Agriculture Strategic & Regulatory Reform Unit established

With the support of GRASP, Government of Sindh Agriculture, Supply and Prices Department in collaboration with Sindh Agriculture University Tando Jam has established Agriculture Strategic & Regulatory Reform Unit.

The unit will map the existing regulatory ecosystem and develop a central repository of agriculture laws, policies, rules, and regulations, and review and update them based on current market trends. The body will also conduct policy research and develop alternate options in consultation with the stakeholders. One of the objectives of the unit is increased coordination between government departments, and liaison with financial departments and donors to mobilize resources and ensure implementation of policy initiatives.

Senior officials from the Sindh Agriculture department and professors from the Sindh Agriculture University Tando Jam make up the members of the Unit.

Coordination workshop held with PPAF

Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) is one of the core partners in implementing and managing activities for GRASP specifically in the areas of Rural Mobilization, Access to Finance, and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) for overall programme components.

PPAF and its local partners will identify and facilitate access to primary producers in rural areas to receive capacity building support through financial literacy and business development trainings, fostering market access linkages through participation in fairs and expos, and also through aggregating them into farmers’ market collectives for greater bargaining power.

A two-day coordination workshop was held with the PPAF team, led by GRASP monitoring and evaluation lead, during the course of which the project work plan, specific activities under each output, and the role of partners was discussed. M&E lead from partner organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) took part in the discussions as well.

The workshop served as a platform to discuss way forwards, and discuss concrete measure in gender-inclusive value chain development through joint interventions. PPAF will lead the monitoring and evaluation processes of the whole consortium to ensure timely data analysis and reporting.

Tapping the livestock and fisheries sector through policy and reforms

Pakistan’s livestock and fisheries sectors are of immense importance as they play a multifaceted role in generating income, developing livelihoods, and fulfilling nutrition needs, both in the rural economy and as a source of export income. The fisheries sector is also important as it reduces the existing pressure on the demand for livestock (mutton, beef, and poultry). According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2019-20, more than eight million rural families are engaged in the livestock production and derive more than 35-40% of their income from the sector. The fisheries sector is the main source of livelihood for coastal inhabitants. About 1,000,000 fishermen are engaged in this sector, 400,000 directly and 600,000 in ancillary industries.
GRASP consultant Dr. Hamid Jalil has developed the Sindh Entrepreneurship & Investments Policy for the Livestock & Fisheries sectors, where keeping in view the local situation and analyzing the resources at hand, policies have been drafted to encourage entrepreneurship and investment. Long and short term goals for the Sindh government have been identified through incentives and trainings.

The department endorsed the document, and discussed additional aspects to be included with the consultant before finalizing the document, and agreed on ways forward to materialize the policy recommendations along with GRASP. The ministry plan to present the document to the Cabinet for approval and incorporation in the Livestock Policy.

**Synergizing efforts with European Union funded projects**

EU BRACE external evaluation team, BRSP team and GRASP team had a detailed meeting to discuss areas of mutual collaboration and synergies between both EU funded projects. The project interventions and themes will be worked out in detail in next couple of months by both BRSP and GRASP teams to avoid duplication of activities and building upon previous work of BRACE.

The projects have four districts in common i-e Khuzdar, Kech, Pishin, Zhob where synergies can be developed. GRASP team will also be rolling out agro-entrepreneurship development trainings in all 10 project districts where beneficiaries of BRACE technical and vocational skill trainings can avail the opportunity to attend micro entrepreneurship trainings and utilize the technical & vocational skills to become entrepreneurs, and apply for GRASP matching grants.

**Building capacity of Food Authorities in Sindh and Balochistan**

Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) assessment report was shared with Secretary Food. A five-year action plan was also developed (as part of the report) for BFA after a thorough institutional assessment, which was shared with BFA. A meeting was held with BFA team (Director Operations, Director Technical and Director Registration and licensing) on 21 April where specific action points were developed around mass awareness on themes related to food safety and hygiene, and capacity building of BFA staff through exposure visits and trainings. BFA is developing a Food Academy, and GRASP support on soft interventions has been sought.

Similarly, Sindh Food Authority (SFA) assessment report was shared with secretary Food and DG SFA. Plan of action for next year was jointly developed with the Secretary Food Department and SFA technical staff for implementation including availability of testing equipment, dashboard development for real time information and incident reporting, media campaign, and exposure visits for staff capacity building etc. SFA has shown interest to be twinned with Punjab Food Authority for learning, collaboration and getting technical support. For that purpose an online meeting with PFA was held to explore partnership opportunity to support SFA capacity building. SFA Act 2016 is now being reviewed for translation in local languages.

**Input distribution to vulnerable communities**

GRASP implementing partner, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) distributed fertilizer, seeds, and animal feed in Thatta and Kharpur districts of Sindh. A thousand date, mango, and livestock farmers received the inputs.

