Ministry of Commerce endorses GRASP, pledges support for ongoing activities

The first meeting of GRASP National Project Steering Committee (NPSC) was held on 25 August 2021. Mr. Sualeh Ahmed Farooqi, Secretary Ministry of Commerce chaired the meeting, and was attended by representatives of Ministry of Planning and Development, Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Board of Investment, Ministry of National Food Security and Research and Ministry of Science and Technology. Provincial governments and private sector participants joined online. European Union was represented by head of development cooperation, Mr. Ovidiu Mic. Representatives from International Trade Centre, chairs from the GRASP Sindh and Balochistan Project Steering Committees, and private sector representatives from horticulture and livestock sector also attended the meeting.

The committee members appreciated GRASP efforts focused on developing the small and medium enterprises into drivers of sustainable economic development, while keeping in mind the priorities of the government of Pakistan. The Secretary stated that “GRASP is a critical intervention as it is addressing key areas of rural poverty by targeting small businesses, nurturing them, and enabling them to grow in a holistic manner”.

Project Coordinator Mr. Azher Ali Choudhry while giving an overview of the scope of work to the committee members emphasized that Pakistan is one of the top ten countries most affected by climate change, and GRASP is working to address trade policies and business environment for SMEs in a global market while promoting climate smart interventions.

GRASP has helped communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic by providing technical assistance, capacity building, and trainings of policy implementing agencies along with direct inputs such as the vaccination of over 60,000 livestock animals. Implemented in 23 districts of Sindh and Balochistan, the project is ensuring that women are a part of its climate conscious interventions. GRASP is also supporting the provincial and federal government in improving policies and laws regarding SMEs.

The chair and committee members appreciated the focused approach of GRASP, validated the report of inception phase with valuable suggestions for better implementation.
GRASP to work with Federal Planning, Development, Reforms and Special Initiative Ministry

PPAF (Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund) Group Head; Institutional development, Innovation, and Integration; Mr Irshad Khan Abbasi along with GRASP Business Development Specialist; Mr Waqar Abbas met with the Federal Minister Planning, Development, Reforms and Special Initiative; Mr Asad Umar.

The team briefed the federal minister on the Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP) project highlighting how the three implementing partners International Trade Centre (ITC), PPAF, and Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, led by ITC are working jointly to provide growth capital along with technical assistance at (Macro, Meso, Micro) to SMEs and MSMEs (micro small and medium enterprises) in livestock and horticulture sectors’ value chains in districts of Sindh and Balochistan. The team further highlighted the need of developing a conducive and supportive ecosystem for businesses to promote private sector-led growth in Balochistan.

The federal Minister agreed on the development of a conducive environment and directed the CEO Public Private Partnership to work closely with GRASP and the Government of Balochistan to roll out Public Private Partnership unit in Balochistan. The federal minister appreciated the GRASP project interventions and assured full support to the project for delivering sustainable SME (Small and Medium sized Enterprises) development interventions in Sindh and Balochistan.

GRASP coordinator attends 7th Ease of doing Business Reform Plan

Mr. Azher Ali Choudhry, GRASP National Coordinator attended the ‘Ease of doing business 7th reform plan’ organized by the Board of Investment, on August 25, 2021. The government launched the plan with the aim to jump to the 75th place in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business EODB-2023) report by making business and investment environmentally more friendly, easy and less time consuming.

In EODB-2020, Pakistan had made a sizable improvement of 28 notches and jumped to 108th place from 136th in year 2019. The EODB-2021 report, which was earlier supposed to launch in October 2020, will be released in December 2021 and the government is confident Pakistan will achieve its global ranking in the range of 90s [90 to 99]. The delay was due to Covid-19 pandemic.

EODB Reform Action Plan was launched in an event organised by Board of Investment (BOI), in collaboration with World Bank, International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom.

The government is encouraging programmes that support the business environment that facilitate business activity and trade, and GRASP is one such programme which aims to reduce poverty in the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan by facilitating small and medium enterprises, rural entrepreneurs, and develop market linkages to promote market competitiveness.

Good manufacturing practices to improve business of traders and retailers

GRASP held a training session on Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) in compliance to Food Safety and Quality standards, for processors, traders, and retailers of Hyderabad District on 31 August 2021. The purpose of the session was to familiarize the participants with the role and principles of the Good Manufacturing Practices and their importance to ensure safe and quality products. During the session, GRASP consultant Dr. Shahbaz ul Hassan briefed the participants on a number of topics, some
of which were disease control during food handling, prevention of cross contamination, understanding of quality dimensions, and food safety and associated risks.

Requirements of national and international buyers of food products such as Metro, Carrefour, Pizza Hut, Dominos, PepsiCo, Nestle, and others Legal and regulatory requirements of Food Authority, PSQCA etc were imparted to the trainees. Special focus was to enable the participants to implement these good practices and fulfill compliance to quality, food safety and SPS measures. Twenty-one traders/processors, and project beneficiaries (14 men and 7 women) were trained in this session.

