

**“Taking empowerment
in our own hands”**

Yemeni Women and Men Tell Their Stories

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PREFACE

CARE International in Yemen is proud to have been associated with this initiative with rural women in Al Mahweet.

The accounts of the village men and women who took part speak clearly and positively of the real and lasting changes in their lives which have happened thanks to the hard work and dedication of CARE staff working in close partnership with local communities in Yemen under the coordination of Faiza Hisham and Stephany Kersten.

We hope that the images and accounts in this book will inspire the imaginations of others to help change the lives of more women in rural communities, everywhere.

Gareth Richards

Country Director

CARE International - Yemen

September 2008



Le projet de renforcement des associations de femmes rurales ("Rural Women's Empowerment Project ") est l'un des 14 projets du Fonds Social de Développement développé par l'ambassade de France à Sanaa depuis 2006. Ces 14 projets ont en commun de viser à améliorer la situation quotidienne des familles rurales au Yémen et à renforcer l'équité dans l'accès des femmes et filles à l'éducation, la santé, la ressource agricole et la reconnaissance de leurs droits. CARE a mené son action en partenariat avec 13 associations du governorat d'Al Mahweet. Ce travail a permis de renforcer des structures associatives, lieux d'émancipation par définition, tout en consolidant les connaissances individuelles de chacun de ces membres par le biais de classes d'alphabétisation et l'organisation de différentes formations.

Apprendre à lire, écrire et compter permet, en effet, de mieux trouver sa place dans le cercle villageois et en dehors des murs du village pour poursuivre une scolarisation ou une activité génératrice de revenus. Soutenir les groupes communautaires c'est permettre de changer pas à pas la perception des droits et devoirs de chacun au sein de la communauté ; c'est aussi enclencher progressivement un système familial et social plus équitable.

Gilles Gauthier

Ambassadeur de France au Yémen

Octobre 2008

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Many people have been working, in different ways, to make this book in two languages possible. First off all the Rural Women's Empowerment Project team who worked with the women and men for two years by providing training and support to increase the capacity of the women's associations:

- ✧ Faiza Hisham & Stephany Kersten (project managers and gender co-ordinators)
- ✧ Fatima Rajeh, Ammar Al Zareka & Ammatilla Ahmed (community mobilisers and trainers)
- ✧ Mohammed Al Dairy, Ahmed Al Hassabee & Ali Soodi (technicians)
- ✧ Yahya Al Sanhani, Ahmed Soye & AbdulRahman (drivers).

The French Embassy in Sana'a, through its Social Development Fund and CARE International - United Kingdom provided funding for this project.

And many thanks to those specifically involved in making this publication possible:

- ✧ The women and men of the 13 villages in Al Mawweet governorate who gave their time and thoughts during the interviews. They do not want to be named, but they know who they are;
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CARE International - United Kingdom provided funds to make this publication possible.

We hope that all of you who read this book will use it in your work with rural women and men in Yemen and elsewhere

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Sana'a, September 2008

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INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women, as formulated by CARE staff, is building the capacity of women, to improve their knowledge, experiences and skills to make decisions, improve the livelihood of her and her family, to participate in development, and improve her self esteem, within the context of Islamic rules and beliefs¹.

For two years, CARE has been working with 13 women's associations in Al Mahweet governorate to increase their capacity, manage their associations and to take charge of their own empowerment.



At the start of this Rural Women's Empowerment Project the men in the villages were running the associations and their activities. The women lacked capacity, knowledge and space to run their association themselves. This needed to change if we were serious about women's empowerment.

Women's inability, and lack of opportunities to rule their own life is not unique to Al Mahweet; this is found across Yemen. Globally, Yemen is ranking lowest out of all countries concerning gender

equity and women's empowerment indexes². These indexes measure disparities between women and men in the areas of health, education, political and economic participation. In the areas of political and economic participation (the public sphere), Yemen scores lowest.

Recently work has been published with accounts of strong women fighting to take their life in their own hands and become an example for other women. *Yemeni Voices. Women tell their stories* (2001) by Martha Paluch and *Influential Women in Yemen* in the Yemen Today (April 2008) are such accounts. Most of the women are urban women, while 70% of Yemenis are rurally based. This book provides stories of rural women and how they have improved their lives and become empowered; their stories are supported by stories from men of the villages.

These stories are about women and men "taking empowerment in their own hands."

¹ CARE Yemen gender assessment 2006

² **UNDP**, Human Development Report: Gender Related development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/>
World Economic Forum: Gender Gap Index (GGI), <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2007.pdf>
Social Watch: Gender Equity index (GEI), <http://www.socialwatch.org/en/avancesyRetrosos/IEG/tablas/SWGEI.htm>.

The Rural Women's Empowerment Project: building women's capacity

In 2006, CARE started a new project in Al Mahweet governorate that focussed on building the capacity of women's associations in an empowering way. These associations already existed. They were established during previous CARE projects. An inquiry into the impact of these associations on the life of women³ showed that the associations needed more and longer support before they could "take empowerment in their own hands", with the women running the organisation, positively supported by the men. The French Embassy in Sana'a provided funds from their Social Development Fund to further support the associations.



The project focused on four areas: association management, income generation, literacy and creating an enabling environment.

Women's associations do not work in isolation but are integrated within their community, cultural and traditional contexts. To create an *enabling*

environment for the women to run their association, men were positively involved and much time was spent on solving problems within the community that impact the associations.



To run an association effectively, women were trained in the tasks of each board member, electing a new board, financial management, understanding the social affairs law for associations, and co-operation, communication and negotiation. After the elections, the new board presented themselves to the manager of the local Ministry of Social Affairs and the local bank to understand where they were registered, could get information and had their bank account.



³ C. Van Schoot & S. Kersten (2005). Women's empowerment through association in Al Mahweet, Yemen.

All associations started an income generating activity or small business varying from producing chickens, eggs, raising sheep or goats, beekeeping, selling gas bottles, or running an electric generator. Some associations were unhappy with their business and looked for other possibilities. Most “chicken for eggs” businesses were changed into “chicken for meat” businesses, as women were more capable of running this themselves.

The project provided technical training from the technicians on the team, and consultants were hired to provide specific training. Each association’s story talks in more detail about these small businesses.



Each association had a literacy class and one or two female community teachers trained in the REFLECT⁴ methodology to literacy. REFLECT is an innovative approach to adult learning and social change which fuses the theories of Paulo Freire with the methodology of Participatory Rural Appraisal⁵ aiming to empower people.

Each association had classrooms with space for 20 women. After nine months the student sat for an exam and received the official LAEO certificate. Where

⁴ www.reflect-action.org

⁵ www.IIED.org

necessary new community literacy teachers were trained in the REFLECT methodology. To attract women to attend classes and to provide opportunities to continue after REFLECT, teachers were trained in using the government curriculum. This revived the classes.



The men in the communities were offered the same training as the women, except for literacy, but in separate sessions. In most communities around 15 to 20 men were interested in these sessions. The training provided by the Imam on “Women’s right (or gender) from an Islamic perspective” was very well received changing men’s attitudes towards the women’s associations, as can be read in the stories.

In many communities, the project mediated in solving problems that influenced the functioning of the association. Time consuming, but a form of capacity building to strengthen the women in how to solve problems.

Many women asked for specific training on health issues. Together with the Yemeni Red Crescent, *First Aid* training was provided and each community received five first aid kits to treat small injuries.

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ADANA: women marry and leave their village.

Association name: *Al Rahama* [Mercy]

Adana village is in Ataweela district and situated on the same mountain as Yelaan-Sawaan. The view from the village is across into Hajja governorate. The track to the village is bumpy and it is hard to reach Adana after rain.

The villagers grow sorghum, wheat and alfalfa on steep, rain fed terraces. In the past, the women fetched their water on foot from the valley below the village. The situation improved dramatically when the villagers built themselves a water harvesting tank using funds obtained from the Social Fund for Development. The

tank uses a gravel filter to remove dirt and debris from the water.

There's no school in Adana, so children go to primary school in a village nearby. *Al Rahama* runs a literacy class but attendance is low, not least because the men do not encourage their women to attend. However, the women do acknowledge that they've learnt life skills from the literacy course, for example, "Girls should not be married early because their body is not ready for it. You have to wait till she is around 20 years of age."



Most of the girls marry men from outside Adana. This means they have to leave their home and their village – taking their new found knowledge (learnt through *Al Rahama*) with them. This has dire consequences for *Al Rahama*: most of its members are old and illiterate.

Al Rahama started a poultry unit to generate income. However, since prevailing custom dictates that selling is not a woman's job, the women had to rely on the men to sell the eggs at market on their behalf; this meant they never knew

whether the men were keeping some of the egg revenue for themselves. In addition, the men never counted how many eggs broke on the bumpy road on the way to market. The women of *Al Rahama* decided to change their focus and rear fattened chickens instead. They adapted the poultry building, attended a training course and set forth. In June 2008 the women sold their first batch of chickens – turning a small profit.



In 2007 the association elected a new board. The head, treasurer and general secretary met the local Social Affairs Manager who explained their roles and responsibilities, and the law under which their association is registered.

Samira

Samira is in her thirties, has six children and is Head of *Al Rahama*. Her parents didn't like the idea of girls and boys being taught in the same classroom, so Samira never went to school. Instead, she tended to the family's maize and barley, herded animals, collected firewood and completed the daily two hour round trip to fetch water from down in the valley.

When she reached fifteen, Samira's parents married her off. In turn, Samira's eldest daughter also married aged fifteen, *"Everybody does that, and everybody accepts the idea, so it's okay."* Samira says that her youngest daughters won't get married until they're over twenty and then laughs sarcastically: she knows that's just her dream. She acknowledges that she doesn't have the power to stop early marriage, *"What can I do, because I don't have a solution!"*

Although her eldest daughter didn't go to school – again due to the issue of mixed sex classrooms - things are starting to change. People's opinions are changing and it has gradually become acceptable for boys and girls to be educated together. Samira is hopeful that her daughters will be able to complete their secondary schooling.

Meanwhile, Samira has also been studying. Before *Al Rahama* was set up she couldn't read a single letter; now she can read the Quran and follow up on her children's studies. She has made the most of *Al Rahama's* activities: learning how to cultivate vegetables and developing basic veterinary skills. Samira's dream is for the village to have its own health centre that can help women when they give birth.

Saleh

Saleh is forty years old and has eight brothers. He always wanted an education but times were hard whilst he was growing up, so his parents and elder brother made him drop out of intermediate school and move to Sana'a with his brother to find work to support the family. After three years in Sana'a he returned to his village with the intention of taking up his studies again. His father wouldn't allow him to study, so he signed up to become a soldier. Again his father stepped in, objecting to Saleh's choice of career, and so he headed off to Saudi Arabia to find work there instead. Three years later, he returned to the village, settled down, married, had nine children and became a farmer.

