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Press Release

Project to uplift rural MSMEs launched in Pakistan

21 October, Islamabad: A virtual ceremony to launch a project funded by the European Union to uplift micro, small and medium agribusinesses in rural areas of Balochistan and Sindh was held today.

Participants from the government, research and academia, development partners and public and private institutions and organizations attended the launch of Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP) project.

GRASP is implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC) – the joint agency of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization – with participation from implementing partners.

Working in 11 districts of Sindh and 10 districts of Balochistan, GRASP will work to connect farmers to the market and will address issues along the whole of that value chain. It focuses on the demand side: what markets, buyers and consumers want, and then drills down to the supply side by equipping producers and the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises with the skills, technology and services needed to meet that demand. The programme will help enterprises in the horticulture and livestock sectors become more competitive by supporting improvements at all levels of the value chain.

Speaking at the ceremony, Abdul Razak Dawood, Advisor to the Prime Minister for Commerce, Textile, Industry, and Production and Investment Government of Pakistan said, “I am confident the implementation of activities focused on SMEs will help unlock the potential in livestock and horticulture besides other sectors in the country that have been recently presented with additional challenges due to COVID-19.”

Ambassador of the European Union to Pakistan, Androulla Kaminara said, "Aligned with the European Union's global development agenda and the EU's three focus areas in Pakistan – Education, Rural development and Governance & human rights – the GRASP project is expected to positively contribute to the betterment of business environment surrounding SME's. SME's represent most of the employment opportunities in the country and for this reason are very important. We are confident that through this initiative, horticulture, livestock, and dairy sector will become more competitive across value chains, ultimately reducing poverty and generating economic momentum for rural SME's in Pakistan."

Participating from the ITC headquarters in Geneva, Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director of the International Trade Centre said, “

“ITC has a long-standing history of collaborating with Pakistan to support trade led growth. As the main implementing partner of this project, ITC is pleased to contribute to both poverty reduction and inclusive

economic growth in Pakistan. Our technical expertise will help create more job opportunities for both men and women and enable the most vulnerable stakeholders to continue to earn a sustainable livelihood. This is especially important as we address the economic and health fall out caused by the pandemic.”

Azher Chaudhry, National Project Coordinator highlighted that the design of the project aligns with the vision of the government of Pakistan and European Union. GRASP efforts are focused on developing small and medium enterprises into drivers of sustainable economic development, while ensuring opportunities of employment for men and women both.

Micro, Small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) make up the bulk of businesses in Pakistan. To achieve broad, sustainable economic growth, these firms must grow and create jobs for the increasing workforce. Livestock and horticulture – which account for 70% of value-added agriculture – have strong potential for adapting to climate and an increased participation of women.

The EU is committed to support Pakistan to realize its full economic potential by supporting sustainable and inclusive development for all its citizens. The EU provides Pakistan with about €100 million annually in grants for development and cooperation. Among other issues, the EU supports Pakistan in its efforts to tackle poverty, increase education, promote good governance, human rights, rule of law and ensure sustainable management of natural resources.
