aesa Sharing, learning and networking for innovation Blog: 300 (November 2026) Agricultural Extension in South Asia

HEY EXTENSION STUDENTS, YOUR JOBS ARE STOLEN

In this blog, Alagu Niranjan urges extension graduates in India to explore employment opportunities outside academia and government.

Over the past 3+ years at CRISP, I've done research, knowledge management, website management, volunteer coordination, and mentored and recruited interns and research assistants. This journey has taught me many lessons. One is that extension graduates are often left out of the vast research and development job market.

The title, “your jobs are stolen”, can be misleading if you take it literally. However, many job opportunities where extension graduates (having MSc and PhD degrees in agricultural extension) would perform best go to graduates with multiple different degrees but similar skills. By "different degrees," I mean courses that don't require agriculture as a core subject but do teach skills like conducting literature reviews, collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative field data, and writing reports (especially for different audiences). In short, neither the job market nor the recruiter cares whether you have an agriculture degree. If you don’t understand this, you won't move forward and find jobs that are more rewarding than academic jobs in government institutions.

While reviewing applications for CRISP’s Internships and Research Assistant/Associate positions, I noticed a few interesting patterns that contrast our extension graduates from others.

1. You are not trying: Only 2 of 10 applications are from extension graduates. This shows you are not even competing for positions that can offer a different worldview.
2. You are not presenting well: Among those who apply, many are not reading the job description well and are not customising their CVs Rather, you share a poorly formatted recent CV of yours without a proper email subject and message. Though you may have the skills needed for the position, your presentation makes your skills and experience hard to find in the CV.

3. You are not speaking confidently: Very few extension graduates who enter the discussion/interview part of the recruitment are speaking confidently. This may be because our ICAR/SAU system discourages you from communicating confidently with seniors and staff. During an interview with one of the extension graduates, I noticed the candidate could not move away from their research topic and work. For every question, even the personality-related ones, their responses connected to their PhD research.
4. You don't have any work experience: The other 8 of 10 applicants are not perfect, but they have something to show on their CV. Many of them had multiple short internships (1-3 months) from multiple organisations.

If you are not trying, presenting and communicating well, and building work experience, your skills and knowledge will have no meaning or space in the non-governmental sector. Some of you may think, *"I am preparing for ARS and Assistant Professor Positions; why should I care?"*

Here are some interesting data points. My estimate, based on last year's ICAR AICE (31st) Online Counselling Brochure-2026 for PG and PhD positions in Extension (all branches), is that the ICAR/SAU system alone admits over 750 PG and 400 PhD students. This does not include private universities and non-accredited agricultural universities.

This means over 1200 students graduate from PG and PhD programmes in extension education in India each year. However, last year's ARS notification offered only 28 ARS positions and 4 SMS positions, for a total of 32 vacancies. Even if we hypothetically assume that SAUs advertise five times as many Assistant Professor positions as the number of ARS and SMS vacancies combined, that would translate into only 160 university positions annually. Let us be generous and round this up to 200 vacancies a year. Compare that with the more than 1,200 students graduating from PG and PhD programmes in extension education each year. The gap between candidates entering the job market and potential openings is hard to ignore.

Some of you may still say, *"I only need one job, and I will be among those 200".*

I respect your confidence. However, the reality might not support that confidence. If you have to make 3-5 ARS attempts and 8-10 AP interviews and still cannot make it, you'll not only lose a job but also years with your family. Not everyone will have the privilege of making 3+ ARS attempts and 8+ AP interviews. So, it is better to start early and explore opportunities on the other side.

If you are wondering where to start, last year we at AESA organised a Panel Discussion on "Beyond Traditional Roles: Career Options for Extension Graduates" to show our extension graduates the other way. Explore the meeting video and the notes online.

Also, start working on the 4 observations I made at the beginning of this blog.

1. Start trying: Please start applying for the positions where part of you can fit in. It is like getting on the metro or bus during peak hours. Just try to put yourself in the position of applying and appearing for an interview. Do not look for words such as "extension" or "agriculture" in the job descriptions. Apply if you find keywords such as field research, facilitation, training, communication, data analysis, report writing, etc. Follow pages that showcase job opportunities in the NGO and Private Sector where you could fit, for example, "AESA Suggests" on LinkedIn.

2. Present yourself better: Do not use boring Times New Roman fonts and stale tables in your CVs Also, do not make your CV run for 8-10 pages. Make it short, crisp and palatable. Beyond presenting yourself well on paper (CV), present yourself well in the interview: dress well, speak audibly, and sit in proper lighting (if appearing online).

3. Speak confidently: Do not hesitate to describe your work experiences. The interviewers are not there to listen to what is already in your CV. Be real when answering questions exploring your personality (for example, a question about your level of curiosity and reading habits).

4. Start interning: Do not rest during the semester holidays. Go to the nearest NGOs or Private organisations for internships/ volunteering. Have something beyond your degree in your CV.

To conclude, your jobs aren't stolen; you just never bothered to explore what is on the other side.

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