



# Yemeni Women in Transition

how development cooperation could fit in

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Nevertheless, the responsibility for this report lies solely with the author, and the views expressed in this paper are therefore not necessarily endorsed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at The Hague.

The analysis of women's current situation as well as the recommendations were discussed with a group of Yemeni women in the Yemeni Centre for Research Studies on the initiative of Fatima Huraibi and Bilquis Al-Hadrani. I sincerely hope that these and similar discussions will take place more often in order to formulate a Yemeni strategy which includes women as active participants in the development of their country and not just as beneficiaries.

## *Introduction*

A Dutch Mission visited the Yemen Arab Republic<sup>1</sup> from October 28 until November 14, 1986 to gain some insight into the current situation of Yemeni women.<sup>2</sup> While discussing the availability of information and the need to update and enlarge on it in order to reach Yemeni women more effectively, a group of Dutch women working in Yemen requested support to improve their data-collection skills.

As a result, one of the mission's recommendations was the appointment of a female researcher with expertise on Women and Development, with the following terms of reference: training in and advice on basic research skills for women working in Dutch-funded projects and the relaying of relevant information with special attention to rural Yemeni women.<sup>3</sup> A workshop was organised in October 1987 on interview and observation techniques, with a practical component on women, water and sanitation.<sup>4</sup>

For people working in Yemen outside of Sana'a it is difficult to find the time

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<sup>1</sup>Henceforth, the Yemen Arab Republic will be referred to as 'Yemen' or 'YAR'.

<sup>2</sup>See also 1.4.1. The mission reported its findings in "*Do not forget me.*" *De Nederlandse ontwikkelingssamenwerking en de positieverbetering van vrouwen in Noord-Jemen: Rapport van de identifikatiemissie 28 oktober - 14 november 1986*, The Hague, DGIS, 1986 ("Do not forget me". Dutch Development Cooperation and the improvement of the position of women in North Yemen - with English summary).

<sup>3</sup>See Annex for full outline of Terms of Reference.

<sup>4</sup>For a report on this training exercise see Joke Buringa *Report on data-collection training. Casestudy on women, water and sanitation in the YAR*, The Hague, DGIS, 1988

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to look for relevant information, especially unpublished articles and project reports. Also, the general expectation was that not much would be found. After starting to visit libraries, institutions, organisations etc. as well as using personal contacts, it soon became clear that 'relaying relevant information' would prove to be a major task.

The bibliography-in-preparation became much sought after and many people were very cooperative in trying to add to the list. Owing to this enthusiasm, I was able to collect between 450 and 500 references.<sup>5</sup> Keeping in mind that many people would not have the time to plough through this report and/or visit the various repositories of information around Sana'a, I then decided to annotate a selected number of published and unpublished materials<sup>6</sup> to assist interested individuals in deciding what might merit further reading.

Although some materials are available in Arabic, most references are found in Western languages. It is clear too that donor organisations tend to give their information rather limited circulations for reasons that are not always easy to understand. This restricted availability of materials in foreign languages is aggravated by the fact that Yemeni channels are quite underused.

It is important that major reports on any aspect of development cooperation in Yemen are not only presented in English (as opposed to Dutch, to name but one language), but also routinely translated into Arabic. Both versions would then

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<sup>5</sup>In order to enable interested persons within Yemen to accede to available materials, locations within Yemen have been included in Joke Buringa, *Bibliography on women in the Yemen Arab Republic*, The Hague, DGIS, 1988.

<sup>6</sup>See Joke Buringa, *Women in the Yemen Arab Republic. A Selected and Annotated Bibliography*, The Hague, DGIS, 1988.



## INTRODUCTION

be handed to Yemeni institutions where they might be consulted.<sup>7</sup> This is particularly relevant for materials pertaining to *women and development*.<sup>8</sup> Translation would greatly increase the accessibility and exchange of ideas.

The objectives of this report are twofold. In the first place an overview will be presented of current knowledge, ideas and activities on WAD within the context of the Yemeni government, donor organisations, as well as researchers and other individuals. Secondly, a possible strategy is suggested, with recommendations on specific activities and further research priorities. This, I hope, will contribute to and stimulate the discussion between and within Yemeni institutions and donor organisations and help arrive at a WAD strategy both appropriate and relevant to Yemen.

This report is meant first and foremost for those directly involved, at present or in the near future, in development activities in the Yemen Arab Republic which are channelled through or in close cooperation with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Directorate General of International Cooperation. Beyond this group, it is also meant for all potential participants in the exchange of ideas mentioned above. Lastly, it could serve as an introduction to other interested parties on current knowledge and ideas regarding WAD in Yemen.

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<sup>7</sup>Possible ones would include the Medical Research Unit, the library of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Sana'a University, the Yemeni Center for Research Studies as well as relevant ministries.

<sup>8</sup>Women and Development will be referred to as WAD throughout this report. This is not in line with the common English abbreviation of WID, which stands for Women in Development. I find the difference significant as WID can be interpreted to imply an approach which regards women as 'beneficiaries' of development. WAD implies both passive and active participation.

## ***SUMMARY***

The question on Women and Development (WAD) is briefly described from an international perspective, starting with the first International Conference on Women's Issues held in Mexico City in 1975, and ending with the official meetings held in Nairobi (Kenya) in 1985 which resulted in the **Forward Looking Strategies**.

Since this report is written within the framework of Dutch-Yemeni development cooperation activities, an overview of both Dutch and Yemeni WAD policy is presented. Although neither the Yemeni government nor donor organisations active in Yemen has yet systematically formulated their views on WAD, women's issues do receive some attention in successive five-year development plans, mainly regarding women's participation in the formal labour force. The outcome of national and international discussions by the Dutch government resulted in the formulation of the following guidelines in 1987: to contribute to an improvement in women's position through their active participation in the development process, which is meant to be realised through their integration in the three sectors of rural development, industrial development and the informal sector, as well as education and research.

The Yemen Arab Republic is undergoing rapid change from a subsistence-based economy to a commercial one. Before the Revolution on September 26, 1962 the country was ruled by Imam Yahya who maintained a delicate balance of power with influential and unruly tribes. For an understanding of the background against which Yemeni society, in general, and the lives of women, in particular, are changing, it is important to keep in mind its history,

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demography, geography, religious make-up, tribal division and structure, as well as the wider geopolitical situation and recent economic developments (including the return of migrant-workers and the start of oil exports in December 1987).

A small part of mainly urban Yemeni women is organised in branches of the Yemeni Women's Association. These generally offer courses in literacy and further education, typing, handicrafts etc. An overview is given of donor organisations' current WAD activities, including most inputs involving women. Attention to WAD in Yemen seems to be only a recent phenomenon.

According to a 1982 CPO study, 68% of Yemeni females over 10 years of age can be considered economically active, with 98.5% of these working in agriculture and livestock, accounting for 70-75% of all activities in these two areas. Although the number of women in the formal labour force is increasing, it is still small, at 1.5% in 1982. The influence of male migration on women's workload differs per area. At present many males are returning due to a decrease in job opportunities in the neighbouring oil-rich states. The impact of this return on women's lives, workload, decision-making power etc. has not yet been studied. The number of boys and girls in schools is increasing rapidly, but at an uneven rate, with the gap between boys and girls widening. There are now roughly four times as many boys enrolled in primary schools than girls. This is caused by shortages both of classrooms, and female teachers as well as parents' uneasiness with literate daughters.

Women's main health problems are related to the early start of many short-spaced pregnancies, possibly resulting in delivery complications and maternal depletion. This may be aggravated by the carrying of heavy loads, rickets and an increase in nutrition-related problems e.g. through a changing diet.

## SUMMARY

Obtaining safe drinking water constitutes a big problem. Also, women's health is seen to be closely interrelated with that of their children. Malnutrition in children is a widespread phenomenon caused by a number of factors.

Weddings and birthings are important rituals in women's lives. Within tribal societies women have been held in high regard and had considerable influence, although they have no outside role as representatives of the tribe. For these women, modernisation may result in more restricted mobility and reduced influence in local affairs. Their legal position is determined by Islamic law, largely based on the Koran, as well as customary law, based on the concept of tribal honour.

Considering the work done by rural women (over 80% of the total population lives in rural areas), it is recommended that women's workload be decreased and that their working circumstances be improved, especially with respect to the following: domestic water use and sanitation, domestic energy, livestock, agriculture and child-spacing. It is postulated that when women have more time and energy, they could become interested in extension, (health) education and income-generating activities.

Currently, the available data on women in Yemen are found with individual donor organisations: they have no widespread circulation and are written mostly in Western languages. It is therefore proposed to establish a Women's Documentation Centre, possibly attached to the Yemeni Center for Research Studies, to serve as a reference and resource base for a network of Yemenis and expatriates committed to WAD issues. Furthermore, as training in WAD theory and in research methodologies are needed, recommendations are made to stimulate Yemeni expertise in these skills, especially amongst women in policy-making positions.

## **Chapter 1: PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT (WAD)**

### 1.1.

#### **introduction**

In this chapter a brief introduction to the international context of Women and Development (WAD) is presented, with special emphasis on the *Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies* and the implications for development cooperation activities.

Yemeni government policy regarding female participation in the development of Yemen will be described, followed by a summary of Dutch WAD policy, since 1975, both in general, and as it relates to Yemen in particular. Finally, a brief mention is made of certain Western preconceptions regarding Arab women which can hamper WAD activities.

### 1.2.

#### **WAD in international perspective**

Attention to the impact and role of women in development cooperation activities is the outcome of a process, which has its national<sup>1</sup> and international roots in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1975, Mexico City hosted the first International Conference on Women organised by the United Nations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A history of the activities of the Yemeni Women's Associations compared with similar developments both within and outside the Arab world could be a valuable contribution to understanding the specific Yemeni context.

<sup>2</sup>1975 is also the year in which the first foreign report appeared on women in Yemen. Rebecca Swanson wrote "*The Role of Women in the Yemen Arab Republic*" for USAID.

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It marked the beginning not only of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) but also of an expanding awareness concerning the importance of women in all aspects and at all levels of life. Objectives, strategies and measures to improve women's position were voiced. Gained experiences and insights were shared at the next conference in Copenhagen in 1980. Heated discussions took place between these women who had come from all over the world with their different perspectives and ideas. The exchange continued at the third conference in Nairobi, Kenya in July 1985, with several Yemeni women attending.

### 1.2.1.

*after Nairobi 1985*

The Forward Looking Strategies (FLS), which resulted from the Nairobi Conference at the end of the UN Decade for Women, were endorsed by all participating governments, including that of Yemen. Part of the document which deals with development aid stated in paragraph 327:

*While technical cooperation should be focused equally on women and men, the incorporation of women's needs and aspirations in the formulation and review of technical co-operation policies and programmes should be ensured and the potential negative effects on women of technical assistance should be minimized.*

This statement was included as awareness had increased among governments, UN organisations, NGOs etc. following numerous evaluations and research efforts in many developing countries all over the world during the Decade, that developmental cooperation more often than not had had a negative impact on the position of women.

