

# Empowering Women One Community at a Time



## PRODUCING OLIVE OIL SOAPS IN THE WADI RUM PROTECTED AREA AS A MEANS TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION, JORDAN



### Project Description

With its unique ecosystem and indigenous population under increasing pressure, the Wadi Rum Protected Area in Jordan has been identified as a priority geographic area for the SGP in its Country Programme Strategy.

As a result, the SGP has sponsored a cluster of projects in Wadi Rum aimed at conservation and livelihood alternatives for local Bedouin communities. One of these projects is known as the Burda Women Collective project that aims decrease the pressure on Wadi Rum's fragile ecosystem, improve incomes and increase tourism.

The project focuses on assisting Bedouin women to produce and sell eco-friendly soaps made from local olive oil. The project also focuses on quality production and marketing of the soaps to local tourists and international customers. As project success is closely linked to tourism, SGP entered into a strategic partnership with the Jordan Tourism Development Project (SIYAHA), a USAID-funded project, which currently works in Wadi Rum. SIYAHA provides technical and financial support to the community to improve the tourism industry and living conditions of the Bedouin communities. These communities are now actively engaged in the development of Wadi Rum as a tourist destination.

### Background

Wadi Rum, known as the Valley of the Moon, runs through southern Jordan about 60 kilometres east of Aqaba. It is one of Jordan's most important tourist sites, familiar to many from the movie, Lawrence of Arabia.

Wadi Rum is a unique wilderness area. Sandstone and granite cliffs marked with ancient rock carvings loom up to 1700 meters high over the desert. Home to indigenous Bedouin communities, Wadi Rum maintains a distinct environmental, social and cultural landscape. Bedouin tribes have been living among the mountains in Wadi Rum for thousands of years, traditionally herding goats and living in goat-hair tents.



Implementing Organization: Women Environment Preservation Committee (WEPCO)

Location: Lalitpur, Nepal

SGP Contribution: US\$ 36,000

In-cash cofinancing: US\$ 20,000

In-kind cofinancing: US\$ 48,651

Number of Beneficiaries: 1861 households and an awareness raising event to over 5000 students annually

Duration: September 2005 – August 2007

Awards and Recognition:

Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology - Women Environment Conservation Award 2010

Recognizing the unique natural and cultural history of Wadi Rum and the vital importance of tourism to the local economy, the Government of Jordan declared Wadi Rum a protected area in 1998. The area has also been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

An intensive conservation programme is now under way led by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority. Through a 2005 agreement with the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, a national NGO, provides technical supervision for the management and development of the Wadi Rum Protected Area. With support from the World Bank, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature was commissioned to prepare a conservation plan and put together a team of local people to manage the area.

## Implementation

Designed to preserve biodiversity and promote sustainable livelihoods, the primary activities of the project included:

- The production of natural olive oil soap as an environmental-friendly product.
- The consolidation of the Cooperative's capacity in management, marketing and competition.
- The development of a marketing and promotion program for the natural soaps and other hand-made products produced by the Cooperative.



- Coordination with other groups working on similar projects in Wadi Rum producing woven goods, ceramics, jewelry, leather items and other traditional items. Groups were encouraged to specialize in diverse handicraft products.

- The development of an integrated strategy with other projects managed by other cooperatives in Wadi Rum to promote information sharing, marketing, and cross-promotion.

- The active participation of community members in all levels of development and implementation of project activities.

- The forging of partnerships with SIYAHA, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation's Enhanced Productivity Program, Qudorat.

- The development of success indicators for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation, based on the project's objectives, activities, outputs and work plan. A quarterly report and mid-year review will be submitted to the SGP to analyze activities and document successes.

The Burda Women's Cooperative had been struggling to develop their handicraft production and soap-making business for several years, with minimal funding and direction. They rented a small store to sell their crafts with a government grant but their earnings did not cover costs. With support from the SGP, the women in the collective improved management of the business and produced and marketed the soaps in a more commercially viable manner.

## Environmental Impact

- The development of environmentally-friendly olive oil soap and sustainable handicrafts.

- An increase in sustainable tourism, which will contribute to the preservation of the environment and the provision of sustainable livelihoods to the people of Wadi Rum.

- An increased awareness of the benefit of conservation.

- The preparation of a conservation plan alongside the project, completed by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature with support from the World Bank. The Royal Society also put in place a team of local people to manage the area.

## Socio-Economic Impacts

Over 75 women in the NGO have benefited from this project. In particular:

- 17 women learned how to produce soap and 5 women were placed in charge of packaging.

