



Saving lives in Ayban Wadi

Conflicts over water resources present a significant challenge to achieving participatory water resource management and sustainable livelihoods. Rising tensions and disputes can undermine the formal and informal institutions and rules that govern water resource use, resulting in environmental degradation and economic decline.

Poor households are especially vulnerable to these shocks, but the entire fabric of society can unravel if conflicts escalate and violence erupts. The merging of water resource conflicts into wider, destructive social conflicts can end in collapsed production systems, uprooted communities and chronic insecurity.

In Bani Matar district, Sanaá governorate, Republic of Yemen, the villages of Raid (Upstream) and Rod'am (Downstream), share wadi Ayban flood water for their livelihoods. For over 250 years, the communities had in place an equitable water allocation agreement. In 1812, the two villages further developed and signed a water use agreement granting both communities the right to use the water for livelihood purposes.

Just two years later, a woman shepherd from Raid village was accused of breaking the agreement when she was found grazing her sheep in Roda'm village. A man from Roda'm village attacked her, and in the struggle that ensued, she stubbed him fatally. According to the tribal law, the agreement had been violated and therefore, was terminated. The upper stream village then followed to cut the water supplies to Rod'am completely.



Since then, the water disputes between the two villages have had severe consequences on the livelihoods of more than 700 families living in the area who have not been able to access adequate water freely. Economically, more than 177 hectares of land has since been degraded beyond use as a result of halting agricultural production

Moreover, the dispute escalated between the two villages to armed violence and retaliations episodes were carried out. Also, the dispute caused the deterioration of social cohesion. For example, marriages between the two villages, which was common before the incident, were halted and all types of social, and economic relations were stopped entirely. Despite, many attempts to resolve the dispute, the conflict persisted, causing hardships for both villages.

The reason these mediation efforts failed is that no one focused on the root causes of the conflict - the management of the water resources to ensure a fair allocation of water for each village.

In 1963 Mr. Abdullah Alwazer was assigned by the Imam of Yemen (Almutawakellaih Kingdom) to resolve the dispute. His proposals were rejected by Rod'am village as they considered him to be coming from a village closely affiliated to Raid village.

Subsequently, the second trial of mediation to resolve the dispute was initiated by Al-Shaikh Alrammah, one of the most respected Sheikh in the whole area. While the Sheikh ruling was accepted by both villages

out of respect for his social status, however, again his ruling failed to address the nature of the conflict of fair distribution of the water, and therefore, the agreement was buried after nine years.

In 2018, FAO through Peace Building Funded (PBF) Project titled, “Strengthening the Role of Women in Peace Building through Natural Resources Management at the Community Level in the Rural Areas of the Governorates of Sana’a and Lahj in Yemen”, in partnership with Shahab Asfal Water Users Association (WUA) Conflict Resolution Committee (CRC) was formed (two women and two men).



The primary role of the CRC was to analyze the dispute, the reasons behind it, and its impact. FAO trained Shehab Asfal Association on; water conflict resolution, mediation process, and how to approach a solution. The CBC held several stakeholders meetings to comprehend the dispute and all related issues fully. Also, to raise possible solutions scenarios that may be accepted by the community to resolve the outstanding dispute and ensure the sustainability of the fair water allocation and developing an efficient water consumption.

To resolve this chronic conflict, FAO and Shehab Asfal CRC with the support from the youth and women in the two communities have enacted a resolution through three steps. The first, establish a dialogue between the communities led by the youth and women of the two villages to dispel deep-seated mistrust or misunderstandings among the communities. The second is the rehabilitation of water channels and check dams that ensure adequate water allocation for both villages. The third is the rehabilitation of the water stream of the valley and unutilized agricultural terraces.

Following the implementation of the three proposed steps of the resolution, people of Raid and Rod’am villages have started to realize the benefit of the peaceful coexistence. Social harmony was best demonstrated by two mix marriages which are unheard of before this peaceful resolution. The people from the two village’s two villages have since been utilizing the water properly and peacefully. The economic and social life aspects of the community have started recuperating gradually. Community members involve in rehabilitation work have benefited from the cash for work modality, and the extra land opened up is positively impacting the lives e of the people from both villages.

Lesson Learned:

The ability to manage and resolve water conflicts in a peaceful, participatory and equitable manner allows for more secure access to, and better management of, natural resources. The capacity of communities, resource managers and policy-makers to address resource conflicts can be enhanced by developing and implementing practical approaches, methods and tools for their management and resolution.

Training in conflict management processes offers an important opportunity for the development of human and social capital in this regard. However, it should be noted that training alone is not likely to address all societal needs regarding natural resource conflicts. Socio-economic and political factors that constrain local participation in conflict management processes may require attention as well, through appropriate reform of policy, legislation, institutions and other realms of the policy environment.

Women came with innovative ideas for dispute resolution. Besides being affected farmers, they are primary caregivers at home and need to feed their otherwise starving and undernourished children.

