

Inclusive development in local communities, an enterprise in Qeshm Geopark, Iran

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Qeshm Geopark was among the first GGN Members recognized in 2006. For many years, Qeshm was famous just for its unique and exciting desert landscapes and geological features but nowadays, after a revolutionary change in management, a wide and inclusive involvement of local communities can be observed through the geopark.

Qeshm society mostly includes traditional and devout people. Women always stay at home and are rarely seen outside. It is not usual for girls and women to communicate with strangers. Involving women - as a very important part of society - in geopark activities is really a challenge. Qeshm geopark management prepared some facilities for women to present their homemade handicrafts to geopark visitors. In the beginning it was just for their simple and traditional products and making them interested to be more active in society and have income to help their families. Hereafter geopark experts help women to incorporate some simple sketches of surrounding landscapes and nature into their products. In this way local people will have some awareness about their local geological and natural features. In addition, they learned simple and general stories and explanations about land formations and try to transfer this information to visitors of their shops. With this simple strategy, Qeshm Geopark involved many girls and women in these activities and as a result they made some impact on their children and husbands. For men, fishing, transportation and small trades was the main job on the island before establishing the geopark. After recognition of the geopark, men living in villages inside geopark discovered that visitors are a good source for their income. They attended several workshops arranged by the geopark in their villages, schools and mosques. During the workshops people learned how to host visitors and give them suitable services. They also found out their landscape, geology and nature are their most valuable wealth, and protecting and preserving is necessary to keep this wealth. Nowadays there are many local guides to geosites, local accommodation and restaurants in villages inside the geopark.

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