

# Strengthening Poor Farmers In Pakistan



Consolidated Report: Farmers Training Program

# **Strengthening Poor Farmers**

## **Farmers Training Program – A Consolidation Report**

### **Backdrop**

Pakistan has had a long-standing agrarian heritage in which agricultural productivity implies an entire way of life extending well beyond its being a mere means of sustenance. This was a system which placed farmers solidly at its very core so that its overall output was efficient without being exploitative. Farmers used indigenously feasible cropping patterns and implements that were readily available, environmentally friendly and economical. However, problems ushered in during corporatization of the agricultural sector in early years of the twentieth century ultimately damaged the subsistence and livelihood-based economy as well as the overall social structure of rural societies. The introduction of canal based agricultural trends meant to promote the culture of cash cropping landed the first major blow to the self-reliance of farmers by removing the most vital element of food security and simultaneously initiating a systematic trend that may have increased the quantum of yield but incidentally undermined a farmer's pervasive presence within agricultural processes. The impact of further misguided experimentation, as evidenced during the so-called 'Green Revolution,' was evident in the resulting curse of water logging and salinity and recurring crop crises. The consequently undermined influence of farmers has led to the eventual degeneration to their status to that of recipients rather than active participants within the process of agricultural production. Farmer representation and participation in decision-making or policy formulation processes in the country has become insignificant. Due to myopic policies including legislative barriers and impediments on civil society expression and organization, farmer communities have suffered lingering suppressions due to which they are unable to obtain a clear political and social role in the modern agricultural sector.

Lingering disempowerment of farmers has resulted in them becoming increasingly marginalized and vulnerable to a host of manipulations including disenfranchisement from policy making that in turn results in them bearing the brunt of technological input costs in spite of a destabilized pricing system. Farmers' face unreliable subsidy support and constant exploitation by commission mafias. Government institutions created to lend financial support to agriculture remained inaccessible in providing credit and technological facilities to the vast majority of poor farmers. Such circumstances have compounded to increase the overall incidence of rural poverty within the country to a staggering figure of seventy percent.

The continuous decline in agricultural production and multiple economic and social problems facing the farmer's community has also affected the pattern and composition of social and cultural structures in rural society. Landlords force heavily indebted peasants confronting

adverse economic and social conditions in many areas of Pakistan into bondage. In Sindh more than fifty thousand peasants and farm laborers living in the personal prisons of local feudals is a stark indicator of the alarming exploitation of these farmers. According to civil society estimates, the current landholding scenario reveals that the majority of feudal landholders comprise only 0.24% of the landholding population but the size of their holdings as well as the influence they yield on both agricultural policies and legislation unfortunately continues to dominate and supercede the interests of the great majority (93%) of poor farmers.

Top-down government policies in the agricultural sector and interference of multi-national seed and pesticide companies have changed not only cropping patterns but even dismantled age-old social and cultural patterns of cooperative farming at the village level. As agricultural patterns slipped out of the farmers hands, so did their control over their own cultural and social ecology including the basic land and food right, due to newly emerging dynamics of governmental complicity with increasing multinational pressures ridding on the back of profit maximization globalization imperatives. Because of such influences, farmers have been rendered helplessly dependent on market forces, profit and commission mafia and their agents. These circumstances have disturbed the overall food security situation in the country and poor farmers themselves find their very livelihood at stake, the rising levels of rural malnourishment, infant mortality and low health standards confirm this state of being.

Poor farmers of the country have not had any feasible platform from which to take on this issue despite the existence of several important precedents. The earliest farmers movement, Sindh Hari Tehrik, had in fact been initiated around the time of partition with a slogan of "halving distribution of production" between tillers and landowners. This movement provided impetus to formulation of the Sindh Tenancy Act of 1948 and further inspired subsequent farmers movements, the largest of which was spearheaded by Maulana Bashani from East Pakistan in the 1970's; simultaneously pressing for land reforms and farmers' rights. This movement mustered unprecedented support as witnessed at a conference in Toba Tek Singh that brought together hundreds of thousands of marginalized farmers from both East and West Pakistan. Yet despite its popular appeal, the movement lacked a coherent vision in terms of sustainability, leading to dissipation.

The lack of cohesive policies at the government level meant to address agricultural sector problems, particularly those of poor farmers, has allowed further deterioration. Agricultural practices adopted over the recent decades besides paying no heed to the issue of food security have also been ignoring environmental consequences of unchecked technological

modes of boosting productivity. The challenge of environmentally friendly agricultural practices for poor farmers is to provide alternative approaches to chemical farming. There is increasing recognition of the need to adopt alternatives to prevailing commercial cultivation practices many of which ironically involve a belated appreciation of the wisdom of 'traditional' farming systems. But such beneficial traditional practices are not widespread anymore specifically due to ad hoc interventions and even ongoing research in this respect still needs to be translated into practical and balanced policies and into actual implementation in the work fields.

### **Existing Needs**

Since Pakistan's population is rapidly increasing and productivity of land is decreasing; we need to meet our food and productivity requirements in light of indigenous agricultural practices sensitive to existing ground realities of poor farmers. Government institutions and policy-making bodies need to take cognizance of such facts and instead of paying undue attention to pro-multinational and anti-people policies, take a more holistic and long termed approach to the agricultural sector which has had, does have and most probably will continue to have a pivotal role in the national economy.

In dealing with agricultural development, the importance of human factors cannot be overemphasized either. There exists a prevailing tendency of farmers being taken as 'producers' or being further reduced to the status of economic indicators rather than socially active actors in the socio-political platforms of the country. Their plight also needs to be considered in human terms as well. In most rural areas illiteracy is very high and there is little or no health and sanitation provision and housing facilities are also minimal. A distressing law and order situation abounds in the absence of accessible justice.

To enhance the quality of life of our rural population, poor farmers need a fair price for their produce and have to be encouraged to adopt means that offer feasible and environmentally safe yield increases. In this context, it is crucial to address the prevalent lack of awareness among poor farmers leading to inadequate land preparation and faulty sowing. Poor access to capital, inadequate implements and lack of environmentally safe technology transfers to farmers also hinders effective productivity. The government has done little to practically rectify the situation on ground, as there even remains an evident lack of timely advice concerning use and timing of farm inputs. Whatever meager resources are available are not being utilized effectively. Test laboratories available at district level where the government is providing soil and water testing services at nominal rates are not being availed by the majority

of farmers. Poor farmers also face post harvest problems particularly with regard to collection of produce while making simultaneous preparations for their next crops. Middlemen take undue advantage of poor farmers' desperation while negotiating prices of produce so as to retain the maximum profit from their own selves.

Prior consultations with the rural poor have indicated a substantive wish list including implied desire for involvement in issues concerning pricing, seed politics, irrigation improvement, agricultural extension advice and credit, better access to agricultural inputs, a greater share in profits and even decision and policy making that directly affect their lives. However the marginalization of poor farmers, compounded by their scattered isolation amidst far-flung rural areas and their inability to come together for collective action, only perpetuated their disempowerment and the consequent neglect. A participatory approach with greater empowerment for the poor farmer community is seen as essential to increased growth in agricultural yield as well as for alleviating poverty.

