E-commerce trainings

E-commerce can be utilized as a powerful tool for women’s empowerment in upcoming economies. For women entrepreneurs in Pakistan, especially those with small businesses residing away from urban centers, access to e-commerce brings additional information resource, and open new communication channels. Keeping in mind the remote areas in Sindh and Balochistan and availability of internet, the appropriate training can enable small and medium enterprises to tap into local and national markets. This will stimulate the rural economy by connecting buyers with remote sellers who might have a competitive advantage with their price points, traditional goods, and organic food items / material which is now becoming increasingly popular among the urban population.

Understanding the importance of imparting this knowledge to communities, GRASP organized a two-day training session focused on women entrepreneurs in Balochistan. Thirty-seven practicing and upcoming businesswomen learned about E-commerce and digital employability, e-market places used by domestic buyers such as Daraz, and ways they could sign up on platforms and access information leading to trade. They were also trained on ways to market their goods and services on Facebook and Instagram, and opportunities in working as freelancers if their academic and research skills were sharp.

Lack of formal trainings, social issues, an unstable political and security situation are major impediments for imparting skills to women for effective and lucrative trade. GRASP is filling the gap by holding trainings relevant to the market dynamics in various districts of the province. The e-commerce training will prove particularly beneficial to these businesswomen, as their physical movement is very limited, but their online presence can make a positive impact on their trade.

GRASP through ECI has also held training sessions for women around Agro-entrepreneurship where 266 individuals, over half of which were women, have been trained on basics of business, key business skills, Agri-marketing, and business modeling in Khuzdar, Lasbela, Pishin, Quetta, and Zhob district in Balochistan.
**Sindh policy work**

To improve domestic agriculture production, effective policies play a major role by providing guidelines, conducive environment and directions to be followed. They help farmers to use improved inputs, and get the maximum benefit from their practice, ultimately reducing poverty. Policies also commercialize small holder agriculture and increase value addition of the products; a theme GRASP is working on by selecting specific products in 23 districts of Sindh and Balochistan.

Improvement of government institutions is vital for the formulation and implementation of effective policies, and currently GRASP team in Sindh is working to assess the capacities and needs of the Livestock Department, Sindh. A requirement specification document for the Livestock Management Information System is being developed, which will also evaluate the departments requirements on creating an information system and data center. A workshop organized by GRASP on 28 July 2021, representatives from the animal husbandry, planning, disease control, fisheries and poultry department intimated about their data and reporting requirements.

Simultaneously, department of agriculture is being assisted by the project where the Sindh Agriculture Policy is being reviewed, and gap analyses being conducted. Once finalized, recommendations against policy gaps identified will be presented to the department, to solidify the document and have it ready for public use.

**Training of trainers**

Three-day long training session on meat safety manual developed by GRASP for Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) from 5 to 7 August 2021 in Quetta. Deputy Directors, Assistant Directors, Food Safety Officers, and Inspectors from Balochistan Food Authority, Provincial Livestock Department and Local Government Municipal Corporation were the trainees. They learned how to operate slaughterhouses as per best international practices, livestock and carcass handling, slaughterhouse hygiene and sanitation, waste disposal and byproduct utilization. The training session concluded with a visit to New Slaughterhouse Quetta (not yet functional) where participants were briefed on the operational protocols of a slaughterhouse. Secretary Food Department Mr. Noor Ahmad Pirkany, and Director General BFA Ibrahim Baloch participated as chief guests.

**Value addition**

Twenty-five women and 10 men from the agricultural community in Khairpur attended training sessions on Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) on 12 and 14 July 2021. Similar sessions on Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)in compliance with food safety and quality were held in Khairpur on 13 and 15 July, attended by 28 women and 12 men. Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) in food processing areas were the main topic, which aimed to build the knowledge of the participants on regulations, requirements, and food safety measures to make the produce of SMEs market competitive.

**Bringing the youth focus back to rural**

Micro entrepreneurship sensitization in youth,
particularly in rural areas of Pakistan is very important for the agricultural and economic growth of the country. There is an urgent need to develop an agro-entrepreneurship mind-set to spur proactivity among farmers and make agriculture more attractive among the youth.

Youth play an important role in the future development and sustainability of agriculture in Pakistan. Their current negative perception of agricultural prospects is influenced by poor working conditions and pressure from family to find employment opportunities in urban areas. The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation.

GRASP is addressing that problem by developing appropriate trainings targeted towards young farmers on Agro-entrepreneurship, and impact stimulating a genuine interest amongst the young in areas of agricultural production and Agro-entrepreneurial activities.

For this purpose, GRASP has been training the youth in Balochistan on topics relevant to whole value chain. These training sessions aim to enhance their business and marketing skills, and impart to them knowledge about business management, financial planning, and safe trade practices in the current environment.

Originally a part of the GRASP regular implementation, these trainings were fast tracked as the Covid-19 pandemic adversely affected the SME’s and smallholder farmers, particularly those residing in rural areas. Limited economic activity meant lower job prospects for an already job strained market for the youth of Balochistan.

Dr. Jalal from Quetta is one of the participants, who has done his MPhil in veterinary parasitology. He attended a five-day Training of Trainer session organized in Quetta. The training has been hugely beneficial to Dr. Jalal in his professional endeavors, and to several rural communities he has been transferring the knowledge to.

Balochistan’s economy relies on its livestock, with most of the rural population involved in rearing or trading their animals. However, the economic returns are not significant, with Balochistan still lagging behind the rest of the country when it comes to standard of living, job availability, and social development. Dr. Jalal believes Balochistan has a lot of potential but is far behind when it comes to skills that are useful in the market or will give the farmers’ and SMEs produce competitive edge.

“Lots of people here own livestock but don’t even know what an entrepreneur means. Many of my friends own chickens or goats and given timely information and equipped with knowledge of market operations, they can convert it into a profitable business. Agriculture farmers, livestock farmers, and landowners of any scale are going to benefit immensely from basic financial literacy. They are already putting in the effort, but with this knowledge, which brings to us technical knowhow, market information, innovations, and tips on how to handle a new venture, their efforts will find a direction. After that, success will be inevitable”, says Dr. Jalal

Dr. Jalal gearing up to partner with local NGOs to train rural communities and working on developing a manual on Livestock management for farmers in Balochistan. Inspired by the training, he has dedicated a chapter in his manual on ways to turn livestock farming into a profitable business. He is confident that the new information he has incorporated in his own life from the training, will be equally beneficial to whoever reads his manual.
News in brief

Two days training on e-commerce and digital employability was held in Quetta where 30 participants/entrepreneurs from Quetta Chambers of Commerce, Quetta Chambers of Small Traders, Balchistan Horticulture Cooperatives Society and officials of Industries and commerce department were trained.

GRASP Sindh lead is a part of the Provincial SME Working Group, and along with Department of Industries and Commerce, work is being done to develop Sindh SME Strategy.

GRASP team in Sindh is working with Department of Agriculture to draft a new Sindh Agriculture Wholesale Market Act.

GRASP in media

GRASP beneficiaries from Sindh featured on a web story by Dawn.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1638399/bovines-for-sale-how-sindhs-rural-women-are-becoming-skilled-entrepreneurs

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission

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Join our Facebook group to stay updated on project activities and milestones, at https://www.facebook.com/groups/1097343917347186 and our official web page at https://www.intracen.org/GRASP/