Hackathon 2021 brings all GRASP partners together

GRASP organized a weeklong Hackathon starting on 28 June 2021. Implementing partners PPAF, FAO, SMEDA, RDF, TF, ECI, KMPG, Cynosure, and other organizations such as SDPI, Engro Foundation and organizations implementing other EU funded projects were in attendance. The Hackathon brought everyone at pace on the project interventions so far, clarity on the roles of implementing partners, and way forward on achieving targets against the work plan. Private company representatives presented their interventions and linkages with them were explored. Synergies were built with major European Union funded projects in Sindh and Balochistan as they presented their work.

Forty-four sessions explored SME focused interventions in the field and through policy work. Notable speakers within the development sector presented the snapshot of current situation of SMEs in Pakistan in a post pandemic scenario. This enabled the attendees to hone down on issues that need to be resolved and renew the understanding of GRASP to build the business capacity of SME’s, ultimately promoting trade nationally and internationally.

Dr. Abid Suleri, a Pakistani social policy analyst and development practitioner presented the CPEC opportunities for the rural entrepreneurs. He emphasized on how MSME’s can be linked to potential opportunities offered by the CPEC. Dr. Aneel Salman, a full bight scholar, and alumni of University of Cambridge, University Bern-Switzerland, and Harvard gave a talk on understanding the context and prospects of MSMEs in the light of the global entrepreneurship prospects and SDGs.

A letter of intent was signed with SMEDA during the event, solidifying the collaborative direction GRASP wants to take in engaging SMEs, and connecting rural beneficiaries with leading private institutions and markets.

MSME Day celebrated on 27 June 2021

Small and medium-sized enterprises are central to the economic and social development of Pakistan. They constitute nearly 90% of all enterprises in the country, and contribute 40% to the GDP, 35% in value addition, and 25% to the exports. Major exporting sectors such as textiles, surgical goods, sporting goods, leather,
footwear, IT, and fruits mostly comprise of SMEs. Similarly, within the domestic economy, SMEs contribute significantly through wholesale and retail, construction, tourism and hospitality sectors. While their importance to the economy is undisputed, in terms of social development, SMEs also account for 72% of the non-agricultural employment in the country. Yet, SMEs in Pakistan continue to face several challenges that hinder their competitiveness, with the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbating the issues, including lack of access to finance, skilled labor, quality certifications, and innovation.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is contributing to the design of provincial SME Competitiveness Strategies in the framework of the National SME Policy 2020, which envisions an SME sector that is globally competitive and innovative, creates high value jobs, and encourages SMEs to scale up and move towards value-added exports. Additionally, the strategy de facto aligns with the aim of the Strategic Trade Policy Framework (STPF) for Pakistan to become a dynamic and efficient domestic market as well as a globally competitive export-driven economy.

The strategy design process will be inclusive and consultative and will bring together relevant stakeholders to generate consensus on priorities to effectively address key issues and create the desired impact. As such, ITC will work with the public and private stakeholders at the provincial level to prioritize key issues and identify the most optimal points upgrading paths.

The main output of the SME Competitiveness Strategy would be a realistic, actionable, and implementable roadmap, jointly for the provincial governments and the private sector. The strategy would yield an action-oriented and precise framework, which goes into detailed activities, targets, and impact measures, indicating what needs to be done, by whom, and when. The strategy would also be tailored to meet the specific needs of the provinces and provide the provinces with the autonomy and flexibility to prioritize actions required.

The scope of the SME Strategy would be defined by the Provincial SME Working Groups operating under the direction of the National SME Policy 2020 and the provincial chief secretaries. Its scope could include strengthening of productive capacity needs of SMEs, financial services to SMEs, quality of the business environment, upgrading and digitalization, institutional services offer, or innovation and incubation. Additionally, a specific focus would be on the Rural SMEs i.e. agribusiness and farmers, and on laying down a set of concrete and implementable actions to improve the rural SME ecosystem and stimulate competitiveness.

The development of the provincial SME Competitiveness Strategies is supported by the Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Development Progress (GRASP) project, implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC), and funded by the European Union.