In light of the systematic disempowerment of poor farmers, there has been a lingering need to establish a self-generating system to bring about the revival of farmers strength within the agricultural sector. Action to address the host of issues confronting our rural populace, required in the foremost, a viable platform for making concerted and sustainable efforts to empower farmers. Alongside addressing this need for a viable organizing medium especially for poor farmers (*haris* or *kissans*) who face the real brunt of such issues at the grassroots level, it was also imperative to initiate a wide range of activities that in turn may obtain an optimum level of sustainable productivity to increase the overall quality of rural life. To initiate a comprehensive capacity building process of farmers and make them interdependent development actors, it became vital to pay heed to formation of farmer groups and to catalyze these farmers group formations to play an increasingly proactive role over the coming years for the sake of participatory socio-economic uplift.

### **Programmatic Approach**

Based on almost a decade of experience and achievements in sustainable agriculture and policy advocacy that was prompted by the opportunity for sustenance and continuity of its core strategic program goals, SAP-PK decided to launch an experimental nine month ***Farmers' Development and Sustainable Agriculture Program*** (FDSAP) in October 1998 in four districts in Sindh (Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Nawabshah and Sanghar) and three districts in Southern Punjab (Khenewal, Lodran and Multan) with the support of two provincial partner organizations - Farmers Development Organization and Takhleeq Foundation - and 20 tehsil resource organizations.

Groundwork done during this pilot phase served the basis for implementing a fourteen-month long **Farmers Training Program** (FTP) that commenced in July 2000 in the same operational areas involving the same provincial partners and local organizations which SAP-PK collaborated with during the FDSAP. The FTP marked the actual initiation of grassroots based interaction that was guided by the prior experimental phase findings.

The next phase immediately followed FTP and was renamed the **Farmers Development Program** (FDP). FDP is of one-year duration and with help of other provincial partners and local resource organizations, the initiative is being introduced by SAP-PK in an additional four districts of Sindh (Dadu, Larkhana, Jacobabad and Shikarpur) and also in five more districts of Punjab (Bhakkar, Khushab, Layyah, Sargodah and Muzzafarghar). FDP again follows the integrated approach for uplifting marginalized and neglected poor farmers by helping to strengthen and organize farmer or *hari/kissan* communities so that they are empowered and politically activated for advocacy and action on the agriculturally related issues. Cooperative initiatives utilizing local resources are a new innovation to the program, meant to provide financial assistance via a resource development component built into the program to help farmers initiate practical implementation of their consecutive capacity building.

### **Program Objectives**

The basic purpose of this tripartite programmatic intervention has been to educate and organize poor farmers' groups so as to increase agricultural production by enhancing their indigenous knowledge, improving farming techniques and initiating policy level discourse that can enable farmers to influence policies and practices directly effecting their lives.

All three of these program have aimed at sequentially addressing the challenge of enhancing skills and capacity of poor farmers (male and female) to deal with a range of problems threatening their very survival and way of life by creating a critical mass that can play a vigilant role for affecting a favorable policy environment for addressing their issues. In order to accomplish this multidimensional goal, some *strategic objectives* were formulated for the program:

- To form poor farmers groups (*hari/kissan* groups) at the grassroots level (district/*tehsil*/village levels)
- To organize farmer groups and to develop inter/intra connections for their networking, experiences sharing and learning through exposure to theory and demonstrations

- To build strong farmers networks at the district level capable of raising a collective voice and initiating policy level dialogues in the agriculture sector
- To impart advocacy skills for increasing awareness of farmers rights and adoption and implementation of sustainable agricultural policies and planning both at government and farming community levels and for taking up gender rights (including those of property and participation)
- To set up sustainable agriculture models (at *tehsil* level) to educate farmers about more environmentally friendly and sustainable approaches to farming

### *Strategic Objectives*

The following methodology was devised in specific view of broad based strategic objectives, so as to obtain optimum results:

- Formulation of Farmer Groups (*Kissan or Hari* Groups)** for activation of farmers through local CBOs and NGOs, networks and social activists, based on a criteria evolved in consultation with Local Resource Organizations (LROs)
- Need Assessment Surveys** in each district conducted through LROs
- Linkage with line departments** at the district level for promoting better understanding between NGOs and government organizations
- Development Orientation Workshops** to introduce new development paradigms via *kissan/hari* groups
- Practical Workshops** to introduce alternatives to chemical farming and new farming techniques via *kissan/hari* groups
- Farmers' Education Workshops** were organized for networking and information sharing at a broader level
- Farmers Group Management Workshops** for inculcating basic organizational skills
- Network formation** at divisional level for advocacy information sharing and formation of relevant linkages
- Publication of a newsletter by the name of "**Kissan Akhbar**" for promoting learning and information sharing processes
- Issue based seminars** for raising awareness level of farming communities and civil society components to build up support particularly for poor farmers
- Exposure Visits** of *kissan/hari* groups to research institutions, extension departments, model farms and agricultural universities to increase knowledge based awareness

- **Kissan Melas** for facilitating networking and building social capital
- **Research** to develop awareness raising material for raising awareness of environmentally friendly agricultural practices
- **Sensitization of media** (local and national) about the program and furthermore invite them to highlight farmers issues as well as achievements

## **Program Activation**

The foremost requirement for operationalization of this programmatic approach was to begin formulating farmers groups that could be guided and organized into self sustaining farmer associations (i.e. *hari/kissan* committees) capable of networking at the larger provincial level for safeguarding and propagating their concerns and interests.

*Farmers Selection Criteria:* SAP-Pakistan helped select male and female farmers with help from local resource organizations in each province that included CBOs/NGOs working in the agriculture sector, local community groups, local social activists and line departments. Subsequent selection was made on the following basis:

- Farmers owning land less than five acres
- Peasants cultivating land less than ten acres
- Landless farmers cultivating less than seven acres of land on lease
- Farmers with low capital input capacity
- Farmers from minority groups
- Women farmers

The actual selection of farmers took place via the platforms of local orientation meetings, farmers gathering, mutual acquaintance meetings with farmers and their local groups.

*Farmers' Development and Sustainable Agriculture Program:* FDSAP was the experimental phase that included a four-month period of intensive support followed by another five months of follow-up activities. The primary activities to launch the program on ground were **district level preparatory meetings**, which were held with *haris/kissans*, small landowners and CBOs/NGOs (with a background of working on farmers issues) for formation of farmer groups to introduce them to the FDSA program including the functional role of the groups and to make preliminary assessment of local interests needs and gauge the potential of focal points for coordination and program support. As a result 15 *hari* groups were formed in Sindh, whereas in the Punjab, 27 *kissan* groups were formed.



The FDSA platform was also utilized to collect data for the **basic needs assessment**. In both provinces, peasants and poor farmers belonging to the *hari/kissan* groups were asked to fill out questionnaires that provided detailed personal profiles, cropping patterns, mode of irrigation, information concerning implement availability and pesticide and fertilizer use. In Sindh and Punjab, 500 *haris* and poor farmers were surveyed and analysis of their responses has yielded interesting results. In Sindh, a majority of respondents in all surveyed districts had obtained primary education and all of the 222 respondents were married and a majority of them had up to 10 family members, an indication of prevailing family densities amongst the poor in rural areas. A majority of Sindhi farmers rely on the canal based irrigational system, the mismanagement of which is illustrated by the fact that shortage of irrigational water was given as the foremost reason for uncultivated lands, followed by water-logging and then salinity. A majority of these respondents, with the exception of a small proportion in Mirpur Khas and Hyderabad, had little access to technical resources of line departments including not only relevant information but also actual services like soil and water testing services existing at the *taluka* (or *tehsil*) level. Although most respondents believed that pesticides and fertilizers increase productivity but harm crops and soil, yet a majority of them were unaware of demonstrated utility of using new farming techniques (concerning cropping patterns or increasing yields) and chemical fertilizer alternatives.

