



Bringing back peace to Al-Jahshi

“Water may spur life but provoke death in the same vein.” This is a common saying in Al-Jahshi village located in Sanhan district and home to over 5 000 people. The village sits squarely on a huge underground water reservoir, yet paradoxically, is bereft of water.

In the 1990s the villagers decided to construct water storage structures on high ground to have water flowing down to villagers homes. For many years, the plan worked, and water was plentiful with everyone enjoying their fair share of the precious liquid.

Over the years, the population grew and so too did the demand for more water. The new communities settling in the area also tried to avoid the low land plains and settled on higher ground for fear of floods. Those on higher ground were above the reservoir level, so all the water flowed to the lowlands. Initially, the communities in the highlands solved this using a water pump, but these eventually broke down. The communities then resorted to using animal power to carry water uphill – a labourious job that was left to women.

Tensions soon began to develop between the two communities with those on the higher ground eventually vandalized the infrastructure and cutting the flow of water downhill to the plains. The communities living in the lowlands had suffered further an economic blow, as they had previously been



selling the plentiful water to water trackers at a handsome fee. With both communities having no access to water and each blaming the other for their woes, violent conflicts erupted. This situation continued unabated until the end of 2018, with each side suffering heavy casualties.

SAM Organisation for rights and development received a fund from FAO and engaged the community in an attempt to understand the root cause of the conflict better and attempt to find workable solutions through open dialogue.

SAM Organisation and FAO then proceeded to develop a project. With the help of local leaders from Aljahshi community, both parties were convinced to cease all hostilities to allow for the project to take root in addressing the root causes of the conflict.

The project proposed the construction of a new water storage facility at the highest peak of the highlands as well as lay out the relevant pipe network to distribute water where it was needed. It also worked out a maintenance schedule for the water pump allowing water to move through the network of pipes quickly.

From this project, there are many lessons can be learned. Noteworthy is the integration of the Cash for Work Programme and the water security programme was extremely successful in reviving a normal and decent life for the community. It demonstrated that the community’s understanding and awareness of peace could be enhanced through teamwork during construction works.

