

NEWSLETTER

GROWTH FOR RURAL ADVANCEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE PROGRESS
(GRASP)

JANUARY 2024

Pakistani SME's score big at Trade Development Conference in Egypt

In a resounding triumph for Pakistani small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the 4th Pakistan-Africa Trade Development Conference (PATDC) & Pakistan Single Country Exhibition (PSCE) held in Cairo emerged as a watershed moment in fostering trade ties within the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. Organized by the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), this hallmark event brought together policymakers, industry leaders, and entrepreneurs to deepen economic relationships.

Supported by the International Trade Centre's (ITC) Global Alliances for Resilient and Sustainable Supply Chains (GRASP) program, seven dynamic SMEs from Sindh and Balochistan showcased their products at this influential platform. The purpose was clear – to strengthen Pakistan-Africa trade relations by combining business development with cultural exchange for a truly comprehensive experience.

Among the success stories, Perfect Food Industries, a GRASP-supported enterprise, secured orders for 21 containers, amounting to an impressive USD 1.56 million. The bilateral trade relationship established with El Bodoor Herbs promises a continued export channel, marking a significant stride in economic collaborations.

Karachi Tea Company, another beneficiary under GRASP, achieved future orders totaling 15 containers, valued at USD 240,000. Beyond immediate sales, the company forged multiple potential partnerships during the exhibition, laying the groundwork for sustained growth.

Banana Fiber Company (BFC), supported by a GRASP grant, introduced innovative banana fiber products that garnered substantial interest from Egyptian businesses. This interest not only signifies market demand but also opens doors for potential partnerships, including technology transfer arrangements.



Herbal Lagoons, a Quetta-based company, engaged with various Egyptian entities during the expo, leading to invitations for factory visits and plans for future joint ventures. The company's products, ranging from dried onions to ginger and dates powder, received positive feedback, sparking interest in collaborative initiatives.

Islamabad Agri Enterprises, specializing in fresh grapes and raisins, showcased its value-added products, inviting interest from a Cairo-based company for a joint venture in grapes processing. Despite market challenges, the company received inquiries for raisin exports, showcasing the resilience of Pakistani enterprises in exploring new avenues.

While Darvaish Cold Store received positive feedback on its raisin varieties, there were no specific orders generated during the expo. However, the exposure and market information gained during the event contribute to the company's understanding of buyer requirements, paving the way for future participation in similar global expos.

Burg Olive SMC Pvt. Ltd., a leading Balochistan-based company in olive production and oil extraction, explored potential collaborations with Egyptian businesses interested in Pomace olive oil. Though facing market challenges due to pricing, the company's participation in the expo laid the groundwork for future engagements.

In essence, the Cairo Expo proved to be a transformative experience for these SMEs from Sindh and Balochistan. The economic impact extended far beyond the exhibition hall, with estimated future commitments between ITC-supported exhibitors and buyers reaching USD 2.0 million. With an initial investment of approximately USD 10,000, the return on investment soared to around USD 2 million, underscoring the extraordinary value generated by this strategic participation. As these enterprises prepare for future global expos, the lessons learned and relationships forged in Cairo serve as a testament to the potential for Pakistani SMEs to thrive on the international stage, showcasing not only their products but also the resilience and innovation inherent in their business strategies.

\$3.5 Million in Business Committed at FoodAg Expo

Forty-six SMEs, including 14 dynamic startups, displayed their products and services at the Food and Agriculture Exhibition held in Karachi, Pakistan in August 2023.

The expo enabled the SMEs to engage with more than 600 global exporters and thousands of national buyers in attendance.

This resulted in the signing of 25 Letters of Intent (Lols) SMEs and lead firms, securing business deals estimated at more than US\$ 3.5 million with national and international buyers with the help of the International Trade Centre (ITC).

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GRASP project, funded by the European Union, partnered with Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) for this first of its kind Food and Agriculture Exhibition in the country

With a dedicated pavilion at the event, GRASP project underpinned its commitment to driving trade growth and empowerment in Pakistan.



The exhibition provided a unique platform to food and agriculture related Pakistani businesses to showcase their products and services to international buyers and develop linkages for enhanced domestic and international trade.

Spanning the horticulture sector, the enterprises showcased a diverse range of products, from environmentally friendly vegan leather crafted from banana fiber produced in Sindh province to delectable ripe mangoes and exquisite dates from Balochistan.

Women-led businesses were prominent participants, highlighting the integral role of gender empowerment in driving economic growth.



Women Led Business Expo

In October 2023, the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) hosted the WEXNET 2023 Expo in Lahore, where the remarkable resilience and innovation of women-led Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from Sindh and Balochistan were on full display. This vibrant event featured over 900 female exhibitors from rural areas across Pakistan, eager to showcase their products, connect with potential clients, and make significant sales transactions. With support from the International Trade Centre (ITC) Sindh and Balochistan teams, these enterprising women not only displayed their products within the GRASP value chain but also forged vital connections and secured sales that would shape their futures.



On the sidelines, ITC also hosted a seminar on "Exporting Food to the EU: Identifying markets, meeting standards and creating packaging that sells" delving into the intricacies of exporting food products to European markets.

Attended by over 300 participants, the session underscored the interest of Pakistan Agro-export businesses in the European market.

As part of the GRASP Agri-tech incubation program, startups availed the opportunity to pitch their business plans to a panel of lead firms and investors. Two standout startups clinched a prize of \$5000 each, a testament to the potential for innovation and growth within the agriculture and horticulture sectors.

A highlight was the formalization of collaboration. ITC and TDAP solidified their commitment to jointly promoting trade in Pakistan through a Letter of Intent. This partnership serves as a concrete step towards uplifting SMEs and fostering sustainable trade growth.

