Awareness Campaign for COVID-19 Information launched

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many economies to a standstill, and Pakistan was no exception. The limited business activity especially affected the operations of MSME’s in the country.

GRASP launched an awareness campaign under its COVID-19 emergency work plan to provide timely and accurate information vital for continuation of business activities in a safe environment. The campaign is utilizing various mediums such as print, social and radio to disseminate key messages issued by International Trade Center and the Government of Pakistan, particularly for the agriculture and livestock sector. The campaign is helping create awareness about social distancing during business hours, management of crowds in market places, cleanliness and sanitization at the workplace, as well as guidelines on consumer and seller protocols for small businesses, farmers, and livestock markets.

Pakistan saw a spike in Corona cases after Eid al Fitr, as a result the Government of Pakistan took stringent measures to ensure safety for Eid al Adha. They declared special livestock mandis (markets) set prior to Eid as potential hotspots of virus transmission due to gathering of large crowds. GRASP displayed crucial information on banners in animal markets, detailing social distancing, cleanliness, and protocols for Eid in local languages. The campaign was initiated in some of the most vulnerable and remote areas such as the district of Pishin in Balochistan, and will continue to disseminate information to assist MSME’s in other districts of the province, as well as Sindh.

SME Survey Results Available for Public

Between December 2019 and January 2020, ITC carried out the MSME Competitiveness Surveys in selected districts of Sindh and Balochistan provinces in Pakistan for GRASP. These surveys helped identify the challenges and needs of agribusinesses and farmers working in the horticulture and livestock sectors. Sukkur IBA University and University of Balochistan coordinated these surveys in Sindh and Balochistan respectively.

A follow-up COVID-19 Business Impact Survey was carried out in May-June 2020 to assess the impact of the pandemic on agricultural MSMEs in the two provinces. These surveys present additional analyses about the situation in Balochistan and Sindh provinces.
The survey reports are now available on the ITC GRASP webpage. The press also highlighted the COVID-19 Business Impact Survey, summarizing the responses collected under GRASP. The surveys depicted the number of MSME's affected by the pandemic, measures they undertook to cope and survive with economic constraints, and specifically GRASP and the government response most adequate to help the sector.

**GRASP Conducts Radio Show**

Radio Pakistan in collaboration with UNICEF has been hosting a show called ‘Kadam Kadam Sehat’ on raising awareness around COVID-19 among the rural communities in Pakistan. GRASP was invited to share best practices for small markets, livestock markets, and general conduct of business in preparation for Eid al Adha.

Government of Pakistan issued SOP's for buying and selling of livestock, and ITC recommendations for business support organizations for safe conduct were discussed during the show, which aired on 41 channels across the country.

The project’s mandate, goals, and activities in areas of interventions were explained to over 10,000 active listeners, and numerous calls fielded from rural Sindh and Balochistan with questions on social distancing in markets, dealing with sacrificial animals and transportation of goods from farms to markets.

**Balochistan team meets with Secretary Food Department**

GRASP Balochistan team met with Mr. Noor Ahmed Pirkani Secretary, government of Balochistan, Food Department, Mr. Shakeel Deputy Secretary FD, and Mr. Ibrahim Baloch DG Balochistan Food Authority. The team discussed the assessment and study to identify constraints in capacities of the MSME’s in Balochistan, and ways of addressing the issues.

GRASP team requested the Food department officials to come up with a brief concept paper encapsulating the provincial situation, and to share with the team.

In line with the priorities of the government, GRASP will work to build technical capacity of lab staff and food safety officers. The team requested BFA to share details about the situation and their immediate needs with them. They also discussed the possibility of updating the food manual.

**Technical support to Sindh Food Authority and incorporation of Agriculture Market Information System (AMIS)**

GRASP seeks to increase quality and SPS compliance across the value chains, including for priority products selected under GRASP through interventions targeting the regulatory and institutional frameworks at provincial levels. For this purpose an in depth, institutional assessment of the Sindh Food Authority will be carried out to design the road map to improvement.

The project will provide tailored technical assistance to provincial institutions to improve quality and SPS compliance through business-friendly compliance mechanisms, facilitating rural MSMEs and ensuring food security. Food safety, plant protection and animal health testing laboratories will be strengthened through access to state-of-the-art equipment and sharing of best practices. GRASP has adopted train-the-trainer approach to improve their services and training portfolios for rural MSMEs on SPS issues and related topics.

Additionally, GRASP in partnership with relevant public and private entities will establish AMIS, in order to increase outreach to market intelligence across the value chain cycle to benefit all stakeholders.

AMIS aims at providing comprehensive one-step market fair price information services with agricultural commodity intelligence to wider audiences at once. It also provides instant access to information about the commodities, supplies, and demand and price trend prevailing in different parts of the province. Overall, this initiative will enhance exports of fruits and vegetables resulting on increase in national income, reduction in poverty and causing prosperity for the country.
News in brief
Ballochistan
Saman Baktawar, SME Development Specialist for GRASP had an introductory meeting with Mr. Qaim Lashari – DC Pishin, Deputy Director Agriculture, Director Agriculture research and Livestock Officers of district Pishin. Government officials were briefed about GRASP project and its activities in Pishin and to assess the challenges in Agriculture and Livestock sector. They discussed the selection of Pishin for COVID-19 emergency response plan, for which information banners on social distancing and safe business practices were displayed in major livestock markets of the districts, leading up to Eid.

GRASP provincial teams have been actively engaging with organizations in rural areas, taking them on board as the project gears up for implementation. Balochistan SME Specialists visited the National Incubation Centre Quetta, and exchanged information about GRASP activities in Balochistan.

They also met with Mr. Masoud Baloch – Director General Agriculture (Extension) and discussed the recent development of the Balochistan Agriculture Market Information System (BAMIS) and to kickstart the formalization of the collaboration between the ITC-GRASP and Department of Agriculture regarding implementation and upgradation of this system.

A meeting was held with Mr. Farmaan Zarkoon CEO of Balochistan Board of Investment and Trade (BBOIT). Future collaboration between GRASP and BBOIT, as well as with the team of Institute of Rural Management (IRM) based in Quetta was discussed.

Sindh
Sindh provincial team has been spearheading meetings with local organizations, government counterparts, development partners, and trade representatives to take their inputs as the team begins implementation.

The Sindh lead along with the Enterprise Development Specialist met with the Chief Executive Officer Sindh Enterprise Development Fund to build synergies and explore partnership opportunities in future around target agricultural value chains.

The team also conducted several coordination meetings with Chief Economist, Planning & Development Department, Secretary Industries and Commerce, Secretary Agriculture, Sindh Enterprise Development Fund, Sindh Economic Zone Management Company, Animal Quarantine Department, Director General Agricultural Extension and Price, Director General Sindh Food Authority and several market committees to discuss project support and build synergies.

Our partners
Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund
PPAF and GRASP team have been holding regular bi-weekly meetings, where they discuss Monitoring and Evaluation, PPAF MIS and other relevant units for customization of the MIS GRASP, which is in progress. PPAF also submitted the revised midterm report to ITC by addressing comments and incorporating the feedback received.

The PPAF team attended meetings with the provincial teams of Sindh and Balochistan to discuss the COVID19 response plan implementation and regular implementation of project activities. The way forward in clustering of districts among relevant units of PPAF and GRASP team, as well as the Union Council selection criteria was part of the agenda.

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

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