

Jordan:

Rural Women Securing Household Water Through Installation of Water Cisterns in Rakin Village

Introduction

If a country's fate is determined by its natural resources, then the future of Jordan will mainly depend on the optimal management of its scarce water resources. Jordan is one of the world's ten most water-scarce countries (World Water Development Report, 2003). The total water available in Jordan is around 180 cubic metres per capita per year, one of the lowest in the world.

Moreover, its location in the Middle East means that Jordan is part of an area characterized by volatile socio-political dynamics. Indeed, one of the major reasons behind Jordan's water scarcity lies in its rapid un-natural population increases due to the influx of refugees from the region's main military conflicts in 1948, 1967 and 1991.

Jordan's rural communities suffer most from lack of water, and they are being challenged on a daily basis by the difficulty of securing clean water and sanitation for households, farms and small businesses. Efforts to support community-based water management have been a major priority in Jordanian water policy. Experiences at the community level for the optimal use of water resources are spreading all over the country, based on successful demonstration projects.

One of the successful initiatives in community-based projects, which emphasizes gender mainstreaming in water management, is a joint activity of the local women's group in Rakin village with funding from the Small Grants Programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The Rakin Women's Society manages a revolving loan system for construction of water cisterns and water harvesting systems in Rakin Village. The project benefited many women and provides secure water resources in households, with a great degree of sustainability.

Environmental Setting

Rakin is the centre of a cluster of villages and small towns located in the southwest of Karak Governorates in the south of Jordan. Rakin has a total population of 5500. Rakin is classified as a poor village on the basis of average income of the population, which relies heavily on army and government employment. The economy is based on services in the state's public institutions and agriculture. The basic services (water, electricity, telecommunication and roads) are available. Two secondary schools and one elementary school form the educational base of the area.

The topography of the region shows areas with slopes as steep as 23-30%. Rainfall is in the range of 250-300 mm annually. The main agricultural products of the village are:

- Fruit and nut orchards: mainly olives and almonds;
- Field crops: barely and wheat;
- Forest crops: combination of old and recently planted forests.
- Spice crops;
- Livestock: 15,000 heads of sheep and goats; and
- Apiculture (bee-keeping).

The Rakin Women's Society was established in 1991 as a charitable group that aims at improvement of the social, economic, cultural and health conditions of the rural women in Rakin.

The Challenge

The topography of the area, human pressure on land and inappropriate land use practices, are some of the reasons that contributed to the degradation of land and increased soil erosion, resulting in a rapid loss of productive lands. A large proportion of the annual rainfall is lost as run-off because of overgrazing

Women bear the responsibility for household management, including water collection and use. Most of the households depend on subsistence cultivation for their basic food supply, with the availability of water resources being the essential ingredient in household food security.

An insufficient supply of water for human consumption, livestock and irrigation is considered a major problem. Rakin receives piped water only once every two weeks for six hours, which does not even meet the inhabitants' most basic requirements. Water has to be purchased at a very high price. Without cisterns as storage facilities, the households are not able to store all the water that is delivered by tankers even though families have to pay for it all.

Project Evolution

The lack of water to meet basic needs provided the justification for the Rakin Women's Society to tackle this challenge. The Society obtained its first grant from the GEF Small Grants Programme to install water cisterns and water harvesting measures in households. The success of this project in the village was so evident that large numbers of applications for loans were presented to the Society's board. The project was based on a 66 per cent grant repayment system that eventually exhausted the financial resources provided in the first phase.

The second phase was initiated in 1998, also with the support of the GEF Small Grants Programme in Jordan. Technical assistance was provided to the Women's Society from the GTZ Watershed Management Project. This new project, however, was based on a revolving fund that required 100 per cent repayment to meet the needs of more than 150 households applying for such loans. A steering committee was formed to be responsible for the implementation of the activities, such as training, follow up on the loans and repayments, as well as selecting the beneficiaries according to certain criteria, and overall organization of the groups.

Project Results

The revolving loan system was structured to provide a 100 per cent repayment to ensure the sustainability of the project's resources, and seriousness of the individual projects.

The main impacts and results of the project were:

1. Securing a sustainable source of clean water in households to provide for irrigation and food security;
2. Reducing the cost of buying water from tankers, and the water consumption bill in households, while increasing actual water consumption;

3. Empowerment of women in the Rakin Women's Society through being responsible for bringing additional resources to households and families. This contributed to improving their status as decision-making partners in households;
4. Capacity development and knowledge acquisition by women in managing the grants.

Lessons Learned

1. The project proved that: the 100 per cent payback system for loans is sustainable; the available capital could be distributed to a wide range of beneficiaries and was not exhausted in a short term; and the high payback ratio could be attributed to the fact that women play a leading role in managing the household economy.
2. The project demonstrated a high efficiency of implementation and good management by rural women, provided that they had the basic support and capacity development needed for project management. Involving women directly contributed to enhancing the project's effectiveness and sustainability.
3. The project proved the immediate positive impacts and benefits for local communities at the household level. This has been manifested mainly in securing sustainable water resources in a water-scarce area.
4. The revolving loan system supported, in addition to water cisterns, bee keeping activities and solar cells installations. It is important always to diversify the income-generation activities to sustain the impact of the loan systems.
5. Community-based participatory water conservation projects are an essential component of any concerted effort to conserve water resources in a water-scarce country.

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