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GRASP-Supported SMEs Shine at International Date Palm Festival



The 1st Pakistan International Date Palm Festival, held in Karachi in October, celebrated the country's flourishing date industry and its potential in the global market. A key highlight was the recognition received by the innovative SMEs, supported by the EU-funded Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP). These SMEs won the prestigious Khalifa International Award and $1,000 prizes for their exceptional date varieties, Muzafati and Begum Jangi. The owners, Muhammad Jan of Baloch Hamza Brothers Dates from Panjgur and Ishaq Saleh of Makran Dates and Sweets Pvt Ltd from Kech, also introduced value-added products such as date coffee and syrup, demonstrating the creativity of Pakistan's rural entrepreneurs.

Funded by the EU, GRASP is implemented by the International Trade Centre in partnership with PPAF, FAO, and SMEDA the project empowers rural agriculture in Sindh and Balochistan, enabling SMEs to compete globally and contribute to sustainable economic growth. It offers training, market linkages, and exposure to best practices, enhancing the productivity and profitability of SMEs.

The festival, organised with the Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, attracted over 150 delegates from eight countries. Notable attendees included Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori, Chief Minister of Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah and UAE Ambassador H.E. Hamad Obaid Alzaabi.





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PPAF Chairman Discusses Poverty Strategy in ICMA Journal

The September-October 2024 issue of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants (ICMA) journal featured an interview with Mohammad Tahseen, Chairman of PPAF, in which he discussed the pivotal role of social capital in PPAF's poverty alleviation strategy, stressing the need for strong, organised community institutions to build long-term resilience and promote sustainable socio-economic development. He also outlined PPAF's approach to tackling poverty, which extends beyond income generation to include community empowerment, governance, green growth, climate resilience, livelihoods, and more.

For complete interview click here:
ICMA Journal (extract) featuring PPAF Chairman Interview



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Reviving Energy and Hope After the Floods

In the wake of the catastrophic 2022 floods, PPAF through financial assistance from KfW is leading a critical effort to rehabilitate Micro Hydro Power (MHP) plants in the flood-ravaged regions of Chitral, Upper Dir, and Buner of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These MHP plants, which once provided sustainable off-grid electricity to thousands of households, were devastated by the floods, leaving communities without access to reliable energy.

The rehabilitation involves repairing and reinforcing electrical and mechanical components, constructing flood protection walls to safeguard the infrastructure from future disasters, and upgrading transmission lines to ensure a stable and far-reaching power supply thus, rebuilding the foundation for long-term resilience.

These MHP plants with a combined capacity of 800 kW will serve approximately 2,000 households, providing essential electricity for heating, reducing deforestation, and powering small businesses. To ensure sustainability, local Operation and Maintenance (O&M) committees have introduced a tariff system, allowing communities to contribute to ongoing maintenance and future upgrades. This initiative besides addressing the immediate energy crisis is also paving way for a more resilient and self-sufficient future, empowering these communities to recover, rebuild, and thrive.









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Advancing Olive Oil Production in Lower Dir

The Olive Processing Plant (OPP) in Lower Dir, established with support from the Italian Government through PPAF has commenced operations for the 2024 olive oil production season. In his recent visit to the facility, the Director General of the Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR) also lauded the facility that excels in advanced processes, including olive grading, temperature-controlled crushing, malaxation, centrifugation, filtration, and bottling.

Operational since September 2021, the OPP has made significant contributions to local economic development and environmental sustainability. In its first operational year, the plant processed between 14,000 and 35,000 kilograms of olives, yielding 6,860 litres of extra virgin olive oil (EVOO). This high-quality oil has been tested and certified by the International Olive Oil Council in Italy and PCSIR in Peshawar, affirming its global standards.

The plant has also become a hub for skill development, particularly for women and marginalised groups, through training initiatives. These programmes enable participants to create value-added products, including olive-based tea, soap, cosmetics, and pickles.

Looking ahead, the OPP aims to expand its processing capacity to 250,000 kilograms of olives annually by 2026, supporting approximately 1,200 farmers across Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Chitral, and Bajaur districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.













