



SUCCESS STORY

Aqaba Women Engaged to Preserve Local Heritage

Aqaba Association for Culture, Arts and Tradition focuses on women's involvement



ACED Program

"We joined the sand art course as a challenge for ourselves and to discover this craft that men have monopolized in Aqaba for a long time. Now we are thinking beyond discovery, to preserve our culture and also to enhance our economic situation. Our next step is to be more than a trainee – to expand our skills and become more involved as producers of sand art."

Hanan, sand art trainee on her interest in the course and the craft.

"I am really proud to be a part of this group and this meeting because it is an example of how committed you all are to empowering the women of Aqaba and how serious Aqaba Association for Culture, Arts and Tradition is about including women in their future."

Asma Khader, Secretary General of the National Committee for Women's Affairs, addressing active women in Aqaba and the ACAT Women's Committee.

The Aqaba Association for Culture, Arts and Tradition (ACAT) joined ten other local organizations to participate in the first year of the USAID Aqaba Community and Economic Development Program's Civil Society Organization (CSO) Capacity Building Initiative. Through the initiative, ACAT received training on accounting, administrative tools, and participatory needs assessment; and then used their training to design and submit a project proposal to maintain the knowledge and skills in Aqaba's traditional crafts such as local sand art and musical heritage.

After participating in the training modules and designing their project with community input, ACAT, whose mission is to increase knowledge about Aqaba's heritage, realized that it was not adequately engaging a critical segment of its constituency – namely, women. ACAT spoke with their stakeholders using participatory methodologies, heard from women interested in keeping Aqaba's traditions alive, and decided to establish a Women's Committee in their organization. With this increased interest in women's involvement, their community project planned to include 10 women in the local crafts training sessions.

Through their involvement with this project, ACAT and the women trainees realized that more could be done to identify and address women's needs in Aqaba. The Women's Committee invited Ms. Asma Khader, Secretary General of the National Committee for Women's Affairs and former Minister of Culture, to speak with local women active in law, business, and CSOs.

At this historic meeting, the participants discussed the range of issues facing women in Aqaba and how they could better organize themselves to address them. A noteworthy suggestion was to establish the Aqaba Committee for Women's Affairs, which would serve as the regional chapter in the national umbrella organization. Being a part of this national structure would facilitate linkages between Aqaba women and chapters in other parts of the country. It would also allow for Aqaba citizens to be included in national consultations about the adoption of laws and programs intended to benefit women.