



# Assessing Capacity Needs of Extension and Advisory Services in South Asia: SYNTHESIS REPORT

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### **Assessing Capacity Needs of Extension and Advisory Service in South Asia: Synthesis Report**

**AESA (2016)**

Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESAs) is a network of all those who are interested and involved in Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) provision in South Asia ([www.aesa-gfras.net](http://www.aesa-gfras.net)). Our vision is to improve food and nutrition security through efficient and effective EAS in South Asia. Our mission is to promote sharing, learning and networking for building effective and efficient EAS.

AESA is part of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS). The Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP) hosts the Secretariat of AESAs. CRISP conducts policy relevant research on agricultural extension and rural innovation.

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Any opinions expressed are those of the authors.

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# Capacity Needs Assessment of Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) in South Asia: Synthesis Report

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) has articulated a new vision for Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) within the Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS). This vision articulated in its position paper, called the “New Extensionist”, argues for an expanded role for EAS (Box 1) within AIS and development of new capacities at different levels. The motive behind the development of the “New Extensionist” comes from the realisation that the existing EAS need new capacities to respond effectively to the emerging challenges in agricultural development (declining water availability, increasing soil degradation, and changing and uncertain climate and markets). In the past few years, capacities in EAS to perform their traditional roles such as training and communication of technical information have eroded. Meanwhile, the extension landscape has become increasingly pluralistic with greater participation of the private sector. All these warrant new knowledge, skills, and expertise among EAS providers.

### Box 1: What is EAS?

Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) consist of all the different activities that provide the information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural settings to assist them in developing their own technical, organizational, and management skills and practices so as to improve their livelihoods and well-being'. It recognizes the diversity of actors in extension and advisory provision (public, private, civil society); much broadened support to rural communities (beyond technology and information sharing) including advice related to farm, organizational and business management; and facilitation and brokerage in rural development and value chains. Source: (GFRAS, 2012)

In addition to linking research to farmers, EAS is crucial for all other actors in the AIS involved in (a) delivery of credit and inputs; (b) provision of training and other services; and (c) marketing and policy development (Figure 1).

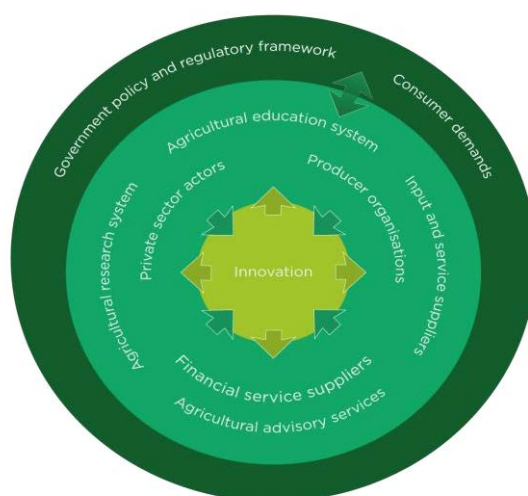


Figure 1: Agricultural Innovation System (Source: GFRAS, 2015)

To undertake the linking or bridging role effectively, EAS need to broaden their mandate and strengthen their capacities. The increasing pluralism in EAS delivery has also brought an additional challenge of ensuring quality, collaboration and synergy among diverse EAS providers.

One of the major priorities identified during the first meeting of the AESA (Agricultural Extension in South Asia) network was capacity development of EAS providers. The participants agreed that much more needs to be done to strengthen the capacities and deal with the rapidly evolving challenges in agriculture (AESA, 2014). The first step in this direction was to assess the capacity gaps among the EAS through undertaking a capacity needs assessment at the national level in select countries in the region.

## 2. PROCESSES

### 2.1 Pre-Workshop Activities

Several preparatory activities were undertaken before this workshop. These are depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Pre-Workshop Activities

#### 2.1.1 E-Discussion

From 4 June 2015 to 26 June 2015, AESA organized an e-discussion on “Capacity Development for Extension and Advisory Service Providers in South Asia”. Twenty-four extension professionals participated in this discussion.