Today Saleh takes an active role in *Al Rahama*. He recognises the benefits it brings to the village, and advocates the need for a proactive leader, *"The people in my village are ignorant and uneducated in the importance of the association...everything was on me... if I did not help them, the association would be over"*. Saleh believes that illiteracy and a lack of education are the main causes for the village's problems, but not everyone agrees. When asked why they refused to attend literacy classes, some of the women laughed and recited a proverb, *"after his hair was grey, he went to school to read and write"* – ridiculing the idea of learning at their age.

Despite Saleh's good intentions, and his determination not to marry his daughters off early, he doesn't have the power to change traditional village customs and practices. When a family member approached him with a view to marrying his eldest daughter he was faced with a dilemma: to say 'no' would be to slight his family, to say 'yes' would go against his beliefs. He agreed to the marriage, on the condition of a long engagement. Once the couple were engaged, the groom's family pushed for an immediate marriage. For Saleh to stand up for his beliefs would have resulted in the engagement being broken off, bringing lasting shame on him and his family. In the end, Saleh bowed to convention, agreeing to an immediate marriage. The whole experience has made Saleh even more resolute not to marry his other two daughters off until they finish school. But he acknowledges, with a shake of the head, that it takes more than literacy class and training in women's rights to shift generation old traditions.

AL DAHABISHA: Women take the lead in village improvements

Association name: *Al Dahabisha*

Unlike many of the other villages in Al Mahweet governorate, Al Dahabisha is not situated high up in the mountains, but languishes in the bottom of Wadi Sara. During the summer, it gets hot and humid; the women complain of illness, and malaria is rife.

Until recently the village lacked all the basic services – such as a school, clean drinking water, electricity, a decent access road, and health services. However, the villagers have managed to improve their lot, due in large part to the role played by the women's association.

The inhabitants graze their animals, and grow crops such as corn, bananas, and alfalfa on the banks of the *wadi*. Large quantities of groundwater are available, so crops can be irrigated from a well.

In 2006, the villagers upgraded a well close to the *wadi* bed. The well acts as the water source for the communal village water tank. In 2007, a water distribution network was established. Now every household has its own water tap and a water filter – this ensures that the water is fit for drinking.



The association launched in 2006, a literacy classroom was built and twenty women started the REFLECT course. By May 2008, eighteen of those women had passed the REFLECT exam and continued their studies following the government curriculum.

The association's income generation project is beekeeping. The project is profitable, but the women needed to take ownership of the project rather than relying on their men folk to do all the work. The women were trained in

beekeeping and honey production by a beekeeper from the Office of Agriculture in Milhan district. The beehives have recently been upgraded; honey can be extracted more easily from the new, 'Kenyan type' beehives. A further improvement is the honey extractor. Combs are placed in the extractor and the honey is drawn out - thereby improving its purity and upgrading its quality.

Despite having relied on the men for beekeeping, the women are a strong and proactive group. They are part of a water

committee in their local area mobilised the women of two nearby villages when a water distribution network was constructed. Neither of the villages have women's associations – meaning that the women would not normally be considered for membership of the committee (despite being the main water collectors). With the support of the *Al Dahabisha* women, women from the other two

villages were elected as members of their village water committee.

Members of *Al Dahabisha* participated in a range of training in areas such as organisational development, job descriptions for board members, association law, financial management, communication and negotiation. Improvements in the running of the association were obvious after each session.



Using the profits generated from honey production, the association purchased a small generator and introduced electricity to the village for the first time. The women charged households for the electricity - thereby increasing the association's income. One of *Al Dahabisha's* members (see below) runs the generator – a great novelty for Al Mahweet governorate; she has also visited other villages, such as Qarn

Basheer, to train the women in how to run a generator.

The women didn't stop there. Their next project was to build a mosque in the village. The women approached a charity with a proposal; the proposal was accepted, and the funding awarded. Today, thanks to the women's association, the village of Al Dahabisha has water, electricity and a mosque.

Latifa

Latifa is in her late teens, and one of seven girls and three boys (from different fathers). Her family's finances are relatively good – they rely on income from their animals and crops grown in the *wadi*. Latifa is in second grade at secondary school and determined to finish her studies, despite school being an hour and a half away by foot. She is used to walking: when she was young she had to fetch water from over 2 km away – being jeered at along the way. Latifa has two brothers and a sister also at school. She despairs that one of her brothers, who is in sixth grade, *“He cannot write his name correctly. The teachers are busy chewing qat and the kids play.”*

When CARE first came to the village in 2001, Latifa was thirteen and too young to attend association meetings. Instead, her mother participated in the association's activities. The first project was goat keeping and her mother was picked as 'the representative' of the goats. This was followed by a terrace renovation initiative, and then a 'clean water project'. Once this project was complete, and the women had more time on their hands (since they didn't have to spend so much time fetching water) the women wanted to set up a literacy class.

Latifa is a tireless enthusiast and takes every opportunity provided by the association: she's been on every training course available – from generator maintenance, to financial management, to hygiene and sanitation, beekeeping and literacy teaching (she is trained in both the REFLECT methodology and the government curriculum). Aside from her role as a literacy teacher (for which she refuses to accept a wage in order to save *Al Dahabisha* money), Latifa is also head of the association, a member of the water committee, and was chosen to travel to other villages to demonstrate to another women's association how to use and maintain a generator. She recognises that her involvement in the association has *“Made me more cooperative, and now I know how to respect other people and how to take care of myself.”*

Although Latifa's father supported her participation in *Al Dahabisha*, she says, *“Some people in the village were afraid of it because they did not know what it means. But now the village is developed. The women have become literate and they know many things.”* The women's next plan is to buy a mill – since the closest mill is in the next door centre *Al Khamees*.

Despite her achievements to date, Latifa's aspirations have yet to be fulfilled. Her next plan is to learn how to use her sewing machine. When she graduates from secondary school she wants to enrol in the local health institute in *Al Khamees*. She says, *“I feel pain when someone dies on the way to hospital, or when a woman gives birth in a vehicle before she can make it to the nearest clinic. I want to serve my village, and the nearby villages.”* One day she hopes that *Al Dahabisha* will have its own sewing centre and hospital.

Ali

Ali is Latifa's father and is in his late thirties. Although he dropped out after primary school in order to work, he understands the importance of education and is very supportive of his daughter's activities. Ali's career started in Saudi Arabia; after five years in Saudi he was called back to Al Dahabisha by his family – his brother had died and they wanted him to marry his brother's wife and to raise her children. Today he is a father to ten children, and a farmer.

When the association started, he encouraged his daughter to participate in all of the activities available, and also enrolled himself in apiculture, livestock husbandry and generator maintenance. Not all of the villagers were so enthusiastic – they'd heard stories of organisations promising projects and then failing to deliver. How could they be sure that CARE was being honest with them? They were also mistrustful of CARE's motives in creating a women's association, asking, *"What is their aim in only choosing women?"*

Ali is determined that his children don't miss out on their education. However, when he allowed his daughters to go to school some of the villagers bad mouthed him. His response was to ask, *"Is it more safe to have my daughters in school or shepherding in the mountains – do you know what happens to them up there? Do you have guardians to protect them in the mountains?"* The head teacher wrote Ali a letter thanking him for his help – girl's enrolment significantly increased as a result of Ali's discussions with his fellow villagers. Latifa's success has had a profound impact: villagers encouraged their daughters to study; they wanted their daughters to be like Latifa.

Ali believes *Al Dahabisha* has improved the quality of life in the village, and eradicated illiteracy – thereby removing the main reason that people feel isolated. He says, *"The women are prisoners in their illiteracy. When the woman becomes literate she breaks the chains around her hands."*

His support and encouragement knows no bounds: he's approached the Social Fund for more beekeeping support; he encouraged Latifa to write a letter to request a new mosque from an organisation in the Emirates (they duly accepted and funded the mosque); his next plan is to apply for a health centre. As for his children, *"I hope that my children will educate their children as I have done."*

AL JAMAYEM: Women rear calves for income

Association name: *Al Mara'a Al Asreehya* [Modern Women]

Al Jamayem is situated just across the mountain from Al Mahweet as the crow flies, but it takes an hour by car along a rough, stony track to get there. The villages in the area are all perched on hill tops, surrounded by terraces. The area is well known for growing snow peas -

planted in amongst the sorghum, and, more unusually, for cultivating ground nuts. Another of the village's peculiarities is that the women wear small straw hats, balanced on the top of their veiled heads to keep the sun off.



The name *Al Mara'a Asreehya* was decided by the men who registered the association; it was only after the elections for the new board had taken place that the women discovered their official name!

Since the establishment of *Al Mara'a Asreehya*, women's freedom and rights have improved immeasurably. Women used not to be able to move around their village freely – they had to be accompanied by a male relative (*mahram*). These days they can move

from house to house freely, and are even allowed to travel to meet women from other associations (under CARE's auspices) with only one *mahram* between them.

There are no schools in al Jamayem; the primary and secondary school are twenty minutes walk from the village. The association runs its own literacy class; the class of 16 women have completed the RELECT course and are following the government curriculum. The success of

the literacy class made the 'village' (aka the men) believe in the abilities of the association; they saw it as an indication that the women could run the association and its income generation projects. In line with the Imam's teachings (from the 'women's rights according to Islamic perspective' training) the men understood that *Mara'a Asreehya* was neither shameful nor forbidden; the men followed the good example set by the Sheikh and their support for the association improved overnight.

Al Mara'a Asreehya's first income generation project was goat rearing. However, the project wasn't a huge success since a number of goats died before reproducing. The association introduced a new system: instead of rearing all 28 goats together, they were

divided into four groups of seven, and women were chosen to rear a group each. The new born kids are sold at market with half of the money going to the association and the other half going to the woman who reared them. The system worked well; the goats are better looked after, and the association still earns an income.

Spurred on by their success, the women decided to take up calf rearing. A group of women, accompanied and supported by the men, and with financial assistance from CARE, went to the market to buy five calves. Five particularly hard up Al Jamayem women were identified and given a calf each. CARE's vet trained the women in calf husbandry and basic veterinary skills. One of the women was such a natural that she became the 'village vet'. So far, so good.



However, each of the recipients of a calf had to sign a contract with the association regarding the distribution of profit after sale of the young cow. The contracts each came back with their husband's signature on them – as though they, not their wives, were contracting with the women's association. Discussions followed to make it clear that it was the women, not their husbands, who were contracting with the association. Once each of the women had negotiated how much of their half of the revenue they would give to their husband

(to reflect the cost of his providing cattle fodder from the market) the five women all signed the new contracts.