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But how to incorporate women in development efforts without such negative effects was the question. Brouwers<sup>3</sup> summarised the consequences of the FLS for the development policy of Development Assistance Committee (DAC)<sup>4</sup> member states. First of all, women are not only beneficiaries of development but also its agents, she said. This is an important distinction, because by regarding women only as beneficiaries, it is thought that their problems will be resolved once development has been achieved. However, by viewing them as agents in the process, it is emphasised that development cannot occur without their active participation and involvement.<sup>5</sup>

The second major point concerns the inequality of power between men and women which may lead to discrimination on the basis of gender. Power differences are often explained in terms of biological differences. The FLS emphasise that men and women should share power equally. Thirdly, women should be assisted and stimulated to organise themselves, in order to define their own interests and priorities, which should be incorporated within the national policy objectives and strategies. Economic, political, social and cultural factors have to be taken into account in any approach which seeks to understand women's position and plan for increased participation of women in the development process (Brouwers 1986:3-4).

Governments are called upon to increase employment for women within both the formal and the informal sector. Women's workloads should be reduced. They

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<sup>3</sup>Ria Brouwers, *Follow-up on the "Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women" in the Development Policy of DAC Member States, 1986*

<sup>4</sup>Donor governments meet regularly through this committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

<sup>5</sup>See also note 6 in the *Introduction*.

## PERSPECTIVES ON WAD

should also receive more education and training. Efforts are called for to improve their health: better nutrition and extended and improved MCH care are of paramount importance. Women should be actively involved in these efforts. In the fourth place, existing women's organisations should be stimulated and supported (ibid:5-6).

1.3.

### Yemeni WAD policy

In the absence of a policy paper, the official policy of the Yemeni government on women will be deduced from its successive five-year plans. The First Five-Year Plan (FFYP), covering the period 1976/77-1981, mentions the following objectives for women: to educate them 'on equal proportion' to males (FFYP 1977:182) and to aim at training sufficient 'teachers and women teachers in all stages of education. According to the FFYP, the Ministry of Labour, Youth and Social Affairs (MOLSA) aims at:

*Taking care of the female sector and organising it in order to make use of the energy latent in half of the society and encouraging it to practice its role in economic and social development (1977:185).*

To realise this aim the MOLSA was to establish day care centres to enable women to participate in paid or unpaid work.<sup>6</sup> Emphasis was placed on training female leadership (ibid:186). The Ministry of Health (MOH), for its part, had the stated objective of expanding MCH services in the country (ibid:184),

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<sup>6</sup>The idea behind this formulation is that women's work is unproductive from an economic point of view, which was congruent with the then-theoretical concepts regarding women's role in development. At present, this view has more or less been discarded after women's contribution, though unpaid, has come to be recognised as economically productive.



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while the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) explicitly mentioned that extension activities should be directed to include rural women (ibid:160). Reference to women was also made by the Ministry of Information and Culture as follows:

*Educating the people, men and women, with the principles of and teaching of Islamic religion, and spreading its rules and spirits, in order to form checking fence against the spreading of any imported ideology inconsistent with religion in its essence (ibid:189/90).*

In the Second Five-Year Plan 1982-1986 (SFYP) the achievements of the First Five-Year Plan period are summarised as follows: in the field of education total enrollment at all levels of education went up by 66% (from 277,900 to 457,000). Male numbers rose by 61.1% and female ones by 91.1%, with students forming 6.4% of the total population. However, while male students constituted 11.4% of the male population, the corollary figure for females was only 1.6% (SFYP 1982:10). Considering that the corresponding figures had earlier been 8.2 and 1% respectively, it can be concluded that the gap between male and female participation in education widened during the timespan of the FFYP.

Women's participation in the "modern" economy grew faster than anticipated: whereas an 86,000 increase had been planned, in effect 101,900 women entered the workforce. However, the SFYP report does not mention the field of activities involved, the total number of working women, the percentage of women within the total labour force or what percentage of the total female population is formally employed.

In order to stimulate women to take part in the modern economic sector, the SFYP suggests relevant training opportunities and the establishment of

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kindergartens and nurseries, like its predecessor. But no specific reference is made anymore to include women in agricultural extension activities or to educate them on the same level as men. In the annex to the chapter on investment, a description of ongoing and planned projects for the period is presented. Out of a total of 295 projects in the different sectors, just one mentions women: an estimated Yemen Riyals (YR) 3 million is to be spent on establishing kindergartens in Sana'a and Ta'iz for the benefit of working mothers (ibid:143).

The section of the SFYP dealing with sectoral development does not mention women's contribution to agriculture. Although 'equal opportunities for citizens of both sexes' in education is mentioned (ibid:176), no reference is made to stimulating female teacher training. The health sector, for its part, is to provide 'incentives to increase male and female student enrollment in health training institutes' and also to encourage female participation in health education (ibid:179).

Objectives outlined by the MOLSA include 'caring for women and motivating them to participate in economic affairs' (ibid:180) and aims at 'providing qualified instructors at training centers, technical institutes, social welfare agencies and women's leagues, as well as recruiting and training women counsellors on family affairs' (ibid:181).

In comparing the two five-year plans it is clear that the major ideas are more or less the same: more women should become involved in the modern economic sector and, to achieve this, appropriate training possibilities should be created, and nurseries and kindergartens established; women should be educated. Overall, the interests of women seem to have been relegated to a slightly less prominent place in the Second Five-Year Plan.

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No English version of the **Third Five-Year Plan 1987-1992 (TFYP)** was available for a thorough examination of its contents with reference to women. I have therefore used what references are made to it by UNFPA in its working paper for a cooperation agreement with the Yemeni government.<sup>7</sup> In this document, UNFPA refers to the Plan's objectives of encouraging women to join the formal labour market, improving their status through literacy programmes and supporting women's groups (in practice the Yemeni Women's Associations).

### 1.4.

#### **Dutch WAD policy**

Since 1975, WAD has formed part of the official Dutch Development Cooperation Policy. Current strategy and measures have been presented in the paper *Women and Development, Programme of Action*, published in June 1987. This document incorporates major issues that arose in the lengthy discussions since the First Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, and the outcome of a survey by the Operations Review Unit in 1985 concerning the effects and impact of fifteen bilateral agricultural and rural development projects on women. In 1986, the National Advisory Council on Development Cooperation presented a detailed document on how to incorporate women in development cooperation. This programme of action also includes the recommendations of a seminar organised in 1986 by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries on women's participation in Third World agricultural activities.

Hence, the principal aim of Dutch WAD policy has been defined as follows:

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<sup>7</sup>UNFPA, *Draft Proposal for a Project Agreement between the Government of the Yemen Arab Republic and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities* Sana'a, 1987, page 5

## PERSPECTIVES ON WAD

*.. to bring about a structural improvement in the economic, social and overall position of women in developing countries by promoting their active involvement in the development process (Netherlands 1987b:5).*

This aim is meant to be integrated into the three sectors of Dutch development cooperation, i.e. rural development, industrial development and the informal sector, and, lastly, education and research.

The rural development sector covers women's involvement in agriculture, as well as drinking water and sanitation, domestic energy, health and population; the circumstances and conditions of employment in the formal and/or informal economical sector form the second area of concern; as illiteracy rates in most countries tend to be higher for women than for men, special efforts are deemed necessary in education and also vocational education and other special training for women; research is considered a tool to facilitate and assist these activities.

Furthermore, three areas of special concern have been identified in the official Dutch WAD general strategy: firstly, in line with Nairobi FLS recommendations, women's organisations need to be stimulated and supported; secondly, support for communication and information networks is called for in order to facilitate the exchange of experience and information between women; lastly, given that physical violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon, curative as well as preventive measures are needed (see also Nairobi FLS) to combat this problem (ibid:6-9).

On the instigation of the Yemen Desk at the Directorate General for

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International Cooperation (DGIS)<sup>8</sup> in The Hague, a temporary 'Women's Participation Reference Group' was formed in 1985 consisting of Yemen desk officers from different institutions and women with work experience in Yemen or with WAD. The discussions regarding possible Dutch WAD activities in Yemen resulted in a report called *Women's Involvement and The Netherlands Development Cooperation with the Yemen Arab Republic*.

The draft of this report was presented by a preliminary WAD mission in January 1986 and widely distributed among Dutch projects for comments. In the meantime, Dutch women working in Yemen had started irregular meetings to discuss recent developments.<sup>9</sup> In order to ensure structural attention to WAD in Dutch-Yemeni development cooperation activities, these women expressed particular support for the appointment of a WAD sector specialist at the Dutch Embassy.

The Dutch *Country Policy of North Yemen* (January 1986) lists WAD under 'special areas of attention' and emphasizes the need for undertaking activities related to literacy, vocational training and income-generation. Preference is given to the integration of these activities in ongoing projects, e.g. through a Women's Section, although some projects are specifically aimed at women.

### 1.4.1.

#### *Dutch WAD mission november 1986*

As mentioned earlier, a WAD mission (headed by the coordinator of Internatio-

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<sup>8</sup>DGIS is integrated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at The Hague.

<sup>9</sup>At the time, the former SNV deputy director acted as coordinator of women's activities for one day per month.

## PERSPECTIVES ON WAD

nal Women's Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) visited the Yemen Arab Republic between October 28th to November 14, 1986. Its brief was to gain an understanding of the current situation of Yemeni women, Yemeni official policy activities, as well as those of donor organisations. By visiting several projects, the mission also had an insight into the degree of women's participation in Dutch-funded projects. Some attention was focused on the position of expatriate women in these projects, identifying bottlenecks and possible means of support to improve their performance.

The mission found that most activities aimed at women within Dutch/Yemeni cooperation centered around health and non-formal education and that women's active involvement in water and sanitation projects was practically non-existent. Also, the presence of female expatriate staff was deemed to stimulate attention to the issue of women's participation in development.

The mission identified the following priority areas:

- a. Increasing the educational level of women at all levels, both through formal and non-formal education.*
- b. Improving the extension on health and agriculture including livestock at different levels.*
- c. Increasing the understanding of the intra-household situation.*
- d. Increasing income-saving and income-earning activities for women.*
- e. Introducing or developing labour-saving devices for women.*
- f. Strengthening policy making on women in Yemen.*
- g. Supporting women working with women (Netherlands 1987a:4-5).*

The mission made several recommendations to ensure that these findings were incorporated into official Dutch development cooperation activities, including the following:

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1. an expatriate expert should be attached to the Women's Department at the Yemeni Ministry of Education, while current support to the Yemeni Women's Associations in the areas of management and other specific activities should be continued.
2. Because rural extension takes place on a relatively small scale and in view of the existing difficulties in recruiting and training female extension agents, with the resulting exclusion of women as a target-group in agricultural and livestock educational messages, the recruitment of female agronomists and extensionists has to be intensified. The development and use of extension materials should be a coordinated effort between different projects and ministries.
3. The participation of women in further training, scholarships etc. should be actively encouraged. Data on intra-household structure and women's position need to be collected in order to gain insight into the varied interests within the household group.<sup>10</sup> Care should also be taken to involve women in waterprojects.