#### 2.1.2 Literature Review

An essential feature of capacity development is a common understanding of what capacity and capacity development mean. To some the terms are synonymous with workshops and training. For senior managers, it might mean organizational development. Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) associate the terms with empowering individuals and grassroots organizations. In the case of international agencies and donors, capacity and capacity development is about national institutions, governance and economic management (Horton 2002).



Another related issue is the lack of systematic efforts to identify the capacity needs of EAS providers, which should be the starting point for organizing capacity development. Though a range of tools and approaches exist for assessing capacity at different levels, the tools are not used in designing capacity development interventions in EAS. We undertook a literature review on different dimensions of capacity, capacity development and capacity need assessment.

### 2.1.3 Interactions with different stakeholders

To know more about the current approaches followed in capacity needs assessment, we interacted with different stakeholders involved in capacity development of EAS in India. We interacted with several extension organizations and those engaged in capacity development of EAS in India. This helped us in understanding some of the existing mechanisms for capacity development and capacity needs assessment followed in the country.

Similar interactions were organized by our partners in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal prior to the workshop to understand the landscape of CD interventions in these countries.

### 2.1.4 Development of the Working Paper

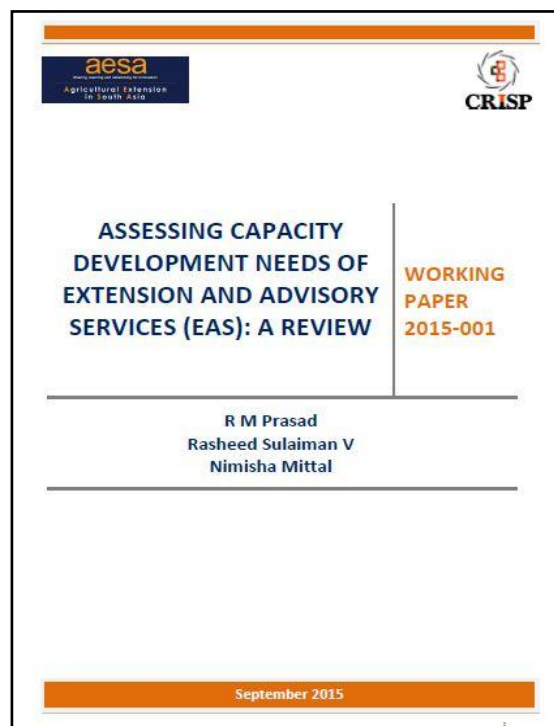
This paper discusses the key concepts and dimensions of capacity, capacity development and capacity need assessment and provides the outcomes of the e-discussion and insights from interactions with the different stakeholders.

It also presents the findings from the need assessment of capacities to support or enable agricultural Innovation, drawing from the work of the Tropical Agricultural Platform, aspects related to capacity development of EAS and specific experiences from India (CRISP, 2015).

## 2.2 Workshop

AESA organised four workshops on Capacity Needs Assessment for EAS in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal with the following objectives.

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



S No	Country	Partner	Dates	Location	Number of participants	Number of organizations
1	India	ICAR-National Academy of Agricultural Research Management	6-7 October 2015	Hyderabad	34	20
2	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka Agricultural Extension Association	10-11 February, 2016	Peradeniya	24	18
3	Bangladesh	Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network	27-28 February 2016	Manikgonj	24	15
4	Nepal	Nepal Agriculture Extension Association	31 May - 01 June, 2016	Kathmandu	38	15

The list of participants is in the annexure.

### 3. OUTPUTS

#### 3.1 Capacity Needs

These workshops identified the capacity needs of EAS providers at the individual and organizational levels in the four countries. These are summarized below:

#### Capacities Required by Field Level EAS Functionaries

The field level EAS functionaries have the most direct engagement/contact with farmers/rural communities. They need to have sound technical knowledge relevant to crops and enterprises in the specific context and functional skills related to communication (oral and written), mobilization, facilitation and use of ICTs including social media. Capacities for assessing farmers' needs and planning based on these needs and capacities to support farmers in marketing are other priority needs identified during the workshops.

