



## SUCCESS STORY

# Love of Sports Spurs Action

### USAID project empowers a young woman to pursue her dreams



Fatima Al-Aiel, Save the Children

Ekhalas Hassan participates in a meeting held by the USAID-supported Youth Empowerment Project.

*“Regardless of the difficulties I face in my life, I will work hard and study to reach my dream and make it a reality,” says Ekhalas Hassan.*

“When I was playing sports in my neighborhood, many neighbors were saying that I was not a good girl; how come that I want to enjoy playing games and sports as a girl?” says Ekhalas Hassan, age 18. In Yemeni society, sports are typically a male pursuit, and females tend to be discouraged from participating.

Hassan knew she needed to find a way to continue to pursue her love of sports in a way that would be acceptable in her community. To support young women like Hassan, USAID funds the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), which is implemented by Save the Children. In a three-day workshop sponsored by the YEP, young people from throughout the country came together to share frustrations. Hassan realized that there are others who have similar frustrations, and together they came up with ideas about how to manage these frustrations.

Hassan demonstrated her leadership ability in these discussions, and she joined the Abyan Girls’ Guides as a way to further this leadership experience. Meanwhile, she was able to play sports nationally and internationally and has won many prizes. In 2007, she participated in a regional athletic competition held in Libya, winning first place in a track event.

With this new sense of confidence, Hassan has now joined the police academy, knowing that her experience in leadership and sports will help her in her job. “Regardless of the difficulties I face in my life, I will work hard and study to reach my dream and make it a reality,” she says. Her dream? Hassan hopes to establish a sports club for girls and to change the mindset in her community so that girls playing sports are no longer a rarity.