Analysis of survey responses in Punjab led to particular identification of credit requirements of farmers. Like in Sindh, the average farmer is not very educated nor do they have the awareness to utilize available technical resources of line departments. As for access to credit due to complicated banking procedures (specifically pertaining to recovery) and thus he resorts to paying twice the amount for inputs (fertilizers, pesticides and seeds) that he obtains on a credit basis. In a situational analysis report, the Program Coordinator for Punjab also highlighted the lack of poor farmers access to markets, required training and information; their neglect by government departments and absence of coordination amongst themselves.

Qualitative feedback from both provinces helped identify and reinforce the strategic program objectives underpinning the programmatic intervention. A reiteration of some of such basic needs of direct relevance to poor farmers is as follows:

- Lack of information concerning government line departments functioning, availability of technical resources and research findings at the district and tehsil levels
- Lack of political consciousness and organization
- Lack of support structure in case of calamities

- Lack of access of poor farmers to research and educational institutions working specifically on agricultural related issues
- Lack of awareness and mobilization of poor farmers concerning issues of common relevance vis-à-vis personal development and empowerment, enhancing productivity and tackling farmers crises

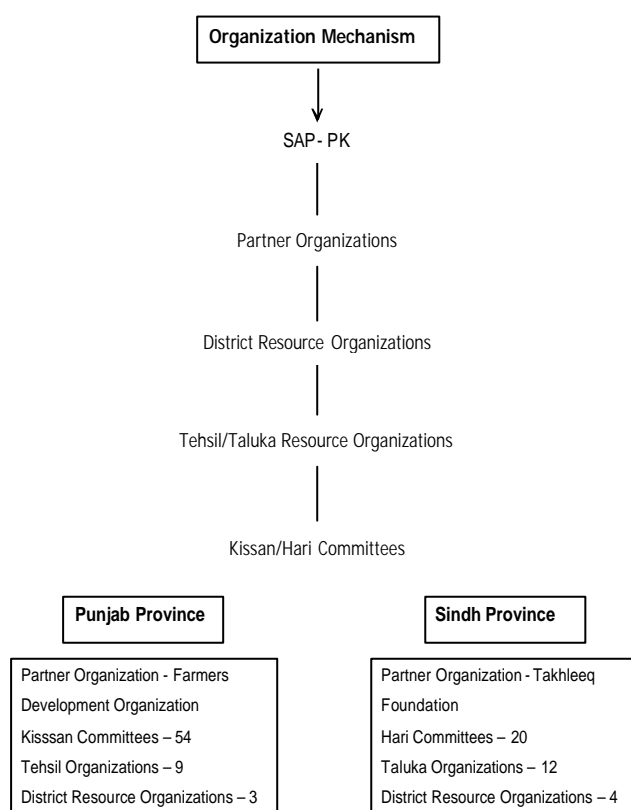
Once *hari/kissan* groups had been formed under the FDSAP, a range of subsequent orientation and plenary workshops were scheduled in all nine districts of Punjab and Sindh in which *hari/kissan* groups and local resource organizations were invited to share experiences and work out a common strategy and plan of action for implementing program goals.

Simultaneously, various line departments and resource organizations were contacted in both provinces by the partner organizations with a view to obtain their patronage and participation in promoting program goals via **networking**. Due to this programmatic imperative, FDO for example managed to obtain impressive expertise from the Agronomic Research Station in Bahawalpur, the Agricultural Extension Office and the Central Cotton Research Institute in Multan. A similar facilitation was provided by the Veterinary Hospital in Lodhran and by the Director of Nature Farming Research Centre (NFRC) at the Agricultural University of Faisalabad who came and spoke about organic farming/EM technology and control of common animal diseases respectively.

After the formation of *hari/kissan* groups, including their orientation and assessment of needs as well as exploratory development of linkages with relevant line departments and resource organizations, the program activities became more sporadic due to lack of resources. However in this interim period due to the motivation of provincial partners and the newly established *hari/kissan* groups, there was never a complete suspension of initiatives. *Hari* groups had been asked to meet at least on a monthly basis and four training workshops were held for awareness and capacity building of *hari/kissan* groups. Takhleeq Foundation managed to conduct follow-up visits of individual committees as well as call larger meetings of farmers concerning sustainable agriculture issues and to organize modest farmers group development and farm management training workshops. Similarly, FDO hired a passenger bus to take farmers for an exposure visit to the NFRC at Agricultural University in Faisalabad. In addition, FDO conducted environment awareness meetings, held a seminar concerning WTO's impact on the agricultural sector and demonstrated construction of model fermenter and an organic farming plot to farmers and local CBOs/NGOs in the adjoining areas.

In addition to these diverse activities, **Farmers Conventions** were also held in both provinces under auspices of FDSA program whereby a wide range of relevant civil society influentials/ organizations with an explicit interest in farmers' development. These conventions provided an opportunity to poor farmers in cognizance of reinforcing their awareness of potential benefits of unified actions for their sustenance and survival.

**Farmers Training Program:** Based on experiences gathered during the pilot phase SAP-PK commenced FTP in collaboration with the Farmers Development Organization in Punjab and Tahkleeq Foundation in Sindh. Both these organizations had already been collaborating with SAP-PK under its Resource Development Program as well as for the experimental FDSA program.



Farmers Development Organization (FDO) Lodhran, was established in 1994. In consultations with SAP-PK, FDO implemented the Farmers Training Program in Punjab through initiation of program activities in three districts of Multan Division i.e. Multan, Khanewal and Lodhran. FDO helped identify nine Tehsil Resource Organizations that have been working with FTP in the Punjab to establish three *kissan* committees each functioning at reasonable levels of maturity. There are 54 *kissan* committees including organizations at the earliest stages of formation is. Each *kissan* committees has 20 to 25 members each. The TROs

becoming increasingly aware of the issues at stake in view of newly available information being shared with them via the FTP's Farmers Education Workshops, decided to further strengthen their base of collective action by merging into a broader political platform; the Ghareeb Kissan Tehreek, which will finally emerge as the unified and self sustaining voice of poor farmers in the Punjab. The Tehreek is in the process of further enhancing its membership drive to bring more poor farmers into its folds.

Based in Karachi, Takhleeq Foundation focuses mainly on agricultural based research and programs and is a partner to SAP-PK in implementing Farmers Training Program in 4 districts of Sindh namely Hyderabad, Sanghar, Mirpurkhas, Nawabshah. The FTP explored entry points in rural districts for this innovative intervention and identified 15 local groups and individuals working for almost identical objectives. The initial learning-sharing cycle culminated into setting up various *kissan* committees in all the four districts with an unprecedented potential to emerge as strong organizations in the foreseeable future. The simultaneous networking process facilitated emergence of a farmers network.

