Food authority institutional capacity assessment

GRASP carried out the capacity assessment of Sindh Food Authority (SFA) and Balochistan Food Authority (BFA). The reports were presented to stakeholders during consultative workshops held in Hyderabad and Quetta, on 22 and 26 February respectively.

The report was prepared by Dr. Zafar Mehmood for GRASP, who conducted a comprehensive institutional assessment of the Food Authorities, in order to identify areas and activities for technical assistance, and to develop a plan for the strengthening of the SFA and BFA as per best international practices.

The study outlines the need for SOPs for determining the standards of various edible commodities, harmonization of food regulations, field visits, storage, and display of foods. One of the key findings of the report was the need for harmonization of national and provincial food regulations. This can be achieved by registration and licensing of food premises and food products originating from other provinces, and revenue sharing between national and provincial government.

Director General SFA Mr. Zubair Pervez Ahmed stressed the need for use of smart technology, transparent procedures, public awareness campaign and ease of managing safe food supply chain for sustainable growth. Stating a food and water nexus, he referred to the UN report regarding 40% water scarcity by 2030, and advised the experts to develop a comprehensive plan for ensuring the food supply with safety and international standards.

In Balochistan, Secretary Food Mr. Noor Ahmed Pirkani lauded the efforts of EU funded project GRASP for conducting a comprehensive institutional assessment of Balochistan Food Authority. He emphasized the need for interdepartmental coordination among various stakeholders to province safe and hygienic food to the consumers. He also highlighted the progress BFA has made in a short span of time after its establishment.

GRASP national coordinator Mr. Azher Choudhry stated ‘The Food Authority objective is consumer welfare, and if we educate them on what foods are safe to consume, it will make the job effective. It is encouraging to see that the Food Authorities in Sindh and Balochistan are very dynamic, and at the forefront to ensure food availability and safety for all. The report presented today serves as a roadmap to support, and provide technical inputs to improve their work in their respective provinces’.

Officials from Food department, Balochistan and Sindh Food Authority, Planning & Development Department, livestock department, Information Department, agriculture department, industries department, local government, International Organizations, Academia and private sector took part in the workshops.
COVID-19 Awareness Campaign

Sindh

FM Radio campaign was initiated in Thatta and Khairpur in Sindh. Messages on prevention and safe business practices were aired three times per day during peak hours. Radio is popular among the rural population in Sindh, where they listen to the shows while working in the fields.

In order to improve value chains and increase income of women entrepreneurs in livestock sector during COVID-19, GRASP through RDF organized 10 vaccination drives at different locations of Khairpur and Thatta district, and provided nutritious fodder – WANDA (Animal feed) for livestock to 300 household, to increase milk and fattening in cattle. In addition, different capacity building sessions focusing on animal health nutrition, digital e-marketing and value-added products from milk were imparted to local women farmers, exposure visits to agriculture extension and livestock departments were also held.

Eight awareness raising sessions were conducted on livestock management sessions in Thatta and 12 sessions in Khairpur for over 100 participants, half of which were women.

150 livestock farmers were trained in Khairpur and Thatta on ways to make dairy products from milk. Participants were involved practically in making – Khoya, yogurt, sweets, butter, ghee etc. The trainees were then linked to sweet sellers in local markets to develop linkages. As a result of market assessment, trained female farmers explored three types of khoya – red, white, and dotted Khoya in city Gharo, Thatta, provided sample to sweet shops and have started to receive orders.

A day long workshop was conducted with the members of Khairpur Market Committees on 15 February 2021 at the DC Khairpur Office on safer business operations during COVID-19. The Deputy Commissioner Khairpur Ahmed Ali Qureshi distributed certificates to the participants.

Balochistan

GRASP in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations organized a livestock management, disease control and animal fattening training for farmers in Nushki and Kharan district, where they were educated in basic hygiene and food safety regulations during slaughtering. They were also introduced to uniform grading standard; quality controlled storage of by-products and meat; and simple value addition of dairy products (including yogurt and ghee production).

