

# Tackling Pakistan's food waste through sustainable solutions

<https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Oct-2024/tackling-pakistan-s-food-waste-through-sustainable-solutions>

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October 03, 2024

**Newspaper, Regional, Islamabad**

Pakistan faces significant challenges in food security, as reflected in the 2023 Global Hunger Index, where the country ranks 102nd out of 129 nations, with a serious hunger score of 26.6. According to the FAO, nearly 40% of food produced in Pakistan is lost or wasted, primarily due to inefficient harvesting, inadequate storage facilities, and poor transportation infrastructure. Addressing these issues is critical not only to alleviate hunger but also to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12.3, which targets a 50% reduction in global food waste and losses across the supply chain by 2030. Strengthening value chains and equipping small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially farmers, with modern agricultural skills are key strategies to reduce food loss. By adopting improved techniques, farmers can optimize resource use, increase crop yields, minimize post-harvest losses, and promote sustainable agricultural practices. This is particularly important for rural farmers who face numerous challenges, such as limited access to resources and learning opportunities, making it difficult for them to implement modern solutions. To address these barriers, the Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP) project, funded by the European Union, focuses on reducing poverty and food waste by empowering SMEs and small-scale agribusinesses in Sindh and Balochistan. Implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC) in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), and Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), the six-year initiative seeks to minimize food loss and waste while fostering rural economic growth. GRASP takes a holistic approach by implementing targeted interventions at each stage of the value chain, from production to consumption. The project covers value chains for dates, onions, tomatoes, grapes, bananas, mangoes, and livestock in 12 districts of Sindh and 11 districts of Balochistan. These improvements have enhanced the quality of food products, ensuring they meet consumer demands for safe,

nutritious, and high-quality produce. Market-oriented strategies are also employed, allowing producers to meet the stringent requirements of both domestic and international markets. Success stories emerging from GRASP's initiatives demonstrate the transformative impact of targeted investments. For instance, a PKR 30 million investment in expanding a tissue culture lab in Tando Allahyar has enhanced banana cultivation by rapidly multiplying the crop, revitalizing land affected by the Panama disease. Similarly, a grant to a dates SME in Khairpur has enabled the installation of metal detection technology, ensuring compliance with international standards and boosting export potential. These initiatives are crucial for promoting long-term food security and driving rural economic growth. Scaling up such efforts is essential to ensure sustainable development and address the pressing challenge of hunger in the country.

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