Both these organizations (FDO and Takhleeq Foundation), along with SAP-PK have been committed to working to organize poor farmers via a platform that is envisaged to become the political voice of farmers to struggle against injustices and exploitation being meted out to them. FDO has additionally been campaigning for awareness on issues of globalization, international protocols on agriculture as well as seed and patent politics. They have been motivating farmers to *return* to traditional farming patterns relying on local resources (return since what is now called modern organic farming was in fact the traditional farming pattern that our farmers were obliged to leave during the so-called Green Revolution of 1960's).

#### **A Community Profile**

SAP-PK staff, particularly that delineated specifically to this program has remained closely involved in all stages of program development. Independent visits to *hari/kissan* committees undertaken by SAP program personnel provide the basis for the following profile of a hari committee in Village Noor Mohammad Junejo, Hyderabad district. This committee's organizational maturity was indicated by the detailed presentation it gave of its own activities. This group was formulated when the prerequisite initial membership of 20 farmers had been obtained but its members were initially disappointed by the Farmers Training Program since it was only 'a training, learning and information sharing forum' rather than an initiative that would provide them tangible benefits in the shape of monetary assistance. However, gradual exposure made members realize that they were being exposed to ideas and practices much more worthy than obtaining mere credit or financing. This *hari* committee after a period of fourteen months was been converted into a formal organization named '*Hari Abadgar Taraqiati Tanzeem*' (since every *hari* committee after reaching a discernable level of growth is destined to become a formal organization -Farmers Association - or *tanzeem*).

This particular group has a strong team of activists who usually meet at a countryside tea stall of one Ahmed Mallah, popularly known as '*hari poet*.' They organize meetings of their committee on weekly basis and sometimes invite the FTP coordinator of Sindh to participate in their meetings and brief them on a certain issue. The committee members admitted that

although no hari women had joined their group, yet there was a good deal of participation of rural women in FTP related activities including seminars and the *kissan mela*.

*Provincial Orientation Workshops:* were held in both Karachi and Lahore to reflect on prior program experiences and to reiterate a sense of continuity with current FTP goals and objectives. SAP-PK helped finalize the role and responsibilities of local resource organizations as well as *hari* committees. The terms of reference for district resource organizations were finalized in these workshops as were FTP work-plans, overall strategic goals and methodological requirements needed to achieve these goals, specific attention was given to effective communication channels and reporting systems.

*Project Review and Planning Meetings:* were held to consider and resolve operational hurdles face by *kissan/hari* committees and partner organizations at the *tehsil* level through mutual coordination and consultations. Furthermore, these meetings provided the opportunity to share field experiences and to set future strategies on this basis of emerging ground realities.

*Development Orientation and Organizational Management Workshops:* Both these workshops were organized with the inherent objective of capacitating the organizational structure of farmers groups. Workshops were held for provincial partners and local resource organizations to clarify procedural and methodological concepts including means for conducting accurate situational analysis of concerned localities and for review progress of *hari/kissan* committees particularly with regard to networking, mobilization and coordination. The organizational management workshops particularly focused on developing organizational management skills like record keeping and effective communication. Essentially both these workshop activities were meant to inculcate a sense of program imperatives, to obtain vital feedback concerning ground realities and also to enhance the capacity of the grassroots organizational mechanism to sustain increasing amounts of responsibilities implied by the strive for the development and empowerment of poor farmers.

*Practical Training Workshops:* With the objective of providing practical exposure to pertinent farming techniques and issues, these workshops were held throughout the program in varying lengths of duration ranging from one to four days. Relevant resource people from concerned line departments, research institutes and agricultural



Practical Training Workshop (Lodharan)

universities were invited to provide practical information and also demonstrate its application to participating farmers. For example in Sindh, an agronomist was invited to speak about farm and cropping systems and an agricultural specialist came all the way from the Agricultural University in Faisalabad to speak about EM technology, particularly the practical use of green manure and organic fertilizers. In Punjab, farmers were informed about Integrated Pest Management (IMP) techniques using a multidimensional approach including cultivation of resistant crop varieties, practicing crop rotation. Participants also received demonstrations via these workshops by concerned resource personnel showing them how to cultivate mushrooms or make green manure for example. Question-answer sessions were also included in these training sessions to address specific concerns of farmers and to provide them a chance to clear personal ambiguities.

*Farmers Education Workshops:* For the purpose of facilitating broad based networking and information sharing these three-day activity workshops were organized at the provincial level.

In it, experts were invited to speak on issues of larger consequence including WTO policies and TRIPS/TRIM Agreements so that farmers could become more aware of relevant issues at stake. For example, participants were informed about how tariff reductions being propagated by WTO will favor the more competitive developed



**Farmers Education Workshop (Khanewal)**

countries and how domestic support for agriculture is being reduced as a consequence of such global maneuverings. To cite an example of conditions closer to home, Indian farmers productivity levels were highlighted and in part due acknowledgement was given to their government's continued responsiveness that has included timely reforms as well as incentives like free electricity provision for agricultural tube wells are fiercely resisting such moves but due to lack of motivation and awareness amongst our farmers, the government has already taken detrimental steps like giving rights to an international seed companies to sell genetically modified seeds that will become infertile after one plantation and despite enhancing immediate productivity, they could wipe out indigenous seed varieties and further damage food security. Awareness concerning such issues is the foremost prerequisite to eventual alteration of circumstances, and it is on the basis of such an awareness that advocacy related components within FTP were identified and justified for constructively channeling motivated farmer concerns. Furthermore, national and international farmers movements and their weaknesses and accomplishments were mentioned as being relevant precedents besides shedding light on other pertinent agricultural issues including irrigational

mismanagement or problems concerning revenue collection. Following these information provision sessions, *hari/kissan* committee members were asked to participate in interactive group work for identifying agricultural problems and then brainstorming on their infrastructure, social, environmental and financial dimensions. The role of women was also stressed via this platform and more productive and feasible income generation initiatives were mentioned to help increase household incomes.

*Seminars:* Issue based seminars were held in both provinces to address issues of local concerns. These seminars provided a platform for broader participation and the list of participants often included a greater number of farmers, female growers, besides line department representatives and media personnel who had specifically been invited to draw greater public attention to the issue at hand as well as give coverage to the organized event. One such seminar held in Sindh concerned local level agricultural marketing issues and their solutions implying increased farmers' awareness and enhanced capabilities to deal with organizational problems. A representative of local farmers in the



Seminar on Cotton Pricing



area (a *hari* committee member) spoke about most pressing issues being market access, use of pesticides and *dhal* recovery. The Director of Agriculture (Information) acknowledged the problems being faced by farmers and also outlined government constraints. He said that farmers should make an attempt to contact the department that could not be expected to go to poor farmers individually. The principal of the Agricultural Training Institute at Sakrand informed participants of introduction of a two-year field assistant training course and stressed the importance of the post that intermediates between agricultural officer and farmers of the area. Another variation on the same theme was addressed by a seminar in the Punjab, where farmers' problems with uncertain agri-markets were discussed with specific attention to smaller farmers and women, who are the most adversely affected by marketing outlets.