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Adding Value to Pakistan's Mango Industry

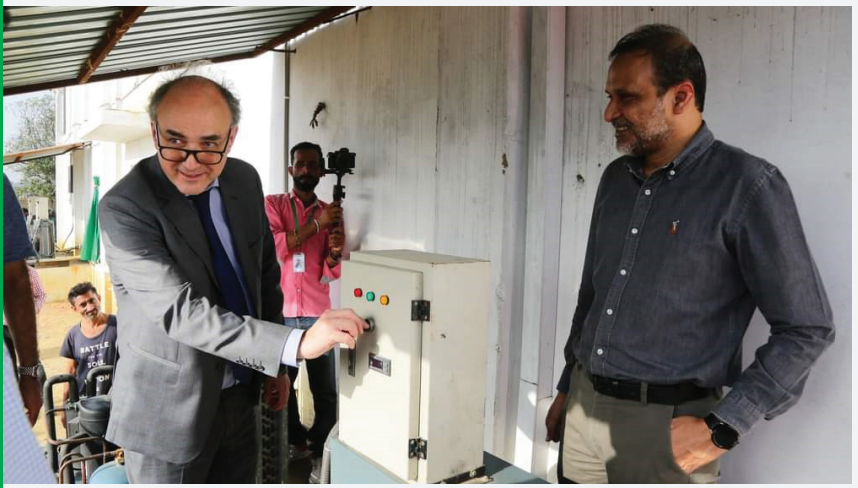
As another milestone under the European Union-funded GRASP initiative, Karachi Tea Company (KTC), an SME based in Sindh, has made remarkable progress in reducing mango waste and strengthening Pakistan's mango value chain. With a PKR 30 million matching grant awarded through PPAF, KTC has established a state-of-the-art mango pulp and cold storage facility, addressing key challenges in the mango industry. This initiative is expected to boost the local economy, create jobs, and promote sustainable growth in the mango industry while enhancing Pakistan's position in global fruit markets.

Pakistan, one of the world's largest mango producer, faces significant losses, with nearly 30% of its crop wasted annually due to medium-sized mangoes being rejected by buyers. KTC's new facility tackles this issue by converting these mangoes into high-quality pulp, adding value while minimising waste.

The facility was inaugurated by Ms. Barbara Riksen, Team Leader for Rural Development and Economic Cooperation at the EU Delegation, in the presence of distinguished guests.







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First Remote Progress Review of Ongoing LACIP-II

The KfW expert panel, comprising specialists from Frankfurt and Islamabad, successfully conducted the inaugural monitoring mission for the Livelihood Support & Promotion of Small Community Infrastructure Programme, Phase II (LACIP-II) in collaboration with PPAF, monitoring consultants NEC, and implementing partners SABAWON and SRSP.

The mission combined remote and physical approaches showcasing innovative methods to ensure accountability and progress in areas with limited access. It included virtual field visits to four project sites across Tank, D.I. Khan, and Lakki Marwat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, complemented by in-person interactions with community institutions.

During the debriefing session, the KfW team lauded PPAF and its partners for their resilience and effectiveness in implementing the programme, reaffirming their dedication to sustainable development in Pakistan.









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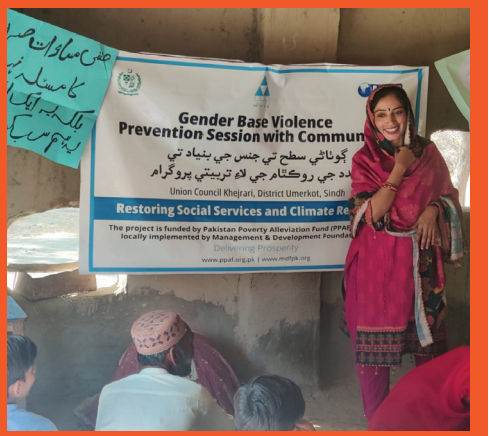
Empowering Communities to Prevent GBV

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) continues to be a pervasive issue, particularly affecting women, girls, and marginalised groups. To tackle this, the PPAF's Restoring Social Services and Climate Resilience project is actively conducting GBV training sessions across project districts.

These training sessions are crucial for equipping community members with the knowledge and skills to recognise, respond to, and prevent GBV. So far, 65 GBV training sessions have been held across nine districts in Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, engaging 1,875 participants, with 53% of them being men. The higher participation of men highlights the project's emphasis on involving all community members, particularly men, in challenging harmful gender norms and supporting the prevention of violence.

The sessions have focused on key topics such as gender awareness, violence recognition, and legal frameworks, ensuring participants understand how to address GBV effectively within their communities.













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Tracking Progress in Enhancing Climate Resilience

Pakistan ranks among the top ten countries most vulnerable to climate change, having endured 152 extreme weather events between 1999 and 2018. In response, PPAF launched the PKR 3.34 billion Restoring Social Services and Climate Resilience project across 61 Union Councils in 19 districts to support climate-resilient development.