Al Jamayem made the transition from being a closed village to being one that received a number of external visitors. The visitors included a photographer who photographed *Al Mara'a Asreehya's* activities for an exhibition at the French Cultural Centre in Sana'a (8 March 2008).

Asma

"[Bushra] told me about a girl called Asma, who wants to be a teacher and who attends classes with boys in the village school, a rarity in Yemen where classes are segregated by sex. Bushra was impressed by Asma's positive, humorous personality and open-mindedness. She realised during her trip that, in spite of the lack of water, electricity and education in many rural areas, "You find this kind of strong personality in women and girls everywhere. There are so many women out there who are achieving amazing things. But you don't hear from them."" (Interview with Bushra Mutawakkil (Yemen's foremost artistic photographer) in Yemen Today magazine, April 2008.)

Asma is seventeen and head of Monitoring and Evaluation for *Al Mara'a Asreehya*. She is in second grade at high school and says, *"I want to continue my education; I no longer do wood collection and animal grazing because now I am responsible for housework and my mother and sister in law do the outside work."*

Al Mara'a Asreehya was set up when Asma was in sixth grade of elementary school. She used to join the women at association meetings but it was hard for her to understand what was being discussed. The women had all sorts of issues: they had identified two young women to train as literacy teachers, one of whom had studied in Saudi Arabia until the end of elementary school, the other was studying at high school. The association chose the woman who had studied in Saudi. This woman was also the head of the association; this caused problems. The association dissolved and a new head had to be chosen. Asma's classmate was elected, but since she was married the women wanted to elect someone else; they chose Asma's sister instead.

Asma's family registered Asma for school because they saw lots of other children going to school. At the beginning, Asma says, *"I didn't realise how important it is to study, but now I realise the importance!"* Today Asma is a standby literacy teacher; initially, she was reluctant to take up the role, thinking that she would have to drop out of school. She was nervous when she was told she would have to travel to Amran for her training, since her father told her it was far away. She travelled with a group of other women and the experience turned out well.

Asma's father and some other men from the village were responsible for introducing CARE to Al Jamayem. Initially people rejected the idea of an association and didn't know to deal with it, Asma recounts, *"When CARE came here many times they asked about meetings, and the people in the village were surprised because we did not know about these things. We had to learn."* People needed encouragement to take key positions, for example Asma's sister, *"She refused to be head of the association because she didn't trust herself. But she was shown how to work, and they convinced her, and now she is the head!"*

In addition to her literacy teacher training, Asma has also been trained in first aid and basic veterinary skills. She started out as a member of the Monitoring and Evaluation team (M&E), and now is head of the M&E team, responsible for administering medicine to the goats and calves.

These experiences have broadened Asma's horizons. She hopes to study at the health institute in Al Mahweet saying, *"there are no nurses in my village, and only two people in a neighbouring village; people here want their own people [from the village] to be doctors and nurses."* Asma is determined to fulfil her ambitions saying that she will reject any marriage proposals, *"then marriage can't get in the way of my dream"*.

Yahya

Yahya is thirty four, Imam of Al Jamayem's mosque, and married with six children. He trained as an Islamic Studies teacher, but couldn't find work so makes his living from tending a few agricultural terraces with his wife. He says, *"We don't have much money, our conditions are very difficult and I must spend most of my time at the mosque."*

Yahya was sceptical about the establishment of the association, and was the first person in his village to openly object to it. Both he and fellow villagers were concerned that CARE intended to convert the women to Christianity, saying, *"It is only for women, this will take women out of their religion,"* and he prevented his wife from joining. This sentiment was reinforced by people in surrounding villages. However, Yahya also recognised that the women had a hard time saying *"Society in the village is a male society, and women are isolated."*

Yahya kept a close eye on *Al Mara'a Asreehya*, and over the course of time his opinion changed – spurred on by the Al Mahweet Imam's teachings (during the 'women's rights from the Islamic perspective' training). Because the training was conducted by a religious man, the men of the village agreed that *"it was right"*. They accepted the association and started to understand that the project benefited women – especially the literacy classes. Women had learnt how to read and write, and no longer had to authorise someone to vote in elections on their behalf!

Yahya concludes, *"I hope that the support for the association will continue and I hope that the other villages that create problems [for us] will have an Imam to explain women's rights from the Islamic perspective to their men."*

AL MASQEF: Eager to learn and supported by their men.

Association name: *Al Barka [The Blessing]*

Al Masqef is situated in the steep, mountainous Hufash district. The village is two and a half hours drive from the town of Al Mahweet and perched high up in the mountains; at night you can see the lights of Al Mahweet twinkling in the distance. Al Masqef lies close to the centre of the district which means that it is relatively accessible, with schools close by. As a result, it is a relatively well developed village with far lower illiteracy levels than elsewhere (including for women). This encourages those women who are still

illiterate to study hard in *Al Barka's* literacy class.

As throughout the rest of Hufash district the women of Al Masqef tend to wear the traditional dark brown and red large shawl [*sarmia*].

Hufash is traditionally a coffee growing area, but the people of Al Masqef have replaced coffee with the more profitable alternative of *qat*. The women of the village are kept busy harvesting *qat* to be sold at market.



Unusually, the men of Al Masqef do not prevent their women from running the association; they are very supportive. The women used to rely on the men to run their gas bottle shop - renting it out to them. However, training in management, income generation and literacy helped the women of *Al Barka* to take ownership of their activities, and they are now running the business themselves – encouraged by the men. The women used their

knowledge of the association's roles and successfully applied this to the running of their gas bottle business.

Al Barka is the first association to have fought against corrupt ministry officials. The women developed a good understanding of the social affairs law under which they are registered and have used their knowledge of the rules and regulations to make sure that no one deceives them. This is hard to achieve,

since officials are powerful, but the women have demonstrated their own power – that of knowledge - and come out on top by following the rules. A huge achievement!

Al Barka used the income from selling the gas bottles to buy sewing materials and CARE added sewing training. It is traditional to have new clothes at *Eid*; now, instead of having to buy their new

clothes, the women can make their own – exactly as they want them.

After the ‘women’s rights according to Islam’ training, Mohammed (the head of the association’s husband) started a newsletter about the association, called *Al Barka*, - the newsletter demonstrates the level of support the men have for the association.



في هذا العدد

- ضيفة العدد
- الموقف من المرأة الحلقة الاولى
- من أنشطة الجمعية

الإصدار الثاني شوال 1428 هـ أكتوبر 2007م

دورية شهرية تصدر عن جمعية البركة الاجتماعية الخيرية النسوية بقرية المسقف- مديرية حفاش

تحت عنوان النوع الاجتماعي من منظور إسلامي

منظمة كير تشدن المرحلة الثانية من التدريب

خاص البركة:-

نفذت منظمة كير خلا الأسبوع الأخير من شهر أكتوبر المرحلة الثانية من البرنامج التدريبي والذي تتبناه المنظمة في إطار رعايتها واهتمامها بالمرأة الريفية والرفع من قدراتها والتحسين من مستواها الاقتصادي والتعليمي حيث تم استضافة الأستاذ/ طه العزاني لإثراء الدورة بالمفاهيم الإسلامية والتي أوضحت دور المرأة ومكانتها في الإسلام ومشاركتها أخيها الرجل في مختلف مناحي الحياة كما تم في الدورة تنفيذ حلقة نقاش وورش عمل نفذها المشاركون تناولت قضايا ذات صلة بالمرأة وفي نهاية الدورة تم تسليم المشاركين شهادات المشاركة من قبل الأستاذة/فانزة هشام هائل مديرة المشروع بالمحافظة

الافتتاحية ظاهرة الفقر في المجتمع الريفي

الأسباب والنتائج

يشير المسح الوطني لطاهرة الفقر في اليمن لعام 99م إلى أن نسبة الأسر التي تعولها نساء قد بلغت 11.7% مقابل 88.2% من الأسر التي يعولها الرجال. وبالنظر إلى الفقر بخطبه الأعلى والأدنى وبحسب نوع رب الأسرة نجد أن نسبة الفقر بخطبه الأعلى والأدنى هي أكبر في أوساط الأسر التي تعولها النساء من تلك التي يعولها الرجال ويعود ذلك إلى: محدودية قدرات النساء وانخفاض مشاركتهن الاقتصادية وتهميش عملهن في الإنتاج وخاصة في الريف بالإضافة إلى معاناة النساء من الحرمان في كثير من الجوانب إذ تعاني النساء أقل حظاً في الحصول على الخدمات، وتفتاقم مشكلات المرأة بسبب ارتفاع نسبة الأمية في أوساطهن ويلعب العنصر الاجتماعي والموروث الثقافي والعادات والتقاليد التي تنظر بكونية للمرأة دوراً مهماً في ارتفاع نسبة الفقر بخطبه الأعلى والأدنى بالنسبة للنساء ويزداد الأمر سوءاً بالنسبة للنساء الريفيات ويمكن ملاحظة ذلك من خلال ارتفاع نسبة الفقر بخطبه الأعلى والأدنى في المناطق الريفية بصورة أكبر من المناطق الحضرية، كما تزداد النسبة ارتفاعاً بين الإناث في كل من الحضر والريف عن مثيلاتها عند الرجال، وترجع أسباب ذلك إلى: كبر حجم الأسرة الريفية عن الأسرة الحضرية مما يؤدي إلى زيادة احتمال وقوع الفقر في أوساط تلك الأسر الكبيرة. محدودية الخدمات الاجتماعية والأساسية في الريف مقارنة بالحضر وارتفاع نسب الأمية في الريف أكثر من الحضر وبين الإناث أكثر من الذكور.

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Aisha

Aisha is twenty four, *Al Barka's* Treasurer, and is studying English Language at Al Mahweet University. When she was in her third grade at secondary school, Aisha got engaged to a cousin on Aisha's mother's side; her fiancé didn't see the need for women to be educated and told her to stop going to school. However, Aisha loved school and, supported by her father, refused to drop out resulting, having an engagement cancelled can cause lasting damage to a family's reputation. Instead Aisha's father continued to support her studies – throughout school, and university (even though the university is two and a half hours drive away from the village).

Since it is so far away, Aisha doesn't go to university very often but she works hard and is determined to do well. So far, so good: she's reached the second level in her studies. What's more, she's just got engaged – this time to a cousin on her father's side. Aisha's sister is also doing well: she is at the police college in Sana'a. Once she's finished her studies she'll return to Al Mahweet to look for a job.

