Events marking International Women’s Day held

**Sindh:** A panel discussion was held in Karachi to celebrate International Women’s Day 2021 in Karachi. GRASP along with Sindh Research and Development Foundation organized the event. Agriculture Minister Sindh Mr. Ismail Rahoo, Minister Women Development Ms. Shehla Raza, and women’s rights activist Ms. Nazo Dharejo were some of the attendees along with rural women, and representatives from government, development sector, academia, and think tanks.

Rural women in Sindh have been a particular focus of GRASP for its COVID-19 emergency response, with trainings aiming to furnish their skills in agriculture, horticulture and livestock, enterprise development, and e-commerce. Their linkages with local markets are being developed through trainings, connecting them to buyers for value added products of milk, dates, and tomatoes.

Female farmers presented the by-products they developed, and received cell phones from GRASP project during the event, which will be used to connect them to wholesale buyers, markets, and enable them to sell their produce online.

The three panels discussed government focus on enterprise development of women and the development of grants for them. The role of men in supporting women was highlighted, where they can be allies and create spaces for women at workplaces. Making up 67 percent of the labor force, women farmer’s skills need to be enhanced. Currently, women in agriculture are in labor only, their representation in policy making and at decisions is needed.

After distribution of cell phones at the IWD event in Karachi, livestock farmers from Thatta are looking at the functions and learning more about the device. This will mainly be used to receive orders for khoya from the sweet shops in main market.

**Balochistan:** An event was held in Quetta where successful women entrepreneurs were invited who shared their experiences and success stories. They shared the challenges they faced, and acknowledged the support they received through projects like GRASP which alleviated their position. Minister and Secretary Womens Department Ms. Mehjabeen attended the event and handed out shields of recognition to the speakers. A second event was also held in Balochistan in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations where prominent actors from the development sector came together and highlighted the work being done to uplift the status of women in the province, and steps that needed to be taken in the right direction to achieve their goals for economic and social uplift of women.
Seeds distributed to communities in Balochistan

The demand for seeds in areas like Balochistan is untapped, and provides opportunities to various agencies for expansion and a wide customer base. With the lockdowns induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, seed availability in markets has been affected. Safety protocols and various measures taken by the government over the last couple of months has enabled timely availability of seeds to farmers and growers in the pandemic, which has played a crucial role in their cropping timelines to remain intact. As GRASP promotes the shift towards adoption of high-quality seeds, distributions were scheduled as part of the projects Covid-19 emergency response plan.

Through its partner organization the Food and Agriculture Organization, Onion and Alfafa seeds were distributed to farmers in Kushki and Kharan. 200 farmers received 1 kg onion seeds each, and 60 farmers received 10 kg alfafa seeds each. In addition, fertilizers for their crops will also be distributed to the farmers, for which inspection of the input is being carried out. SOP, DAP, and Urea distribution have been planned for the end of April 2021.

Workshop on Tomato value chain

GRASP in collaboration with partner organization Research and Development Foundation (RDF) organized a seminar on improving tomato value chain in Sindh. Experts, farmer representatives, and members of civil society discussed tomato price volatility and production issues, as well as the way forward at the seminar held on April 1 2021.

A large number of growers attended from Thatta, Badin, Tando Allahyar, Sanghar, and Mirpurshas. Noted economist Dr Kaiser Bengali highlighted the need for an integrated cluster-based approach to deal with agriculture production and market issues and said market integration could help alleviate poverty levels in rural areas where agri-hubs could be developed. He also underscored the need for private sector’s contribution and said though the provincial government had committed to implementation of the Sindh Poverty Reduction Strategy 2019, the private sector should come forward and contribute towards development of markets that were in access to farmers.

Shabnam Baloch, provincial lead of GRASP in Sindh, said there was a need to make a policy framework for perishable agriculture products, which was lacking in Sindh. GRASP is currently supporting the Government of Sindh in updating a number of laws and Acts as part of its efforts to uplift and regulate the policy framework around agriculture in the country.

Second BRRC and PPD held in Balochistan

Balochistan Regulatory Reform Committee (BRRC) second meeting was held on 10 March 2021 in Quetta, Balochistan. Members from Agriculture, Livestock, Industries & Commerce, Women Department, Private Sector and Academia took part. The forum endorsed the initiative for development of rural SME Competitiveness and Sustainability Strategy. Industries and Commerce Department will be the lead for the initiative which will be technically supported by GRASP.