Training of Slaughterhouse Management and SPS Compliance

Enhancing capacities of SMEs to comply with food safety and other SPS measures is one of the key outputs of GRASP. Under this output GRASP has initiated a series of district level trainings to develop master trainers in slaughterhouses management and SPS compliance through sharing of best international practices. The trainings are being held simultaneously in Sindh and Balochistan, as part of GRASP support to Sindh and Balochistan Food Authorities.

There are two types of slaughterhouses in Pakistan i.e., slaughterhouses solely producing meat for export purposes and those producing meat to meet local needs. The former is regulated by Animal Quarantine Department of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research which provides quarantine, inspection, and certification services across Pakistan whereas the later have complex operational and functional mechanism. The local slaughterhouses are managed and regulated by the local government department through Taluka Municipal Administrations and District Administration. The situation of local slaughterhouses becomes more complicated when it comes to the animal/meat inspection, monitoring of hygiene and safety standards etc.

Ideally, there ought to be only officially recognized slaughterhouses making it easier and possible for the monitoring personnel to carry out inspection duties, however, the street level individual slaughterhouses have made it exceedingly difficult for the departmental staff to perform inspection and monitoring activities on daily bases.

GRASP is also carrying out hands on trainings to develop master trainers in Sindh and Balochistan. The trainings focus on safety standards i.e., monitoring the slaughterhouses and meat shops, meat storage, animal inspection, coordination with other line agencies, SPS compliance etc. Around 20 veterinary officers/staff in each training are trained as master trainers. It will be replicated by the master trainers to ensure ownership and sustainability of the initiative with certain modifications based on learning and feedback from these first-round trainings.

The proposed activity will result in improved understanding and technical capacity of concerned staff to monitor food safety standards and SPS compliances related to meat product.

Training of trainers on meat safety

Three-day Training of Trainers (ToT) on meat safety and standards was organized from August 2-4, 2021 in Quetta. The training provided the understanding on meat quality characteristics, good hygiene practices in meat production, processing, transportation, and retail marketing. Technical sessions included importance of food safety and Meat Safety Standards, national and International best practices, compliance, safe sample collection and testing, Regulatory framework and institutional mandate, SMEs Sensitization tools and techniques for compliance on food safety standards, and best operating practices. Twenty officials of Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) were trained as master trainers to further disseminate advisory services to the entrepreneurs on meat safety and hygiene protocols, and also supervise the provision of quality meat and meat products to the consumers. Mr. Noor Ahmed Pirkani, Secretary Food Department and Mr. Ibrahim Baloch, Director General BFA graced the occasion as chief guests.

Orientation program on GRASP Gender Mainstreaming Strategy

GRASP Sindh team presented the projects gender mainstreaming strategy to Women Development Department (WDD) on August 31, 2021, in Karachi.
GRASP aims to integrate gender into the overall project to augment gender mainstreaming into the agribusinesses and entrepreneurship around GRASP’s value chains related to horticulture and livestock. The constraints in the agricultural domain have been affecting lives of women, and GRASP and WDD teams will work together to enhance opportunities to meaningfully engage rural women in Agri-entrepreneurship.

GRASP provincial lead Ms. Shabnam Baloch after giving an overview of the output-based three-pronged approach of GRASP, i.e., to give policy development support to the GRASP stakeholders to set grounds for the conducive business environment for the SMEs development; give integrated support to the Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in which training, capacity building, technical assistance, climate smart agriculture, technological support is included to capacitate the SMEs. Finally, to commercialize SMEs, through access to finance, grants and linking women farmers to the market. Linking few areas of the rules of business of the WDD to GRASP, Ms. Baloch suggested the concerned policies and laws could be jointly reviewed to meet the special needs of farmer women to enhance their representation and minimize their plight.

GRASP Gender advisor for Sindh Ms. Sahar Gul defined key principles of the GRASP GMS, its implementation approach, its gender related solutions and strategies, and an action plan for 2021-2022, which is now being implemented. It elaborated how the GRASP GMS has gender-based value chain approach to offer integrated support to women farmer groups/SMEs as women have a strong role in horticulture and livestock. Besides pre/post-harvest on/off-farm work, they also contribute to the value additions of the products. The project has also begun extensive online marketing programmes to connect the start-up businesses of women growers to the local markets through online platforms and increase their bargain power through forming their market collectives. Work is being done to connect farmer women to financial institutions.

The event concluded with the training need assessment of the WDD personnel in line with the functions and rules of business of the WDD. The participants shared their capacity building and training requirements, which included subjects like, Gender Equality, Integration of gender into policy, good organizational practices, etc.

**Promoting digital employability**

A two-day training was conducted from 10-11 August 2021 for small and medium entrepreneurs in Balochistan on the theme of “E-commerce and Digital Employability for Economic Empowerment. Thirty entrepreneurs from Quetta Chambers of Commerce and Industry (QCCI), Quetta chambers of small traders, Balochistan Horticulture Cooperative Society (BHCS) and officials of Industries and Commerce Department were trained on e-market places in the domestic market. They were also facilitated in registering for various e-market platforms and digital marketing.