According to Aisha, *Al Barka* has had a profound impact on her family, particularly on her mother. Apart from learning to read and write, her mother's whole outlook has changed. Aisha reckons that if her mother hadn't attended *Al Barka's* literacy class and learnt that women have a place in society, and a right to an education, then Aisha wouldn't have been allowed to go to university. As well as her English Language studies, Aisha wants to learn how to use a computer and to help her friends in the village reach her level of education.

Houria

Houria is thirty six, and married with six children – the eldest of whom is eighteen; her husband is a police officer in Hodeidah, four hours by car from the village. Houria went to primary school, but was one of only three girls studying in the class, "*At that time it was 'ayb' [shame] for girls to study.*"

Before *Al Barka* was set up, Houria says "*life was quite meaningless, and the women didn't have a role in the village, they were isolated, and only did the work that they were supposed to do.*" They were so excited by the prospect of having an association that the women signed up members and ran their own elections before CARE even arrived for the initial meetings. *Al Barka* has brought the women of the village together, "*The association made all the women have one aim. Before they lived for themselves, now they cooperate.*" The association chose to start the gas bottle project agreeing that "*It is forever, not like chickens.*"

Houria's housework duties are simple now that the children have grown up and her husband is away and he supports her involvement in the association's activities. She claims, "*I have benefited from the association because now I am confident and I know how to talk to people; I am more developed and civilised.*" *Al Barka* has started a sewing project and Houria's dream is to learn how to sew.

Mohammed

Mohammed is thirty years old and comes from a poor family. When he was a child he juggled school with helping his father work the land. After secondary school he married a local illiterate woman and then enrolled in Al Mahweet to study Islamic Studies.

Whilst in Al Mahweet, Mohammed heard about CARE's project and applied for an association to be set up in Al Masqef. He encouraged his wife to attend literacy classes; now she can read and write and follow her children's progress. After a two year stint as a volunteer teacher in the village, Mohammed was appointed to the position of Director of Administrative Affairs in the local agricultural office. In his spare time he started up *Al Barka's* monthly newsletter. The women write poems and articles with titles such as, '*Women have rights like men, but also have duties like men*' using extracts from the Quran to support their arguments. The newsletter is typed up and printed at the district offices nearby and then distributed in the village.

Mohammed is determined that his children will receive the best education possible, and wants to support them in transforming their village into a thriving town.

AL QAAHI: Solving their problems, improvements followed

Association name: *Al Kheer [Welfare]*

Al Qaahi is an ancient village comprising stone tower houses and narrow alleys based around a central market place. The village is situated in Arrujum district; to get there from the Al Mahweet road you have to cross several brown, dry mountain ridges. Villagers subsist on rain fed crops grown on terraces, and herding goats and sheep.

The village has a school, but no mains electricity; a few houses have private generators and at night the generator for

the grain mill is used to supply household electricity. Water is available from the valley below the village and, during the rainy season, from rainwater harvesting cisterns in the village. Many women in the village are illiterate, but the women's association runs a literacy class. They started off following the REFLECT methodology and progressed on to being taught the government curriculum. In May 2008, 12 women studied in the class.



When CARE arrived in Al Qaahi there was already a community association. Nevertheless, the women of the village were eager to start their own association just for women. However, this was to create a great deal of problems. A number of women were members of the community association, and so it contributed towards the set up costs of *Al Kheer*. However, as a result, the community association's men felt that they had jurisdiction over *Al Kheer*'s board, and tried to use *Al Kheer* as a means of attracting funds for the village. This conflicted with the objectives of a

women's association: *"to provide a space for women to follow their own development needs, build their capacity, and become empowered."* It took the village some time to figure out a better way of accommodating the women's association.

As a means of income generation, the association started a grain mill project. Tradition dictates that running a grain mill is a man's job; the women found it difficult to run the mill by themselves so they rented it out to a local man. However, he never paid the rent, and the

women felt powerless to do anything about it. In Al Qaahi, as in many villages, cultural, family and community relations are so intertwined that it is difficult to stand up for your rights, especially for women.

The first year and a half of CARE's involvement was dedicated to helping solve the problem between the community association and *Al Kheer*. The problem had become progressively more complex to the point that no one knew, or could even remember, the actual facts. The manager of the Social Affairs office in Al Mahweet, where both associations are registered, intervened to explain how both associations should behave in order to adhere to the Social Affairs law for associations, and how to fulfil their duties as registered associations.



The Al Qaahi men are used to dominating leaving little opportunity for the women to take decisions and manage their association. The men claimed their

dominance was based on Islamic principles. CARE took this opportunity to set up discussion groups on women's rights according to Islam, inviting Imams from Sana'a and Al Mahweet to discuss women's rights with the men of the village; these sessions served as great eye opener, and caused a number of men to change their perceptions. Such was the success of the sessions; the village has even become a role model for embracing "gender from an Islamic perspective." One of the men subsequently travelled around other villages with the Imam to promote the issue.

The sessions improved *Al Kheer's* situation immeasurably. The men allowed the women to take ownership of their association and its activities. A new board was elected. This time, the women chose the president themselves, and chose a woman who lives in the village (the former head lived outside of the village). The women decided to print their own new stationary complete with *Al Kheer's* logo. Training activities could finally begin, and the women were very eager. They chose water hygiene and sanitation training as a result of their visit to Yelaan-Sawaan's water and poultry project. Also included in the training, as a bonus, was food preservation, child nutrition, and how to support your child's growth and health.

Khadija

Khadija is eighteen years old, single, and has lead a tough life. Her father died when she was young, and her younger brother took the role as the head of the family. He is strict with Khadija and is known to exercise his power through use of force. Even though she consistently came top in her class, Khadija dropped out of school in sixth grade since she couldn't manage to juggle school as well as her daily household tasks of collecting wood, grass and water from the nearest reservoir – a two hour round trip from the village. *“It was so difficult for me, all the work in the morning, and school in the afternoon. I was so tired I could not study but had to lie down. My brother didn't work; he was in the street all the time.”*

Khadija's life took a turn for the better when *Al Kheer* was established. The women of the village knew her to be a strong woman, who always persevered, and elected her as the General Secretary. Although her brother wasn't happy, he allowed this development. After a while, the opportunity to be trained as a literacy teacher arose – Khadija jumped at the chance, along with a girl from the next door village. Through her involvement with *Al Kheer*, Khadija has come to understand that she is entitled to an education, and that being educated opens up a variety of opportunities. Today, five years after dropping out, Khadija wants to return to school to complete her studies. When fellow villagers tell her she is too old to study she replies boldly, *“I don't care, I don't feel ashamed to study.”*

Since she is single, Khadija doesn't have a husband to convince that she should be allowed to complete her studies (she is sick, her kidneys don't work, and therefore she doesn't have great marriage prospects); but she still has to convince her family. As you might imagine, Khadija's brother tried to stop her returning to school. However, Khadija has a solid ally in her mother who learnt to read and write at the literacy class, and understands what she herself missed out on as a child. Khadija's mother is adamant that her daughter will not be deprived of her education.

Abdul Aziz

Abdul Aziz is thirty three and a tireless supporter of *Al Kheer* and its activities. He comes from a relatively well educated family – his father was insistent that he and his five brothers and three sisters went to school, saying “*he used to beat us to make us study!*” Only one of his sisters didn’t attend school, she herded the family flock of sheep instead. Despite being grown up, and married with two children, Abdul Aziz is still very much under his father’s authority – his salary goes straight to his father.

Abdul Aziz completed his secondary school and then signed up for Military College in Sana’a. However, his father didn’t want his son to go to war, preferring instead that he chose a civilian career. Abdul Aziz enrolled in the Faculty of Education in Al Mahweet and trained to be a teacher. He graduated, returned to the village, married a local, educated woman, and volunteered as a teacher in the village school. He was later offered a permanent teaching job, on behalf of someone else. This is not an unusual occurrence: a government employee will continue to draw his salary whilst subcontracting his job out to someone else (often passing on as little as 25% of the salary), leaving the government employee free to work elsewhere.

From the outset, Abdul Aziz embraced *Al Kheer* – although he thinks that its members could put more effort into their activities. He coaxed his illiterate sister into enrolling in the literacy class: now she can read and write confidently; he supported his wife in her application to become Head of the Association; he attended the gender training in Al Mahweet – and now, as a result, he thinks, “*women should have the opportunity to express themselves, be asked for their opinions, and to participate in everything.*” Whenever there are project meetings with CARE staff, it is Abdul Aziz who volunteers to go from house to house spreading the word. His enthusiasm and dedication don’t stop there: Abdul Aziz has approached the Social Fund for Development, the Saleh Fund and the *Islah* Foundation looking for more activities and extra funds for projects – especially for improving healthcare.

AL QALLAA: Too busy to pursue their development

Association name: *Al Amal [Hope]*

Al Qallaa village is in Hufash district. As in the rest of Hufash, the women of Al Qallaa wear the dark brown and red shawl [*sarmia*]. When they travel outside the district they prefer the more fashionable black *abaya*.

According to the information gathered from the gender analysis questionnaire (what do men do, what do women do?), conducted by men of Al Qallaa, women are not involved in farming the terraces. Instead, women are responsible for collecting animal fodder, feeding the

animals, fetching water and collecting fire wood – activities that take up a large part of their day.

Basic services in the village are limited: there is no school (there's one in a nearby village), no proper drinking water, and no electricity. The women's association started up a literacy class and followed the government curriculum. The women felt too busy to study, and numbers dwindled until the association had to close the class.



Al Amal was the first association to elect a new board by presenting their annual financial report and 'voting by hand' in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Social Affairs in Al Mahweet. Later on the new board (the head,

treasurer and general secretary), together with newly elected boards of fellow associations, met with the manager of Social Affairs who explained their roles and responsibilities.

To generate income, the women ran an egg laying unit. The initiative wasn't very successful so they switched to rearing chickens; however, they were

disheartened when the sale of the first batch of chickens failed to turn a decent profit.

Selma

Selma is twenty seven, she married when she was fourteen and has had children (five boys and two girls). Selma says life is tough; she has problems with her husband's family and she has to fetch water every day, carrying it all the way home on her head, whilst keeping her hair and face covered.

Selma dropped out of school after the birth of her first child and gave birth every year consecutively after that; unfortunately, today she only has six children after one of them drowned whilst she was busy with her work. Her eldest child, a son, is thirteen years old and at secondary school. Selma is adamant that all of her children will complete their education, and that she will not let her two daughters marry early – she understands the damage caused by early marriage and doesn't want her children to experience the hardships she had to endure.

At the outset, Selma didn't understand what the association was all about. But then members of CARE and the Agricultural Office explained the purpose of the association and provided training. When the former head of *Al Amal* married Selma was elected as head - the women of the village didn't realise that the head of the association needed to be literate.

