



### Bait Hadher gets a new lease of life

Bait Hadher, it is one of the biggest villages in Sanhan district in Sana'a governorate. For years this region's agricultural activities thrived due to its abundant groundwater availability. With such an abundant resource in hand, the government drilled two artesian wells to promote agriculture and boost water availability all villagers.

After several years, one of the wells was found to be depleting the Sana'a water basin too rapidly and the government decided to decommission the well to slow down the depletion rate of the basin. In addition to this, changing rainfall patterns meant that the basin was not being replenished fast enough.

With the well destroyed and rains no longer predictable, the community's agriculture-based livelihoods, begun to suffer. Tensions began to build within the community with people having to trek further every day just to access drinking.

Influential persons in Bait Hadher tried to manipulate the remaining well and private water pumps for private use were installed for their personal use. The inequity of water allocation led aggrieved members of the community to vandalize the only remaining well. Consequently, Bait Hadher village was left without a viable water source and the once green fields quickly dried up.



The wealthy in the community were still able to purchase water from as far as 12 kilometers away (Dar Salam) or drill private wells in their wells seriously degrading the water table. This enraged those in the community who could not afford this, leading to the eruption of violent conflict and many casualties. As with every conflict, there were revenge attacks, eventually leading to a very complex dispute. Moreover, as the conflict continued unabated, the neglected land degenerated even further as the rare seasonal rains formed massive streams that were shovelling away fertile soils.

With no end in sight to the violence, some in the community of Bait Hadher grew anxious. They approached Sam Organisation for Rights and Development – a long-standing partner of FAO. The Organization started surveying and collecting data about the situation and meeting community leaders to understand the dispute better. Sam Organisation and FAO discussed proposals to address the situation in Bait Hadher that could restore the peace.



A geographical survey to better understand the terrains of Bait Hader and the possibilities to benefit from the seasonal rain and torrents was carried out. The FAO team with co-operation from Sam Organisation and the community leaders were able to find that there were many shallow wells along both sides of the valley and watercourses that could be quickly rehabilitated to allow for replenishment.



One of the requirements was also to build check dams and excavate ponds in the valley to harvest rainwater so the nearby shallow wells would later absorb the water. These works revived eight shallow wells and the water level started increasing gradually. Almost three hundred families benefited from the water of shallow wells and 13 hectares of land were recovered for agricultural use.

Before this intervention, around 18 000 cubic meters of water were purchased annually for around US\$ 48 000. The cost of the project was around US\$ 35 000 - which is less than the annual cost of buying water.

By building and rehabilitating water harvesting structures, the community's disputes have been resolved. There is now sufficient water for both human and agricultural needs. In addition, the communities were able to earn extra income through cash for work programmes that were used to compensate the community for providing the labour required.

Women played a crucial role throughout the project. While there may have been some initial resistance to their participation at all levels for customary reasons, these were quickly dispelled. The community embraced the need for teamwork and involvement of both men and women at all levels of the project.