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Cultivating Young Changemakers for Agricultural Innovation

USAID's assistance towards Pakistan's agribusiness sector results in sale of ground-breaking locally manufactured agricultural machinery for boosting farmers' productivity



"Through PATTA's support I have introduced the reengineered reaper binder and mini harvester to help farmers adapt sustainable solutions for improving agricultural efficiency. I have earned sales revenue of PKR 82,410,000 since September 2019."

Young Osama Shahid joined his family-owned Punjab-based agricultural manufacturing business 'Soby Ag Engineers' in 2016 with a clear mission: to head-on tackle Pakistani small farmers' challenges and improve their productivity by driving innovation in the agriculture sector. "Our business scope was limited, and we performed functions on a seasonal basis at harvesting and land preparation time only and manufactured a small range of seasonal agricultural machineries. In 2018, we were headed towards a downfall due to Pakistan's stifling economic climate, political instability, and core manufacturing challenges but I was passionate about bringing change," explains 26-year old Osama.

Osama's trajectory took a new direction when he stumbled upon USAID Pakistan Agricultural Technology Transfer Activity's (PATTA) call for partnership on a local recruitment website. The four-year technical assistance project is dedicated towards investing in agripreneurs, innovators and leaders including farmers, dealers, and owners of private sector agribusinesses to collectively revitalize agriculture and bring game-changing innovations through technology transfer across Pakistan.

In January 2019, Osama signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with PATTA and began attending the project-facilitated agricultural technologies demonstrations sessions across Pakistan. In his mission with PATTA, Osama explored new fruits and vegetable markets in Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan and met diverse local farmer groups. "Based on my direct interaction with small farmers mobilized by PATTA, I quickly learnt about their struggles. I realized that the average landholding size of small farmers in Pakistan is less than five acres and in order to reduce their overhead costs for better economic returns, I had to somehow introduce affordable and small agricultural tools and equipment," says Osama. As a result of this new learning, Osama imported small two-wheel tractor, three-wheel tractor, and handy tools such as brush cutters, hand push seeder, and other multipurpose tools priced at an affordable range of PKR 10,000-20,000. Osama believed that by adopting these small agricultural tools, farmers can reap more benefits and plant a diverse range of vegetables and crops including maize, peas, peanut, sunflower, wheat and rice. He collaborated with PATTA and demonstrated these technologies at the project's agricultural demonstrations in districts Rahim Yar Khan, Sheikhupura, Mardan, Peshawar, Hyderabad, Mirpur Khas, Tando Jam and Hunza, among others. "I was able to grow my portfolio from eight to 100 agricultural products and tools for small farmers in a span of one year with PATTA's facilitation. I have now bid farewell to the days of 'seasonal' working," he adds.

PATTA also helps its private-sector partners in developing new, targeted solutions designed to respond to the needs of Pakistani smallholders. For example, as Osama came closer to accomplishing some of his goals, he availed PATTA's guidance and facilitation in Research and Development (R&D) for the development of wheat harvesting and land preparation machinery. "Wheat is the largest crop in Pakistan and involves intense labor including harvesting, binding and threshing. PATTA supported me in my efforts to design, reengineer and manufacture mini tractors and reaper binders. We successfully performed reverse engineering of these machines which allow farmers to save time, reduce fuel consumption and increase production," Osama says. In September 2019, PATTA mobilized 500 farmers and facilitated Osama to launch and promote these new innovations in Kala Shah Kaku, District Sheikhupura in Punjab province in collaboration with the Rice Research Institute (RRI), Government of Pakistan. Till date, PATTA's support has led Osama to sell 35 mini tractors and 94 reaper binders priced at PKR 300,000 and PKR 750,000 each respectively.

Following his collaboration with PATTa, Osama was recently shortlisted for a start-up idea which he developed for sustainable small farming at the National Incubation Centre at Lahore University of Management Sciences. “I owe my success to USAID PATTa since the project has helped me create new solutions for local manufacturing. In Pakistan, we will have to focus on local manufacturing to make agriculture sustainable. Many investors are now keen to invest in my business for expansion,” he explains. This is just one example of how PATTa has successfully collaborated with the private sector and empowered the youth to build linkages with farmers and make a difference by improving productivity, enhancing competitiveness, and catalyzing innovations for more than 40,000 farmers across Pakistan.