1.5.

the dilemma of WAD activities in the YAR

A stereotypical image of Arab women still permeates much of Western society (including development workers) which tends to obscure these women's reality. It is presumed that the oppression of Arab women under Islam is unequalled in other societies. The idea persists that Arab women have practically no legal

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<sup>10</sup>The term 'intra-household structure' has been coined to express both the inter-relatedness of household members as well as the division of tasks and responsibilities among them in general, and between men and women, in particular. By studying this structure, insight is also obtained in decision-making processes, for instance.

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rights. Women's dresscodes are interpreted as symbols of their oppression and backwardness, while the degree of emancipation of Arab women is seen by some as synonymous with the number of veiled women in the street, i.e. the fewer the veils, the greater the emancipation.<sup>11</sup>

However, to quote but one reference, which squarely contradicts such stereotypes:

*They (the women, jb) do not see themselves as men's moral or intellectual inferiors, and they are both freely critical of male failing and supportive of female moral deviance when male neglect or abuse necessitates it. Far from conforming to Western notions of the passive, vacuous victim behind the veil, they are, with few exceptions, strong, vital, self-confident women, abundantly capable of pursuing their own ends within the limits set for them and deriving great satisfaction from their lives (Dorsky 186:206).<sup>12</sup>*

The quotation is taken from Dorsky's book about the lives of women in 'Amran, one of the more conservative areas of Yemen. Makhlof, for her part, mentions urban Yemeni women's apparently positive self-image, and states that she had the impression that Yemeni women were much more relaxed and less tense than many women in some other cultures (Makhlof 1979:25).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Some expatriate women have been heard to describe the Yemeni women's dresses in terms like 'draping themselves in tablecloths' or reported feeling physically ill when seeing women covered up in the streets of Sana'a.

<sup>12</sup>Susan Dorsky, *Women of 'Amran: a Middle Eastern Ethnographic Study*, Salt Lake City, 1986

<sup>13</sup>Carla Makhlof, *Changing Veils: Women and Modernisation in North Yemen*, London, Croom Helm, 1979



## PERSPECTIVES ON WAD

Two perspectives can generally be detected in writings about women under Islam. One argues that women are considerably kept down, while the other suggests that Islam holds women in very high esteem. Be that as it may, it remains extremely difficult for most people to rid themselves of their ethnocentric vantage-point and understand that a system of values is just that and not necessarily better or worse than another system. By and large, they find it very difficult to imagine that Arab women may not want to become Westernised or so-called 'liberated'. How, then, does one support changes for Arab women without immediately being relegated to the ethnocentric camp?

Within Western development cooperation circles, some people argue that there should not be such a thing as WAD activities, because 'the local culture might be upset'. While having no qualms about interfering in a culture through agricultural interventions, to name just one category, such arguments are actively or passively opposing specific attention to women.

Other arguments tend to overlook the fact that movements and ideas do not develop in a vacuum but arise within particular social, economical, historical and political contexts which make situations very specific and rule out the transposition of development models in a universal way. Priorities may differ from country to country and the emergence of Western ideas and concepts - such as women's liberation, for example, could quite easily be regarded as another form of cultural imperialism. Taking no stand is also no solution, as current development activities necessarily have an impact on women, albeit partially unknown and possibly negative.

This is the dilemma facing us. Based on currently available data and insights an analysis regarding WAD in Yemen is presented and priorities are identified, in order to stimulate a discussion between all parties involved

## PERSPECTIVES ON WAD

in the Yemeni development context to formulate a specifically Yemeni policy that regards women not merely as active beneficiaries but participants and agents of change in the development process of their country.

## **Chapter 2: CONTEXT OF WAD ACTIVITIES IN THE YAR**

### **2.1.**

#### **introduction**

Before presenting some of the more specific information available on the situation of women in Yemen, a brief and general overview of various aspects of life in the YAR will be given, including the geographical setting, religious and tribal divisions, Yemen's geopolitical significance, as well as recent economic developments, population factors and the role of religion.

This overview will be followed by a description of the activities of the Yemeni Women's Associations, as well as those of the Yemeni government and foreign donor organisations that are aimed at women.

### **2.2.**

#### **overview**

The Yemen Arab Republic stretches over 200,000 square kilometers on the southwestern edge of the Arabian Peninsula and is bordered by the Red Sea to the west, Saudi Arabia to the north and east and South Yemen to the south. According to the 1986 census, the present population amounts to a little over 8 million, of whom 86% live in rural areas scattered over countless small villages and tiny hamlets.

#### *geography*

The geography of the country is spectacular and very diverse, ranging from mountains of over 3,000 metres to tropical wadis and from dry desert conditions in the east to the humid heat of the coast. The coastal strip is

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

known as the Tihama. Its inhabitants tend to be darker through centuries of migration to and from Africa. In the scarce accounts of early travellers, the Tihama is depicted as an awful place stifling with heat and humidity, gruesome malaria attacks etc. African influences are not only clear from people's physical appearance but also in the architecture, as well as the music and other material aspects of culture.

The Highlands can be divided into the Northern, Central and Southern. The inhabitants of the latter have traditionally had more contact with the British colony in Aden. All through the Highlands, Yemenis have built their houses in truly incredible places, preferably on the highest of ridges and the most inaccessible crags. Finally, there is also the Eastern Plateau, which levels off into the Empty Quarter.

History is important to the Yemenis. They are proud of their past and historic names, places and events live on to the present day. Tourists are lured to Yemen by images of Saba, the Queen of Sheba, also known locally as Bilquis. Her memory is still vivid today, as is that of Arwa, the famous and generous queen who ruled Yemen for many years during the 12th century AD.<sup>1</sup> Names of former kingdoms like Qataban and Mareb still exist today. Mareb which is famous for the remains of its ancient dams, whose collapse is recounted in the Koran, still attracts tourist today, while the new dam, constructed slightly beyond the old one, is a source of national pride to the Yemenis who see it as a symbolic link with the glorious past.

### *religious and tribal division*

The major denominations of Islam in Yemen are the Zaydis, who mostly inhabit

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<sup>1</sup>Popular names for girls include Arwa, Saba and Bilquis.

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

the Central and Northern Highlands and the Shaf'eis along the coast and in the Southern Highlands (see also 2.2.2.). The successive imams were recruited from among the Sada (single Sayyid), a group who claim descent from the Prophet Mohamed's daughter, Fatima, and her husband Ali Bin Abi Taleb. Imam Yahya (1904-1948) was internationally recognised as ruler of Yemen after the demise of Ottoman rule after 1918 (Hauck 1987: 16).<sup>2</sup>

Yemen's social hierarchy divides as follows: at the top, the Sada, considered the elite, followed by the Qudhat, i.e. judges, who enjoy a hereditary status like the Sada, and then tribespeople called Qabili. Women from any of these groups may marry from within their group or upwards. Urban merchants, known as Bay'a, come next, followed by Bani Khums, also known as Nagis, who are traditionally craftsmen, animal slaughterers and barbers. At the bottom of the social hierarchy are the Akhdam (sing. Khadim) who do the dirtiest work, like sweeping the streets. The women of the latter three groups tend to marry within their groups (Myntti 1979:29).<sup>3</sup>

The two major tribal confederations are the Bakil and the Hashid, both found in the central and northeastern part of the country. They are mentioned as early as the 10th Century A.D. by the renowned historian and geographer Al-Hamdani, and their geographical emplacement has barely changed since then (Dresch 1983:1).<sup>4</sup> In the southern part of the YAR, tribal organisation is less prominent. The tribes there are on friendly terms with each other although it

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<sup>2</sup>Volker A. Hauck, *Policy choices in the Yemen Arab Republic: Institutional Development in the Context of International Relationships*, MA thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1987

<sup>3</sup>Cynthia Myntti, *Women and Development in Yemen Arab Republic*, Eschborn, GTZ, 1979

<sup>4</sup>Paul Dresch, *Tribal relations in upper Yemen*, (manuscript) Oxford, 1983

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is not uncommon to overhear denigrating remarks being made by members of this or that tribe about their former enemies and men may still abstain from travelling though previously hostile territory.

### *tribal influence*

Halliday describes how society during the Imamates was organised and how the miserable living circumstances experienced by large groups of landless people (mostly in the south, jb) contributed to the uprising against the Imam in 1962. At the time of the revolution, he says,

*.. there were only 15 doctors - all foreigners. There were 600 hospital beds in the whole country. Over 50 per cent of the population had some kind of venereal disease; over 80 percent were suffering from trachoma. No money at all was spent on education by the state and less than 5 per cent of the children attended the traditional Koranic schools. There was not only no North Yemeni doctor, but there were no modern schools, no paved roads, no railways, no factories. The average per capita income was \$70 a year. There was nothing romantic about it; it was a very horrible place (Halliday 1967:92).<sup>5</sup>*

During the Revolution of 26 September 1962 and the subsequent civil war, between 1962 and 1967, some of the tribes were royalist while others fought on the Republican side. The royalist tribes were supported by Saudi Arabia while Egypt backed the republicans. Despite the victory of the republicans, tribal politics still play an important part in the affairs of the modern state. As Dresch puts it:

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<sup>5</sup>Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans*, London, Harmondsworth, 1974

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

*Much of the detail of Yemeni politics cannot be grasped without some knowledge of tribal affairs, but relations between tribes and state are not a matter of two forces facing each other on a common border. That is only an occasional symptom. What is at stake are two views of the world and sets of loyalties which are opposed, if anywhere, in the understanding of those involved (Dresch 1983:20).*

### *geopolitical situation*

The place Yemen occupies geo-politically also deserves some mention, owing to its importance in shaping the country's policies. Yemen is one of the ten states bordering the Red Sea, with the Suez Canal to the north giving access to the Mediterranean and Bab Al-Mandab to the south, to the Indian Ocean. The Red Sea is, of course, an important waterway for Nato countries, both militarily and as a major route for their oil supplies from the Gulf.

Equally, the Red Sea is also important to the Soviet Union<sup>6</sup> both from a commercial and a military perspective. This renders Yemen of considerable interest in superpower politics and enables the country, which maintains good relations with both sides, to foster its own interests to a considerable extent (Hauck 1987:6).

### *recent economic developments*

Surely it is important to say that up to 1,5 million men migrated to work in the Gulf States between 1975 and 1985 and sent home huge remittances, while the oil-states, for their part, significantly contributed to Yemen's budget. The subsequent decline in oil-revenues and recession in the Gulf led to the

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<sup>6</sup>The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) and Ethiopia, located on opposite sides of Bab al-Mandeb - the gateway from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean - are within the Soviet sphere of influence.

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

return of many migrants and the consequent fall in total remittances at a time when Arab development assistance was also reduced, owing to the same phenomena, which led to substantial deficits and inflation, resulting in the enactment of stringent import and currency restrictions.

