basic amenities.

Market Garden Farm of a Young Agripreneur

A young agripreneur's market garden farm showcases youth integration into agriculture and job creation. After an unsuccessful illegal migration attempt, he established his Farmer Hub with support from the Syngenta Foundation, focusing on greenhouse nursery production and marketing, creating five permanent and nine temporary jobs. The hub also serves as a site for testing agricultural innovations and

incubating youth. He increased his income, invested in greenhouses, and expanded into poultry farming. Initially discouraged from farming because his parents' traditional practices were not financially rewarding—and after unsuccessful attempts to migrate to Europe—he turned to innovative agriculture. With support from the Syngenta Foundation, ANCAR, and a local university, he embraced new approaches that ultimately led to his success.

Farmer's House

Farmer's House exemplifies a public-private partnership (ANCAR-OCP), a new initiative by multinational OCP to connect producers with agricultural inputs and services through forums, 'BoutikMbay,' and advisory support, fostering business links.

THE CLOSING

Dr. Mabouba Diagne, Senegal's Minister of Agriculture, attended the closing as Chief Guest, where the audience size exceeded the inaugural session. He praised the participation and committed to improving agricultural advisory services through better coordination, convergence, and funding. He appreciated insights from international experts, citing examples from Vietnam, China, and the Netherlands showing how effective Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) enhance farmer capacity, modernization, and exports. The importance of adopting global best practices was highlighted. Mrs. Gifty Narh Guiella, RESCAR-AOC President, presented the [Dakar Declaration](#).



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Transform Agricultural Education: It is urgent to update curricula regularly to develop human capital for rural progress and create jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture.
2. Professionalize Agricultural Extension & Advisory Services (EAS): Proactively strengthen EAS at all levels. Introduce mandatory internships for practical experience and skill development.
3. Enhance EAS competencies regularly to meet farmers' and stakeholders' evolving needs.
4. Strengthen EAS's role in farmer organisations by actively organizing groups and building their capacity to manage Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).

5. Accelerate EAS Digitalisation: Digitalization is crucial for EAS. Building digital skills among EAS professionals ensures accessible, inclusive, and universal advisory services.
6. Leverage the strengths of robust and active country forums to support less developed ones and to help establish new ones when needed.
7. Build capacities for agroecology and organic farming: The shift to sustainable agriculture requires new skills among EAS professionals. Capacity-building in agroecology and organic farming is essential.
8. Engage youth in agricultural value chains: EAS should prioritise targeted programs, investments, and mentorship to attract and retain youth in agriculture.
9. Promote women's entrepreneurship in rural areas by organising women for ventures to make EAS more inclusive, equitable, and impactful.
10. Develop NELK 2.0: The GFRAS New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK) has been transformative. Now, it is time to create NELK 2.0, including new developments, tools, and skills needed in the evolving AEAS landscape.

Dr Mahesh Chander is Principal Scientist (Agricultural Extension) and Former Head, Division of Extension Education, ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Izatnagar-243122 (UP). He can be contacted at drmahesh.chander@gmail.com.

I am grateful to GFRAS/ AGRIDEA for sponsorship & thankful to ICAR, Ministry of Home Affairs & Ministry of External Affairs for necessary permission & clearances.

AESA Secretariat: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP)
Road No 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India

www.aesannetwork.org

Email: aesannetwork@gmail.com