Even though the poultry project wasn't a great success, the project generated sufficient profits to fund the literacy class. In addition to her role as head of *Al Amal*, Selma is a standby literacy teacher – trained in both the REFLECT methodology and also the government curriculum. She wants the older women in the village to learn to read and write so, during the summer, she taught the *Quran* and the *Hadiths* to encourage them to come to the classes.

Selma feels that her experiences with *Al Amal* have made her stronger and more understanding of life. What is more, she is delighted that, as a result of the training, the men in her village are treating the women better. Selma's dream come true would be a water project for Al Qallaa.

Abdullah

Abdullah is thirty one. Ever since he was a child he has helped his father on the land but times have been tough: his fifteen strong family doesn't own enough land to meet their subsistence needs. Seeing little benefit in education (compared with its expense), Abdullah's father forced him to drop out in third grade of preparatory school, and he started to work alongside his father on the terraces full time. Today Abdullah has three children, and wants each of them complete their schooling.

Abdullah welcomed the prospect of the association, immediately understanding the potential benefits; he made sure that his wife got involved wherever possible. He believes that village facilities have improved: there is a generator, telephone lines and hopefully a water tank in the near future. Having seen the enormous effort the village women put in to fetching water, Abdullah is hugely supportive of the idea of a communal village water tank, and wants this to be the next project. However, he also recognises the association's shortcomings, saying, "*The association is established, but it is still not completed, something is missing*" and then refers to the low turnout for literacy classes and the lack of impetus in the chicken project, "*in the beginning the people helped but financially [the project] is not very helpful, they are poor people.*" The most important thing Abdullah has learnt as a result of *Al Amal*, is about women's rights, and how women should be treated.

AL SABRE WALWATI: Water and electricity improve life

Association name: *Al Nahda [The Rise]*

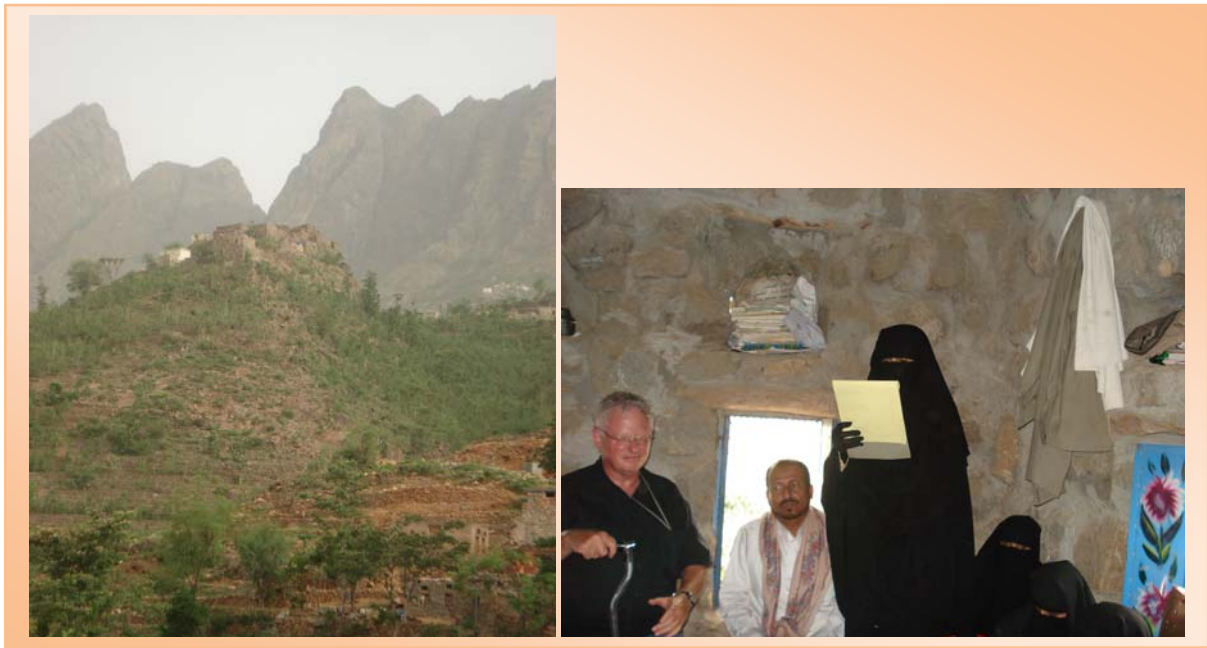
The village of Al Sabre Walwati is very remote; it lies deep in the mountains of Milhan district. The road up to the village from the plains of the Tihama is long and difficult to drive – with lots of sheer edges and tight corners.

Al Sabre Walwati has no basic services, neither electricity nor clean water; the nearest school is in the next door village, and the nearest health centre even further away (also it's a private centre, so you have to pay before being treated).

The better off families each have a small water tank, but these don't store enough

water to last through the dry season. When the tank runs dry the women have to drop down into the valley to fetch their water – the round trip takes the majority of the day.

Al Nahda runs a literacy class for the many illiterate women in the village. The women have completed the course using the REFLECT methodology and are now following the government curriculum. As at May 2008, *Al Nahda* was teaching eighteen enthusiastic students how to improve their reading and writing skills.



The association started out with a “chickens for eggs” income generation project. Due to the remoteness of the village, and the condition of the access track, it was very expensive to transport the chicks and chicken feed up to the village, and to transport the freshly laid eggs down to the souk.

The women closed the project down, and asked instead for help in generating electricity for the village; due to its remote location, it's unlikely that the village will be hooked up to the public supply for quite some years. *Al Nahda* applied for funding from a Dutch foundation and was awarded funds for a generator, connections to all houses, and

a water collection tank for every household. The women couldn't have been more delighted. As in Yelaan-Sawaan, water filters are being distributed to every household to ensure the villagers have access not just to water, but also to clean drinking water. *Al Nahda* will be in charge of managing the project, with the men providing building services.

The election of the association's board marked a turning point for *Al Nahda* (and for the village). The men tried to influence the elections, but the women didn't agree with the men's preferred candidate for the position of head of the association. With CARE's help, the women managed to elect their own choice of candidate, and settle their issues with the men.



Following the election, the men participated in “*women's rights from an Islamic perspective*” and “*gender analysis*” training. After this, the men started to give the women the space they need to run the association – but the women were careful not to forget they needed the support of the men in certain activities.

security and child nutrition with a women's association from a different project. For one of the attendees, it was the first time she had been allowed to leave the confines of Al Sabre Walwati. When asked how she had managed to travel, she replied, grinning from ear to ear, “*You trained my husband!*”

Soon after the men's training, members of *Al Nahda* travelled to Hajja to discuss food

Yahya

Yahya is the mayor of Al Sabre Al Walwati and has been known to wield his mayoral power in his family's affairs. Yahya is twenty seven, but due to his tough life, he looks as though he's in his forties. He provides for his wife and six children, as well as his mother and brother – despite the fact he has no guaranteed income.

Yahya dropped out of secondary school to support his family when his father died; however, he found it hard to find work since he hadn't completed his schooling. He would roam the neighbouring villages picking up odd jobs here and there. He was hardworking and determined, and started cultivating local farmland as well as becoming involved in *Al Nahda's* egg laying project to provide for his extended family.

At its outset, Yahya was extremely mistrustful of the association, and suspicious that CARE might have ulterior motives. When the *Al Nahda* was founded, Sawsan (his niece and Rukaya's daughter) ran for the position of general secretary. On the day of the elections, Yahya shouted at his niece in public, forcing her to remove her name from the election list; he made it clear, in public, that he didn't want members of his family involved in *Al Nahda*.

Yahya's negative perception of the association assured him a place on the '*women's rights from the Islamic perspective*' training in Al Mahweet. The *qat* chew after the training provided an opportunity for everyone to discuss their views, and Yahya was deeply affected by these discussions. After the training, he approached a member of the CARE project team and said "*I'm sorry..., sorry for everything*". From that day onwards he has promoted *Al Nahda's* activities, encouraging women to get involved, and is one of the main proponents for the upcoming electricity and water project.

Rukaya

Rukaya is fifty years old, separated from her husband, and a force to be reckoned with! She takes an extremely active role in *Al Nahda*, and is never scared to put forward her opinion. She refused to take a Board position, saying, *“I think this is a role for educated women, and I am not an educated woman”*. Rukaya’s daughter, Sawsan, is *Al Nahda*’s literacy teacher; Rukaya couldn’t be more proud and supportive of her daughter.

Rukaya and her daughter haven’t had an easy time. Rukaya’s husband moved to Hajjah with his second wife; he comes to see Rukaya and Sawsan once a year bringing a minimal stipend. They’ve been forced to lead a simple life – living in a one roomed house with an old black and white TV, a sewing machine and very basic furniture. The village has no electricity, so mother and daughter rely on their neighbour’s generator when it is switched on for a couple of hours per day.

However, hardship hasn’t stopped Rukaya giving her daughter an education. Sawsan is a bright girl, she completed secondary school and is currently studying six hours away in Abs (Hajjah governorate). Sawsan lives on campus; had Rukaya’s husband been around, it is extremely unlikely this would have been permitted.

Both Rukaya and Sawsan have benefited from *Al Nahda*. Rukaya has extremely poor sight, but says, *“I attended the literacy class, and I learnt to read, but my sight was too poor for writing. But I was so happy when I came second out of the whole class in reading!”* Rukaya can see the benefits that education can bring, and will continue to be a great advocate for the CARE project and girls’ and women’s education.

AL ZAWIA: Sewing their way out of poverty

Association name: *Wadi Al Qaseea [Valley of the Cane]*

Al Zawia is situated in Bani Saad district - on the main asphalt road between Sana'a and Hodeidah. To get to the village from the road you have a climb a steep set of steps.

The women of the village fetch their water from the *wadi* on the other side of the road. Few girls go to school because, until recently, there wasn't a school in the village and the pupils had to walk to another village; also people used to make fun of girls who went to the school. Now

the village has a primary school which villagers built using funds donated by a Gulfi bank. The women's association runs a literacy class; again, people in the village made fun of the women who study in the class. As a result, the women tended to stay away from the class, and needed lots of encouragement to carry on with their studies. However, by May 2008, sixteen women were following the government curriculum.



To generate income, the women of *Wadi Al Qaseea* own a herd of goats. At the start it was hard work: in the dry season food was scarce, and the goats suffered from diseases. Slowly the women are getting the hang of it; they have started to

recognise different diseases and treat the goats accordingly.