In the meantime however, oil had been discovered east of Mareb and a pipeline to the Red Sea coast just north of Hodeidah was built, and opened on December 9, 1987 by President Ali Abdallah Saleh. It remains to be seen what influence oil sales will have on the Yemeni economy in the near future. Expectations are high: government policy hinges on reducing the country's dependence on imports 'whenever possible'; much emphasis is placed on food self-sufficiency, which means strenghtening the agricultural sector.<sup>7</sup>

### *census data*

The full results of the 1986 census have not yet been made public, although some preliminary findings were included in the *Statistical Yearbook 1986*. It gave a total population of 9,274,173, including 1,168,199 migrants residing outside of Yemen (CPO 1987:31). The male to female ratio has been established at 97:100, up from 91:100 in 1975.<sup>8</sup> A total number of 1,366,460 households were counted, with an average number of 5.7 persons per household (ibid:32). No recent figures for annual population growth rates are yet available. In 1981, this rate was established at 2.5% for rural areas and 3.8% for urban areas (ibid:69). A pilot demographic survey in rural areas taken during 1981 found that 50.1% of the population was younger than 15 years old.

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<sup>7</sup>Draft Third Five-Year Plan:88, quoted by Hauck 1987:78

<sup>8</sup>These data are taken from the *Preliminary Findings of the 1986 Census* CPO 1986.



## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

The average age of first marriage for women was established at 17.6 years, for males at 22.2 years, with a crude birth rate of 51.9. Men could expect to reach 43.3 years and women 40.8 years; the total life expectancy for both came to 42.1 years. Infant death rates for boys were calculated at 176.7 per 1,000 and for girls at 170.1 per 1,000, together amounting to 173.5 deaths per 1,000 births. The total fertility rate came to 7.88. The crude death rate for males was 25.3%, for females 27.4% and for both sexes 26.4% (ibid 72-75).

Health sector statistics for 1986 show the presence of 35 hospitals with 4,644 beds (CPO 1987:214), i.e. one bed per 1745 inhabitants (calculation jb); 909 doctors were counted, including 276 expatriates (ibid:215), yielding a ration of one doctor for every 8,917 inhabitants (calculation jb). In practice, however, doctors tend to concentrate in towns and cities. 487 Yemeni nurses and 924 expatriate ones were found, as well as 48 qualified Yemeni midwives and 117 expatriate ones, with 287 trained primary health care workers are working in the countryside (ibid:246 and 249).

### *religion*

Islam is the state religion, with reference usually made to the Shi'ite Zaydi's and the Sunni Shaf'eis, with the former traditionally exercising power in Yemen. After their exodus around 1950, some 1,200 Jews have remained in the country in small settlements around the northern town of Sa'ada.

With a few exceptions, when women attend services in a mosque, they fulfill their religious duties within the privacy of their homes, whereas men go to the mosques to pray. Religion plays an important role in Yemeni society. A trip on the Hadj to the Holy Places in Saudi Arabia is regarded as a highlight by men and women alike.

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

During the Holy Month of Ramadan daily rhythms tend to be reversed. Shops will be open until the early morning-hours and - contrary to other times of the year - many women can be observed out in the streets of cities at night. Everybody is preoccupied with fasting. Official working hours are decreased to four hours, from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m., while in the countryside work is done as much as possible during the early morning hours.

Besides the two major religious denominations usually mentioned, there is a group of Ismaelites around Manakha who maintain intensive ties with other Ismaelites in India. Marriages between members in the two countries continue to be arranged.

Not much has been written about religious practices in the Tihama. According to Stone,

*.. religious preferences change to the Sunni Branch of Islam which accommodates the veneration of local saints and miracle workers, unlike the Shi'ah practices of the Zaydi sect in the highlands (Stone 1985:4).<sup>9</sup>*

The members of the Tihama Expedition in 1982 identified several important days when tombs of local saints are visited (ziyarah). Both men and women take part in these cults of saint worship. Not much has been written about the nature, extent or origins of these activities, and the role played by devotion and superstition. Some rituals are thought to be of pre-islamic origin, but influence from India and Africa is also likely. These practices certainly form an important part of life in the Tihama today. Men and women also take an active part in zar ceremonies, performed to heal certain individuals (ibid

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<sup>9</sup>Francine Stone (ed.), *Studies on the Tihama: the Report of the Tihama Expedition 1982 and Related Papers*, Harlow, Longman, 1985

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

1985:118-124). In other areas of Yemen, remnants of pre-islamic beliefs are thought to be present, but hardly any information has been published on the subject.

### 2.3.

#### **strategies, policies and actions**

Activities involving women are organised by the different branches of the Yemeni Women's Association (YWA), governmental institutions and development projects, usually in cooperation with foreign donor organisations. Some information on the YWA is given below, followed by a brief overview of Yemeni policy as well as current WAD activities by NGOs and donor organisations.

#### 2.3.1.

##### *women's organisations*

Not long after the Revolution of 1962 the first Yemeni Women's Associations were established, notably in Sana'a and in Ta'iz, and there was great enthusiasm for the anticipated changes in women's role and position in the post-revolutionary society. According to certain women's narrations, some women refused to veil and shortened their skirts. This caused public aggression and the women had to give in to pressure being put on them.

At present, the YWA has a branch in Hodeidah, while Ta'iz has opened up a number of branch offices in the governorate. Bajil has its organisation since 1986 and Dhamar has recently founded one. No actual national organisation exists, with the various chapters forming a loose coalition of local groups. Officially, they fall under the auspices of the Women's Bureau at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

The Association in Ta'iz was established in 1965, under the slogans: *Love of country is part of faith, and Women account for half of society.* The Ta'iz YWA is active in the areas of culture, religion, health, fund-raising as well as maternity and childcare. Women are seen as the cornerstone of society, in line with the Yemeni Constitution.

Within the YWA/Ta'iz women are taught literacy, arithmetic, religion. Instruction is also provided in 'housekeeping, sewing, typewriting (Arabic/English), secretarial work, tapestry, weaving, calligraphy and sculpture' (YAR/YWA/1987:8).<sup>10</sup> Health education meetings are organised and a library is available for use by members.

Women from the YWA have attended conferences abroad and although the association is mainly an urban phenomenon, its achievements are very encouraging. Many women have found their way to the YWA to attend courses; in most branches, they are very eager and enthusiastic to learn new skills.

### 2.3.2.

#### *policy of YAR government*

The policy of the Yemeni Government has been outlined in 1.4. Participation of (educated) women in the formal sector is regarded as very important, as we have seen, as the encouragement for women to study and be trained. It is hoped to improve women's health through providing maternal-and-child health care facilities.

That attention to women's needs is definitely increasing is clear when examining the rising number of project activities explicitly formulated to

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<sup>10</sup>YAR/YWA, *The Yemeni Women's Association during 20 years, Ta'iz, 1987*

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

improve women's position. For example, women's sections have been or will be attached to all integrated rural development projects. Much experience has been gained at RIRD in Rada', which seems to emerge as a model for similar projects in the rest of the country.

Nonetheless, an overall strategy is still lacking. The Yemeni government has committed itself to prepare one by signing the FLS adopted at the Nairobi Conference in 1985.<sup>11</sup> Institutional support to design and implement a strategy relevant to WAD in Yemen may be one investment with far-reaching benefits.

### 2.3.3.

#### *activities of NGOs and donor organisations*

In preparation for the Dutch WAD mission to Yemen during November 1986, Ms Anne-Marieke Steeman (former deputy director of SNV in Sana'a) prepared an overview of foreign-sponsored activities aimed at increasing women's involvement in development. Her report is summarized below and brought up-to-date with some recent activities.<sup>12</sup>

Only two NGOs are active in Yemen, Oxfam and Rädä Barnen. Oxfam supports the recently established Yemen Women's Association in Bajil while health activities promoting women's health are funded through BOCD. A clinic for employees (overwhelmingly female) of the Ministry of Municipalities & Housing is sponsored in the old city of Sana'a and the Technical Unit for Nutrition is

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<sup>11</sup> "Technical co-operation and women must be linked to overall national development objectives and priorities, and technical assistance plans and programmes should be managed so as to ensure the full integration of activities specific to women" (FLS 1985:80 Par. 327).

<sup>12</sup> Anne Marieke Steeman, *Women's Involvement in the YAR through Non-Governmental, Multilateral, Bilateral and Volunteer Organisations*, Sana'a, 1986

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

supported. In the meantime, Oxfam has hired a female deputy director in order to stimulate projects aimed at women. Rädä Barnen is mainly involved in health activities and health-related training, but has no concern with WAD.

Multilateral assistance is provided by UNDP, UNFPA, Unicef and FAO. UNDP, in close cooperation with Unifem, sponsors a rural development project in Khowlan, with special attention to women. In the fall of 1987, a seminar has been held in Ta'iz to upgrade the management skills of members of the Yemen Women's Association. The Dutch Government provided the funds through a 'cost-sharing arrangement' while UNDP organised it and Unicef implemented the workshop together with the Yemen Women Association in Ta'iz. Another recent UNDP activity, undertaken in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education concerns *non-formal education teacher training for women*, in which Yemeni women are trained to teach home economics. Within UNDP, two women are working on WAD issues. A workshop on women in agriculture, organised by UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries was on April 9, 1988.<sup>13</sup>

UNFPA is mainly involved in health projects. A project recently started to upgrade institutional capacity in the area of women, population and development. Unicef is mainly involved in female education and MCH programmes with a Yemeni woman responsible for women's issues. FAO is participating with UNDP in the Khowlan project, where women receive training in nutrition, health, and childcare and extension activities are planned. UNV (part of UNDP) has supplied three volunteers for the UNDP/Unifem/FAO project in Khowlan.

USAID, GTZ, ODA and DGIS are bilateral donors. GTZ sponsors the 'Amran Basic

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<sup>13</sup>The proceedings are recorded in Joke Buringa, *Report about the workshop on Women in Agriculture 9 April 1988*, Sana'a, YAR/MAF and UNDP, 1988

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

Health Services and a women's section has been started up in the integrated Mahweit project. ODA has been sponsoring one female veterinarian in Hodeidah until recently, though she was not specifically appointed to attend to women's needs in caring for livestock. A female women's agricultural extension adviser has been attached by the ODA to the Central Highlands Project in Dhamar and she is responsible for women's extension and workload reduction by decreasing the time spent on hand-feeding cows through supplementary feedings.

USAID has activities aimed at women in their Tihama Primary Health Care Project, while recently, a big project called 'Child Survival' has started up in various governorates. Future attention to women's role in water and sanitation is anticipated while support to the Yemen Women's Associations is seen as essential. A six-day workshop on WAD issues for Yemeni women working in ministries and institutions was held in July 1988.

The Women's Section of the Rada' Integrated Rural Development Project has been supported by DGIS for 10 years. In the Tihama women's extension activities take place through the TDA, and health projects are sponsored in Dhamar, Rada' and Hodeidah. For several years, the Women's Training Center and the Yemen Women's Associations in Ta'iz and Hodeidah have been receiving assistance. At present, the new YWA in Dhamar is being aided and a sector specialist on WAD is expected to be appointed at the Dutch Embassy.