**GRASP A2F specialist advancing partnership prospects for financial component**

GRASP Access to Finance Specialist through PPAF, Ms Robila Agha in a round of meetings in July and August 2021 presented the GRASP project to the leading financial institutions of Pakistan. The discussions revolved around elaboration on the scope of the project, foreseeable challenges and producing an optimal strategy for the financial component of the project to drive viable partnership interventions for financing MSMEs and SMEs.
At State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Karachi, Ms Robila and International Trade Centre – GRASP Gender Advisor Sindh, Dr Sahar Gul, met with SBP teams from three major departments lead by; Banking Policy, Mr Nadeem Khanzada; National Policy, Mr Umair Ahmed; and Development Finance, Ms Shahla Riaz. SBP agreed in facilitating the project implementation fully and linking GRASP representatives to decision-makers at major banking and financing institutions of Pakistan.

Subsequently, in a round of meetings, Ms Robila met with high-level representatives, including, country heads, HODs and domain heads from AdvansMFB, ASIA Insurance, Bank Alfalah, FINCA Bank, HBL, Karandaz, KASHF, Meezan Bank, NBP, PakOmanMFB, Primus Leasing, Public Private Partnership, SMEDA (Small & Medium Enterprise Development Authority) Sindh, Ubank, UBL, SEDF and Sindh MFB.

The representatives from financial institutions showed eagerness in partnering on GRASP’s objectives through a variety of interventions. In the next round of talks, the parties are moving towards finalising the right mix of relevant products and services for synergistic value addition in livestock and horticulture sectors in the targeted districts of Sindh and Balochistan.

**FAO completes distribution of seeds and fertilizers**

FAO as part of its Climate Smart Agriculture Interventions distributed 780 bags of fertilizers including Urea, SOP and DAP amongst 260 farmers from district Kharan and Nushki (130 each) in Balochistan. Technical specifications of seeds, harvesting baskets, and packaging materials were sent to Lead Technical Officer (LTO) for approval. In addition, eight Farmer Field Schools (FFS) sites were identified in the target districts for female FFS demo plots. In Sindh, FAO team held awareness sessions on the benefits of the seed and fertilizer, its utilization, recommended dosages, and benefits in the production. Further to these 16 sessions were conducted on livestock management, participated by 96 community members including 12 males and 84 females from district Thatta, Khairpur, and Tharparkar.

**News in brief**

- **Additional Chief Secretary (Dev) visited GRASP Balochistan office on 7th August 2021.** GRASP team updated him on project progress and planned activities. ACS Balochistan, who is also the chair of PSC chair, specially appreciated GRASP team visits to the field during the implementation of project activities to ensure prompt implementation.

- **GRASP is working with Balochistan Food Authority to build their capacity, and here a detailed assessment is being carried out for their mobile vans.**

- **Training on Good Agricultural Practises in Hyderabad, Sindh.**

- **Public private dialogue held in Karachi to discuss the Sindh Agriculture Policy – 2018.**
MoC endorses trade project to uplift SMEs

ISLAMABAD: Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress, a project funded by the European Union and implemented by the International Trade Centre held its first National Project Steering Committee meeting in Islamabad on August 25, 2021, chaired by Federal Secretary Ministry of Commerce, Saeed Ahmad Farooqi. Representatives from the Ministry of Planning and Development, Ministry of National Food Security and Research, and Ministry of Science and Technology validated the project’s inception phase, and pledged support for ongoing interventions.

Representatives of the European Union and head of development cooperation Mr. Oswald Mio, representatives from the International Trade Centre,来自从GRASP’s蓿小于and Balochistan Project Steering Committees, and private sector representatives from agriculture and livestock sector also attended the meeting.

The committee members appreciated GRASP’s efforts focused on developing the small and medium enterprises into drivers of sustainable economic development, while keeping in mind the priorities of the government of Pakistan. The Secretary stated that “GRASP is a critical intervention as it is addressing key areas of rural poverty by targeting small businesses, nurturing them, and enabling them to grow in a holistic manner.”

Project Coordinator Mr. Adil Ali Chaudhry while giving an overview of the scope of work to the committee members emphasized that Pakistan is one of the top ten countries most affected by climate change, and GRASP is working to address trade policies and business environment for SMEs in a global market while promoting climate smart interventions.

GRASP has helped communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic by providing technical assistance, capacity building, and trainings of policy implementing agencies along with direct inputs such as the vaccination of over 60,000 livestock animals. Implemented in 12 districts of South and Balochistan, the project is ensuring that women are a part of its climate conscious interventions. GRASP is also supporting the provincial and federal government in improving policies and laws regarding SMEs.

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK
https://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=1258564433477599

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

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

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

Join our Facebook group to stay updated on project activities and milestones, at https://www.facebook.com/groups/1097343917347186
and our official web page at https://www.intracen.org/GRASP/