**GRASP project executive holds meetings in Pakistan**

Chief Sector & Enterprise Competitiveness at ITC, and GRASP project executive Mr. Robert Skidmore visited GRASP offices in Karachi, Quetta, and Islamabad during the month of June 2021. He met with partner organizations, government counterparts, key stakeholders from private sector, and observed the project implementation by interacting with beneficiaries.

Along with Mr. Azher Choudhry, GRASP Project Coordinator, he signed Letters of Intents with four
potential partners from private sector in Sindh including FTGOs (Pvt) Ltd, Jadoon Livestock (Pvt) Ltd, Meat Matters (Pvt) Ltd and Wild Orchards (Pvt) Ltd in Karachi. Together with the private sector, GRASP will explore opportunities of collaborations in livestock and horticulture sectors including livestock fattening, meat processing and marketing, dairy development, horticulture production, traceability and marketing. The partnerships will also help in building capacities of the GRASP beneficiary enterprises in terms of increasing their competitiveness and market outreach. Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industries co-organized a stakeholders’ seminar with GRASP on this occasion to engage private sector stakeholders on developing SME competitiveness in Sindh.

In Quetta, Mr. Skidmore met with members of Quetta Chamber of Commerce & Industries, who presented their business expansion ideas for goat and sheep farms, grapes export and olive processing. He also met with the General Secretary for Balochistan Horticulture Cooperative Society (BHCS), signing a letter of Intent to support in onion value chain. He also interacted with a group of women entrepreneurs while attending a training on micro entrepreneurship organized by GRASP and encouraged them to submit their business plans for investment opportunities.

GRASP continues to empower women

GRASP has been notified as a member of Women Economic Empowerment Council (WEEC) by Women Department of Balochistan on June 1, 2021. Provincial lead and Gender Advisor, Balochistan attended the session on 4 June 2021 and shared GRASP activities focused on uplifting rural women in the region like Kitchen Gardening, entrepreneurship training in districts and upcoming e-commerce training. The forum acknowledged GRASP activities to empower women. A letter of intent was signed between the Balochistan Women Business Association (BWBA) and GRASP to work together. Ms Sana Durrani CEO BWBA highlighted the importance of capacity building and matching grants GRASP was providing to women, who had limited to no access to finance to explore business opportunities.

Media visit was organized to highlight stories of women SMEs of district Thatta to bring attention of policy makers and extension service providers to the rural women SMEs

Slaughterhouse operation training

Officials from Sindh Food Authority, Livestock and Fisheries Department and Karachi Municipal Corporation were trained on the use of slaughterhouse operational manual developed by GRASP consultant Dr. Mohsin Kiani in Karachi, Sindh. The purpose of this Manual is to set out the guidelines for the slaughter of ruminants in slaughterhouses. Handling and slaughter for public consumption invariably follow traditional and ritualistic norms, some of which at times are at variance with acceptable practices resulting in cruelty to animals, quality losses in meat and a challenge to public health and aesthetic values. The manual outlines the Standard Operating Procedure governing modern-day slaughtering, particularly on Halal Method of slaughtering with humane practices and the attainment of good quality product, which is safe and wholesome for human use. The training covered the Codex Code of Hygienic Practices for Meat and OIE Requirements for Veterinary Public health and Sanitary and PhytoSanitary (SPS) requirements.

Slaughterhouse operational protocol was taught to the 20 professionals already involved in animal slaughtering and meat quality inspection from cattle, buffaloes, sheep and goat. The goal was to enhance their capacity to monitor the meat processing protocol from slaughterhouse to butchers. The participants also visited Organic Meat Company in Karachi, where they observed feedlot farm, lairage management, slaughtering and processing operation, laboratory work, and processing and value addition sections of the meat plant. Secretary Food Sindh attended the closing ceremony and announced that Sindh Food Authority will adopt the SOPs outlined in the manual.
Knowledge products distributed

GRASP is working to build capacities of institutions at provincial level to improve their operations. 900 books for the library of Sindh Animal Health Institute were distributed. The books will assist in bringing the officials up to date with latest information and techniques on a range of topics including Pathobiology to Animal Nutrition.

Promoting Agro-entrepreneurship

GRASP partner organization, Empowerment thru Creative Integration (ECI) in Balochistan conducted two-day training sessions in Zhob, Pishin, Lasbela and Quetta on micro-entrepreneurship and business skills in horticulture and livestock sectors from 7-8 June 2021. One hundred and fifty-eight participants were trained on engagement in livestock and farming business and improving their economic situation while using available resources. They were trained on basic tools needed to start a business, such as market knowledge of Balochistan, business plans, and financial literacy. Almost half of these participants were women.