The association applied for, and was awarded, funding by the German Development Service (DED) to set up a sewing centre. CARE supported the

initiative by teaching the women how to sew, so they could make their own dresses and children's clothes. At the moment they are only making clothes for themselves, but when their skills improve

they hope to sell clothes. They have also been learning embroidery; they even took the initiative to embroider the CARE logo onto caps.

Maryam

Maryam is twenty six, married to a teacher, Sahdan (see below) and has four children - three girls and a boy. Her parents are illiterate, but understand the importance of education; they ignored fellow villagers' criticisms of their decision to send Maryam and her sisters to school. Maryam is very proud of the fact that she was one of the first girls to go to school in her village. But it wasn't easy: the villagers would make fun of her and her sisters saying, *"You will not find husbands in our village"* and *"You will be 'on the shelf'; you will have to show yourselves to men in other villages to get married."*

Maryam's school was half an hour away by car; this, combined with her shepherding duties, meant Maryam found it impossible to go to school every day. Luckily her teachers allowed her to study from home so Maryam used to take her school work up into the mountains and study whilst she shepherded the family's flocks.

When Maryam's father was approached by Sahdan, who wanted to marry Maryam, her father accepted - on the condition that Sahdan allowed her to complete her studies. Sahdan, and also allowed Maryam to take a training course in nursing; she was delighted - this gave her an opportunity to travel out of the village. However, by the time the course started she was pregnant and was sent home on sickness grounds, *"We want to learn, but we are also mothers. They do not have the right to force us not to join the training. We are girls from the village, and our villages need the kind of skills we are being trained in."*

Maryam was very keen to get involved in the association and was elected to the position of general secretary. When her sister (who also happened to be the literacy teacher) moved to Hodeidah to complete her studies, Maryam jumped at the chance to take her sister's place saying, *"I felt important, and knew that I could teach others in a way that would benefit them"*. Her ambitions haven't stopped there: she is hoping to become a teacher at the primary school alongside her husband. Maryam is also an avid reader - she reads anything from biscuit wrappers to brochures. One day she would like to see the village school full of books.

Mariam is aware of the conventions of her society saying, *"If a woman is married and has children, is that time to bury her? Are there no other things in society for her to do?"* She advocates education and won't allow her daughters to marry until they've completed their education and achieved their aspirations.

Sahdan

Sahdan is a teacher at the village primary school, and therefore a well respected man. He is married to Maryam and has seven brothers – who all live in separate houses in Al Zawia.

Initially Sahdan was against CARE setting up *Wadi Al Qaseea* association in Al Zawia. People from the village and members of the CARE project tried to convince him that the project's aim was to help and support the local women. However, Sahdan was concerned there was an ulterior motive to the project, and that perhaps CARE's real aim was to convert people to Christianity.

Sahdan would attend all of the Association meetings, remaining silent throughout. After the meetings he would share his concerns about the project with his fellow villagers.

Sahdan has attended the *'women's rights from Islamic perspective'* training and, *"From that day on, my views totally changed, I suddenly understood that the organisation was helping and supporting our women, and that the Quran encourages this."* Although Sahdan is not directly involved in the association, he has allowed Maryam to take a very active role, and he is a strong advocate for *Wadi Al Qaseea's* activities. And, due to his respected position as a teacher, people listen to him.

BAIT ABDALLAH: Literacy progress revives the association

Association name: *Al Deea [The Light]*

Bait Abdallah is situated in the eastern part of Al Mahweet governorate high up on the cold, windy plains of Sheebam district. The plains provide the people of Bait Abdallah with wide (irrigated) fields in broad *wadis*, in which they grow wheat, barley, lentils, alfalfa, sorghum, and qat and also graze their sheep.

The women of the village wear the traditional Sheebam black, red, yellow and golden striped shawl.

Drinking water in the village comes from a private well that is also used for irrigation. The well owner allows the women to collect water at certain times of the day. The alternative is to fetch the water from the dam down in the valley; not only is this further away, but it is also prone to pollution since it is surface water (thus open to the elements). The women are delighted with their new drinking water option.



Some houses have electricity from small privately owned generators. The village has a shop, owned by a man, but run by a woman, which provides villagers with their daily needs and gas bottles for cooking and light.

Bait Abdallah has a mixed sex, government primary school and the association provides a well run literacy class. The association had existed for several years before CARE's arrival but its activities were nearly non-existent and

the board was badly organised. The association was meant to be renting out a laundry facility in Sana'a but the women couldn't visit the facility and no one knew where the money went. Closer to home, they ran a poultry unit in the village for egg production; unfortunately this wasn't very successful either. Although the association was registered with Social Affairs as a women's association, the men took responsibility for running it. The women of Bait Abdallah lacked the

experience, good examples, power, and opportunities to take ownership themselves.

The majority of the women in the village were illiterate, having only attended primary school for a few years, if at all. Not one girl had made it to secondary school. This meant that most of the association members were illiterate, and didn't have the skills needed to run the association. Worse still, their illiteracy meant they could be cheated easily – for example, the time that they were eligible to receive YR 100,000 but were asked to pay YR 50,000 first!

Once the literacy class was up and running, the next task was to improve the board's skills and make the association more active. Sixty women attended the nine month literacy course and a large

number of them passed the exam. This meant that there was a larger pool of literate women in the village from which three new board members could be elected. The previous board had comprised mainly older women who weren't proactive and didn't want to travel out of the village.

After the elections, the administration of the association improved and became more transparent. Each board member performed the tasks that fell under their responsibility – which had not been the case before. The way the men were involved changed too. Before, the men had seen the association as a money spinning opportunity. Now, they were slowly starting to view the association as a means of improving the lives of Bait Abdallah's women.



The literacy class has picked up too. Two new teachers were trained and now the association offers classes using the REFLECT methodology and the government curriculum. This served to attract women to the class: once they had successfully completed the nine month REFLECT course they could move on to the government curriculum. Despite any of the problems that held *Al Deea* back, the literacy classes continued unabated and attendance levels remained high.

The problems with the association's poultry unit needed to be addressed. To take the eggs to market they had to be transported on bumpy tracks and many of the eggs broke long before they'd even arrived. In addition, selling the eggs was a man's responsibility, and the women never knew how much money had been made from the sale of the eggs. The women weren't allowed to go to the market themselves and they weren't in charge of their project. After the chickens

had been sold, no new chicks were purchased (due to problems within the association) and the chicken shed fell into disrepair.

The first task was to renovate the chicken shed. The women agreed that rearing chickens for meat (rather than eggs) would be more suited to their situation. CARE supported the women, but it took six months for *Al Deea* to solve their problems, elect a strong board, and agree how to proceed. Eventually the shed was

done up and a group of women travelled all the way to Sana'a to buy 500 chicks to fatten up into plump chickens. A vet trained the women how to look after chickens, and how to vaccinate against major diseases. Due to their increased literacy levels, the women could read and understand the training manual and apply their newfound knowledge. One woman has been selected to be the poultry unit supervisor and manage the unit on a daily basis.



Gradually Bait Abdallah's men became more and more involved in *Al Deea* – sometimes even donating the association their own money to support the

empowerment of their women. The men started to attend more of the training sessions, to get involved in the analysis of gender disparities in the village, and to

understand women's rights according to Islam.

One of the association's greatest successes was for Khadija (see below) to be selected to present on *Al Deea's* literacy achievements at a 'G8 and Broader Middle East Literacy Conference' in Sana'a. Representatives from over 20

countries listened to Khadija's personal account of what it was like to have become literate in her thirties and how this had changed her life. As a result of her new found literacy, Khadija was elected to the position of general secretary of *Al Deea*.



Radhi

Radhi is twenty five, married, and one of *Al Deea's* 'movers and shakers'. Throughout his school days, Radhi helped his father and brothers on the family land. He graduated from secondary school with excellent grades, a love of reading, and a natural talent for computers and information technology. After taking a diploma in computers, he studied English Language at Sana'a University, became an assistant teacher at the university and is currently trying to win a scholarship to study a Masters outside Yemen.

Radhi is a tireless supporter of *Al Deea* and recognises the benefits it has brought to the women of the village. Radhi has approached organisations in Sana'a to support family planning in both Bait Abdallah and surrounding villages; he has supported his wife in her role as treasurer of *Al Deea*, has helped with organising meetings, and supported the literacy class. Today, nearly all the women in Bait Abdallah can read and write and follow their children's studies; what's more the number of girls enrolled in school has increased since *Al Deea* was established. Radhi is very proud that the village is improving itself.

Khadija

Khadija is married but doesn't have any children. She thinks she is about forty years old. Her mother died when she was seven and Khadija can't remember what she looked like. Khadija was too burdened down with duties to go to school - herding sheep and fetching water by donkey from the valley. To make her life even harder, Khadija was married off aged twelve. Married life was tough: she had no-one to support her and teach her how to deal with life's challenges, and her husband's family treated her badly. Her sisters in law gave her the responsibility of fetching water and wood, and for cleaning all the dishes; Khadija felt insulted. The situation got so bad that her and her husband moved to a new house, and at last things started to look up. Khadija relaxed and fell pregnant. Then trouble struck again: she had a miscarriage and was told she would never give birth without surgery. Surgery wasn't an option: the couple didn't have enough money to pay for the treatment.

Khadija's husband wanted a family, so there was no option but for him to take a second wife. Although she wasn't delighted with the prospect, Khadija took the unusual step of choosing her husband's new wife for him (making sure it was a woman she didn't think would cause her too many problems). It wasn't easy to have a new woman in the house, but Khadija gradually found her place sewing dresses and clothes and looking after the second wife's children - who grew up adoring Khadija, even calling her 'mama' - whilst her husband and his second wife worked in the fields. The main area of contention between the two women is over housework: Khadija thinks that the second wife doesn't do the housework well. But they don't tell their husband about their differences.

Then *Al Deea* was established. Khadija made the most of the opportunities that were open to her. Even though her husband banned her from attending literacy class, saying, "*Who will take care of the shop and the children?*" Khadija insisted on attending. She studied hard and after nine months passed her first exam. Today she can read and write, and runs her husband's shop - keeping a record of what's been sold, and who buys what items on credit. Because she is literate, she doesn't have to remember who owes the shop money but can write everything down immediately. Khadija has also trained in how to do the accounts, and in basic animal and chicken health. Due to her being literate, she has been elected as General Secretary of the *Al Deea* and she is very proud that she can even send and receive sms messages on her mobile!

What is more, Khadija's new found literacy means she can help her step children study and says, "*Now I know that study needs energy; during exam time I make sure the children have time to study, and I know they suffer when they study.*"

Khadija's proudest moment was being invited to speak about her life and show pictures of her village at an international G8 literacy conference in Sana'a in front of more than 100 people from across the world. Despite feeling shy at the start, she managed to speak out loud, confidently, and without any problems - she states that before getting involved in *Al Deea* she'd never have managed to do such a thing.