*Impact Analysis Meetings Follow-up and Monitoring Visits:* For the purpose of analyzing the influence and achievements of FTP on constituted *hari/kissan* committees and to facilitate their eventual linkage with the SHAN and GKT (in Sindh and Punjab), such meeting were held at the corresponding districts level. Committee coordinators made presentations concerning

achievements and issues emerging in their specific localities of work. SAP-PK and partner organizations (Takhleeq Foundation and FDO) were present at these meetings to gauge the capacity of committees and their level of activism vis-à-vis networking via the larger platforms of GKT and SHAN. Furthermore, follow-up visits were scheduled to motivate and assist new TROs and separate district level monitoring meetings were held with *hari/kissan* committee members to ascertain, via a standardized format, the level of coordination amongst committees and corresponding networks of SHAN and GKT, and to gauge the level of female participation in program activities within overall program achievements and hurdles. Impact assessments meetings recorded the enthusiasm of many farmers after exposure visits particularly praising the information obtained about use of fermenters and EM Technology. Many farmers have experimented with EM fermenters to get away from the intensive use of inorganic chemical fertilizers. For example, 39 farmers affiliated with TRO Khanewal have produced 45 mounds of wheat relying solely on green manure and Bio-Aab and the resounding success of this experiment is bound to lead to further replication. Many farmers in both provinces reportedly seemed convinced of benefits of organic farming and the concept of intensive agriculture was also noticed to be declining as farmers were beginning to give up cultivating water intensive crops due to the prevailing water scarcity.

*Action Oriented Research:* The land revenue collection system operative at the rural level is both exploitative and inefficient. This situation is particularly blatant in rural Sindh where growers have to pay several taxes including water charges, land revenue, drainage tax, local cess collectively referred to as *dhal*. These taxes are collected lump sum from farmers by *tapedars*, the lowest ranking officials in the revenue department, who usually visit villages accompanied by armed policemen and use illegal force against growers to extort payments in blatant violation of recovery rules. According to revenue rules, *tapedars* are supposed to inspect crops and record this data in their field books but they have long ago given up this practice. Instead they fill out fictitious entries and enable them to overcharge and misappropriate funds coerced from the defenseless farmers. There are two obvious reasons for the perpetuation of this distorted recovery system, one is that the administration lacks any other feasible arrangement to replace *tapedars* and secondly the entire administrative setup at the district and even the divisional level is greased by this illegal income. Also since most of the farming community remains unaware of the complicated legal preambles of taxation, they are exploited mercilessly due to this ignorance.

There has been a dire need to shed light on such ruthless distortions in the agricultural taxation system that not only prevent effective revenue transfer to the government but also cause extreme financial strain to growers who are compelled to away up their meager profit



from yields and subsequent production investments to fill the pockets of corrupt *tapedars*. Accurate information concerning the nature of the problem was considered the first step in articulating effective imperatives that can in turn be used for making workable recommendations to concerned policy makers and for exerting pressure via advocacy.

In view of this need, Takhleeq Foundation was asked to undertake an investigative research study of 'Dhal system issues in Sindh.' The study proposed to scrutinize the legal status and prevalent malpractices with regard to the dhal system and make available a set of comprehensive recommendations for advocacy by farmers and for consideration by policy makers. Focusing on four districts of Sindh (Hyderabad, Nawabshah, Mirpurkhas and Sanghar) the research methodology included extensive meetings with concerned line departments, a survey of 240 respondents from *hari* committees in these districts as well as use of the PRA methods, focus group discussions and personal profiles. Secondary data was also utilized to make the understanding of issues more comprehensive. The subsequent report provides a condensed description and assessment of various forms of taxes being levied in these four areas and then on the basis of feedback by respondents, it illustrates the real nature of problems being faced by these farming communities. For example it points towards the lack of awareness of growers about the whole system of dhal recovery. 20% respondents were aware that there existed tax exemptions below a certain ceiling of landholdings. 72% respondents did not know how to obtain an exemption from water rates in case they were not using irrigational water. 87% respondents indicated ignorance about rates of *ushr* recovery. The research further made clear that this unawareness is being perpetuated by revenue department authorities who have a vested interest in keeping growers unaware of their legal rights.

In light of issues highlighted by the research, pertinent suggestions were put forth for attention of advocacy activists and policymakers and some of them are being reiterated herein. The research report suggested consideration of payment of all dhal dues via banks instead of revenue department authorities to potentially bypass the entire faulty system. It suggested consideration of a single agricultural tax fixed on a rational basis instead of a varied and complicated system that is very difficult to rectify and/or understand. The report also recommended that land revenue rates must be publicized via local media as well as via national television and radio broadcasts in addition to being made available to growers at union council and *dhe/* levels. Besides other issue specific recommendations, the report concluded by stressing that at the very least there is need for immediate legal recourse against *tapedars* exploiting local growers in connivance even with the police.

To highlight its research findings, partner organizations published and disseminated the research report in Sindhi and in English and then organized a divisional seminar on the subject which was attended by over two hundred participants, mostly farmers, as the venue of the activity was consciously chosen to be a village (Jhando Narjo near Tando Jam) to ensure maximum participation of people for whom awareness of *dhal* issues is most relevant. A journalist from the daily *Kawish* as well as a resource person from the Sindh Development Study Center also participated in this event. Many poor farmers have begun resisting over-charging by *tapedars/patwaris*. They have rallied around the slogan of “*Bill diyo, dhal watho*” (Give receipt, collect revenue) since revenue officials, mainly the *tapedars/patwaris*, often overcharge farmers and could get away with this practice previously by not issuing official receipts.

*Exposure Visits:* To develop space for sustained interaction and linkages between farmers and agri-research departments/institutes. These exposure visits also provided an opportunity to poor farmers to actually go and see trails and experiments being undertaken at agricultural research institutions, extension departments and universities in order to personally gauge the potential for benefit and also to learn about EM technology, mushroom cultivation and other viable crops through informational sessions and practical demonstrations given by relevant experts.

*Hari/kissan* committee members were selected by their concerned Tehsil Resource Organizations for participation in exposure visits to agricultural research institutes including those based in the Agricultural Universities in Faisalabad and Tando Jam. In Punjab, 64 farmers from 9 *tehsils* were sent to Punjab Seed Corporation Research Centre at Peeruwal. Here, these farmers learned of pre-basic, basic and certified seeds and were informed about issues concerning procurement, processing, storage and marketing of seeds. After the exposure visit, Punjab Seed Corporation Peeruwal (12 Kilometers from Khanewal) is providing unrestricted access to farmers in the area to certified seeds. Prior to this, the PSC would provide basic and pre-basic seeds only to influential landlords only rather than poor farmers. Additionally, they observed results of different wheat varieties and crop rotations. Pakistan Television also interviewed one of participants of an exposure visit and broadcast his interview about learning how to cultivate mushroom and participating in a practical session on Bio-Aab Technology.



