

## Mainstreaming Gender in Partner Organisations: African Cooperative Action Trust

In July 2008, Skillshare International formed a new partnership with the African Cooperative Action Trust (ACAT) under a democracy and good governance programme. ACAT is a Christian development organisation in Swaziland that works through practical development and spiritual initiatives. The purpose of this partnership is to strengthen the capacity of civil society and ACAT to raise awareness of women's rights and the country's new constitution, and to facilitate broader social change in Swazi communities.

Initially, ACAT participated in a three-day training event run by Skillshare International, which focused on gender, human rights, constitutionalism and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and included practical sessions on advocacy and civic education and planning for beneficiary communities.

ACAT's site officers have witnessed and intervened in several cases where people in rural communities have had their rights violated in the name of culture, by other community members and people in authority.

In December 2008 Skillshare International trained 20 members of ACAT programme staff on international instruments, socio-economic rights and women's rights, focusing on the right to land, water, food and health.

*Photo: One of the training events on CEDAW and rights.*



Community members are becoming increasingly familiar with the constitution and with women's rights. By participating in the CEDAW training and vocational skills development activities, women in Swaziland are empowered to claim their rights. They have developed business administration and record-keeping skills, which means that they are better able to run small businesses and manage their own finances. Levels of participation have also increased significantly, with more women elected into decision-making positions. The Khubutha community have adopted a new parliamentary community development structure, and through this over 30% of elected candidates were women.

Workshops are also being held for traditional authorities and community members. Discussions with traditional leaders have focused on the right to food and water, and on the role of the inner council in enabling communities and individuals to claim socio-economic rights, including issues such as the gender-equitable allocation of land so that people can grow their own food.

The collaborative efforts of Skillshare International and ACAT have been effective. More than 300 people have been sensitised on gender issues, and socio-economic and women's rights. ACAT needs additional support to build the capacity of their entire staff team so that gender can be mainstreamed across their whole programme. The partnership with Skillshare International continues as both organisations work together to raise awareness of CEDAW and empower women to claim their rights.