Khadija hopes to study until she dies, saying, "*Every day I learn something new!*" In the meantime she dreams of having "*a machine to harvest the grain.*"

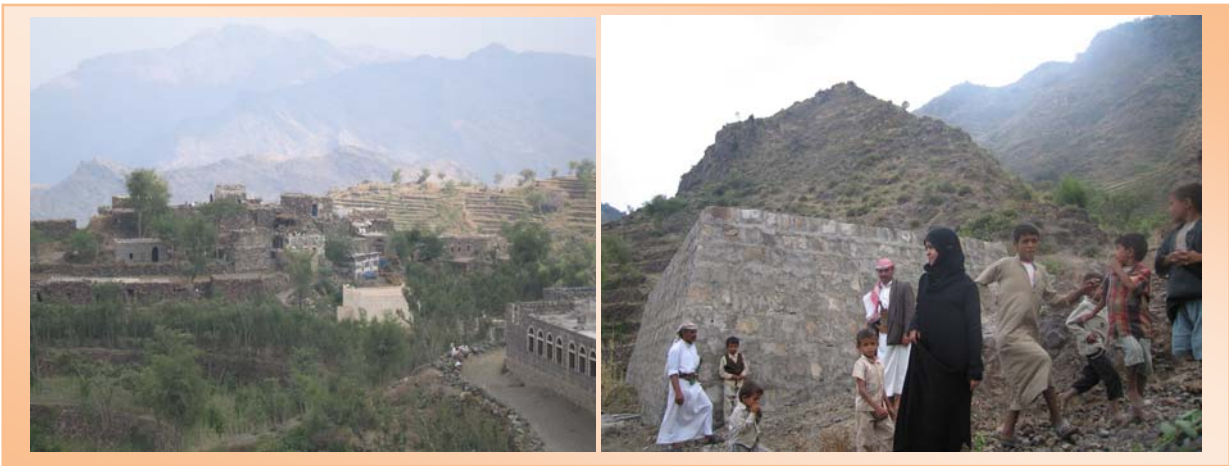
BANI AL MUHAYA: Bees made the association buzz

Association name: *Al Najah [Success]*

Bani Al Muhaya is situated in the hills of Bani Saad district, overlooking Wadi Sara.

Water provision in the village is very poor. Women fetch water from a small source above the village which is shared with three other villages. Another well, a bit further away, is used for irrigation but the women can only use water from there during the dry season. The village has a half finished water harvesting tank to collect run off during the rainy season; however, the tank is open and what little water it provides is dirty.

Members took a long time to take responsibility for their association after it had been established. It was only after the women had visited a fellow women's association and seen what could be achieved that they became active. The first income generating project (with chickens) failed to turn a profit, so the women decided to rent out the unit. As is the case with a number of the associations, the tenant did not pay the rent and fled when he was asked to do so.



The association was impressed by the women of nearby Dahabisha's bee keeping skills and how they have developed their village. The women of *Al Najah* asked CARE to help them set up a similar activity; the progress they have made with bee keeping proves that they have finally understood the purpose of an association, and how it can improve village life. After a lot of discussion, the women changed their income generating activity and initiated a beekeeping

project. They were trained and took the activity into their own hands.

The women elected a new board for their association and the new head and general secretary presented themselves to the Social Affairs Manager in Al Mahweet. They received information about Social Affairs and the law under which the association is registered. The manager also gave them a certificate to recognise their holding transparent and fair elections.



The association also runs a literacy class; their classroom doubled up as a house for the contractor building a new primary school in the village, so they were forced to find an alternative place to study. When they returned to their original classroom the women discovered that termites had eaten the roof - dirt was constantly spilling into the room - making classes all but impossible. In July 2008, the roof was replaced and women carried on with their studies.

Selma

Selma is twenty eight, has four children – three girls and a boy – and her husband works illegally in Saudi Arabia. Her father is educated; he founded Bani Al Muhaya's first school under a tree outside the village. Selma was the first girl in her village to go to school, but dropped out when she was twelve to take care of her younger brothers and sisters after their mother died. She claims to have been unimpressed by the teachers saying that they were graduates straight from high school with no training in how to teach. She tried in vain to continue her studies – studying from home and going to school for her exams – but dropped out again since she couldn't juggle her duties and water collecting (an hour and a half round trip) with her studies.

Selma takes an active role in *Al Najah*, to the point that she is known as the 'hidden soldier'. Since the outset, she has attended project meetings; she used to sit in the corner not saying a word, but you could tell that she was bright and alert from her eyes. To her delight, Selma was elected *Al Najah's* Treasurer. Unfortunately, her husband telephoned from Saudi Arabia and banned her from the role, so she had to stand down; today she is Head of Monitoring and Evaluation instead. Selma has nothing but praise for the way the *Al Najah* has developed her, and her fellow village women, *"Now we can all see that we are big in the world, we are something. New things have happened inside us. We are responsible for improving our village."*

However, life is still hard for Selma. Although she has a cow and some sheep she doesn't have enough electricity or water (the nearest well is a long way away), and the villagers still suffer from poverty and sickness. But it's not all bad: Selma has a mobile phone and her children are going to teach her how to use it. Next she wants to learn to sew, and has plans for all of her children to complete their schooling.

Nasser

Nasser is a twenty eight year old literacy teacher; he's married to the Head Al Najah and they have four children – two girls and two boys. Nasser grew up living in a house with fifteen of his cousins. School was a fair distance away, but, unlike many of his class mates, he didn't drop out. After Nasser got married he studied history, and his wife studied geography, at Al Mahweet University. Unfortunately, a year into the course, the government forced Nasser's wife to return to her village to teach. Her college wouldn't allow her to study from home; luckily she managed to finish her studies later on in life.

Whilst at university, Nasser heard about CARE and its work in the governorate and he wrote a letter asking for support in Bani Al Muhaya. In 2004 *Al Najah* was established, "*to get rid of women's ignorance and illiteracy.*" Today nearly all of the women in the village can read and write – bar five or six of the elder women. Nasser is proud of his efforts on behalf of the women, but he, and the other villagers, continue to hope for a better water source, electricity, and an access road.

QARN BASHEER: Running their own electricity generator

Association name: *Al Meethaq [Agreement]*

Qarn Basheer is situated in Milhan district, right on the top of a very steep hill. The track to Qarn Basheer is very long, but luckily access has improved considerably since part of the *wadi* leading to the village was asphalted and the village entrance road was paved by Yemen Mobile (they needed to improve access to

install their telephone poles). *Qat* has not yet replaced coffee, and coffee plants flourish in amongst the houses and across the terraces. The village has primary and secondary schools; this makes it easier for girls to go to school (since they don't need to leave the village).



Al Meethaq runs an electricity generation project, providing electricity to 80% of the households in the village as their means of income generation. At the outset, the generator and the fee collection were managed by the association's male

representative since it was considered '*ayb*' [shame] for a woman to go from house to house collecting money. As a result, the income never made it back to the association's coffers. However, this all changed when a woman from Al

Dahabisha (Bani Saad district) and her father visited *Al Meethaq*. The woman explained how her association ran the generator in Dahabisha. This was a great eye opener for the women of *Al Meethaq* and inspired them to run their generator themselves. Meanwhile, the woman's father talked to the men of Qarn Basheer about what women can achieve if you let them.

The first aid training was a particular favourite for *Al Meethaq*. After the training five women received a first aid kit which they use to treat people in the neighbourhood. They all mention occasions they've needed to use the kit after an accident – in the past they'd have been incapable to helping.



Moving around Qarn Basheer is difficult for women and leaving the village is virtually out of the question. For the majority of the project, the men refused to let their women travel, even under CARE's auspices. Travel arrangements had

to be cancelled at the last minute on three occasions, despite the men understanding exactly what an exchange visit involved. Finally, after much discussion, off the back of the "women's rights from Islamic perspective" training, the women

achieved a great victory. The men allowed eight women to travel to Dahabisha in Bani Saad district – three of whom had

never left Qarn Basheer in their lives.

Aziza

Aziza is about 20 and in second grade at secondary school; she stopped going to school after primary school since there wasn't a secondary school close by. When a secondary school opened in Qarn Basheer her brother insisted that she took up her studies again; he wanted her to obtain her certificate of secondary education. Life is tough: her family rely on what little money they can make from growing maize. Aziza was raised with her four brothers and six sisters; every day her and her sisters would collect firewood, water and food for the animals from the valley.

Aziza's family, and particularly two of her brothers (one of whom is a doctor, and the other works in Sana'a), encouraged her to join *Al Meethaq*. As she was educated, Aziza was elected to the position of head of the association; however, she decided to withdraw shortly afterwards after hearing that, "*The association is only for bad people*".

Later on, *Al Meethaq* started looking for literacy teachers. With the family in need of money, she registered and was invited to Al Mahweet for the training – the first time she had left her village. Today Aziza is a member of *Al Meethaq* and the literacy teacher. Teaching is hard work because most of the women are older and slow to grasp their studies. But Aziza has stuck at it: she wants to support the women of Qarn Basheer in learning about their religion and how to read the Quran.

In Aziza's view, the village has benefited from the work of the association, "*Before when a girl got sick she was accused of being pregnant, even when that wasn't the case. So girls were never allowed to be sick*". As a result of *Al Meethaq's* activities this notion doesn't exist anymore – people understand that girls can be sick without being pregnant. As for herself, Aziza says, "*Before, if people came to village, I would hide and so I didn't know anyone from outside*." Nowadays, she knows girls from villages across the governorate. Aziza, like many other women in the village, has learnt to be more confident, "*Before the association, if any educated girls visited the village nobody knew how to talk with them – like when the CARE mobilisers arrived for the first time!*" Talking to people from outside Qarn Basheer isn't as difficult anymore.

Whilst Aziza was in Al Mahweet she saw a woman using a computer in the CARE office; she'd studied them at school from pictures but this was the first time she'd seen a computer in real life. *Maash'allah!* Now her goal is to study computers at Sana'a University – so she can be just like the woman she saw using a computer in Al Mahweet.

Abdullah

Abdullah is thirty one; he has seven brothers, five sisters and is married with three children. Whilst he was growing up he helped his father and brothers on their land growing coffee, maize and vegetables. He enjoyed school and was determined to balance his family duties with his studies. He completed secondary school and enrolled in the Faculty of Education at Sana'a University; after graduating he became a teacher in the village, was then promoted to the position of Director of the local Youth and Sports office. Today he is preparing his Masters at Sana'a University.