**Exposure Visit to BM-Technology Training Institute Faisalabad**

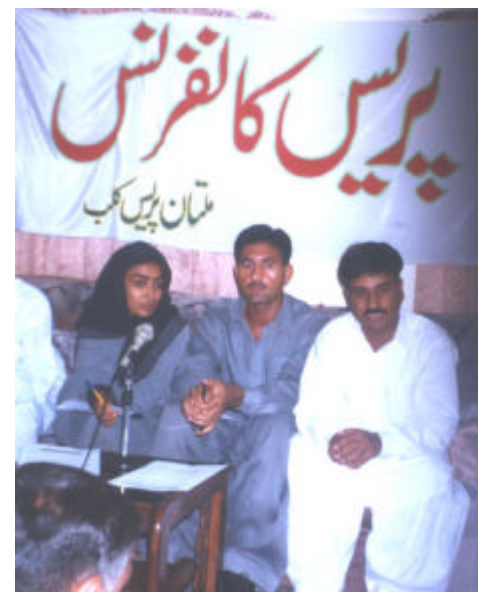
Similarly, *hari* committee members selected from all four concerned districts in Sindh were taken to the Nuclear Institute of Agriculture in Tando Jam. Participants were first taken to the plant physiology department and briefed about development of crops that can grow despite salinity and water logging as well as inter cropping systems that utilize scarce resources in the most productive manner. Next, at the soil science division, they were informed about how crop productivity is affected by soil combinations and fertilizer use. Then taken to the plant breeding division, participants received a briefing about production rates of different crop varieties and the impact of environment and seasonal changes, wheat-breeding processes were also demonstrated at this venue. Participants were immensely enthusiastic about the information obtained by their visit and asked a number of questions about hybrid seeds, wheat varieties and post harvesting issues. *Hari* committee members were also taken to the Drainage and Reclamation Center (DRC) located in Tando Jam. Here they were given specific information about underground water management issues since there is an increasing trend amongst Sindhi farmers of installing tube wells without having the quality of their soil or water tested which often irreparably damages their lands. Participants were also taken to the Lysi Meter Station being operated by DRC, which evaluates water requirements corresponding to different crops. Another batch of *hari* committee representatives was sent to the Agricultural University in Faisalabad where they were provided both theoretical and field based exposure. These participants were taken to the departments of plant pathology, food technology and agricultural sciences and respectively provided information about mushroom cultivation, food preservation and EM technology. They were also shown video films detailing various aspects of mushroom cultivation and EM technology and then shown an actual fermenter tube well and small irrigation system as well as mushrooms being grown artificially on blocks of wood via field visits within proximity of the university. Returning from their exposure visits, *hari* group members in Sindh have group introduced Bio-Aab technology to tube wells previously producing saline water detrimental to their crops. The fermenter has reduced the saline features of water and EM Technology is gaining ground because it has proven a successful way to tackle the salinity problem.

*Networking Mechanism:* A provincial level farmers network has been launched in Sindh (SHAN) whereas in the Punjab the movement has assumed the shape of Ghareeb Kissan Tehreeq (GKT). Both these initiatives explicitly propose to encourage social, economic and political empowerment of poor farmers to build up a strong movement that can undertake effective advocacy for taking up poor farmers issues at the government and farming community level.

Both these provincial movements have an explicit mandate that proposes to:

- Increase awareness on political, social and cultural issues among poor farmers
- Strengthen collective efforts to achieve basic rights of the farmers
- Increase awareness and empower the collective voice of farmers demanding sustainable agricultural policies and laws.
- Awareness and motivation programs have been developed with the assistance of the local *tehsil* resource organization and potential *kissan/hari* committees.

The Ghareeb Kissan Tehreek (Poor Farmers Movement) in Punjab has been active since January 2001 and GKT activities have included facilitation of farmer linkages with agricultural institutions besides conducting weekly meetings at the *kissan* committee level and monthly meetings at the *tehsil* level on agricultural related issues. Farmers have enthusiastically participated in protests launched by Ghareeb Kissan Tehreek during the crisis ensuing from withdrawal of wheat support price. TRO Khanewal even organized and celebrated an 'Anti-Trips Day.' GKT has also been involved in facilitating candidates for local body elections. In Khanewal District for example, which has 100 Union Councils out of which 25 are in Tehsil Khanewal, Ghareeb Kissan Tehreek backed candidates won 40% seats in the *tehsil* excluding the Nazims and Naib Nazim seats. In four union



GKT Press Conference in Multan

councils, consisting of 200 *chaks*, Tekrik backed candidates swept electoral victories. The sheer number of candidates that turned towards Ghareeb Kissan Tehreek for help during recent LB polls is in itself indicative of an increase in political outreach of this TRO. Despite their economic constraints, many of the activists of Ghareeb Kissan Tehreek are preparing to contest the next general elections to be held in October 2002 as promised by the military regime. There was a 53% voter turn out on the day of polling, out of which 50 % was that of women.

The movement's office bearers need to become more proactive concerning certain issues facing the farming community that they were unable to respond to adequately. For example, they still need to respond to the recent 18% GST levy on agricultural fertilizers and pesticides or the wheat crisis and waited instead for SAP-PK to take the lead in calling a collective press conference at Lahore Press Club. This tendency is indicative of how reliant the movement's office bearers are on SAP-PK whose role was not supposed to go beyond that of a catalyst in

the entire exercise. At places like Village Barakitanaya near Kabirwallah, Kissan Committees did not participate in ongoing elections even to the extent of promoting voters' education and since farmers in particular are a scattered community, hence GKT as an emerging movement of farmers urgently needs to address this need prior to the next phase of elections.

In Sindh, a similar networking platform was to be created yet it initially kept running into problems due to a persisting lack of communication and motivation between *hari* committee coordinators. Takhleeq Foundation tried to undertake several remedial steps that included holding individual meetings with the committees and observing monthly and quarterly progress of different committees. A three-day workshop for fifty participants was held in Mirpurkhas in order to conduct a situation analysis and subsequent reorganization and activation of *hari* committees. It was subsequently decided that the structural mechanism of the network needed to be bolstered for effectiveness provincial coordination. Another strategic planning workshop was especially organized to prepare a new working pattern and strategy for more engaging activation of *hari* committees and hence was envisaged a role for provincial and district based coordinators. The Sindh Hari Abadgar Network (SHAN) was subsequently established and demarcated to focus on twelve villages in four districts of Sindh where FTP had begun gaining firm ground. SHAN via its proposed aims and objectives was thus able to provide a platform for concerned *hari* committees to express and advocate for their rights and it additionally began to supplement their empowerment through increased linkages with line departments and NGOs. Its support to poor farmers was also evident during the recent devolution exercise. Many *hari* committee members participated in the recent elections and have won various general, peasant and minority seats backed by SHAN, which also focused on providing support to female candidates as well.

The influence of SHAN as a political forum is undoubtedly on the increase yet some organizational management concerns still need to be tackled. For example, group meetings are being held regularly but record keeping remains irregular and subsequently little evidence of the proceedings are available on record. As far as the agenda of the meetings is concerned, it includes the requisite wide range of topics from organic manure preparation to EM Technology, agricultural income tax and impact of world trade organizations on the national agricultural sector. Decisions were also being made through a consultative process and a conscious effort being made to share available experiences and expertise with *hari* group members. SHAN has reportedly been thinking of establishing a base office and registering their newly formed organization/*tehreeq* with competent authorities as a CBO.