- Other women benefited from capacity building and other project activities as well as training in the management and marketing of all activities of the cooperative.

- Soap products in the Burda Women Cooperative were produced, marketed and promoted in all available outlets in Wadi Rum. The locally produced soaps, and the other products, are sold at the Wadi Rum Visitor Center and other shops.

- All the women who worked on the project received an increase in their monthly home revenue which benefited their families. Before the project, only the Burda Women's Cooperative produced handicrafts, generating an average income of US\$50 to US\$85 each month. Today, there are three organizations producing handicrafts, and the total monthly income from this activity is in the thousands.

## Policy Impacts

By changing the position of women in society and empowering them through the project, a soft influence on policy can be developed over time.

## Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

- The entire project was managed by women and it involved women in the local community. In total, 75 women were involved in the project.
- The project aimed to build the capacities of women and challenge local customs, which enabled women to play a role in income generation for their families.
- The women from the local community had the chance to contribute to family income.
- The women from the local community were given a chance to learn something new and therefore feel more important in the household.
- The women have challenged the local community's customs and further provided a positive impact and model for others.
- The women have contributed to providing tourists with local products, handmade soaps and handicrafts, which has boosted the economy.

The project was the first to be implemented by a women's organization in the Wadi Rum area, since previously it was not acceptable for women to participate in organized community work. One of the initial challenges was to find local women who could leave their homes on a regular basis for training. Over time, the engagement of women in the project changed views within the community about women's capacity for learning and employment and provided a positive model for other groups of women.

Regular donor meetings were held to make sure that all donors and contributors were working on the same plan and timeless.

The meetings also facilitated the provision of technical assistance for the local NGO. Women have challenged their customs and culture, and found a way to be able to work, and further provide for their families. They have acted as a positive model for other CBOs in the area.

## Sustainability

- Awareness of the NGO and capacity building within the NGO was initiated in this project, which will allow community participation and a larger awareness of the project going forward.
- The project enhanced the women's capabilities in making



handicrafts and soap which are now produced, marketed and sold to local customers and to tourists. This will ensure financial sustainability of and act as a model for other communities.

- To improve sustainability, the project can benefit from better managerial assistance and training for the NGO and a more focused marketing plan to sell their products.
- SGP's strategic partnership with SIYAHA provides the project with additional technical and financial support and assists in the improvement of the tourism industry and living conditions in the area.
- Through the 2005 agreement with the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, a national NGO, provides technical supervision for the management and development of the Wadi Rum Protected Area. With support from the World Bank, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature prepared a conservation plan and put in place a team of local people to manage the area, all reinforcing the conservation and livelihood aims of the project.

## Replication and Upscaling

The women of Burda Women Collective who have participated in this project have served as positive role models for other CBOs in the area.

This project can be easily replicated in other regions in Jordan and other countries that have financial and managerial assistance from the outset.

A trained and qualified cadre of local community members, capable of managing and marketing all activities operated by the cooperative increases capacity in the area.

## Lessons Learned

A number of lessons have been learnt which can be very helpful in replication of this project:

It is important that managerial assistance is taken through all project phases until completion with NGOs who have limited experience in marketing.

It would have enhanced effectiveness if more assistance was provided at the implementation phase and there was better follow up from the other co-financing organizations.



One of the main challenges for the local community in implementing this project was to get all donor contributions to be given at the same time. Since different organizations have different implementation mechanisms, disbursements took a longer time than planned to provide the training for the local women so the project took a longer time to commence.

Regular donor meetings should be held to make sure that all donors and contributors work according to the same plan and timeline and provide technical assistance to the local NGO.



## Contribution to the MDGs



Training of young people which may result in increased job opportunities for the youth.  
Income generation for 496 women members of the Gangeswor Saving and Credit Cooperative, mobilizing US\$123,924 and using it to provide loans to 150 members



The project came about through the leadership of women in the Lalitpur district. Women are the project proponents, implementers and beneficiaries  
496 women members in one initiative alone (Gangeswor Saving and Credit Cooperative)  
Total of 892 women in 30 groups mobilize and currently replicate the project



Waste management undertaken in 1861 households through segregation, conversion to biogas energy and recycling  
Innovative reduction of waste through conversion to an alternative mode of energy resource  
Environmental education in 47 schools/1400 students  
Awareness raising to over 5,000 visitors at the WEPCO demonstration site  
Implementation of the Biogas Subsidy Programme by the government  
Replication in 20 other sites in the country