As part of this initiative, PPAF's MEAL and Programme teams conducted two weeks of intensive monitoring visits in 17 districts, engaging with 33 Partner Organisations. These visits aimed to assess progress against targets, ensure compliance with agreements, and address implementation challenges.

The teams focused on key areas, including community engagement to involve vulnerable groups in decision-making, accountability through record-keeping and complaint redressal systems, and the development of Village Development Plans. They also evaluated capacity-building efforts for Community Resource Persons, particularly women, alongside monitoring systems, media coverage, and adherence to visibility guideline

The monitoring visits provided valuable insights into project progress, highlighted areas for improvement, and reinforced best practices for enhancing the effectiveness of project delivery,



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Stories From the Field

A Journey Towards Prosperity

Khalida, an Afghan refugee living in Dodba Camp in Upper Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa struggled to support her family amidst the challenges of displacement and poverty. Like many others, she faced cultural and financial barriers to establishing a livelihood. Her life took a transformative turn when she attended the Enterprise Development Trainings under the UNHCR-funded Poverty Graduation Programme (PGP) led by PPAF.

Through community consultations and a systematic identification process using the Poverty Scorecard (PSC), Khalida was selected to participate in the training, which aimed to empower Afghan refugees with the skills to launch and manage their own businesses. The training covered essential topics such as record-keeping, business planning, marketing techniques, financial literacy, and cash management. Special focus was given to women, with separate sessions addressing cultural constraints and ensuring they fully understood the concepts despite varying literacy levels.

Khalida is one of 450 Afghan refugees, including 155 women, who have received training across camps in Upper Dir, Malakand, and other regions. The training equipped her with the knowledge to establish a business, and she is now eligible for a cash grant from UNHCR to help launch her enterprise.

Reflecting on her experience, Khalida shared, "UNHCR & PPAF have brought me into the light from darkness." With the support of this programme, Khalida now has the opportunity to secure a sustainable source of income, offering a brighter future for her family. Her journey is a powerful example of how targeted training and support can uplift individuals, providing Afghan refugees like her with the chance to thrive.





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From Struggle to Stability

Arbab Ali Khoso, hailing from Nagarparkar in Sindh, was born with a physical disability affecting one of his feet, limiting his mobility. Growing up in extreme poverty, his parents could not afford to send him to school. As he grew older and started his own family, his physical condition became a barrier to earning a decent living. In desperation, he began working at a Dhaba (roadside restaurant), earning only PKR 300 a day, which barely covered the needs of his family.

However, everything changed when Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP), PPAF's implementing partner in Nagarparkar, introduced the Prime Minister Interest Free Loan (PMIFL) programme in his neighbourhood. Seeing an opportunity, Arbab applied for the loan, drawing on his experience at the Dhaba. His application was approved, and he received PKR 40,000. With this financial boost, Arbab opened his own Dhaba. His daily income quickly rose to between PKR 500 and 1,000, providing a much-needed sense of stability for his family. For the first time, he could afford to send his children to school—a dream he once thought was out of reach.



Arbab is now filled with hope for the future. He plans to expand his business and is already thinking about applying for another interest free loan. Deeply grateful to TRDP, PPAF, and the Government of Pakistan, Arbab believes this support has not just transformed his life but has paved the way for a prosperous future for his children.

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Stories From the Field

Marium's Journey to Entrepreneurship

Marium Hussain, a skilled embroidery artist from Haripur, transformed into a tech-enabled entrepreneur through the Ba-Ikhtiar Programme. Funded by PPAF in partnership with Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) and implemented by the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), this initiative has empowered women entrepreneurs for economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Selected as one of 100 "strivers" from PPAF-supported community organisations, Marium received vocational training through TEVTA, gaining technical skills, life skills, and career counseling. PTCL provided all the 'strivers' under the project with a mobile phone, a one-year data package, and digital marketing and financial literacy training from Ubank and Daraz. Marium now uses UPaisa wallets and e-commerce platforms to expand her business and reach new markets.

Marium also had the opportunity to showcase her work at Gitex in Dubai this year. This major global platform highlights emerging trends, fosters collaborations, and drives investments across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia demonstrating the transformative impact of Ba-Ikhtiar.

Today, Marium is a role model, inspiring women to achieve economic independence and drive community progress.