A public private dialogue was also held where policy brief developed by ITC partner SDPI for rural SME strategy was reviewed, and feedback from
stakeholders was taken note of. The findings of the brief were also translated into Urdu for a wider reach among internal and external partners for the programme. The document will be used as a reference with stakeholders to develop the rural SME Strategy.

Sessions on efficient use of agriculture labor held

To guide communities on efficient use of local agriculture labor, and to allow movements of agriculture female workers to support village/UC based collaborative labour networks, sessions were organized across Sindh. In collaboration with the government of Sindh, three sessions with LSOs in Thatta and Khairpur mapped out movement of local female agriculture labor and available sources of utilizing work force. 130 rural women and 10 male farmers participated in the sessions. Middlemen are the mediators between farmers and landlords in villages, and coordinate the sowing and picking of crops. However different types of pickings are charged different, either on weight basis or on the number of bags. Women are willing to work in the fields, but when work opportunities are scarce, they turn to stitching and embroidery. Through these sessions, it is hoped that a uniform methodology will be applied which benefits the laborers and middlemen both.

Rural SME strategy

GRASP provincial lead Sindh has been notified as the member of Provincial SME working group constituted on the directions of Prime Minister of Pakistan under his initiative called “PM Regulatory Modernization Initiative-PMRMI”. Under this initiative all provincial governments are required to conduct regulatory assessment & come up with the smart regulations. The sub-group under the provincial SME working group led by Secretary Industries and Commerce will also work on the regulatory assessment of current business related laws. Provincial Lead-Sindh is also notified to be member of subject sub-group on regulatory assessment and participated in its 2nd meeting. The group is reviewing “Partnership Act 1932 “and proposing amendments. The major amendments are the digitalization of the system of registration of fee payment.

Gender working group to be formed

Based on GRASP Gender Mainstreaming Strategy, with the help of SheTrades team from ITC, a gender working group is being formed in Sindh in order to promote close coordination with line departments of Government of Sindh, and to review policies to highlight the potential risks to gender mainstreaming and explore preventive options. The initiative will connect GRASP with the gender focused grants and schemes initiated by the GoS line departments, to maximize the uplifting chances of GRASP beneficiaries. The group will be launched officially in April 2021.

Training of Trainers on Agri – Entrepreneurship

A 5-day Training of Trainers was conducted under GRASP project through partner organization ECI for selected individuals from 5 districts in Balochistan province, where the participants were trained on core training competencies on agro entrepreneurship. The training modules were tailored around local needs. Secretary P&D Department Mr Abdullah Khan attended the training and appreciated GRASP project for focusing on building the capacities of youth in the province through targeted trainings relevant to their line of work, and the scope of agriculture in the province. Director General Agriculture and Director General Livestock Department also distributed certificates among the participants at the conclusion of the event.

Rural women attended livestock expos in Sindh

Animal Livestock Festival was held in Hyderabad on 14th March, where fifteen rural women farmers under GRASP participated in the Livestock Festival arranged in Hyderabad through livestock department. They were oriented in different stalls to build relationships with different Government and private sector organizations. The GRASP team also facilitated rural women from Sindh to participate in the DALFA Livestock Expo in Karachi. The participants were introduced to different actors present at the expo, and encouraged to build relationships with different government and private sector organizations.
**News in brief**

- **Distribution of drip irrigation kits in Nuski and Kharan**
  - Drip irrigation kits with water tanks delivered to district field locations and will be further delivered to the beneficiaries in Nuski and Kharan.

- **Secretary agriculture Sindh with senior leadership and district team in Thatta visited Village Izzat Lashari to meet with GRASP beneficiaries of Covid-19 Response.**

- **Wash rooms constructed at Khajoor Market Khairpur, Sindh as part of the Covid-19 emergency plan to promote hygiene.**

- **GRASP team in Balochistan visited district Pishin on 26-27 March 2021 to ensure coordination with line departments and other project stakeholders (farmers, SMEs). The team met with Director Sardar Bahadur Khan Women’s University and also with Director Agriculture who showed govt. owned grapes experimental farm. The team also visited progressive farmer of Pishin who showed his grapes farm. The team also had discussion with rural women involved in livestock management and on farm activities.**

- **GRASP presentation in Sindh Livestock Expo - Technical seminar. Minister Livestock, Chief secretary Sindh, and other officials were present in addition to over 1000 stakeholders from the Agriculture and Livestock sector.**

**GRASP in the news**

- **Govt urged to set up fair market mechanisms for tomato production**

- **Speakers urge investment for tomato growers**

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

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