Volunteer organisations include BOCD, DED, Peace Corps and SNV. BOCD had been training health workers and providing health education in 'Abs (Tihama), Al Jabin and Ja'aferiah while research into women's attitudes towards literacy has also been conducted. DED is involved in women's activities through health care projects and District Training Centers in Zabid, Bajil and 'Amran. Peace Corps have not paid any special attention to WAD in their activities until

## CONTEXT OF WAD IN YAR

very recently: as part of a project for the preservation of the old city of Sana'a, one female volunteer is in charge of assessing whether stimulating women's participation in handicrafts is feasible. SNV has supplied a home economist to the project in Rada' and was active in several MCH-projects. A female veterinarian was stationed in Rada' and is presently working in Mahweit. Since mid 1988, SNV is also responsible for the execution of a project on Mother and Child Health in Rada'.



## **Chapter 3: SITUATION OF WOMEN**

### **3.1.**

#### **introduction**

In recent years, two reports have appeared which summarise existing knowledge on the situation of women in the Yemen Arab Republic. Adra and Al-Dabbi prepared a report for Unicef in 1986<sup>1</sup> describing the major health problems as well as the activities by national institutions and donor organisations which are related to women. The report also covered research needs and recommendations. The second study, by Nijland<sup>2</sup>, summarises part of the existing literature, and provides data obtained from interviews with a number of female development workers in a country survey of women in Yemen undertaken for SNV in 1987.

In this chapter, an overview will be given concerning women's status, her contribution to the formal and informal economy, her participation in education, her health and legal status. Lastly, mention is made of some aspects of women's culture, as these tend to reflect on the changes taking place in women's lives.

### **3.2**

#### **social status of women**

The concept of women's status is an ambiguous one, as it gives the suggestion

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<sup>1</sup>Najwa Adra and Bilqis Al-Dabbi, *Situation Analysis - Women*, Sana'a, Unicef, 1986

<sup>2</sup>Heleen Nijland, *Landenstudie Noord-Jemen: SNV en de Positieverbetering van Vrouwen*, Dhamar, SNV, 1987

## SITUATION OF WOMEN

that women form a homogeneous group. Differing interests and unequal access to resources cut across the category of women in Yemen as well. The geography of the country resulting in near isolation of clusters of hamlets, a valley, a plateau etc. due to a lack of roads, although rapidly changing, has contributed remarkable differences even between neighbouring villages in the way women's behaviour and possibilities have developed.

Yemeni society is undergoing rapid change, due to the opening up of the countryside by the building of roads, migration of large numbers of males until recently and their current return, oil-findings and exports, development aid, the spread of education, consumer goods etc. These are affecting women in many ways, perhaps positive and perhaps partly negative.

Experience in other developing societies has shown time and time again, that women tend to loose out to men in the developing process when their particular interests are not kept in mind by policy-makers. For example, it has been amply documented that a change from subsistence to commercial agriculture often leads to a decrease of women's control over land and produce. Indeed, it has been argued by Seger<sup>3</sup> that most rural women have become increasingly marginalised in recent economic development. This contrasts the widely held view that Yemeni women have become more 'liberated' through the development processes of the past fifteen years or so.

In Western thinking, women's status is related to her participation in the formal, and in this case also informal, labour force, her level of education, her legal status and the attention given to her health. This status manifests

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<sup>3</sup>Karen E. Seger, *Women and Change in the Yemen Arab Republic: a view from the literature*, MA thesis, University of Arizona, 1986

## SITUATION OF WOMEN

itself in some rituals and other cultural expressions like dancing and dress. These kind of data are presented in this chapter. But it needs to be stressed, that such an approach does no justice to perceptions about the quality of life as perceived by men and women themselves.

Yemen is a strictly gender-segregated society. Men and women do not normally socialise together unless they are family members. Men have no direct access to the female world and do not know what women discuss. When they wish to marry, female relatives may be called upon for suggesting potential candidates, as these will be known to the women. Through their female networks, women may hear a substantial amount of information, not necessarily known to their male kin. This strict segregation also stimulates greater interdependence between men and women than in societies with less gender-segregation.

As to their self-images and their perception of how they differ from men, Dorsky says:

*Women do not generally see male character as morally superior to female. Whenever I asked about the relative goodness of the sexes, the question was dismissed as foolish. Only individual variations exist; some men are good, some bad, some in between; and the same holds for women. There are two dimensions in which individual women are seen as commendable: one is based on temperament and sociability and the other on honor and virtue. Women ranked high on the first dimension are popular, whereas those topping the second scale are respected (Dorsky 1986:179).*

Rural women tend to have greater mobility than city women. It must be mentioned, however, that the building of roads seems to have had a negative impact on their mobility and also on norms regarding women's mode of dress,

## SITUATION OF WOMEN

due to the greater possibility for women of encountering a male stranger, men requested their women to dress more modestly (Gascoigne 1986:14).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, quite a few women move around in cities, preferably by taxi, while rural women can usually only travel with a male escort and after male permission.<sup>5</sup> Especially since the building of roads, men go to the markets and do considerably more of the buying and/or selling, again to preserve women's modesty.

However, the women of Jebel Sabr above Ta'iz are known for their independent spirit and the strong character of women in the Eastern Plateau is often noted.<sup>6</sup> It is said that some drive cars and that others carry a gun at all times. The women of the Az-Zaraniq tribe in the Tihama are supposed to be quite remarkable persons in their own right too. In general it can be said that tribal women have considerable power within the tribe, but none in representing their group to the outside. Relatively little research has been carried out on the influence of male migration, building of roads, television, foreign-funded projects etc. on women's status within their group.

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<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth Gascoigne, *North Yemen: do Rural Roads mean Rural Development?* RDDC Bulletin, September 1986, pp. 11-14

<sup>5</sup>The practice of traveling with an escort and with permission from an authority is firmly rooted in Yemen's recent past. Tribal law required an escort for travellers from outside a tribe's area, and during the Imamate travel permissions were required for everybody.

<sup>6</sup>During a trip with two other women in the Eastern Plateau area during 'Id Arafa 1987, we spent the night with a woman (and her children), whose husband was working on the Saudi Arabian border. Her uncle, who came to check whether everything was alright, assured us that there was no reason whatsoever to be afraid of anything, as our hostess was quite capable of "tackling twenty men".

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3.3.

### **work, employment and income**

In this section, all aspects of women's work, both in the formal and informal sector will be covered.

In the house, women are responsible for childcare, cleaning, cooking and serving food and drink to men, washing clothes, looking after animals, fetching water and fuelwood etc. Hospitality rules dictate that guests are always welcome for the time they would like to stay. For women, this may mean extra work in feeding the guests and cleaning up after them. In general, when non-family male guests are present, men and women tend to eat separately.

Largely owing to massive male migration to the Gulf (and consequent remittances) and partly to increased foreign development assistance, many women have experienced a substantial improvement in their lives from an economic point of view. They may own more clothes and jewellery, more appliances than ever before in living memory. It is certainly true that in towns and cities their workload has been reduced substantially through the use of butagas, piped water supplies, washing-machines, and other facilities.

In general, rural women still face a rather heavy workload. The most time-consuming activities are the fetching of water, the collection of fuelwood and fodder and hand-feeding livestock. In the highlands, women may spend up to 6 to 8 hours a day collecting fodder and handfeeding their cow, which may then supply them with no more than two pints of milk per day. While decreasing supplies of fuelwood contribute to an increase either in women's workload (as they have to go farther to fetch it) or in the market price, women's knowledge, needs and wishes tend not to be taken into account while identifying, implementing or evaluating water projects and the extent of their

## SITUATION OF WOMEN

responsibility for agricultural work tends to be underreported and underestimated.

In a demographic study carried out by CPO in 1982, it was found that of all males aged 10 years or more 69,6% participated in the labourmarket; the corresponding percentage given for females was 48.7%<sup>7</sup>, and the conclusion has to be drawn that the methodology used in the study did not allow for more adequate registration of women's activities.

However, a more recent study by CPO found that of economically active women - 68% of all women over 10 years old - 98.5% worked in agriculture and livestock.<sup>8</sup> The study also noted that women are responsible for 70-75% of all agricultural activities in Yemen. Nevertheless, agricultural extension activities, albeit still in their infancy, tend to be directed at men. Few female agricultural extension agents have been trained, partly due to the absence of a training institute within the country. Furthermore, agricultural extension often stresses women's activities in their role as homemaker, thus overlooking their important contribution to agriculture and livestock.

The influence of men's absence on women's workload differed according to geographical area and method of irrigation. It seems, for instance, to have been highest in areas with exclusively rain-fed agriculture, where the availability of water is most uncertain. According to Adra and Al-Dabbi, women's tasks could be expected to increase most in spring-irrigated areas, where men contributed most to agriculture. However, men in these areas did not

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<sup>7</sup>cited in The Kingdom of the Netherlands 1987a:13

<sup>8</sup>Kuduse al Maruni, *A study in the Participation of Women in the Economic Activities*, Sana'a, CPO, 1984:3

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necessarily migrate in great numbers. Growing affluence also led to an increase in the cultivation of qat, to which women in general do not contribute any labour. Therefore, in areas with greatly expanded qat production, their workload diminished (Adra and Al-Dabbi 1986:37).

Since the return of many migrants due to decreased employment opportunities in the Gulf States, no study has documented the influence of men's renewed presence on women's work in agriculture. Migration continues but tends to be short-term and from areas close to Saudi Arabia.

Relatively little is known about women's activities in the informal sector. They may bake and sell bread, decorate brides for their wedding festivities, work as street-sweepers, musicians, basketmakers, seamstresses etc. It is known that owing to the expansion of the road network, women no longer attend the weekly local and regional markets as frequently as they used to do (Adra and Al-Dabbi 1986:49). Also, in cities like Sana'a, the number of women vendors has decreased over the past decade. Women now sell their produce to middlemen who may be relatives. This development has resulted in a partial loss of income and social contacts for women. Well-known exceptions are the women of Jebel Sabr near Ta'iz and Tihami women who both continue to frequent markets as vendors.

According to Kuduse al Maruni (1984:3), only 1.5% of economically active women are employed in the formal sector, where the most favoured employment is teaching. Women can also be found in banks and in offices, mostly in clerical positions, while women in ministries tend to work in higher positions. Since the most recent figures available for women in the formal sector date from 1978, they will not be included here. In the **Third Five-Year Plan 1987-1992**, it is stated that the participation of women in the formal sector needs to be

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stimulated, with the prerequisite to that being the establishment of more nurseries for women with children who wish to work.

3.4.

### female participation in education

In the Statistical Yearbook 1986 (CPO, 1987), the latest available figures on literacy rates are from the demographic survey conducted in 1982 which found that 35.9% of the males and 1.8% of females were literate in the rural population. In urban areas, the corresponding figures were 63.7% and 16.4% respectively (CPO 1987:86). Adra and Al-Dabbi note that boys are more likely than girls to drop out of primary school during the first five years. However, many girls are observed to leave school by the sixth grade, probably due to the onset of menarche (Adra and Al-Dabbi 1986:56-7).

