

➔ **JORDAN:  
DIVING CLUB EVOLVES INTO INFLUENTIAL ACTOR ON  
COASTAL MANAGEMENT**

**In a Nutshell**

Through a gradual and organic process of capacity development, a Jordanian environmental NGO evolved from humble beginnings into an effective and respected institution with the capacity for research, advocacy, policy advice and community mobilization. The Jordanian Royal Ecological Diving Society (JREDS) has built partnerships with various public agencies, and with other NGOs and community organizations, both nationally and regionally. Starting as a beneficiary of the Global Environmental Facility's (GEF) Small Grants Programme, it has broadened its funding base to assure financial sustainability and independence. This has all been achieved despite little tradition of civic participation in Jordan, or of questioning state and commercial interests on safeguarding the natural environment.

**The Story**

Jordan is a comparatively small country facing many environmental and social development challenges. One of the most complex issues is the sustainable management of the fragile and over-exploited coastal area in Aqaba. This fragile ecosystem has unique features and is a centre of attraction for ecological divers. However, developments have engulfed the short beach in the last decades, with fierce competition between transport, tourism and industry sectors over occupying it. Only seven kilometres remain untouched, and environmental deterioration and pollution are major problems. In 2000, Aqaba was declared a "special economic zone", which threatened even greater environmental hazards. While the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority has devised environmental protection by-laws with stringent standards and regulations that are even more advanced than those provided under national law, success in sustainably managing a fragile ecosystem ultimately requires the integration of the efforts of various institutions and community groups.

The involvement of civil society started in 1995, with the establishment of JREDS. Evolving from a club for Jordanian ecological divers, it gained momentum as a full-fledged NGO. The project initiated a continuous coral reef monitoring programme together with the country's top marine ecology scientists, and supported an intensive public awareness campaign. Through its close cooperation with the Marine Science Station, a national scientific organization based in Aqaba, JREDS also built a comprehensive information database. It has played a role in subsequent awareness and capacity development efforts, as well as in conducting scientific research and advocating scientifically based views on economic development plans in Aqaba. This capacity readily attracted further support from donors, extended cooperation links with the Aqaba Special Economic Zone

Authority, and brought the local community into various activities. Throughout, staff took part in various training and capacity-building initiatives that enhanced considerably their skills in project management, public advocacy, and knowledge generation and distribution.

In 1998, JREDS organized a participatory multi-stakeholders' workshop to investigate new project ideas that are now technically and administratively coordinated by JREDS, while being implemented by grass-roots organizations. In 2002, the Small Grants Programme supported JREDS with a planning grant to crystallize its latest initiative, which aims to help boat operators in Aqaba upgrade their role in sustainable tourism. JREDS worked extensively with the operators' society in developing the proposal and concept.

Today, JREDS is an organization with some 250 members, 15 staff and eight ongoing projects. It has become the technical arm of the GEF Small Grants Programme in Aqaba, while managing to diversify its own donor base and to develop demand-driven projects covering various issues, including rehabilitation of water networks in poor urban areas. Three coral monitoring stations in the Gulf of Aqaba chart the well-being of the coral reef, and in terms of knowledge on the marine environment in Jordan, JREDS is now considered a one-stop shop.

In its brief history, JREDS has cooperated with almost all relevant stakeholders in Aqaba: the public sector, private concerns in industry and tourism, tourists, school children, fisher folk, local women and youth. It has also managed to work at regional levels, and was granted the responsibility of coordinating regional public awareness programmes in the Red Sea region in 2001. Through participation in regional networks, its activities now cover eight countries along the coastal ecosystem.

Reaching out to people as well as ecosystems, JREDS staff train community members and students at an education centre on how to use computers and the Internet to research information on the marine environment. In addition, the group has an active socioeconomic programme to improve the living standards of the less fortunate in Aqaba, especially fisher folk and people whose livelihoods depend on the sea, through income-generating projects and the production of environmentally sound local sea crafts.

## **Results and Critical Factors**

JREDS has been the only NGO in Jordan to focus professionally on protecting marine ecosystems. It has shared its capacity with smaller NGOs working on other sustainable development projects, and proved to be vital in mobilizing human and technical resources for implementing projects and conducting advocacy campaigns.

- Capacity development at JREDS has involved a cumulative process rather than a pre-set product or outcome. Many stakeholders have contributed inputs.

- Projects have been constructed through a bottom-up approach. Multi-stakeholder meetings and planning grants have helped in focusing preparation, and ensuring a high level of civil society and local community participation.
- The capacity development process at JREDS has been institutionally and socially sustainable, with the knowledge gleaned readily available in databases and shared among the society's staff, as well as other stakeholders and interested sectors via the educational centre.
- Knowledge and experiences have been transferred to other NGOs by engaging in technical and administrative coordination of the Small Grants Programme projects in Aqaba. This does not impose JREDS' presence on smaller groups, but helps them to engage in their own capacity development cycles, while gaining self-confidence and a sense of ownership of projects.
- Although capacity development has not yet had a direct impact on policy in Aqaba, JREDS has been very active in filling the need for advocacy, human resource mobilization, public awareness campaigns and specific grass-roots initiatives.
- The GEF Small Grants Programme provided the needed financial and technical support for the nascent JREDS to mature. Carrying out the initial GEF-supported project was a learning process that facilitated and supported further capacity development initiatives.
- Capacity development has helped the group to broaden its funding base, ensuring the diversity and sustainability of its programmes. Staff have been well trained on attracting donor attention, and their professional track record has helped to impress various funders.

### **Further information**

JREDS ([www.jreds.org](http://www.jreds.org)).

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