*Networking at large:* Besides inculcation of provincial level platforms for farmers to organize and express their views and concerns, several other means were interlinked to this primary imperative in order to strengthen it from various angles. Linkages with line departments and agricultural research institutions initiated during the experimental program phase were further strengthened during FTP's tenure. Contacts cultivated in this sense facilitated numerous exposure visits and agreed to become resource persons for project activities to share information with otherwise marginalized farmers with little or no information previously available to them.

Also to enhance this sense of networking for a common purpose and to share program experiences, FTP published three editions of the *Kissan Akhbar* and disseminated them amongst relevant audiences including the donor community, NGOs/CBOs across the country and of course to *hari/kissan* committees and farmers who participated in FTP activities (10,000 copies of the most recent issue were disseminated as such). Topics included within *Kissan Akhbar* traced farmers progress in local bodies elections, contained articles exploring policy issues and national and international agricultural concerns like water scarcity and effect of WTO policies and corporate farming.

*Kissan Mela:* Takhleeq Foundation in Sindh and FDO in Punjab, with cooperation of SHAN and GKT respectively, organized village based *kisaan melas* to provide a networking and mobilization platform to farmers for jointly sharing experiences and for introducing their specific produce including homemade items at the cultural stalls set up at the *mela*. Local *hari* committees also provided indispensable support in this regard. The *mela* in Sindh was held in District Sanghar where a local cattle show was organized in which many farmers from surrounding villages participated. In the latter part of the day, the popular local game of *kodi-kodi* was arranged for prominent local players. A documentary film about cotton cultivation issues was arranged by the Agricultural Extension Department. Another film that Takhleeq Foundation had made during the exposure visit of FTP members to the Agriculture University in Tando Jam was shown next. Subsequently, a *hari* conference commenced which provided a platform for discussing relevant agricultural issues from the viewpoint of FTP goals and objectives and also provided the opportunity to introduce and elaborate upon SHAN. Thereafter, there were musical and comedy items for entertainment that lasted long in to the night.

## Glimpses of Ground Realities

Partner organizations feel that several farmer groups were still in the training and learning phase and that besides needing time for accumulating experience also needed to focus on resource mobilization and institutional discipline. For the purpose of institution building, some *hari* committees in Sindh have fixed fees for registration and membership in addition to a monthly fee. Although literacy amongst farmers in the area is limited, *kissan* committee comprising of some educated farmer at least facilitate other members by reading aloud relevant materials to them, including *Kissan Akhbar*. Commenting on the participatory nature of their consultative process, one *hari* committee member said that ‘we believe that only a democratic process can finally steer us out of the feudal culture of domination and exploitation and will never fall prey to such values when we have been given this platform to express ourselves.’

The shortage of irrigation water to the extent of 40 percent has already affected the performance of major crops in particular and agriculture in general.<sup>1</sup> In the context of irrigational management, FTP beneficiaries have taken some notable initiatives to tackle the water scarcity issue. Several *hari* groups have been involved in repair of SCARP tube wells in their area through community contributions. The government had installed these tube wells to check water logging but after a brief period, government officials deserted these installations without even bothering to hand them over to the concerned communities. This group was of the view that if repaired, these tube wells could be a great source of water for farmers who being end-users were victims of water scarcity and misdistribution so *hari* have begun repairing tube wells that are run on ‘*phori*’ (community contribution) basis of charging Rs.5 for irrigating one acre of cropland. However, research carried out by Water Modeling Institute Tando Jam and other institutes reveal that water level in southern parts of Sindh has now gone down to unknown depths during the past decades which is one of the main factors responsible for prevailing droughts in Sindh. The increasing use of hybrid seeds is also leading to higher water demand. Under these circumstances, if tube wells keep draining out scare ground water, they could become counter productive and create environmental and geophysical hazards, which the community will not be able to cope with. Therefore, it was recommended to concerned committees to consult scientific studies or some expert opinions before embarking upon repair of SCARP tube wells and also have the P.H value of water being extracted from these and other tube wells for their area.

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<sup>1</sup> Pakistan’s Economic Performance July – February 2000-2001 ([www.pak.gov.pk/public/pakistan-economic.htm](http://www.pak.gov.pk/public/pakistan-economic.htm))

During an assessment exercise, Sindhi *haris* complained that on one hand they were facing terrible water scarcity, and on the other hand, water was not appropriately distributed and managed (on the same day that this comment was recorded in a consultative meeting, there was a breach in the water tributary at the nearby Village Fazal Kalani in District Sanghar). The water scarcity in Village Ranjho Khan Talpur of District Sanghar has a specific background. Farmers explained that the previous year a new canal named New Jamrao Command was inaugurated and Chinese Engineers in charge of the project and construction of its watercourses have now departed. But the module of the watercourse supplying water to their particular community with a command area of 1200 acres of cropland was utterly miscalculated. After the Chinese had rolled back their hardware and left, a hazard developed for villagers who did not have a drop of water even to drink. Only 30 acres of wheat were cultivated during the subsequent year and that too with utilization of saline water from Sim Nala (a nearby the irrigation drain). No one seemed interest in this problem of a tiny community in a remote village until the *hari* committee organized by FTP took the issue head on. Its activists now tell the story of a sordid reality of how government departments kept giving them false hopes directing and redirecting them to each other on certain pretexts and technicalities. The Irrigation Department asked them to approach the Remodeling Department, while the Remodeling Department advised them to approach the Secretary Irrigation. These activists kept shuttling between various departments until they were frustrated enough to resort to launching a protest campaign. For a month or so, this protest campaign kept making headlines in the papers. The protest finally bore fruit when the Irrigation Secretary took note of their problem and came up to visit the site. He was surprised to see the module was constructed at an inappropriately high level, contrary to the standards regulated by the department. On his orders, the module was re-constructed and thus a major problem for the area got resolved.

Although seventy percent of the country's irrigated agriculture is in Punjab province, an acute water scarcity is recently being experienced in several agrarian areas within the province and this situation has lead to installation of numerous tube wells. For example, there are 34 Union Councils in Tehsil Kabirwallah with an average of seven *mozza* each and there are already 15 to 20 tube wells in each one of these *mozzas*, the number of which is increasing rapidly. Now many farmers of the area, like their Sindhi counterparts, are fearful that the growing presence of tube wells could deplete underground water resources and are now realizing the value of conservation and waste management.

Besides water scarcity, other particularly prominent issues for farming communities are related to market access and the need of capital formation for agricultural inputs. *Hari* groups



in Sindh have at least been successful in germinating the notion of reverting to sustainable agricultural practices utilizing diversified crop patterns. Having educated youth activists or retired research officers with expertise in agriculture is an asset for some *hari* groups that provides them a rich in-house resource base for information sharing.

Networking has also begun yielding benefits. For example, in Kabirwala tehsil of Khanewal district within a small community comprised of 600 households that has a population of 6,000, cast dominated interests have been preventing women of their area from exercising voting rights since the past twelve years. After the introduction of FPT activities in the area, it was categorically decided in a Farmers Education Workshop that women participation in elections was vital and despite initial reluctance of community males, they were eventually convinced to allow women of the area to exercise their fundamental political rights instead of making them face exclusionary restrictions imposed by vested interests. In another community also situated within Kabirwala tehsil, farmers had requested the Executive Engineer for a mogga (module) but the request remained pending for three months until 80 members of several FPT *kissan* committees congregated at the Executive Engineers office and not only had their request approved within a day but also proved the demonstrated value of farmers mobilization.