Coordination meetings with stakeholders

GRASP implementing partner, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund held consultations and meetings with stakeholders in Balochistan from 21-26 June 2021. PPAF Group head for Institutional Development, Innovation, and Integration Mr. Irshad Abbasi and Group Head for Infrastructure development Mr. Shams Badrudin met with the vice chancellor of Balochistan University of Information Technology. They discussed GRASP work in the province and explored areas of collaboration building on the Universities work on targeted value chains, water research, executive education development program, and technology and innovation.

The team also met with National Incubation Centre Quetta, SMEDA, FAO, National Bank of Pakistan Regional Chief, State Bank of Pakistan Representative, and Balochistan Women Business Association. They discussed how GRASP interventions can take from and compliment the work these organizations have been doing to develop the economy in Balochistan. Several areas for mutual interventions were highlighted, which the implementation team will be pursuing in the coming months.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

In Sindh, Livestock capacity building sessions were organized in Thatta and Khairpur Mirs, and twenty sessions on feeding management of Livestock were held where 22 men and 99 women were trained.

For value addition, a three days training on harvest and postharvest management of onion was conducted at FAO office Quetta, benefiting 25 farmers from different district of Balochistan. Participants were trained on harvesting, handling, sorting, and grading, packaging, and storage techniques of onion. In Sindh, the team conducted follow up visits in GRAS Covid-19 plan intervention villages where seed and fertilizer were distributed. Benefits of quality seeds and fertilizer, recommended dosages, recommendations for mango, dates, tomato and fodder for livestock and processing, improving quality and adding value to the GRASP’s focused products were discussed with the beneficiaries.
Stories from the field!

When the water runs out

This olive farm specializes in producing olive oil. It moved from livestock rearing to growing olives to adapt to climate change.

‘Before I was an olive farmer, I reared livestock. I abandoned this in 2010 because I lost about 1,400 animals due to drought and fodder deficiency. Droughts are becoming more frequent in my region as temperatures rise. For many people in my community this poses a threat to their livelihoods, as they rely on livestock for income.

Water table levels also are going down. In a 60km radius around our village, we were unable to find any water. Because of this scarcity, farming is not an option for most people. On my private land I was lucky enough to find some water and set up a tube well. I also have built a small dam to save rainwater during the monsoon season.

Planting olive trees was a way for me to adapt to the changing climate. They are drought-resistant plants that require little water, are evergreen and can survive temperatures up to 50 degrees Celsius.

My olive oil is used in homeopathic treatments to address health conditions such as diabetes and arthritis. Olive shoots and leaves are by-products of the oil production that I use to feed my remaining livestock. They are very nutritious fodder that improves meat quality. I have also started to produce olive tea, made from the leaves.

I am participating in ITC’s GRASP project to learn more about best farming practices. Recently, I joined an exposure visit where we discussed the latest innovations in olive value chains and were taught about orchard management, grading, packaging and marketing.’

The Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP) project, funded by the European Union, focuses on rural SMEs in two Pakistani provinces, in the horticulture and livestock sectors, with an emphasis on climate-smart agriculture.

Ahmed Khan Buzdar
Owner, Burg Olive Oil Products, Pakistan

https://www.intracen.org/smeco2021/
News in brief

GRASP project executive signs LOI with Balochistan Horticulture Cooperative Society for potential collaboration in the future to support investment in agriculture and Livestock in Balochistan.

KPMG conducted a business assessment visit in Sindh and Balochistan, where they shortlisted 36 cases for matching grants.

Women men were trained on agri-entrepreneurship in four districts of Balochistan in 2-day sessions.

GRASP project coordinator and project executive met with PPAF CEO, discussing progress made, exploring opportunities in Sindh and Balochistan, and developing an exchange programme for farmers.

GRASP Chief Technical Advisor Dr. Tariq Sardar and Provincial Lead Mr. Jahanzeb Khan met with the Chief Secretary Balochistan Mr.Mathar Niaz Rana and briefed him on GRASP activities.

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