Balochistan Regulatory Reform Committee holds first meeting

The first meeting of the Balochistan Regulatory Reform Committee (BRRC) was held in Quetta on 23rd November 2020. Formed with the support and technical assistance of GRASP, the Planning and Development Department notified the constitution of Balochistan Regulatory Reform Committee (BRRC) on 8 September 2020.

Mr. Ghulam Farooq, Secretary Planning and Development Department, chaired the meeting attended by BRRC members, which included representatives from key provincial government departments, private sector organizations and academia. Secretary Livestock Mr. Tayyab Lahry expressed his interest in the project, and gave his valuable inputs on ways the committee could be mutually beneficial to the GRASP, government institutions, and SME’s in the province. Mr. Dawood Bazai, DG Small Industries, Mr. Imran, Additional Secretary Agriculture, representatives from Women Development Department, ITC GRASP staff and other key stakeholders from the agriculture and development sector also joined the event virtually.

GRASP Deputy Coordinator Mr. Owais Khattak gave a detailed overview of the functions and purpose of BRRC. He explained that the objective of the BRRC is to advance policy dialogue among public sector, private sector and academia to take a holistic view of the regulatory environment and build consensus among the stakeholders for new laws and policies. Inter-Departmental coordination realized through BRRC will ensure that different laws and policies developed by different Departments of the government are mutually supportive.

Mr. Ghulam Farooq, Secretary Planning and Development Department while concluding the session acknowledged the efforts of all stakeholders and stated that establishment of this forum is a significant step for policy coherence. All key stakeholders are required to work in close liaison in regulatory reforms to address common challenges in the area of policy design and its implementation. A conducive regulatory regime and effective implementation of business-friendly policies are important prerequisites for the growth and sustainability of MSMEs and the competitiveness of the value chains, added Mr. Jahanzeb Khan, GRASP lead for Balochistan.
Government of Sindh and Balochistan endorse GRASP activities in PSC meetings

GRASP held Project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings for Sindh and Balochistan on 25 and 27 November respectively. Comprising of key influencers in the government, development, and agriculture and livestock sector, the PSCs will provide guidance to GRASP as it works to improve the business environment of small and medium enterprises in the country. The provincial government representatives pledged their support to the project, and acknowledged the rapid response by the GRASP team on mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on small and medium enterprises in the Sindh and Balochistan.

Additional Chief Secretary Planning and Development Department Balochistan, Mr. Abdul Rehman Buzdar chaired the meeting for Balochistan, and Mr Muhammad Waseem, Chairman Planning and Development Department Sindh chaired the meeting in Sindh. Representatives attended the meeting from the European Union Delegation, Planning and Development department, ITC team from Geneva, the department of Livestock, Fisheries and Dairy Development, the department of Industries and Commerce, the department of Women Development and investment departments, as well as representatives from the provincial horticulture, livestock agriculture, and dairy sectors.

GRASP team provided updates to the committee members on the implementation of project activities, COVID-19 response strategy, and future work plan. After conducting rapid assessment of SMEs in the provinces, COVID-19 response was implemented in four high-risk districts of Balochistan and Sindh both. Awareness raising on government finance schemes to farmers and SME’s has been completed, capacity building of market committees is being carried out, and businesses are being processed for grant support. Market opportunities gave been identified for top products in both the provinces, including women from rural areas in value chain development and kitchen garden trainings.

The committee chairs expressed their gratitude to the European Union for their ongoing support to uplift the horticulture and livestock sectors in the provinces, which is the main source of livelihood for many. They pledged their support to GRASP for the implementation of activities, and its work on policy development, bringing a positive change in the lives of farmers and SME’s, while creating jobs in the country.

Engaging community to raise awareness regarding COVID-19

The second wave of COVID-19 has gripped the country, and reaching out to rural communities, small and medium entrepreneurs, and small holder farmers is crucial to prevent a large scale outbreak. GRASP team with the support of Taraqee Foundation, has been working extensively in Balochistan on various fronts to spread awareness regarding the prevention methods to mitigate COVID-19 spread, by building capacity of government departments, and raising awareness on government schemes available for small and medium enterprises across the country.

Capacity building

The organizations conducted a capacity building session with market staff on COVID-19 safety. The objective was to promote hand washing behavior, hygiene, and physical distancing. Markets are a critical place of commerce and can pose potential risk for COVID-19. The session provided information for mitigating COVID-19 transmission for markets. It also identified and addressed COVID-19 related rumors and misinformation. The restrictions and lock down, though necessary to control the spread of the coronavirus, may lead to the disruption of market chains and trade of agricultural goods and services (labor flows), with significant potential impacts on the populations that depend on them for their livelihoods and food and nutrition needs. It was mutually agreed between the trainers and market committee members that behavior change was needed to incorporate hygiene practices in the public and for that constant reminder with visual material was suggested.
In Balochistan almost 7000 organizations are registered with the Social Welfare department, however, the overwhelming majority of these face serious challenges in organizational efficacy and popular credibility, and as a result are struggling to emerge as significant drivers of development or reform. Recognizing the need for concentrated support to strengthen organizations and their long-term sustainability, capacity building trainings were conducted for CSOs and CBOs of three districts in Balochistan. The program will assist civil society organizations in developing organizational structures and effective operational mechanisms to accomplish their goals and work plans. The training focused on developing organizations’ ability to apply for funding from international donors, providing training in proposal writing and budget development.