While no females were enrolled in agricultural institutes or vocational training centers (CPO 1987: 182) during the 1985/1986 academic year, the table below shows the levels of enrollement for that year at Sana'a University.

faculty	total	female	male
arts	1,756	479	1,277
commerce & economics	3,547	396	3,151
law	4,645	117	4,528
education	1,881	462	1,419
science	395	95	399
medicine <sup>9</sup>	184	119	65
engineering	206	28	178
agriculture	156	9	147
total	12,770	1,705	11,065

Source: Statistical Yearbook 1986 page 191

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<sup>9</sup>The faculty of medicine was not opened until 1984/1985.



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Rates of enrollement at other levels of the Yemeni education system in 1985/1986 are given below.

<u>Educational level</u>	males	%	females	%	total	%
primary school	728,931	80.6	175,556	19.4	904,487	100
preparatory school	87,188	90.3	9,391	9.7	96,579	100
secondary school	22,629	89.3	2,706	10.7	25,335	100
total	838,748	-	187,653	-	1,026,401	100

Source: based on Statistical Yearbook page 180

Thus, of the total non-university student population of 1,026,401 during 1985/1986, 81.7% was male and 18.3% female.

Some argue that illiteracy is the biggest problem facing Yemen. Current national figures reveal a 53.8% illiteracy rate for men and a 93.2% one for women. As formal education was essentially non-existent before the Revolution of 1962, the country has little or no tradition in formal education. during 1985/1986 enrolled before university level 81.7% is male and 18.3% female. In the FFYP, the Government stated that it expected to be able to make female education compulsory after 30 years<sup>10</sup>, in about the year 2005.

Generally, Yemen seems to follow a pattern that occurs in many countries: first, a small number of highly motivated boys start attending school, and are followed after a while by a large group of boys, amongst whom the dropout rate is much higher. At about this time, the first highly motivated girls start going to school. They, in their turn, are also followed by a larger number of girls who are also more likely to leave school prematurely. Not until a later

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<sup>10</sup>See YAR/CPO/Prime Minister's Office **The First Five-Year Plan** 1977:182.

## SITUATION OF WOMEN

stage, do large numbers of boys and girls attend and finish school (Andrea Rugh, personal communication).

School attendance for girls in Yemen is not only hindered by the practice of early marriage, by the need for their work at home, or by concerns about her reputation, but also by practical problems like insufficient numbers of schools, distance and a serious shortage of female teachers. At present, female secondary school graduates are required to do one year of primary school teaching, in counterpart to young males' military service. This unfortunately leads to a situation where young women, with no pedagogical training and supervision, are teaching classes of up to 100 6-year olds in a room meant for a third of this number. Not only is the quality of the teaching poor but with so many children to one classroom there is little else to do than to try and prevent chaos. A further consequence is that these young women may well be turned off teaching.

*Number of girls in primary school 1965-1985*

year	number	%increase
1965	2,864	-
1970	8,263	188.5
1974	20,770	151.4
1976	30,224	60.2
1982	87,289	188.8
1985	175,556	101.1

(Data obtained from Statistical Yearbooks)

3.5.

### women's health

Until recently, women's health has generally been considered in terms related to women's recognized role as childbearer and -rearer by health planners and

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providers. For Yemen, as in most other countries, this has led to an overemphasis on the need for Mother and Child Health services at the expense of attention to women's other roles in, for example, agriculture and livestock and their influence on women's health. Women's personal health is the outcome of an intricate web of factors. Some of their needs are clearly related to their biological functioning, while others can be linked to their social, economic and cultural roles. Not only are women consumers of health care, they also provide health skills on the household, and perhaps, community level. As we shall see below, some wider aspects of women's health have been considered before, yet there is a need for an analysis of Yemeni women's health in the wider context mentioned.

Adra and Al-Dabbi note the following major health-related problems as regarding women: childbearing, nutrition, sanitation and domestic hazards.<sup>11</sup> Since the health of a child and that of its mother are interrelated, some references to children will also be made in this section.

Mortality figures start to climb higher for females than for males after the age of 15. Since women start childbearing at this age, it is likely that resulting complications cause the difference mentioned. Ruptured uteruses, excessive post-partum bleeding and retained placenta are common. Contributing factors are identified as home deliveries (usually without a medically trained

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<sup>11</sup>The practice of female circumcision is potentially harmful to women. A mild form (khadaan) is applied in the Tihama. Female children are circumcised preferably before they are 10 days old, and have their ears pierced at the same time. Dorsky mentions that although the practice is very uncommon in the 'Amran area, she nevertheless reports that it is done in two villages just outside 'Amran, though 'Amrani women were very much opposed to these practices (Dorsky 1986:79 and 137). The Yemeni Government does not favour female circumcision either (Adra and Al-Dabbi 1986:7).

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birth attendant)<sup>12</sup>, the carrying of heavy loads (water, fodder, fire wood), rickets caused by limited skin exposure to sunshine and 'maternal depletion' caused by early and frequent pregnancies.

Nutrition-related problems in pregnant women are influenced by the belief that big babies cause difficulties at delivery time and so women eat less to avoid these. Recent changes in diet, including the switch to white flour and the consumption of large amounts of sugar contribute to vitamin B deficiency. And many rural women do not regularly get any animal protein as meat is expensive and fewer house-cows are kept.<sup>13</sup>

Generally speaking, Yemeni people have a limited understanding of biological processes like the female reproductive cycle, especially in rural areas. As far as contraceptives are concerned, when they are aware of their existence at all, women are worried about possible real or imagined side-effects. Knowledge is also limited on the relationship between breast-feeding and postponing another pregnancy. Post-partum abstinence is sanctioned for 40 days, but wide regional variations are known to exist. Bearing children is considered to be imperative and an infertile woman may be divorced.

Around the house, poorly-ventilated, badly-lit and smoky kitchens<sup>14</sup> are cited as one health problem; the seclusion of women is also thought to have negative repercussions on their health and it has been noted that veiled women are more

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<sup>12</sup>Home deliveries as such are not necessarily problematic, but the severe shortage of well-trained attendants in combination with the common practice of having women give birth in dark and dirty rooms make them so.

<sup>13</sup>Many women in the world are vegetarians by choice or religious principle. This does not necessarily have to result in nutritional deficiencies.

<sup>14</sup>In the kitchen quite a few women burn themselves at one time or another through having to reach into the bread-baking oven (tannur).

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at risk from anemia and osteomalacia (rickets).

One of the biggest problems facing rural women is the great difficulty entailed in obtaining clear drinking-water. Women tend to be quite knowledgeable about the degree of water purity and are able to describe quite well what criteria are used for assessing different kinds of water. Considering their positions as managers of the domestic water supply, sanitation messages should be aimed at them.

Despite the recent establishment of health centres and hospitals and an expanded number of roads, women are still at a disadvantage in terms of access to health facilities either because they cannot travel without a male relative or because they cannot afford to hire a car to take them there. And older women may simply refuse to travel by car. Nevertheless, it must be stated that spending money on health is not in itself seen as undesirable. Local healers are also charging for their services as bloodcuppers, burners etc. Also, people use and abuse injections and drugs, and although popularity is waning infant formula is bought either to supplement or replace breastfeeding and also as a weaning food (Adra and Al-Dabbi 1986:59-72).

Adra and Al-Dabbi do not focus much on local knowledge regarding perceived causes of illness or preventive and curative health behaviour. According to Beatty and Van Dijk,<sup>15</sup> who conducted a study on the determinants of childhood malnutrition in villages of Dhamar Governorate, disease in children was quite often seen to be the result of supernatural causes. The ones most commonly mentioned were 'fright' (faji'a) and 'the evil eye' ('ain), which they as

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<sup>15</sup> Sharon E. Beatty and Ronald E. van Dijk, *Draft: Determinants of Childhood Malnutrition*, Dhamar, DRHP, 1987

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follows:

*'Fright' is a condition whereby one becomes ill after suffering a shock or being startled. The 'evil eye' is when a person, often unwittingly, causes illness by gazing covetously at a child, especially a beautiful, healthy one (Beatty and Van Dijk 1987:139).*

Many health workers have noted the use of amulets, consisting of Koranic citations in small cylindrical containers which are attached to the cap on a child's head or to some other piece of clothing. Also quite common is the use of a little bag of herbs hanging around a child's neck or pinned to its clothes. Still extant are the practices of burners, bloodcuppers, cauterists, exorcists, as well as traditional healers who prescribe a variety of herbs. In different areas of Yemen people believe in the existence of al'ugari, a spirit living in the uterus during pregnancy. The spirit, in the shape of a bizarre animal, is supposed to leave the female body at the time of delivery of the placenta, and can be seen by a traditional birth attendant. In 'Amran the husband is blamed for the presence of this spirit, which is thought to be caused by upsetting the woman emotionally, specifically by forcing her to have sexual relations. Thus, a failed pregnancy can be blamed on the husband. Apparently only one in one hundred pregnancies suffers from the presence of al'ugari (Dorsky 1986:154).

Sooner preferably than later, the married couple will start producing offspring. An infertile woman is pitied and her husband may divorce her or marry a second wife. Therefore, the first pregnancy is especially a cause for relief and excitement. In general, their workload is not reduced during pregnancy and women are expected to fast during Ramadan (Dorsky 1986:153, Beatty and Van Dijk 1987:170-174). Their food intake also may remain the same,

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especially among those who wish to avoid large babies, who may actually want to eat even less than before. It is clear from the study by Beatty and Van Dijk that food intake and smoking are perceived to be related to size of the child at birth (1987:169).

### 3.6.

#### women's legal status

To describe Yemeni law and customary law about women, extensive use will be made of Adra's chapter on customary law.<sup>16</sup> Myntti included in an appendix an English translation of Yemeni Labour Law (1970) and Family Law (1978), which are still extant, but this translation has not been authorized by the Yemeni government (1979:119-163).

#### 3.6.1.

##### *customary law*

Customary law concerns itself with matters that are considered the public responsibility of tribes and their members. As such, it expresses the 'tribal concept'. Central to this concept are the maintenance and/or loss of honour and the protection of the "weak", including women, children, travellers and other people under a tribe's protection. In the literature, customary law is known as 'urf, but other terms are widely used.

'Urf is not only used to punish, but serves equally often as a guide to proper conduct. Furthermore, issues dealing with marriage, inheritance and religious ritual form no part of customary law, as they are considered part of Islamic law (shar'ia). Customary law can be considered a written law of

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<sup>16</sup>Najwa Adra, *Qabyala: the Tribal Concept in the Central Highlands of the Yemen Arab Republic*, Ph.D. thesis, Temple University, 1982, pp. 161-212

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precedent, insofar that proceedings of cases are recorded and taken in custody by a Shaykh. The extent to which these proceedings are still kept could not be ascertained by Adra. During the Imamate of Yahya (1904-1948), customary law was made illegal and the possession of written documents pertaining to cases were punishable by death.<sup>17</sup>

Islamic law and customary law are not mutually exclusive legal systems, but rather complementary as they have influenced each other, and incorporated aspects of each other.