Abdullah has been a CARE supporter since the start of the project. He approached CARE to request support for Qarn Basheer, and he accompanied the Imam (who gave the women's rights training in Al Mahweet) around project villages to talk about women's rights. He has seen the impact that the CARE project has had across the Al Mahweet governorate first hand. Many of the villages are very remote, and often the men are away working in Saudi Arabia. His view is that, *"Women in the villages are starting to understand that they have a right to be educated and that their role is more than just the housework, looking after children, and cooking food."*

SUKHAIM: non-traditional, strong female leadership

Association name: *Al Sakha [Generosity]*

Sukhaim village is in Hufash district. The majority of the Hufashi women wear a dark brown and red shawl [*sarmia*], however, in Sukhaim, they don't: "*It is old fashioned; now-a-days fashion is to wear black*".

A number of the young village women study at Al Mahweet University and play an important role in the association.

Apart from their household duties, the women work in the fields, collecting food

and wood, and raising cattle. Fetching water has become easier since a tank was installed in the village which is connected to a well higher up the mountain. Space is precious in this mountain village – so the literacy classroom is located on top of the village water tank! At night, you can see the lights of Al Mahweet twinkling relatively close by – but the journey takes two hours by car.



In the past, despite being literate and educated, the women of the village tended not to express themselves freely. Local customs dictated, "*It is shameful for women to express themselves, let alone doing it in front of men.*" However, provided a place in which women could gain confidence and learn to express themselves. At the outset, the association faced a serious problem with services provided by the village men. The men would provide their services for free, but later present *Al Sakha* with a bill. As the women's confidence levels increased, they learnt to discuss and resolve the problems: an enormous and unusual achievement.

The women's confidence went from strength to strength: they decided that they would represent their association to 'strangers from outside the village' and no longer needed a man to take on the role. *Al Sakha's* women embraced the management training programme and, as a result, *Al Sakha* is seen as one of the project's most successful associations, with strong female leadership.

As for the men, their attitudes shifted as a result of the "*Women's right from an Islamic perspective*" training. The training developed the men's understanding of Islamic and traditional rules and, as a consequence, they allowed their women

the space needed to run the association themselves, according to their own ideals.

Al Sakha runs its own literacy class. The women took the initiative and started their class in an association member's house, sitting on the floor, before the classroom had even been finished. The association teaches both the REFLECT methodology and the government curriculum. By May 2008, 16 women were studying the REFLECT methodology and 12

women were following the government curriculum.

For income generation purposes, the women run a relatively successful poultry unit. However, they've learnt the hard way: one season they mixed up the medicines and most of the chickens died. The CARE project provided assistance in the form of financial support and training; now the poultry unit is back on track, and turning a small profit.

Fatima

Fatima isn't happy with her lot: she's had a tough life. She comes from a family of ten children, and married age seventeen – although it was her own choice, her family didn't force her to marry. Fatima never completed her schooling: when she was twelve, people in the village complained to her father, saying, "*They [Fatima and her sister] shouldn't go to school now they've become women.*" Her father succumbed, and took the two girls out of school to concentrate on their work in the house and out in the fields. Fatima has four children. After the third, she had a stroke and lay in a coma, sick for days. She's never really recovered and has had little support from her husband's family – who claim her illness is her own fault.

Fatima has been a member of the association since its incarnation; she's tried to leave on several occasions – on the grounds of ill health – however, her fellow members won't have any of it saying she is far too active in *Al Sakha* activities. She's certainly made the most of the opportunities that have come her way: she's learnt how to communicate better, how to have a discussion, how to raise her children, basic first aid, and how to look after her animals. Fatima wishes she could continue with her studies, but her responsibilities towards her animals, children and husband, as well as her ill health, hold her back. Instead, she hopes, "*my children will study for their Masters degrees, be professors or astronauts – to be different from other people, to be whatever they want to be.*" As for Fatima, she'd like a new project, and has set her sights on selling gas bottles.

Saleh

Saleh is twenty seven and married with two children – a boy and a girl. Even though school was a long way from his village, he enjoyed it, and completed his secondary school with good grades. During the school holidays he would help his father with farming the coffee, millet, sorghum and mangoes. After school he joined the army for a brief stint, but army life didn't agree with him. Instead, he studied for a Masters in *Quran* and *Sharia* Sciences at Al Imam University in Sana'a. After graduating, he couldn't find a job near his home because Al Imam University isn't recognised by the government. He heard about a job opportunity down south but as the eldest and only man in his family he couldn't leave Al Mahweet. Instead Saleh scrapes together a living selling produce in the local shop, being a driver, and teaching the *Quran* at the local mosque.

Initially Saleh was suspicious of CARE and its motives– suspecting that it was really a missionary outfit. He didn't want strangers interacting with the women of his village. Although he couldn't ban the association, he banned his wife from participating. He would monitor everything that the association did by attending meetings, checking brochures, and asking around for anything that might give him a pretext for closing *Al Sakha* down. However, slowly he came round to *Al Sakha*, realising there was nothing sinister to the project, stating, “*Until now nothing has happened to prove that CARE is a missionary organisation.*”

YELAAN-SAWAAN: working on water and income both unites and divides

Association name: *Al Tafuq [Excellence]*

Yelaan-Sawaan comprises two villages and has a shared women's association, *Al Tafuq*. The villages are on the dirt road from Ataweela to Amran in the eastern part of Ataweela district. From the village you can see three governorates: Amran, Hajja and Al Mahweet.

The people of Yelaan-Sawaan farm steep terraces, growing sorghum, wheat, alfalfa and a few vegetables, such as spring onions. Each family has a small, irrigated, plot of land close to the outlet of the

water source higher up the hill. Families have one or two cows, and the women hand feed them every day for hours on dried sorghum stems wrapped in alfalfa.

The village of Yelaan has a primary school; the secondary school is in another village further down the valley. *Al Tafuq* runs a literacy class, but the women are reluctant to attend - even though they have more time on their hands now that water provision has been improved and they don't have to spend hours on end every day fetching water from far away.



As a result of *Al Tafuq's* activities, water is now piped to a closed tank with taps, and every household has a ceramic silver colloidal water filter – for drinking water purposes. Yelaan-Sawaan was the first village to try out the water filters, and they have been well received. A group of women conducted tests on the water quality from the old source, their household storage containers, and on the filtered water. They used a laboratory testing kit interpreting and analysing the results. The men couldn't believe that the

women were capable of doing this by themselves.

Yelaan-Sawaan is a very traditional village; in public men and women are strictly separate, for example, women cannot even talk or walk in front of men. This meant that the men kept close control over *Al Tafuq*. Nevertheless the women have successfully started their own poultry unit to generate income. They received funding to build the unit, trained in chicken healthcare and production, and in May 2008, they sold their first batch of fattened chickens and even turned a small

profit. The women have also been trained in how to manage their association. This has had a significant impact on their confidence levels, they are taking more control of their work and are increasingly capable of discussing how to resolve issues during meetings and training sessions.

The literacy class is taught by a teacher from Sawaan and a teacher from Yelaan; both were trained to use both the REFLECT and the governmental

curriculum. However, the women don't seem very interested in becoming literate, always finding something better to do than go to school – such as weddings and other events. To make matters worse, the men don't encourage their women folk to study. Of the twenty women who started the REFLECT course, only ten sat the exam. However, there has been some success: a formally illiterate women who attended the literacy class is now *Al Tafuq's* treasurer



A group of women travelled to a local market to buy materials to build the new water system and set up the poultry unit. These women had never travelled to market before because women were not allowed to travel. The women learnt how to order chicks, food and medicine. They grew more confident in talking to strangers – as demonstrated at the opening of the water system and poultry unit: they talked freely and easily to the Dutch Ambassador's wife and two German Development Co-operation (GTZ) water engineers.

Al Tafuq was also invited to present on their experience of using the water filters at a GTZ organised conference in the Mövenpick Hotel in Sana'a. The highlight was when the head of *Al Tafuq* gave an interview for Yemen TV.

Despite all their achievements, the women still aren't in charge of their association's money: the men still have control. Jobs like 'selling chickens' traditionally fall into the male domain; this gives men access to *Al Tafuq's* revenues and profit.



Mohammed

Mohammed is a thirty five year old farmer with three children. He works hard cultivating his crops (mainly *qat*, grain and fruits), travelling to market to sell them and occasionally working in Sana'a. Mohammed didn't finish secondary school - work has always been more important to him than his education. He takes the same view with regards to his children's education – he doesn't see the value in sending them to school.

Mohammed and his wife are involved in a number of *Al Tafuq's* activities: he helped to build the water tanks and the poultry unit buildings; he acted as a guard for the buildings; and his wife is the poultry unit supervisor. The couple were disappointed that some of the chickens died, and with the cost of transporting the chickens to market to sell them.

However, Mohammed is very happy with the new water filters. The water "*is much cleaner than before. Now there is no animal dung and human faeces in the water,*" which means his children aren't exposed to so many diseases. Mohammed hopes that a health centre will be built in the village soon.

Aisha

Aisha is sixteen and has seven sisters and three brothers; unfortunately, her father died ten years ago. Two of her brothers are married and live in separate houses in the village. Aisha studied until she was fifteen, and completed her secondary school. These days she is kept busy with housework, working on the family's land, and collecting wood from the surrounding hills and valleys.

Initially, Aisha didn't join *Al Tafuq* since she didn't know much about it. However, when she did join, she embraced the opportunities on offer and trained as a literacy teacher; she was lucky, *"My family was the only one in Sawaan to allow me to travel [to training courses in Amran and Al Mahweet]"*. However, Aisha has yet to teach since, *"the women of Sawaan refuse to go to the literacy class in Yelaan. They want a place closer to their village even though it is not that far."*

Aisha recognises that she has developed as a result of *Al Tafuq's* activities saying, *"Before I joined the association I was very hesitant and unable to have a conversation. During the training I was afraid to make a mistake, so I was very quiet. Now I'm much better, I participate and ask questions. I'm not afraid anymore to make mistakes. My life has developed for the better and I am different now."*

Aisha thinks that *Al Tafuq's* most successful project to date is the water project. She describes, with tears in her eyes, how the new village water tank has saved the women in the village a three hour walk to the nearest spring, a long wait whilst other women fill their water drums, followed by a three hour journey home, carrying heavy water drums on their heads. She says *"We used to take a blanket with us because sometimes we had to stay the night"*. The villagers are hoping for a second tank, since the first isn't sufficient to meet their needs. Aisha is also very happy with the water filters, *"The water is clean now. Before we had to take water with dirty pots and animals drank directly from the polluted source."* Aisha wants to see more life changing developments in Yelaan-Sawaan and will do whatever it takes to support *Al Tafuq* in realising them.