

Redefining Women's Empowerment- Sidab Women's Sewing Group

Located along the coastal regions in northeastern Oman is Sidab, a small fishing village well known for its rugged mountains and serene beaches. What makes this village stand out more is the Sidab Women's Sewing Group, a project started by Badriyah Al Siyabi in the year 2004.

Born in Bahrain, Badriyah moved overseas with her family for higher education between the years 1950 and 1960. She completed her schooling in Muscat and returned to Bahrain to continue her own higher education. She was involved in a number of social and cultural activities in Sidab during her visits and went on to work with banks like Oman Housing Bank, Alliance Housing Bank, Ahli Bank, Bank Sohar and currently works with Omran, a tourism development company.

Apart from this, she has taken part in various training and developmental workshops to aid in community building, women's empowerment and activities related to poverty alleviation. Her volunteering experience in the Omani Women's Association and the Ministry of Social Development enabled her to provide support to women, equipping them with skills and knowledge to become independent and support the family income. On joining a community centre in the United States, she was thrilled to see the impact it had on society and began her own venture here in Sidab.

On distributing surveys to women of different age groups, tailoring was chosen to be a skill that could be used as a business opportunity among the women as it was practiced locally and didn't need any specific training. She started the group with six women, along with the help of local and expatriate volunteers. On brainstorming ideas for the products, they decided on timeless pieces that tourists would treasure once they return back to their home countries. Calico bags with colored 'wizar' (traditional Omani fabric) decorated with motifs like camels, date palms and forts were decided on.

For the trial run, they worked on forty sample bags from a tent factory in Rusayl Industrial Estate and sold it at a community bazaar organized by the American Women's Group. With the positive response from the event, Badriyah was able to set up a shop with the help of the Women's Guild of Oman and the American Women's Group.



Different products were developed over the years including towels, vegetable bags, tissue cases, fragrance bags, handmade decorations and most recently, masks of different sizes and patterns have become popular among the people living in Oman. With ideas taken collectively from the group, different designs have been incorporated with the 'kameez' and 'dish-dasha' being added to the list of sort after designs.

With the added advantage of the bags being environmental friendly, these bags have been a favorite with people locally following the ban of plastic bags from January 2021. Available for purchase at a few international hotels, online on Markeetex and in-store in Sidab, their products are sold at a reasonable price with the profit divided equally among the women working in the group. The women earn around RO 150 monthly with up to RO 100 per week during peak tourist seasons.



This opportunity has not only provided them a steady income and allowed them to be more productive, but has also given them more experience with the world beyond Sidab. Shell Oman's training to make them more proficient in communication, accounting and computer skills have also benefited them and given them the confidence they were looking for.

Their unique designs have been showcased in an exhibition in the British Museum in London and have also gotten appreciation by Prince Willem-Alexander and Princess Maxima of The Netherlands during their visit to Oman.

With brands like TOMS shoes or the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh creating large scale social changes through social entrepreneurship, Oman is inching closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals thanks to Sidab Women's Sewing Group which has touched the lives of the women using a similar strategy and empowered women to develop a craft worth preserving for future generations.

References:

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