In customary law there are certain obligations which may not be violated in order to avoid losing honour, whereby a bloodprice (diya) is demanded of an offender who has killed, albeit unvoluntarily. It is also possible to inflict a wound on the offender and ask for compensation. Obligations exist for instance between families for mutual assistance and reciprocal visiting. As villagers tend to be related, this obligation encourages intervillage ties. Greeting a stranger is another mutual obligation, as is hospitality.

Tresspassing on another person's territory on purpose or accidentally gives cause to ask for material indemnity. Quarrelling on somebody else's territory is seen as an insult to the owner and may lead him to seek compensation. Women may place themselves under the protection of a man they trust if they are involved in a dispute with their husband or male relatives and if he agrees to protect her he is held responsible for her safety. The practice of women being escorted by male relatives while travelling should be seen in the light of the

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<sup>17</sup>R.B. Sergeant, "The Zaidis" in A.J. Arberry (ed.), *Religion in the Middle East* ed. II, 1969:285-301, London/Cambridge University Press pg 297, and C. Rathjens, *Taghut gegen Sheri'a* in *Jahrbuch des Lindennuseums Stuttgart* 1951/1:172-187 (pg 174) quoted in Adra 1983.



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following contractual obligation:

*The protection of women is also imperative. It is the greatest dishonor to strike a woman or harm her in any way. This is a responsibility taken seriously by Qaba'il (Adra 1982:187).<sup>18</sup>*

To settle disputes a man is looked for to mediate. Usually mediators are leaders from another tribe or Sada. During the process of trying to reach an agreement, weapons are given into custody to the mediator. Both parties give their word that they will submit to arbitration first and respect the settlement second. After a man has given his word, he has no choice but to comply. Men without honour, or suffering from a loss thereof, are not allowed to testify during settlement procedures.

At present, disputes can also be brought to the Yemeni government and its representatives. These generally uphold Islamic law (shar'ia). Adherents of tribal law may become offended if a case is brought directly to government officials without first being submitted to the local shaykh.

### 3.6.2.

#### *Family and Labour Law*

The Yemen Arab Republic is an Arab state, with Arabic as the national language and Islam the state religion. This means that the country's laws are governed by the shar'ia, the Islamic law based on the Koran and other major sources such as the hadith (Prophet's sayings) and the sunna. Whereas customary law revolves around the concept of honour, Islamic law is concerned with adhering

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<sup>18</sup>During 1985 30 cases of rape were reported in the country. No figures for 1986 are available at present. (CPO 1987:291)

## SITUATION OF WOMEN

to religious principles.

According to Yemeni law, women have the same rights and duties as men. They have been allowed to vote since 1983. Their active participation in politics is, however, extremely limited, possibly owing to prevailing notions regarding the impropriety of drawing attention to themselves in public. A limited number of women has been appointed to political bodies. In theory, any profession is open to them, except for that of law-practitioner and member of parliament.

The Labour Law of 1970 specifies that its regulations apply to both male and female employees, outside government service, who work for a wage following a verbal or written contract. Children under 12 years old may not be employed and women may not work between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., nor should they be employed in occupations that may damage their health. Pregnant women are entitled to 70 days' maternity leave, comprising the period before and after delivery, during which time they are entitled to 70% of their wages. The 40 days' rest-period after delivery has to be observed.

In 1978, the Women's Bureau of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs suggested that certain changes be brought to women's legal entitlements. The suggestions were the following: women should be paid their full wage during maternity leave, as is already the case for female government employees; a pregnant woman should not have to work for more than 6 hours a day; during the first year after delivery, a woman should be entitled to breastfeed for one hour during working hours; at her request, a woman should be granted a two-year leave of absence after delivery, at half her salary; a woman should be allowed a two-year leave without pay "for family reasons"; companies with more than a certain number of female employees should provide a nursery; pregnant and nursing working women should be entitled to periodic medical check-ups.

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These suggestions have not yet been incorporated into the law.

The Family Law has been in effect since 1978. It stipulates that marriage contracts have to be drawn up in the presence of two Moslem witnesses. Contracts are invalid if husband and/or wife have been forced into them. A man can marry up to four wives if he can treat them all equally and fairly. The minimum age of marriage for girls is fifteen.

*Article 20. Consent of a girl is mandatory. The silence of a virgin gives consent and the consent of a girl is by her utterance. The marriage of the adult shall not be concluded without her consent. The marriage of a minor concluded by her agent is valid, provided that she gives consent thereto at the time of wedding. The meeting with the girl in privacy is not permissible, nor her wedding for consummation of marriage unless she is not less than sixteen in years and is apt (fit) for intercourse (Myntti 1979:135).*

A Moslem woman may not marry a non-Moslem (art. 26). The brideprice is agreed upon between the parties concerned and should not exceed the amount set by the state. It should go to the bride. In case of divorce initiated by the man, his wife does not have to retribute this brideprice.<sup>19</sup> After marriage a woman is required to live with her husband and to enable him to have sexual relations with her in private. She is required to obey him and to be responsible for house-work. She should not leave their house without her husband's permission.

*.. whereas the husband is not supposed to prevent her from going out for*

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<sup>19</sup>The high brideprice and the costs of marriage force many people to postpone their wedding. Men are often heard to complain that they will never have enough money to get married.

## SITUATION OF WOMEN

*a legitimate excuse or for what usage may allow, without prejudicing the honor or her duties towards him, and in particular, going out for improving her concerns or carrying out her function (Article 37:4).*

In Article 38, it is stated that when a woman does not feel secure with her husband in the sense that she is afraid of him, either for herself or for her property, or when he does not provide her with living expenses, her consequent behaviour may not be considered inobedient. A woman is entitled to a home, to expenses and clothing and she can expect to be treated on the same basis as other wives, if there are any. Should several wives share one house, it should be large enough for each to feel secure.

Circumstances that may lead to the dissolution of a marriage include differences of opinion regarding religion; insanity or leprosy; one of the spouses embracing Islam while the other does not; failure of a man to provide for his wife; husband's addiction to alcohol; wife's reaching of maturity without consumation of marriage having occurred.

A husband may divorce his wife by saying three times 'you are divorced'. Man and wife may get back together during the following mandatory three-month "waiting-period" to see whether the woman is pregnant. After final divorce the woman is prohibited to him until after she has married and lost - through divorce or death - her subsequent husband. A man is required to pay alimony during the waiting period and until delivery, if she is found to be pregnant.

A child's legitimacy is based on marriage as far as its tie to the father goes, and on the delivery to establish the bond with the mother. Pregnancy is defined to last minimally six months and maximally nine months or more. Mothers are required by law to suckle their children (art. 128). When a

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custodian needs to be appointed, it is done a period of seven years; whether male or female, the custodian must be Moslem.

### 3.7.

#### **some aspects of women's social role**

Most societies have certain rituals by which men and women are encouraged and recognised in the roles expected of them. If dancing is viewed as a symbolic embodiment of certain, commonly-held concepts, it may be revealing concerning the different roles of men and women in a society. Dress and make-up are also ways in which people express themselves and make statements regarding their place of origin, social status, profession, religion etc. In Yemen, changing dresscodes and their implicit meanings for women have hardly been documented and/or analysed. These subjects will be examined briefly below.

#### 3.7.1.

##### *important rituals*

The most important rituals in a Yemeni woman's life are her marriage and the birth of her children. The favourite period for getting married is 'Id Ramadan, the national holiday after the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. Parties are organised for men and women separately, for three days at least, including lunches, qat-chews and dancing. Brides have their superfluous bodyhair removed and sit for hours while a henna specialist decorates their hands, arms, feet and legs. In city weddings, a white, Western-style wedding dress is now fashionable, instead of the traditional richly embroidered ones. Many layers of make-up are put on and the bride's hair is done up elaborately. Thus, she sits on an elevated platform, receiving congratulations and presents from her female friends, who dance for her to music performed by female musicians.

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*The cosmetics, the curls, the crown, the fine white dress, and lavish jewels all combine to make the bride truly transfigured (Dorsky 1986:121).*

In case of divorce, no stigma is usually attached to the woman. People tend to remarry rather quickly and women as well as men have more of a say in the choice of their partner in a subsequent marriage.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.7.2.

#### *tribal dancing*

As it is usually difficult for people to verbalise or even conceptualise the central themes of their culture, one way of exploring these is to look at certain cultural manifestations. In her Ph.D. thesis on the tribal concept in the Central Highlands of Yemen, Adra examines tribal dancing which she views as 'a metaphor of cultural relations'. The two kinds of tribal dancing she mentions - bar'a and li'ba - are viewed as expressions of two of the major leitmotifs of the tribal concepts: one revolving around cooperation and the other around individuality. They are seen as expressions of two themes in the tribal concept: one dealing with cooperation and the other with individuality.

*Of these two genres of dancing, one of them, bar'a, simultaneously symbolizes the tribe and represents qabyala. The second, li'ba, represents the realm of the personal and its association (Adra 1982:238).*

Bar'a dances are group dances, where it is extremely hard to tell who leads movements and footsteps: a supreme example of tight-knit cooperation where the

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<sup>20</sup>Although a man is legally allowed to marry up to four wives at a time, this is not so common in Yemen. The 1975 census found that 95% of men were married to only one woman, though that does not have any bearing on the actual number of marriages (CPO 1987:41).

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outside observer cannot, except with great difficulty, detect the "ring-leader". Women do not participate in bar'a dances, but are active in li'ba dancing.

Li'ba dances are organised to celebrate weddings and births, but also at family gatherings. In an informal family atmosphere, when no outsiders are present, men and women may dance together. At any time, there will always be two people involved in li'ba dancing while others watch. The dance requires intricate footsteps and movements, and usually lasts some ten to twenty minutes. Adra found that in Ahjur, where she did her fieldwork, there were "traditional" and "modern" liba'a dances; but the "modern" Ahjur dance was considered "traditional" by Sana'ni standards.

### 3.7.3.

#### *dress and make-up*

In the city, women attending women's parties arrive in their best clothes, wearing elaborate jewelry and much perfume. They can be observed to wear earrings of considerable size, a necklace, rings and bracelets, hand arrangements which look like a glove and maybe even a belt, all of gold which has become much more popular than the traditional Yemeni silver that is still to be seen in the countryside, however.

Dresses at city parties are made of colourful materials, usually the popular, comfortable ankle-length loose-falling skirts (dir') with a matching underskirt. Women also like to apply henna to their hands and feet, especially for wedding-parties, religious holidays and other festive occasions. The decoration, whether with red or black henna is called nagsh. Each area has its distinctive nagsh patterns which are often reminiscent of decorations on buildings as well as of embroidery patterns on local dresses. For special

## SITUATION OF WOMEN

occasions henna specialists are employed, for instance in preparing a bride for her wedding. A sum of 200 Riyal for decorating the hands, and 800 YR for hands, arms, feet and legs are normal prices in 1987 in Sana'a and Hodeidah.

