Introducing Agriculture Market Information Systems

Agriculture Market Information Systems (AIMS) are used by agri-economies to track the supply, prices, and enhance food market transparency and policy response for food security, it was launched in 2011 by the G20 Ministers of Agriculture following the global food prices hikes in 2007/08 and 2010. Bringing together the principal trading countries of agriculture commodities, AMIS assess global food supplies and provides a platform to coordinate policy action in times of market uncertainty.

GRASP is assisting Government of Balochistan and Government of Sindh in establishing Agri-market information systems. The mock up for AMIS has been presented to the government officials of both the provinces. Punjab has already adopted AMIS, and the GRASP team from December 22 – 25 2020 conducted a study visit to Lahore, to understand their well-established market information collection and dissemination system. Department of Agriculture Sindh and Balochistan officers accompanied the GRASP team.

The Directorate of Agriculture gave a presentation, explaining that the main objective of the Punjab AMIS was provision of timely, reliable, and usable market information to growers and other stakeholders. Various data collection sources on the website included market committees, crop reporting services, and weather information. The AMIS webpage connects 135 market committees for daily rates of 126 items, which is available in English as well as Urdu.

The GRASP teams and government of Sindh and Balochistan officials also met the Secretary Industries, Commerce, Investment and Skills Development Department, Punjab, the Special Secretary Agriculture Marketing Punjab, Director General PAMRA Punjab and other concerned Punjab Government Officials during the study visit.

Supporting olive farmers

Balochistan has vast potential when it comes to natural products for agriculture, and if tapped correctly, the market can be very lucrative and bring much needed revenue to the farmers and entrepreneurs of the province. GRASP Balochistan team visited District Zhob to gather preliminary information regarding olive, grapes and livestock (sheep, goat, wool) farming in the district. They also met with Deputy Commissioner Zhob who assured his support to GRASP.

Zhob has proven to be very suitable for olive farming as confirmed by a number of farmers the team spoke to, and the department of agriculture. There are a handful of progressive
farmers in the district, who need to be encouraged and supported in olive production and value addition. A study carried out by GRASP on olives also provides a detailed overview of the province. GRASP discussed possibilities to support the farmers for measurable and impactful results in terms of production. It is important to provide better olive varieties to the farmers, which can be easily planted or grafted. The team also identified the need to train olive farmers in pre and post-harvest management including marketing (packaging, branding etc.).

In addition to olives, Zhob is also famous for grapes, which is at an advanced stage in the district. The farmers are growing varieties and have better farm practices when it comes to grapes. However, grape growers still need support in the stages of value chain. Olive and grape farmers will benefit immensely if trained in post-harvest management, grape processing, transportation, and marketing. The GRASP team also met with Deputy Director Livestock to discuss potential interventions around GRASP value chains (Sheep, Goat, and Wool).

A visit is scheduled to take olive farmers from Zhob and other districts, as well as government officials involved in the value chain to Barani Agriculture Research Institute in Chakwal, which has made headway in innovative techniques when it comes to olive farming. The visit is part of GRASP mandate to build capacity of government institutes and local farmers through exposure visits.

COVID-19 emergency response activities

Balochistan

- Hand washing facility installed and inaugurated at Fruit and Vegetable market at Hazar Ganji on 21st December 2020. Mr. Jahanzeb Khan, Provincial Lead GRASP inaugurated it, the project distributed PE (masks, soaps, sanitizers etc), and IEC materials to masses at F&V market, Quetta.

- In collaboration with the livestock and dairy development department, GRASP organized livestock vaccination camps, where it treated small and large animals in Nushki and Kharan. Food and Agriculture Organization, GRASP partner in Sindh and Balochistan has also been working to provide emergency response to communities affected by COVID-19. Thirty livestock farmers have received training/support on feedlot fattening, and 287 have been supported in the provision of vaccines and other medicines (deworming). In addition, training manuals on grape processing, and feedlot fattening and livestock farming have been completed, which will be a used for information and training sessions.

Sindh

- COVID-19 Response teams of GRASP and partner in Sindh, Research and Development Foundation, in Thatta and Khairpur have conducted four awareness sessions, attended by around 88 farmers and the entrepreneurs. The sessions introduced GRASP project, COVID-19 impacts and SOPs. The COVID-19 and the repercussions of lockdown in relation to the agri-enterprises and livestock sector were discussed with the participants.

- Awareness raising workshops with Market Committees were held in Thatta and Khairpur markets where 22 male beneficiaries were oriented on social distancing and preventative SOPs.

