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Unesco imparts training to farmers to mitigate flood hazards

CHAKWAL: Around 16 Mha of land (20 percent of total area of Pakistan) is affected directly or indirectly by soil erosion (wind and water). Out of this, 11.2 Mha is affected by water erosion only, says a press release.

Due to many reasons, including high intensity, short duration rainfalls and lack of awareness among professionals and farmers in the field of watershed management and rainwater harvesting techniques, a huge amount of rainwater is being lost annually as surface runoff from Potohar region.

This is not only the loss of water but also results in loss of fertile topsoil that may increase flood severity in lowland areas and silting in dams, rivers and ponds etc. thereby decreasing their storage capacity.

To further improve the technical capabilities, Unesco Islamabad under its phase-II "Strategic Strengthening of Flood Warning and Management Capacity of Pakistan" is imparting "Community Based Training Programme on Watershed Management for Flood and Drought Control" to farmers and relevant government and semi government professionals from agriculture extension, soil conservation, water management, NGOs and academia in Chakwal.

In this connection the Unesco arranged a two-day training session that was concluded on Friday.

On first day of the training session, key experts gave brief history to participants on flood in Pakistan, echo hydrology approach for addressing flood and drought, onsite training on rainwater harvesting techniques and drip/bubbler irrigation system and field visit to water saving techniques at Barani Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) and Soil and Water Conservation Research Institute (SAWCRI). On second day, participants were taken to the farmer sites for onsite soil conservation activities, rainwater harvesting techniques and high efficiency irrigation system at PEL farm, Kallar Kahar and Murid respectively.

The farmers also visited on site to see the effect of gypsum application on soil moisture retention and crop yield.

Speaking at the concluding session of the training, Vibeke Jensen, Unesco Representative to Pakistan, mentioned that after successful completion of this training, participants have now acquired knowledge of watershed management approaches which will result in reduced soil erosion through reduction in water runoff and improved storage of rainwater, hence mitigating flood hazard.

The participants also learned practical utilisation of stored rainwater through efficient means to grow high value crops for improving livelihood of farmers and poverty alleviation.