

ACS WORKSHOP RESULTS IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGIONAL NETWORK OF ARTISANS OF THE GREATER CARIBBEAN



Cartagena, Colombia (October 29th 2014) - The acclaimed colonial city of Cartagena de Indias, a UNESCO World Heritage site situated in the north of Colombia, along Colombia's Caribbean Coast, was host to the Regional workshop Entrepreneurial Strengthening in the Tourism Sector: Opportunities for Women, organised by the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in collaboration with the Regional Port Society of Cartagena and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism of Colombia, with the support of the Office of Culture and Tourism of the Organisation of American States. This workshop had as its main objectives to identify the needs and challenges affecting Women Artisans and Entrepreneurs with micro, small and medium enterprises operating in the Tourism Sector and also deliver training and capacity-building tools to develop and/or enhance their business.

Twenty-one (21) women Artisan Entrepreneurs participated in the workshop, representing a cross-section of 15 ACS Member Countries from the four geographic sub-regions.

The keynote presentation was delivered by Mr. Kelvin Sergeant, Specialist, Sustainable Enterprise Development and Job Creation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), who delivered an informative presentation highlighting efforts of the ILO to support women's empowerment, SME development and strengthening of the craft sector. Presentations were also delivered by Tourism Industry experts Mrs. Anasha Campbell, Executive Secretary of the Central American Tourist Integration Secretariat (SITCA) and Mrs. Clara Inés Sánchez Arciniegas, Director of Quality and Sustainable Tourism Development from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism of the Republic of Colombia, who discussed the role and contribution of women in the Tourism industry and shared experiences from Central America and Colombia respectively, to contribute to Women's Entrepreneurship and SME development.

A very interactive presentation was delivered by Juan Miguel Moreno, from the University of Almería, Spain on the use of information communication technologies (ICT's) for market access and promotion. Carola Mandelbaum, Managing Director, Creative Learning-Aid to Artisans also facilitated a very hands-on session which included presentations by the Artisans of their craft products, product assessments and feedback on product marketability and sales pitch.

The workshop was a tremendous success with very positive feedback being received from the Artisans. Among the main outcomes the Artisans committed to forming a Regional Commission of Artisans of the Greater Caribbean for ongoing networking, co-operation and dialogue. As it relates to recommendations for follow-up activities, the Artisans made an appeal requesting that a Regional Fair be organised to showcase and promote the Arts and Craft from the Region to international buyers. The ACS will hold discussions with its partners and will also outreach to other regional organisations to define the modalities to support both these activities.

The workshop culminated in an exercise to document priorities and brainstorm mitigation strategies to address issues affecting the growth and productivity of Artisans and SMEs in the region. The need for special provisions for SMEs to access financing, the desire to increase linkages with other Artisans from the Region, inconsistency across the value chain in terms of the escalating cost and often unavailability of raw materials coupled with inefficiencies in production, as well as assistance to increase trade among the wider Caribbean and Latin America to purchase raw materials, for the manufacturing of products and for shipping and moving goods were among the top priorities. In terms of strategies recurring suggestions were as follows: (i) the need for more such workshops and hands-on training in business management and product innovation related to design, production and quality; (ii) having more direct access to sales opportunities as well as access to information on regional and international trade markets; and (iii) to enhance marketing and advertising of products particularly through training in new technologies.

Participants were awarded with Certificates of Participation at the conclusion of the workshop and were also afforded with the opportunity to explore the city of Cartegena, well-known for the splendour of its architecture, a rich history and vibrant cultural heritage shaped by Indigenous, Colonial Spanish and African influences and equipped with all the attractions and amenities of a modern and growing city made even more memorable by the warmth and hospitality of its people.

The ACS notes with appreciation the support provided by the hosts, partner organisations and presenters, and commend the participants for their interest and active participation which contributed greatly to the successful execution of this workshop and to productive deliberations and outcomes.