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MY MEETING NOTES

National Workshop on
Capacity Needs Assessment of Extension and Advisory Service (EAS) Providers
6-7 October 2015, Hyderabad, India
Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP)
National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM)

CRISP and NAARM co-organized this workshop to identify capacity gaps among extension professionals and to develop a methodology to undertake capacity needs assessment among extension professionals in India. P V K Sasidhar who participated in this workshop shares his experiences here.

CONTEXT

Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) need new capacities at different levels to effectively deal with the new and evolving challenges faced by rural communities. While the importance of developing new capacities among EAS providers is increasingly recognized, there is very little appreciation and acceptance on the need for a systematic Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) to guide Capacity Development (CD) interventions. Undertaking CNA is critical for organising appropriate CD interventions. CNA is a capacity-strengthening process in its own right, and this process is as important as the outcomes. While several approaches and tools on CNA exist, these are yet to be adapted and used in the context of EAS. Lack of a clearly articulated list of core competencies for EAS adversely affect the recruitment of new staff, professional development of existing staff and also the quality of professional education in extension. The workshop was organized to achieve the following two objectives:

1. Identify capacity gaps among EAS providers
2. Finalise a methodology for undertaking capacity needs assessment.

PROGRAMME

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION

The meeting started with a very brief and informal opening ceremony. D Rama Rao (Director, NAARM) welcomed the participants and this was followed by a one minute self introduction by each participant. This unique and short ice-breaking introduction helped participants to know each other and individual and / or their organization's role in EAS delivery in India. The introduction session revealed that the participants represent over 20 organizations with diverse backgrounds and experiences across sectors in EAS delivery.

Rasheed Sulaiman V (Director, CRISP) made a presentation to introduce the context, the preparatory work (e-discussion and the review paper) undertaken before the workshop and the objectives of the workshop. His presentation focused on the diversity of actors in EAS provision, the challenges EAS faces, the importance of performing new tasks and the need for new capacities at the individual, organizational, and systems/enabling environment level. However, to organize appropriate capacity development programmes, we need to undertake a systematic assessment of capacity needs, he argued. This introductory presentation set the background for the rest of the two days meeting.

SESSION 2: VISION MAPPING - FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT

This session started with a card exercise. The rationale behind this exercise was that before we explore new functions and new capacities, we should assess the current functions being performed by different organizations engaged in EAS provision. A perusal of the displayed functions reveal a diverse functions being carried out in EAS delivery across the public, private and NGOs sectors.

This was followed by two presentations. The first presentation by Rasheed focussed on the new challenges before EAS and the new functions to be performed to address these challenges. The second presentation by R K Tripathi (Director - IT and Extension, Directorate of Extension, Ministry of Agriculture) focused on the National Mission on Agricultural Extension and Technology (NMAET). He discussed the changing nature of support farmers require (based on the calls

received through Kisan Call Centres) and the need for convergence at ground level for effective EAS delivery. This was followed by a group exercise.

The participants were divided into four groups and they discussed the current and new functions of EAS based on the following three questions:
1. Are the current functions performed by EAS adequate?
2. What other functions have to be performed?
3. Why these new functions are not being performed or not performed effectively?

The outcome of this exercise was presented by the facilitator identified in each group:

Group	Are the current functions performed by EAS are adequate?	What other functions have to be performed?	Why these new functions are not being performed or not performed effectively?
Group 1	No (routine type of functions)	1. Networking with other EAS providers 2. Field interaction 3. NRM extension in view of climate change 4. Linkages - AAA (awareness, acceptability and availability) 5. Project formation	1. No accountability 2. Lack of effective M& E system 3. Financial and human resources challenges
Group 2	Inadequate (farmers needs not addressed)	1. Shift to demand driven from existing supply driven EAS 2. Address entire value chain – end to end 3. Inculcate entrepreneurship 4. Address food safety 5. Consumer focus	1. Gap in capacity assessment and frontline working in EAS 2. Need assessment for different categories of farmers not done 3. Lack of training resources for EAS (TTCs) 4. Lack of convergence.
Group 3	Inadequate	1. Knowledge management 2. ICT / digitized EAS 3. Market linkages 4. Supply chain management 5. Convergence	1. Farmer centered EAS 2. Competency level of EAS? 3. Human, financial and infrastructure resources? 4. Need assessment? 5. ICTs and location specific packages through KVKs.
Group 4	Inadequate	1. Focus on KASA changes 2. Value chain & input services 3. ICTs 4. Mobilizing farmers organizations 5. Inclusiveness 6. Enabling policy	1. Inadequate manpower Inadequate capacity 2. Confining to mandates 3. Administrative flaws 4. EAS to Extension advisory and input services (EAIS)

The presentations were followed by group discussions.