The expo proved to be an exceptional platform for SMEs based in Sindh to gain a profound understanding of the complexities of the business world. They learned about business registration processes with renowned national brands, acquired valuable insights, and expanded their online presence and service offerings. Over the course of three days, these SMEs established connections with national-level platforms, enabling them to present and sell their products to a much broader audience, resulting in a growing customer base that included both new and returning patrons.



One of the standout success stories at the expo was Ms. Zahida Jiskani, whose banana value-added products garnered attention from the markets of Lahore and Karachi. The demand for her banana chips was so substantial that she depleted her inventory within just two days of the exposition.



Ms. Rozina, another entrepreneur, secured a promising supply agreement for her value-added milk products, selling an impressive 95% of her displayed stock.

Women SMEs from Balochistan also showcased their talent and determination to improve their enterprises at the Expo. They used the event as a platform to gain insights into the intricacies of the business world, learning about business registration process with the government through Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA) to be included in the formal economy, and expanding their online presence and services by attending enterprise development training by the GRASP project. Over three days, these SMEs established connections with national-level platforms, enabling them to present and sell their products to a much broader audience, leading to a growing customer base.

Ms. Asia Tariq's sheep woolen items, including handbags, rugs, and wall hangings, drew the attention of the Middle East market at the Expo. The demand for her handbags was so high that she ran out of stock on just the second day. Ms. Shaheen Ejaz secured a promising supply agreement for Sebu thorns, a crucial ingredient for her natural cosmetics business, and sold 30% of her displayed stock.

Sector Strategies in Balochistan



Meetings for development strategies of key sectors including olives, wool, meat, dates, and grapes were held in Quetta. These crucial consultations, held from December 13 to December 19, 2023, were orchestrated by GRASP Balochistan. The primary objective was to validate strategic and operational goals, action plans, modalities, as well as governance, management, and implementation plans for the identified sectors.

Over the past six months, GRASP Balochistan has facilitated 28 multi-stakeholder consultations, shaping and refining 10 sector development strategies within an impressively tight schedule. This accomplishment signifies a significant milestone, and heartfelt congratulations are extended to everyone who contributed their essential roles in this success.

GRASP at a glance



Balochistan team in Kech to assess the progress of matching grant recipients. They have successfully initiated by-products such as yogurt, oil, cheese, date powder, syrup, and vacuum drying.



Training and one on one coaching on results measurement for Business Support Organizations of Sindh and Balochistan held in Karachi



Public Private Dialogue held on SPS curriculum for government officials, private sector stakeholders, and partner organization representatives in Karachi



Provincial Steering Committee for Sindh was held in Karachi under the Chairman Planning and Development Board. The committee acknowledged the great work done by the project in Sindh, and endorsed workplan for the upcoming year.



Training on SheTrades Gender and Value Chains for Partner Organizations officials



Provincial Steering Committee for Balochistan was held in Quetta, attended by EUD and Core Partners. GRASP work in Balochistan was appreciated, a new category for matching grants was requested, and the work plan for new year was formally approved.



Workshop on Market Information Systems (MIS) for officials from Balochistan



Training on domestic commerce for officials from the Ministry of Commerce and Industries in Islamabad



Delegates from the European Union visited matching grant beneficiaries in Balochistan



GRASP Mid Year Review and Planning Meeting

In December 2023, over fifty members of the GRASP team gathered for a mid-end project review and planning meeting in Islamabad. Core partners, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), and Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), presented key achievements and outlined plans for the upcoming year. Representatives from all seven partner organizations in Sindh and Balochistan, along with ITC teams in Pakistan and Geneva, reviewed results, discussed challenges, and engaged in breakout sessions for solutions, team building, and refreshers on value chain development in each province.

A notable shift in the interest of SMEs, government, and stakeholders was observed, with increased momentum in trade discussions both within and outside of Pakistan. A panel discussion addressed ways to enhance private sector engagement for boosting Pakistan's trade. The session, featuring Dr. Irfan from the Ministry of Commerce, Mariana Llantada from the European Union Delegation to Pakistan, Dr. Aneel Salman from the Islamabad Policy Research Institute, and Robert Skidmore from the International Trade Centre, focused on identifying opportunities, addressing challenges, and proposing strategic initiatives to foster a dynamic and resilient trade environment.



Balochistan E-commerce plan

The proposed policy interventions in Balochistan's e-commerce plan offer a multitude of benefits that can transform the province into a thriving e-commerce hub.

Enhanced Consumer Protection: Amendments to the Consumer Protection Act and the establishment of online complaint mechanisms will improve consumer confidence and ensure swift dispute resolution.



Tax Incentives: Reduced provincial sales tax and tax holidays will attract e-commerce companies, reducing compliance burdens and fostering business growth.



Improved Digital Access: Initiatives like providing high-speed internet in commercial hubs and co-working spaces will bridge the digital divide and promote digital inclusion.



Specialized Governance: The creation of an e-commerce cell and stakeholder involvement will enhance policy implementation and regulatory oversight.



Data-Driven Decisions: Collecting data on e-commerce transactions, businesses, and export earnings will enable informed regulatory management.



Efficient Logistics: Modern warehousing and collaboration with Pakistan Post will reduce delivery costs, enhancing logistics services and reducing business overheads.



Empowering Marginalized Groups: Committees and programs will empower youth, SMEs, and women by providing them with resources, skills, and financial assistance.



Global Market Access: Onboarding businesses on international trade platforms and promoting eco-tourism will expand market reach, creating economic opportunities.



Regulatory Compliance: Harmonized regulations and a "Mark of Trust" certification will promote compliance and trust in e-commerce transactions.