E-Commerce Training

GRASP is supporting farmers access to markets through various approaches ranging from direct connection to agro-processing companies to using emerging solutions such as e-commerce platforms. The project is working to support rural women to engage in economic opportunities in agricultural production and value addition in selected value chains.

For this purpose, GRASP with partner organization RDF, organized a two-day training on “Digital Service and Market Platforms for Horticulture and Livestock business” on February 23 – 24 in Hyderabad. The women were introduced to Digital business services, e-market platforms, and to connected with online market institutions. Ten female farmers from Thatta and Kahirpur took part in the training where they learned about the concept of e-marketing, tips for
online selling, promotion of products, negotiation skills, and order booking and delivery service.

For many of the participants, it was the first time they came across the concept of online business and how to sell on the internet. They agreed that it was useful for women with limited mobility, and without access to markets. Selling online can save time and resources, with flexible working hours. It particularly appealed to the women as they stated they can do their house chores and farm duties, and sell their produce online as there was no time constraint.

**ECI to work along GRASP in Balochistan**

A training firm - Empowerment Thru Creative Integration (ECI) has been engaged by GRASP project to roll out entrepreneurship development trainings in Balochistan. The project will build capacity of 125 farmers, 125 entrepreneurs and 25 business service providers in 5 districts of Balochistan. These trainings will enhance the entrepreneur and business related skills, knowledge and practices of the participants involved in horticulture and livestock sector. The GRASP team had a kickoff meeting with ECI in start of February 2021.

**New team members join GRASP team**

Irshad Ali has joined GRASP as the monitoring and evaluation lead, and is based in the Project Management Unit (PMU), Islamabad. He has 18 years of experience in the field of M&E and impact measurement covering sectors such as; Environment, Agriculture, Corporate Social Responsibility, Governance, Education, Health, and Disaster Response. He brings practical experience of working with various partners across Asia, Africa, Australia/Oceania, and the Caribbean.

Sara Khan has joined GRASP as the gender advisor for Sindh. She has been working in the development sector since 2002. She has worked with several UN agencies, International non-governmental organizations, and Government of Balochistan. Her job assignments include Gender Development Specialist with BIWRMD Project funded by the World Bank with Government of Balochistan, Gender & Child Protection technical support officer (Gender Advisor) with PDMA and UNWOMEN.

**Stories from the field**

Thirty nine year old Lachmi from rural Sindh works tirelessly to help her family in the fields; she also does embroidery work for additional income, which she contributes in household expenses.

“We struggle financially, we used to purchase seeds and fertilizers from the market on credit and pay the dues when the crop was ready”, Lachmi shares a practice common in the region, where poor farmers purchase seeds on credit, oftentimes paying high interest with tough terms when their yield is low. COVID-19 further disturbed their work cycle, as closed markets meant zero availability of inputs.

GRASP with Sindh Research and Development Foundation distributed seeds and fertilizer under the COVID-19 emergency response in Khairpur and Thatta, Sindh, have been a huge help. Not only has her family sown the seeds in time for a proper yield, but have also been spared from taking a cut from the returns to pay creditors. Lachmi believes that the timely distributions have saved her family from a difficult financial season.
A panel discussion to mark the International Women’s Day will be held in Karachi. Panelist from academia, government agriculture department, and female farmers will participate in discussions, chaired by Noor ul Huda Shah, Pakistani dramatist, short story writer, poet and columnist who has been highlighting the role of women in the country through her creative work.

GRASP team in Balochistan will hold an event to pay tribute to female farmers in horticulture and livestock. Ms. Mahjabeen Sheran, parliamentary secretary for women development, Secretary Women Development Department, Director Women Division and female agri-entrepreneurs will take part in the event.

Contact us:
Aliyya.noor@intracen.org
Communication Specialist

ITC - GRASP
CO-United Nations (UNMOGIP) - HQ,
PO Box 1350, 5-11 diplomatic enclave, G-5, Islamabad