**Table 1: Capacities required by field level EAS functionaries**

S No	Field level	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	Nepal
1	Communication skills including use of ICTs	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Sound technical knowledge	✓		✓	✓
3	Community mobilization, Farmer organization development and Facilitation skills	✓		✓	✓
4	Need Assessment of farmers and planning based on these needs		✓	✓	
5	Capacities to link farmers to markets		✓		

## Capacities Required by Middle Level EAS Functionaries

EAS personnel at the middle management level should have more skills related to networking, coordination and partnering. Capacities to build teams, coach and mentor their subordinate staff are also important. They also need to have sound technical knowledge and should possess skills to use ICTs and capacities to plan and design need based programmes.

**Table 2: Capacities required by middle level EAS functionaries**

S No	Middle level	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	Nepal
1	Capacities to network, partner, establish linkages and coordinate actions of different stakeholders and achieve convergence	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Leadership, Team building, Coaching, Mentoring and Organizing CNA of subordinate staff	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Planning and designing need based programmes	✓			
4	Technical knowledge				✓
5	ICT Skills			✓	

## Capacities Required by Senior Level EAS Functionaries

EAS functionaries at the senior management level should have capacities for effective engagement with policy makers and should have leadership and managerial capacities. They also need capacities for visioning to design strategic plans for the varied scenarios that might emerge. Human and Financial resources are the major assets of an organisation and so efficient mobilization of these resources is critical for the success of EAS.

**Table 3: Capacities required by senior level EAS functionaries**

S No	Senior level	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	Nepal
1	Policy engagement and policy advocacy including development of relevant policies and generating evidence to influence policy	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Leadership, Organisational Development, Networking, Partnership Development, Regulation, Negotiation and Mentoring	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Visioning, Strategic planning	✓		✓	
4	Resource mobilization				✓

## Capacities required at the organizational level

Every EAS should have a clear vision, mission and goals, a system for managing its human resources and an organisational culture that supports collaboration, networking and learning. It should have a system of good governance, a system for knowledge management, resources to achieve its goals and a result based management system in place.



**Table 4: Capacities required at the organisational level in EAS**

S No	Organisational level	India	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	Nepal
1	Clear vision, mission, mandate and goals specifying a broader role for EAS	✓	✓		✓
2	Human Resource Management (well defined job profile, procedures and chain of command)	✓			✓
3	Culture of collaboration, networking and learning in EAS	✓	✓		
4	Good Governance (accountability to clients, transparency, fair rules related to employee placement and promotions)				✓
5	Resource mobilisation			✓	
6	Knowledge management (infrastructure, tools and networking)			✓	
7	Result Based Management			✓	
8	Recognition of the role of extension as a distinct discipline and profession		✓		

### 3.2 How to strengthen/enhance capacities?

Once the capacity gaps are identified, the next step is to find ways of addressing these gaps through capacity development interventions. These interventions must be appropriate to the level at which the staff are employed with focus on the organisational level capacity development at the same time. The workshops came out with a number of methods to strengthen capacities beyond training individuals at different levels which has hitherto been the most frequently used method for capacity development. These are as follows:

- 1. Strengthening education and training curricula:** Review existing curricula (both education and training) for capacity development at regular intervals; develop cases and good practices that can be used for training; develop, pilot test and refine training modules; and develop technical manuals, fact sheets and posters.
- 2. Organise continuous professional development programmes:** Include topics that provide capacities to support application of new technologies and processes in production, processing /value addition and marketing; enhance communication (oral and written), mobilization, and facilitation skills; use ICTs including social media; undertake capacity needs assessment; promote successful networking, collaboration/partnerships and convergence; facilitate project management including monitoring and evaluation; and engage with policy actors.
- 3. Organise mentoring programme:** Link staff to work closely with mentors identified for different themes (Mentoring is an important mechanism for capacity development where an experienced person uses his greater knowledge and expertise to support the personal development of another).
- 4. Develop a directory of EAS providers:** Develop a directory of EAS providers working at different levels with contact details, thematic and geographical focus and specialization