Introduction to the 'New Extensionist'

Rasheed while presenting the essence of "The New Extensionist: Roles, Strategies and Capacities to Strengthen EAS" summarized the new capacities needed at different levels. This was followed by a group discussion on the three levels of capacity development. The discussion highlighted the

importance of technical (knowledge on new technologies/practices/standards/regulations) leadership, problem solving, partnership building, reflective learning, and brokering) capacities among EAS providers at the individual level and also the need for generalists and specialists in EAS

provision. As all technical and functional capacities won't be found in one single individual/organization, emphasis was to be placed on targeting capacity development to the nature of the task to be performed.

SESSION 3: INTRODUCTION TO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In two brief presentations, R M Prasad (Ex-Assistant Director-Extension, KAU) discussed the core concepts of competency, capacity, capacity development vs. training, capacity assessment; capacity needs assessment and types of capacities. The FAO and UNDP frameworks on capacity needs assessment were also discussed.

SESSION 4: CAPACITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Asset Mapping

Two exercises were conducted as part of this session.

The first exercise was conducted to assess existing capacities at the individual level. Three cards (different colours) were provided to each participant (one for each level) and they were asked to list out existing capacities of extension staff in their organisations at three levels:
- field level – pink card
- middle management level – yellow card
- senior management level – green card

These existing capacities were organized on three flannel boards separately for field level, middle management level and senior management level by the participants.

In the second exercise, the participants were divided into four groups and each group discussed the areas where new capacities are required. The groups also discussed some of the existing capacities that need to be strengthened at the same levels (field, middle management and senior management) in EAS (irrespective of organisational affiliation). The identified functions were organized on the flannel boards by the four groups and from each group a facilitator presented the exercise outcome.

SESSION 5: CAPACITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT AT THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

This session started with a presentation by N H Rao (Principal Scientist, NAARM) on "Competency Based Management of Human Capital in Organizations". He discussed the concepts of strategic management, competencies and competency models (Iceberg model of competencies), strategic challenges for ICAR/NARS in EAS delivery, interconnects between organizational strategy and competencies management, and Competency Management System (CMS) for agricultural extension.

This was followed by a presentation on new capacities that are needed at the different levels. Rasheed in his brief presentation introduced the new capacities required at organizational level:

- Institutions that enable sharing, interacting, learning
- Strategic management functions
- Structures and relationships
- Processes, systems and procedures
- Values, incentives/rewards
- Human and financial resource
- Infrastructure

Appreciative Inquiry

In this session, through a paired card exercise, individuals reflected on significant past achievements in their organisations to identify factors that led to the success. Participants are paired and each one interviewed the other to enquire on the organisational elements that contributed to the success and recorded this in the cards. The identified success factors were organized on the flannel boards by the individuals.

The participants were again divided into four groups with one facilitator in each group. Each group identified the desired capacities at organizational level and presented the findings.

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Experiences Sharing:

The workshop had several short presentations from different organizations belonging to the public, private and NGO sectors. The presentations were focussed on capacity development among EAS providers. Anish Kumar, (Team Co-Lead, Transform Rural India (TRIF), New Delhi) explained how capacities were developed among community resource persons at Pradan and how they were transformed to service providers who offer a wide range of services to farmers on cost basis. Vasumathi (Vice President, BASIX) shared the experiences of Basix in providing extension support to producers and the lessons the organization learnt during the three phases of its evolution. Girish G Sohani (President, BAIF Development Research Foundation), drawing upon the experience from the livestock sector, stressed the importance of regular CNA for EAS professionals as the context, perspectives and engagement with stakeholders are rapidly evolving. C Sasidhar (Manager - Agri Services, ITC) shared the experiences of ITC's Agribusiness Division in strengthening capacities of its staff mainly drawing from the experience of e-choupal. S N Ojha (Principal Scientist, CIFE) shared the experiences from the fisheries extension sector based on studies that focused on capacity gaps in this sector. P.V.K. Sasidhar (Associate Professor, IGNOU) shared the details of USAID- MEAS ongoing project 'Assessment of Core Competencies of Livestock Extension Professionals in India'. He presented the project survey instrument intended to measure core competencies of livestock extension professionals in India. Soumen Biswas (Lead- Partnership & PMRDF, NRLM, GOI) shared his experience from Pradan and NRLM on community based EAS and the challenges in ensuring convergence across different programmes.

