



Grassroots Business Initiative



Siwa Creations

Egypt



Background

SIWA is the largest oasis in Egypt and is renowned for its spectacular natural environment, characterized by beautifully shaped sand dunes, rivers and stone formations, and numerous archeological sites. However, insufficient infrastructure makes it difficult to access the oasis, whose first asphalt road was only put in place in 1984. Consequently, Siwan people have been isolated from the rest of the world, and have maintained their strong cultural identity and traditions.

While it is not difficult to imagine the under-explored opportunities for economic development in Siwa given the appropriate infrastructure, the importance of preserving the eco-system and maintaining the cultural heritage of its people cannot be underestimated.

The Siwa Women's Native Artisanry Development Initiative, was started by Environmental Quality International (EQI), in 2001 to increase the economic self-sufficiency of Siwan women through the revitalization of traditional handicraft production. This is part of a larger International Finance Corporation's (IFC's), supported project on revitalization of the SIWA oasis.

What Is Siwa Creations?

EQI trains women artisans and provides them with the raw materials and tools to produce four lines of clothing under the brand name of Siwa Creations. The clothes are reproductions of the traditional shirt-dress (galabeya); the Abbaya (cloak); the blouse; and the shawl, all decorated with traditional embroidery. Tableware items are also being produced, and a separate line is produced for Italian fashion designer Ermanno Scervino.



With IFC assistance, EQI currently works to:

- increase production capacity by building additional workspace and training more women
- add new business lines such as silver, ceramics and wood products to increase sales and employ additional artisans

- establish a brand and product presence in international markets, built on the success of the Scervino line sales

In the future, EQI will create a full-scale business development support center providing management and strategic advice, microfinance, and other related services for Siwan entrepreneurs. Capacity building and expansion efforts are expected to yield income generating opportunities for an additional 320 women by 2008.

IFC's Involvement

Through its Grassroots Business Initiative, IFC has provided SIWA with a patient capital loan for the expansion of Women's Artisanry Initiative. Specifically, GBI funds will be used to:

- construct 2 satellite working facilities and one central working facility to improve working conditions of the female artisans;
- train at least 350 women in traditional Siwan handicrafts to expand production; and
- establish linkages with national and international exporters for women's artisan products.

Results To-Date

- Embroidered garments, accessories and household items are exported to Europe and sold through shops in Cairo and in Siwa.
- Approximately 180 Siwan women (including part-time and temporary artisan women) have been provided with home-based business opportunities, earning a total of about USD\$16,000.
- Thirteen people have been employed to train the female artisans.