Several farmer communities grow vegetable but their produce does not fetch appropriate prices in the market since city markets are totally hostile towards poor farmers. Yet in Sindh, some affirmative action has been initiated in this regard. Farmers realized that a small market was in their proximity at Khaisana bus stop, which could be particularly useful for them since 10 out of 30 shops at this market belonged to their *hari* committee members, which could easily buy community produce subject to provision of onward facilitation to bigger markets. A parallel market was also available at Khowaja Stand, some 40 kilometers from Khaisana on the same Hyderabad Mirpurkhas road. Thus the *hari* committee activists agreed and approached FTP partner organizations to organize an exposure visit to the Khowaja stand community based parallel market for vegetables. This committee has also resolved to come up with a case study of this non-formal market established by the Khowaja Community of Agha Khan to help their poor farmers by provision of a non-formal market at their doorstep.

Wheat producers have been encouraged by the government in its drive to achieve food security that included many promises of price subsidies that have remained unfulfilled and caused a lot of resentment amongst these growers. This disappointment was also conveyed via FTP platforms particularly in *kissan* committees within Lodhran, Multan and Khanewal,

which decided to hold a combined press conference to draw public attention to their plight. In addition, GKT was also prompted by SAP-PK to take up the issue at the provincial level and another issue specific press conference was organized at the Lahore Press Club to highlight wheat growers concerns. Cotton growers in Punjab also do not get appropriate prices for their yield and are kept waiting for payments by traders and often given abysmal prices on the pretext that the textile market refuses to pay more for staple that is not large enough for international market standards. On the other hand, all supplies including pesticides have recently been levied with 18% GST with no subsidy or exceptions. *Phutti* picking requires Rs.100/- per *mond* and the pickers have to be paid on daily basis while farmer's money remains stuck within the market for months. It was realized that there were alternate purchasers available including the Punjab Seed Corporation but it only registered growers with more than 50 acres of land and did in fact purchase their produce without delays and inconvenience. It was brought to light in subsequent meetings that Punjab Seed Corporation has agreed to extend the same facility to poor farmers as well.

Highly encouraged after exposure visits to research institutions of Tando Jam, 30 farmers approached the Soil Science Research Institute at Tando Jam and had soil from their lands tested since they feared it was rapidly turning saline. Using a technique demonstrated at Agriculture University Faisalabad, farmers have begun using gypsum to counter effects of saline water. Many of the farmers have used indigenous sprays, fermenters, and organic sprays produced by the researchers of Lower Sindh Rural Development Association (LSRDA) Ratanabad and found them efficient and cost effective.

Concerning the contentious issue of exclusion of women from formal project platforms, local project partners at the behest of SAP-PK facilitated two Sindi *hari* committees in setting up separate wings for female participants called the 'Marvi Group for girls,' whose volunteers work among female farmers. Both Marvi groups also participated in a recent voter's education initiative held in conjunction with the devolution exercise and two female activists of this contested and one of them won a reserved female seat for the Union Councilor. *Kissan/hari* committees did manage to induct members belonging to minority groups.

Gender Concerns: Women in rural areas are directly or indirectly engaged in numerous agricultural related activities including decision making for cultivation of major and minor crops, large and small livestock raising, fodder management and disease control, water management at the small level, forest conservation and management. While many more women have been elected at local government level, which is surely an empowering gesture, yet due to years of marginalization and neglect, women (particularly rural women) remain

unfamiliar with procedures of local government and their roles and responsibilities within it. Civil society initiatives concerning governance are already addressing this issue concerning capacity building, but the same lack of preparedness is evident when it comes to development projects, where women's participation in the operations and decision-making still remains insignificant. What is needed is to bring women in the forefront of the decision making process, otherwise they would be thrust to play the usual back seat role of silent and unacknowledged contributors, a blatant illustration of which is a seventy percent wage differential between male and female labourers.

Although women did participate in various FTP activities, they have not yet been officially inducted into the *hari/kissan* committees. Despite programmatic constraint, FTP activities in particular the seminars and workshops, were designed to ingrain within their activity agendas the theme of promoting understanding of women's role in decision making and policy implementations. Poor farmers have been encouraged to pay heed to and acknowledge the role of their women as a precondition to their own empowerment. Besides, emphasizing this potential role of women and encouraging their participation at least in all program activities in both provinces, the specific support provided to female candidates via SHAN and GKT will significantly bolster gender parity within the rural sector. In fact the GKT executive body of also includes a female in the capacity of an assistant coordinator.

*Program Highlights:* FTP in conjunction with its experimental FDSA program and subsequent FDP has started a tangible and proactive programmatic intervention, which first of all is reinforcing and refining its own expertise in the area as well as strengthening the capacity, of its partner organizations including local resource organizations at the *tehsil* level to network and supervise a multi-pronged initiative meant to tackle some of the most serious and persisting problems in the agricultural sector.

In terms of tangible outputs, FTP formed 95 *kissan/hari* committees and each committee consists of 20 to 30 farmers and 500 farmers are direct beneficiaries and 3000 farmers indirect beneficiaries who have participated in various scheduled FTP activities including farmers meetings, seminars and advocacy-related demonstrations. To consolidate institutional formation and to bolster sustainability of these grassroots based farmer committees, specific training and educational workshops focused on capacity building services, implementing support and networking requirements of community based committees, linked to broader provincial networks (i.e. SHAN and GKT) with the overall stated objectives of increasing awareness and motivation besides empowering the collective voice

of farmers to achieve their basic rights and to demand policies conducive to sustainable agricultural development.

*Sustainability:* This programmatic approach had been consciously devised to learn from preceding experiences and also to help replicate practicable accomplishments. There has also been a strong social sustainability factor implied by the very format of organizing farmer's association and building their capacity in organizational management and sustainable agricultural techniques and this very human resource development component will enable the associations (i.e. *hari/kissan* committees) to undertake required activities through their own resources. And as Farmers Associations start managing their own activities, they are gradually acquiring leadership and other skills allowing them to take on local issues and evolve their own line of action without any external support. Technically the Farmer Associations have been enabled to offer their services to local farmers at the village level. Moreover since the program itself has culminated into development of advocacy platforms (SHAN and GKT) which are independent networking organizations. SAP-PK, for its part, will continue lending technical and moral support through its own programs, yet these platforms also include an inbuilt component for mobilizing local resources for example through offering services to other mid-size NGOs, training institutions and support organizations to organize trainings for farmers and for agricultural development. Thus the poor farmers support programs initiated by SAP-PK are not meant to have a limited scope of impact nor a confined life cycle but instead are geared to become a self perpetuating and enduring movement striving to improve agricultural related circumstances well into the future.

Lingering disempowerment of poor farmers has made them increasingly marginalized and vulnerable to a host of manipulations ranging from disenfranchisement from policy making to interference of multi-national seed and pesticide companies that have changed not only traditional cropping patterns but also dismantled age-old social and cultural patterns of cooperative farming at the village level. In view of the basic goal of strengthening poor farmers and to address their lingering concerns and problems, South Asia Partnership Pakistan's programme interventions have been tailored to educate poor farmers' (male and female) and organize them into groups and broader provincial platforms for enabling them to influence policies and practices directly affecting their lives.

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