Awareness sessions on Livestock and Feed/Fodder Management and Precautionary Measure against Covid-19 were also held focusing on rural women. One hundred and six participants attended the 15 sessions organized, out of which 19 were males.
As part of Integrated Household Food System intervention, to support women and their household food systems, FAO staff continued to distribute remaining bags of vegetable seeds amongst women farmers in district Kharan and Nushki in Balochistan. The women farmers are supported with provision of different vegetable seeds, that includes Reddish, Coriander, French Beans, Spinach, Turnip, Onion, Carrot and Okra to produce more food of the correct diversity and quantity for their households. The IHFS approach aims to strengthen the resilience of smallholder farming households of Balochistan that includes pregnant and/or lactating women by improving household food production and food consumption behaviors.

**Agribusiness Management and Marketing**

The need assessment of wholesale markets has been initiated through Cynosure Consultants. As part of GRASP Output 3.2 Business Management, Marketing, Market linkage capacities of agribusinesses in selected value chains enhanced, it is envisioned that capacity-building support will be provided to Agriculture Produce Markets (APMs) and their committees in order to enhance and sustain market linkages with rural SMEs. Understanding the capacity and constraints of APMs and the committees that manage them in being able to serve rural SMEs and facilitate market transactions is an important step in developing and sustaining such market linkages. Under this activity, the team will collect and analyse data to establish the current state of service provision of agricultural produce markets (specifically horticulture and livestock), the gaps in capacity (technical and infrastructure) in serving rural SMEs and propose market improvement plans. The ability of APMs to serve rural SMEs will be based on understanding the needs around the following four themes of APM management and their capacity to fulfil their roles, trading practices and capacity, market data and data management, and infrastructure and facilities. So far, data has been collected from the selected markets in Balochistan and the results will be shared by June 2021.

**Access to finance for small and medium enterprises**

The objective of the GRASP Covid-19 Response Strategy was to support the most vulnerable stakeholders by intervening to mitigate impact of the pandemic. The responses were designed through a rapid consultation with farmer organizations, chambers of commerce and government officials. As part of the response, grant-matching facility will be able to provide financial support to SMEs in order to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19. Producers, women, SME’s, Markets and Civil society organizations have benefitted directly from the Covid-19 response, while GRASP support to the functioning of markets, rural support programmes/ CBOs/Civil Society organizations will have broader impacts on the rural economy.

Partnership with KPMG has been established to administer matching grants. KPMG will serve as the Grant Management Office (GMO) of GRASP. The organization will design, monitor, and administer the Emergency Support Fund (ESF) under the guidance of the ITC. As the applications were published online and in leading national newspapers, applicants from both Sindh and Balochistan have submitted their cases, which are currently under review. In relation to this, GRASP partner organization in Sindh, RDF conducted a survey identifying potential MSMEs for the matching grants. Out of 103 surveyed, 20 proposals were shared with KPMG for screening. RDF also conducted a survey with 10 market committees and associations for their requirements under COVID-19 to help their operations run sustainably.

The objectives of the grant is to provide financial support to SMEs and agribusinesses in the horticulture and livestock sectors in order to effectively mitigate the impacts of Covid-19, and also to enhance the success rate of businesses supported in line with program Sustainable Development Goals. To increase engagement and success and prevent opportunistic behaviors, adverse selection, favoritism, cronynism, and nepotism; and encourage and augment women participation and leadership by prioritizing women-led SMEs.
Policy discussion with Ministry of Commerce Pakistan

GRASP National Project Coordinator and Policy lead met with the senior officials at the Ministry of Commerce in a virtual meeting held on 6 May 2021. They discussed the ongoing work of GRASP on policy reforms, reviewed their coordination, and discussed way forward to synergize parallel efforts in uplifting domestic commerce in Pakistan.

Development of provincial trade support framework was discussed, highlighting the importance of provincial government’s participation with the rest of the stakeholders, in order for the ministry of commerce to deliver impactful interventions. The officials from the ministry highlighted their need to professionally manage and progress the work done so far in drafting policies. The members agreed on a focus on the productivity, quality, and sustainability of selected value chains the ministry is focusing on, as well as those GRASP is working on.

Agri-business support providers trained (ABSP)

The project is working to enhance institutional capacity of selected ABSPs and support sectors to deliver services, and to strengthen capacity of ABSPs to provide climate risk mitigation and adaptation strategies to SMEs.

For this, GRASP organized a number of trainings implemented via locally hired NGO in Sindh, Civil Society Support Program (SCCP). Sixty Livestock groups were trained in animal health and nutrition in 10 districts of Sindh (Hyderabad, Matiari, Tando Allah Yar, Tando Muhammad Khan, Khairpur, Mirpurkhas, Thatta, Sanghar and Shaheed Benazirabad) where 84 females participated. Sixty ABSPs were trained on gender mainstreaming and improved service delivery for women. Additionally sixty ABSPs were trained on Enterprise Development.

News in brief

GRASP Policy lead and provincial lead for Balochistan met with Vice President of Quetta Chambers of Small Industry and Small Traders to discuss capacity development needs of the chamber. The VP is now also a member of technical working group for SME Strategy upon invitation from GRASP.

Meeting with market committee members of Hazarjangi fruits and vegetable market in Quetta, Balochistan.

Meeting to build linkages between progressive Dates Growers, GRASP, Sindh Enterprise Development Fund, and Dutch Fund for Climate Change to transform Dates Economy in Sindh.

GRASP team in Sindh visiting scalable tomato farm near Karachi in order to identify grantees for COVID-19 emergency funds.

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

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