**Government finance schemes**

GRASP with support of Taraqee Foundation conducted awareness session on Government Financing Schemes for SMEs at Press Club Nushki. The objective of this event was to give information on Government financing schemes for SMEs related matters, share experiences, and develop linkages between State Bank of Pakistan and SMEs, FMCs, medium-sized enterprises and market committee and Ajuman-e-Tajran Nushki.

Thirty male and female representatives attended, from various fields including representatives of Marketing Collectives Committees FMCs, small-scale farmers, Micro Small and medium-sized enterprises, Government department officials and, Market Committee Representatives.

**Building institutional capacity to make Pakistani products market competitive**

GRASP Sindh team conducted trainings for the Sindh Food Authority officials on the safety standards of meat in Karachi and Hyderabad from 30 November until 5 December 2020.

It is important for Pakistani produce to be clean, packaged properly, and be up to date with the market standards as national and international trade is promoted. The Sindh Food Authority officials were trained in international best practices, licensing, compliance, and food surveillance among other topics.

Secretary Food Mr. Haleem Shaikh expressed his appreciation for European Union and ITC for the capacity building support for Sindh Food Authority. He said “this is a wonderful initiative taken by GRASP in Sindh. It marks the beginning of a new era of enhancing and strengthening SFA staff capacity in professional performance and execution of their duties, followed by an overall institutional capacity assessment of SFA, also supported by GRASP”. Mr. Shaikh said that collaboration between public and private sectors was vital for sustainable progress.

GRASP Provincial Lead for Sindh Ms. Shabnam Baloch acknowledged the participants for their enthusiastic participation, and accentuated the significance of ITC’s partnership with Sindh Food Authority to improve the quality of processed food and awareness among consumers, retailers and processors.

GRASP is working to build the capacity of Pakistan’s institutions by training its officials to be equipped with all the knowledge to make them market competitive. The training on food safety standards will enhance the technical and professional capacities of the officials, and enable them to follow internationally recognized food safety standards to ensure SPS compliance.
GRASP and Research and Development Foundation (RDF) COVID-19 Response teams in Thatta and Khairpur have conducted a series of awareness sessions at different locations in targeted districts. In November eight sessions were organized, attended by around 114 farmers and entrepreneurs.

GRASP has distributed nutrition rich livestock fodder (WANDA) to 90 women farmers in Thatta District and 60 women farmers in Khairpur District. The package of WANDA is designed for the milking and fattening of the livestock that was affected during C-19 lockdown. It also distributed seed and fertilizer of ITC value products to 150 farmers in Thatta and Khairpur. This distribution was done after due assessment and registration of beneficiaries as per criteria. The women who received the seed/seedling were found highly committed for revival of their livelihoods and promote the value chain of identified crops.

Three days Training of Trainers of RDF Female Field staff and Livestock experts held in Hyderabad where two males and two females from the staff were trained for further replicating training of livestock beneficiaries in the field.

Awareness meetings were held with the office bearers and members of Livestock Mandi Karachi Malir, New Sabzi Mandi Karachi, Cattle Colony Karachi, and Gharo Main Market.

GRASP team in Sindh has conducted four sessions on Ehsaas Emergency program. The participants were given information about the program, access and the package, and pre-requisite for the registration in the program where 29 male and 235 female participants attended these sessions.
Laying groundwork and carrying out research prior to introducing interventions and innovations to rural communities in Pakistan is vital! GRASP team in Balochistan has been diligently reaching out and visiting sites where innovations and updated technologies can be implemented, and the entrepreneurs and small holder farmers can be made market competitive! The team visiting olive farms, and evaluating the land for innovative techniques such as expellers, drip irrigation, and olive oil extraction machines etc. Olive oil can be a lucrative business, and bring in much needed revenue for Balochistan if sustainable interventions are planned!

Our partners
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

FAO team distributed multi-purpose plastic sheets amongst 200 growers of Date tree in union council Shadi Shaheed, Taluka and district Khairpur under the GRASP project. Each farmer received a multi-purpose plastic sheet to harvest dates from seasonal rains and other environmental hazards.

FAO conducted awareness sessions under its Farmer Field Schools. The FFS team conducted 27 awareness sessions at community level in district Thatta and Khairpur Mirs. The core objective of those sessions was to inform and educate farmers on the precautionary measures against COVID-19.

It also completed assessment of 811 household in district Thatta and Khairpur Mirs for beneficiaries’ selection for different planned activities. In the next step, beneficiaries would be identified as per the set criteria for value chains support of tomato, dates, mango and goat as per set criteria of household selection.

FAO under GRASP project continued with the Farmer Field School sessions in Balochistan on Integrated Household Food systems (IHFS), focusing on land leveling and vegetable garden bed preparations techniques. Three FFS sessions have been conducted in each integrated household garden, whereas the number of the integrated garden in each district (Nushki and Kharam) is 68. These FFS sessions will be conducted throughout the season.