- A joint seminar was held in Karachi, on COVID-19 pandemic. Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industries (KCCI), Thatta and Hyderabad Market Committees, Anjuman e tajiran and MSMEs, attended the seminar. Mr. Nadeem Khanzada Sr. Joint Director State Bank joined as a special guest.

- Sindh team conducted four sessions on Ehsaas Emergency program, initiated by the government while responding the COVID-19 situation. The participants were given information about the program, access and the package, which is offered under the program. They were also informed about pre-requirement for the registration in the program. Twenty-four male and 64 female participants in Thatta and Khairpur attended the sessions, which also included information on Refinancing and Credit Guarantee Schemes.
Identifying gender barriers for women farmers

GRASP gender advisor has been visiting identified districts in interior Sindh and meeting with the women, community leaders, and farmers and entrepreneurs to map out the gender canvas around identified value chains.

A meeting was conducted in this regard at the Date Palm Research Institute (Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur). Attended by farmers representatives, small and medium entrepreneurs, business owners, and rural women, GRASP objectives around livestock and horticulture value chains, and COVID-19 response in Thatta and Khairpur was explained to them.

The women present at the meeting brought forward issues they face while starting business ventures. They are interested to start business enterprises, but their understanding of technical terms and modern cropping, grading, and branding techniques used in the markets is limited. There are no institutes accessible to them to get the required trainings. Their movement is limited, which is further enhanced due to the limited business activity after the pandemic, and permissions from their male members of the family are hard to get.

Since it is not common practice for women to own land in their name, and there is lack of implementation of concerned legislation, ownership of resource and limited role in decision making add to the barriers in their economic development.

Many women in the region grow vegetables in their backyard or farmland, oftentimes the produce in surplus of their domestic needs. Capacity building programs could promote homegrown produce such as onions, dates, tomatoes, mangoes and bananas, and small loans could be obtained for them.

It has been found through various studies that when rural women in Pakistan start a business venture, and are given autonomy to control their decisions and exercise their rights, they money they make is either reinvested back into their business, or spent on their children’s education or medical expenses. Investing in the development of women is vital to the economic and social progress of the regions.

Women in agriculture in Pakistan need to be supported, trained and promoted in order to economically and socially uplift our rural areas. Through trainings for rural women on feedlot fattening and livestock rearing, sessions on applications for government finance schemes and the Ehsaas emergency fund, as well as gender mainstreaming workshops to professional and government bodies, the project has made steady progress in the past year to achieve Output 2.2 (Rural Women Empowerment).

Moving forward, GRASP will assist in registering women cooperatives, and develop linkages of women led SMEs/ traders with main markets and economic zone, extension departments, financial institutions etc. It will also introduce technologies to women entrepreneurs such as solar plants for drying dates.

Upcoming events

National project steering committee is scheduled to take place in January 2021. Dates will be communicated to members through official channels.
A year in GRASP

Human Rights Day was marked on 10th December 2020 in both districts Thatta and Khairpur, Sindh. 27 men and 104 women participated from Government departments, civil society and farming and business communities.

GRASP was officially launched in a virtual ceremony, attended by the ITC Executive Director, EUD Ambassador, and Advisor to the Prime Minister Pakistan on Commerce and Trade.

Balochistan Regulatory Reform Committee was approved on 8 September 2020, and held its first meeting in November.

Awareness campaigns were lead in Sindh and Balochistan, which included awareness sessions for market committees, farmers, and government officials.

GRASP team got together for a week long hackathon to discuss the roadmap for GRASP implementation.

Free livestock vaccination camps were held in Balochistan and Sindh, with GRASP partner Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Trainings were held in Sindh & Balochistan on livestock and feedlot fattening, geared towards women who are often skipped when it comes to educating them.

A public private dialogue was held with stakeholders to discuss the government response to COVID-19, in collaboration with Sustainable Development Policy Institute.

Information sessions on government finance schemes available for small business affected by the pandemic were held in Balochistan, in partnership with the State Bank of Pakistan.

Government of Balochistan and Sindh endorsed GRASP in Project Steering Committee Meetings.

COVID-19 Impact surveys were gathered by GRASP for Sindh and Balochistan, and presented to stakeholders in events held.

GRASP Sindh team conducted trainings for the Sindh Food Authority officials on the safety standards of meat in Karachi and Hyderabad.

GRASP has distributed nutrition rich livestock fodder (WANDA) women farmers in Thatta and Khairpur District. Also distributed seed and fertilizer of ITC value products.

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