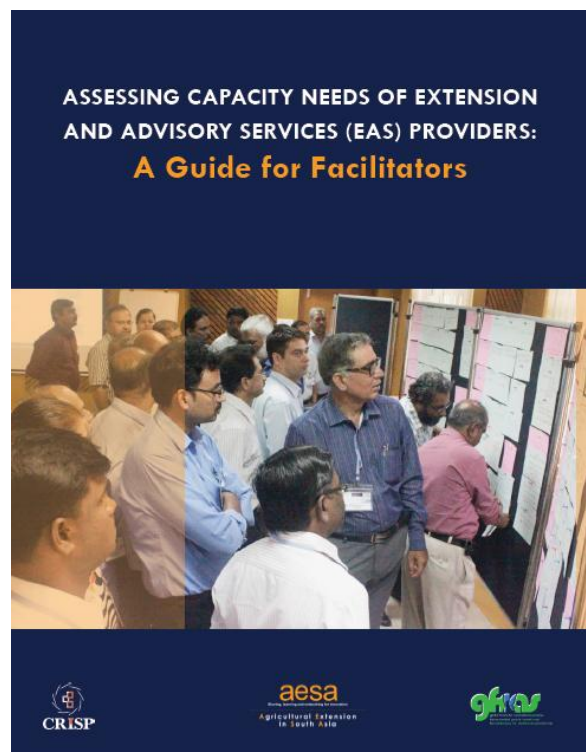
to help everyone know the different initiatives happening in their region and enhance possibilities for collaboration.

5. **Create platforms for regular consultations:** There should be a platform for EAS providers at different levels for regular consultations with other stakeholders/ partners at different levels. This will help address issues of similar concerns, foster collaborations, prevent duplication of efforts and optimize of resources.
6. **Strengthen knowledge management:** Establish a web portal for EAS and develop different interest groups using social media applications (e.g.: Facebook, WhatsApp) to promote knowledge sharing.
7. **Digitize work environment and promote ICTs:** Provide modern ICT tools (e.g.: tablets with relevant pre-loaded content, smart phones) to EAS staff with sufficient/ adequate resources to use data cards/data plans.
8. **Visioning and goal setting:** Establish well-articulated vision, mission and goals for the organisation and revisit these say once in five years. Evolve transparent and participatory mechanisms for client interactions as well as for internal process within the organization. Use external consultants to support these processes.
9. **Encourage reflection, learning and feedback:** Organise reflective learning sessions with staff and organise annual retreats to reflect on past performance, and collectively devise strategies for better performance. This would help in team building and strengthening team cohesion.
10. **Promote cross learning within the EAS ecosystem:** Organise training programmes for staff of other EAS providers. For instance, NGOs having experience with community mobilisation can organise training for public sector EAS staff. Similarly public sector research organisations can organise training on technical aspects to private and NGO staff. Also depute staff to participate in exposure visits, workshops, seminars, conferences organised nationally and internationally.
11. **Strengthen strategic management:** Hire consultants and advisors to provide strategic advice on specific areas.
12. **Human Resource Development:** Develop systems and procedures for Human Resource Management and organise sessions on manpower planning.
13. **Fund raising:** Develop a small team for resource mobilization.
14. **Gathering evidence:** Commission studies for evaluation and assessing impact.
15. **Policy engagement/Influencing policy:** Strengthen capacities to develop and use evidence to influence policies that impact EAS and also develop a national extension policy.

### 3.3 Facilitators Guide

We developed a Facilitators Guide for Assessing Capacity Needs of EAS. This guide builds on the outputs of the four National Workshops held at India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal and it uses a blend of interactive approaches for different sessions with tips for facilitators for effective delivery. This guide is intended to assist facilitators in conducting a workshop with Extension and Advisory Service (EAS) providers for assessing their capacity needs.

This guide can be used as a standalone document / procedure for assessing the capacity needs of the extension and advisory service providers. However, using this guide for CNA has greater value if the outputs of this exercise are linked to a capacity development process. Moreover, this process also needs to be organised from time to time to identify new capacity gaps (AESA, 2016).



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## 5. ANNEXURE

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