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SESSION 6: CAPACITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT AT THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT LEVEL

Rasheed in his brief presentation introduced the new capacities required at enabling environment level:

- Macroeconomic policies, incentives to increase production
- Political commitment to agricultural development
- Availability of policy framework
- Capacity of policy making bodies to adapt policies based on learning
- Capacity and willingness of other actors to share resources and engage in joint action
- Institutions that facilitate collaboration
- Availability and access to inputs.

This was followed by a group discussion. Everyone agreed that a different set of participants at higher level is required to assess capacity development needs at enabling environment level. Moreover, those who can fairly represent different actors in the Agricultural Innovation System (AIS) are also important for a discussion on this topic as capacities needed at the enabling environment cut across different actors in AIS.

SESSION 7: STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES OF EAS IN INDIA -- WAYS FORWARD

The capacity development needs at individual (field level, middle level and senior level) and organizational levels identified by the four groups in the above sessions were summarized on four charts under the following heads:

a. Capacity development needs of field level individual
b. Capacity development needs of middle level individual

c. Capacity development needs of senior level individual
d. Capacity development needs at organizational level

Dotmocracy -- Priority Setting on Capacity Development Needs

Dotmocracy is a facilitation methods used to describe voting with dot stickers. Participants vote on their favourite options using a limited number of stickers. It works well with large groups (e.g., 20–30 participants), in situations when a quick 'read' of the group feelings are required and when participants are not able to engage in very rigorous and analytical ranking processes.

In this exercise, each participant was provided with three dots (red stickers) per chart and they were invited to place the dots on top three priority capacity needs in each chart. Thus each participant placed three dots in all the four charts and prioritized top three priority capacity development needs at the individual (field, middle, and senior) and organizational level.

Top Priority Capacity Development Areas

Field level individual
1. Providing handholding / technical know-how, farm advisory
2. Community mobilization / farmers organizations development
3. Timely advice
Middle level individual
1. Convergence, networking, coordination, linkages and partnership development
2. HRD, team building and leadership
3. Planning-identifying need based programmes
Senior level individual
1. Visioning, strategic planning and futuristic approach.
2. Advocacy - for policy changes / institutions based upon demand / feedback.
3. Convergence, networking and partnerships
Organizational level
1. Clarity in the role, goal, mission, vision and mandate
2. Networking / convergence
3. Focus on HRD of staff – motivation and team building

SESSION 8: HOW DO WE BETTER ADDRESS THE PRIORITISED CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

The World Cafe

This was a group interaction session focused on conversations to discuss the way forward on how to implement the top three priority areas identified through Dotmocracy exercise in the above session.

The participants were divided into four groups. They sat around a table and held a series of conversational rounds lasting for 10 minutes about the way forward to implement the above three top priority capacity needs at each level. At the end of each round, the facilitator in charge of each table remained there as the host, while the others moved to other table. The hosts welcomed newcomers to their tables and shared the essence of that table's conversation so far. The newcomers deepened the conversations so far through their insights as the round progressed. This process continued until all the four tables were visited by everyone in four sessions. Finally the four hosts from the four tables presented the outcome of the discussions on ways to implement the top priority capacity development needs at each level.

SESSION 9: CLOSING SESSION

Before the closing session, participants were given one card each for feedback on both the positive and negative aspects of the workshop anonymously. This was followed by an open feedback of the participants about the workshop. In her closing remarks R Kalpana Sastry (Joint Director, NAARM) appreciated the organisers of this workshop for their planning and implementation of this workshop.

WHAT I LEARNT

The workshop provided conceptual clarity on capacity needs assessment, different frameworks used in capacity needs assessment, new challenges in EAS delivery, new functions of EAS providers and capacity gaps among EAS providers – individual (field level, middle level and senior level) and organizational levels.

Learnings included application of some approaches, tools and exercises on Capacity Needs Assessment in the context of EAS. The workshop also provided some feedback on my project questionnaire on "Assessment of Core Competencies of Livestock Extension Professionals in India".

MY IMPRESSIONS

This workshop was a methodically planned event with the following pre-workshop activities:
- e-discussion
- Review of literature
- Interaction with key stakeholders, and
- Publication of a well prepared background review paper on capacity needs assessment.

The workshop with 9 sessions was very well organized meeting with 28 selected participants representing about 20 different organizations in EAS delivery. The representation covered the public and private sectors, NGOs and agri-business organizations from different parts of the country. The short presentations on theoretical concepts followed by individual and group exercises involving all the participants resulted in a successful and exemplary workshop. The organizers have plans to conduct similar workshops in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. "A Facilitators Guide on Capacity Needs Assessment of EAS Providers" based on overall exercise is being planned.

Presentations and other workshop related details are available at:
http://aesa-gfras.net/aesaeventscategory.aspx?category=workshop and also at:
http://crispindia.org/index.php/events/

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