Ordinary dress for rural women consists of a pair of baggy pants with simple to very elaborate embroidery at the bottom of the legs. On top of these they wear dresses with fullpleated skirts made from artificial materials in varying lengths according to the area. Women's clothes are made at home or by a seamstress who might charge from 40 YR in rural to 100 YR in urban areas for a dress.

In cities and towns many women wear a sharshaf when leaving the compound. It consist of a black pleated skirt, a black cloth covering the face and tied around the head, and a black jacket which is also tied around the head and covers the upper part of the body. When visiting the sharshaf is often not removed, the black cloth covering the veiled face will be thrown backward over the head.



## **Chapter 4: RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ACTIVITIES**

### **4.1.**

#### **introduction**

In the light of the general overview of the lives of Yemeni women given in the preceding chapters, it is now necessary to combine the data and arrive at some recommendations regarding WAD activities. When designing such schemes, the most likely target group would be rural women as more than 80% of the population still lives in rural areas<sup>0000</sup>. It can be safely assumed that the overwhelming majority of these women have not been formally educated, and that the percentage of their daughters who are/will attend school is likely to be small both in absolute terms and also compared to boys.

These women live in a rapidly changing society, in which Islam as well as traditional (which does not necessarily imply conservative) ideas and values are still very influential. As Yemen is still a society where gender-segregation is quite strict it is suggested that men's ideas and responsibilities are involved in the formulation of WAD activities so as not to upset the delicate balance between male and female worlds. It would, for instance, be of little use to direct a pregnant woman to visit a health centre for ante-natal checkups if her husband did not approve her visits and was not properly informed and/or notified.

I will argue below that the priority for rural women lies in reducing her workload and improving her working conditions. There may then be the time and energy needed for activities in extension, education and health. I do not see income-generating work as very important at this stage for rural women,

## RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

although care should be taken not to undermine existing income-earning possibilities such as selling agricultural produce, livestock rearing and selling, and ancillary activities such as the sale of dungcakes, etc.

4.2.

### **perceived priorities for rural women**

In 3.2., we have already seen that 70 - 75% of all agricultural work in Yemen is carried out by women. Whether or not these figures are totally accurate is less important than the overall fact that women play a major part in agriculture which cannot be ignored. In the light of the official Yemeni policy target of food self-sufficiency, this is made only the more important.

Any activities or changes undertaken in the area of agriculture and livestock will necessarily have a substantial impact on women, directly or indirectly. At present, the exact nature of this impact is difficult to assess due to a paucity of reliable data. However, basing oneself on developments in other parts of the world, where subsistence farming has given way to commercial agriculture, one could surmise that similarly a parallel trend in Yemen could lead to the increasing marginalisation as well as "domestication" of women.

In the process of marginalisation, women may lose existing decision-making powers over land use, livestock, produce, income from farming produce, farming methods and their resulting "domestication" entail the strengthening of their role as spouses, homemakers and childbearers at the expense of, say, influence in the community and personal mobility.

Considering the importance both of agriculture and livestock as such as well as women's contribution to them, WAD activities in Yemen would probably do best to be integrated into rural development projects. In the 1985 discussion

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paper *Women's Involvement and the Netherlands Development Cooperation with the Yemen Arab Republic* the idea was put forward to consider seconding a female expert in rural development at the Yemeni Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries by the Dutch government. It is recommended to reconsider this suggestion.

In examining how women's workloads may be reduced and their working conditions improved, attention should be given to sanitation, domestic energy, livestock, agricultural work and the drain on their energy and wellbeing by repeated and short-spaced pregnancies. Although each aspect will be dealt with separately below, all of them should be seen in their inter-relatedness to each other.

### 4.2.1.

#### *domestic water use and sanitation*

As the 1986 Dutch WAD mission noted, women's needs and wishes are hardly ever taken into account in the planning, implementation and evaluation of water-related projects (DGIS 1987a:3); and furthermore, as we have seen, data on both women's knowledge and workload regarding domestic water use and sanitation are relatively scarce. Attempts at including local women in the design of waterprojects should be expanded. It is suggested that a female expert on health education be appointed preferably a speaker of Arabic with experience in water and sanitation; she could be attached to an existing project assisted by occasional support from a social scientist. Alternatively, a social scientist could be appointed and receive support from a health educator. In either case, the person would explore the potential, nature and scope of involving women in different phases of waterprojects.

In the Environmental Health Education Section of the Ministry of Municipalities and Housing efforts have increased recently to design health

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educational materials in the field of domestic water use, hygiene and sanitation adapted to the Yemeni situation. These efforts could be supported on a national and/or governorate level in order to design, test and distribute simple, direct and relevant messages centered around a major point.

### 4.2.2.

#### *domestic energy*

The cooking fuels used in Yemen vary from firewood, sorghum stalks, cow and sheep dungcakes (the last are preferred), to butagas and kerosene. The different types of fuel are used to varying degrees in different areas, according to availability: in the Central Highlands, for instance, dungcakes are used extensively, while in the Tihama the use of sorghum stalks in the rural areas and kerosene in poor urban areas is more common.

Firewood is inevitably becoming increasingly scarce, driving women to walk farther in its search, although it is possible to buy it by the truckload. This is, of course, expensive, especially as firewood is particularly liked for baking bread owing to the flavour it imparts. Thus, in some areas, tree-planting campaigns might be very useful. Involvement of women in these campaigns may be made more visible, for instance, by explicitly making them a target group, by designing campaigns aimed at them, by educating the general public about women's important role in caring for and using trees, by advocating the planting of trees that grow quickly close to settlements etc.

Worldwide, insight has developed rapidly regarding the link between women and

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the state of the environment.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is seen as very important that possible (Dutch) support (looked into by a mission in November 1987) to the 1987 established *Environmental Protection Council* includes WAD expertise.

An experiment that might be worth trying would be to have bread baked on a communal basis for consumption by individual households. This could save energy, lessen women's workload and still satisfy the preference for bread baked in the traditional way. Moreover, it could create an opportunity to generate income for the women involved in the baking.

As butagas is increasingly used for cooking in the cities, the possibility for introducing energy-saving butagas stoves could be further explored in cooperation with Sana'a University. The rapidly expanding market contributes to an irregular supply which might be lessened, for the time being, by improved distribution of gas cylinders. The question whether the gas recovered as byproduct of oil exploration could be bottled for use in cooking is presently being looked into by the Household Fuel Marketing Study, financed by the World Bank and The Netherlands.

### 4.2.3.

#### *livestock*

Many houwe cows in Yemen are handfed, usually by women. Some attribute this to the poor protein and phosphor content of the cows' diet, whose appetites are reduced to the extent that they will not eat by themselves. Others claim that

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<sup>1</sup>The interested reader is referred to, for instance:  
Irene Dankelman and Joan Davidson (eds.), *Women and Environment: Alliance for a Sustainable Future* MUNYAKHO, London, Earthscan, 1988  
Dorothy K. Munyakho (ed.), *Women and the Environmental Crisis, Forum 1985* (A report of the proceedings of the workshops on Women, Environment & Development July 10-20, 1985 Nairobi, Kenya) Environment Liaison Centre, Nairobi, 1985

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the reasons are cultural, in that over time, both people and cows have come to expect this behaviour. Whatever the reason, collecting fodder and feeding cows may take anywhere from 4 to 8 hours per day.

Experiments conducted around Dhamar with supplementary feeding of meat and bonemeal supplied by the Sana'a slaughterhouse have had very encouraging results, with substantial increases in milkyields, shorter intervals between calving and the cow's increased appetite.<sup>2</sup> As not enough meat and bonemeal could be produced to supplement the diet of all needy cows, other experiments have been carried out combining wheatbran (byproduct of Red Sea Flour Mills in Hodeidah) and urea. More data are needed however, for instance on the impact of this supplementary food on the effect on women's workload and the composition of dung.<sup>3</sup>

Sheepfattening by women also deserves further attention. It has been noted that the quality of food given to sheep should be yielding a higher growth rate than the one currently registered: this might be due to spilling and the inefficient use of the food as a result of health problems. However, more research is needed before more conclusive statements can be made although

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<sup>2</sup>See YAR/MAF/CHRD, *A review of the possibilities for increasing animal production in the Montane Plains of the Central Highlands Rural Development Project*, Publication No. 112, ODA, 1986 and *Supplementation of the housecow in the Yemen Arab Republic II. The effect of supplement (meat and bone meal) upon milk yield at various stages of lactation*, Publication No. 130, ODA, 1987

For a discussion of the economic aspects of keeping a housecow YAR/MAF/CHRD *Economic aspects of traditional and non-traditional house-cow management in the Yemen Arab Republic* Publication No. 118 ODA/1987

<sup>3</sup>It should be remembered that producing dungcakes is an activity with economic value for women. Dungcakes may reduce expenditures on otherwise required sources of fuel, provide an income in cash through sales or may be used in an exchange of services. A deterioration in dung composition may endanger this source of income for women.

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altering the design/lay-out of sheep stables has already been suggested to alleviate food spillage.

Contrary to current documentation in which shepmilking is reported to be a rare occurrence, Maarse has found that 80% of the households keeping sheep in the Central Highlands milk their sheep. She suggests that a simple labour saving device for milk separation could be tried out in a limited area (personal communication L. Maarse).

It is important to remember that both the fattening and the milking of sheep are income-generating activities for women. Building on that and improving current hygiene and maintenance standards (animals are generally kept in the dark groundfloor of houses with resulting risks to the health of all its occupants) might be one avenue of work to pursue in improving rural women's situations.

### 4.2.4.

#### *agriculture*

Women's agricultural activities differ per area according to a variety of factors such as on the source of irrigation, income from migrant labour, the presence or absence of males, the kind of crops grown as well as the nature of agricultural production, i.e., subsistence or commercial farming. Relatively little systematic information on women's workload, production methods etc. has been collected.

In a Workshop on Women in Agriculture hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and organised in cooperation with UNDP on April 9, 1988, a

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number of observations were mentioned.<sup>4</sup> First and foremost, in areas where they play a large role in agriculture, women tend to work in traditional ways, while in those where there is prominent presence of men, the introduction of modern techniques and machinery is more likely. A related issue involves the transition from subsistence to commercial farming. In the former, women have more say over the choice of crops grown and production methods, including decisions about ploughing, sowing and harvesting. Where commercial farming prevails, men tend to be the main decision-makers in all aspects of production with women employed as casual labourers. Diminishing emphasis on subsistence farming may also influence dietary patterns negatively, especially when once unnecessary cash to buy food is - temporarily - unavailable.

Rural women have mentioned the following as their least productive and most timeconsuming tasks: grinding grains by hand, hauling water, collecting fuel and making dungcakes, gathering fresh fodder, handfeeding sorghum stalks to cows, manually processing milk into butter, threshing and winnowing grain. Efforts to lighten these tasks should therefore receive priority (personal communication H. Dubok).

At present, no female students are allowed to enroll at the Secondary Agricultural Institutes in Yemen and women interested in studying agriculture and agricultural extension need to travel abroad. Extension workers tend to be able to work most effectively in their home area, yet among the still small group of families that agrees to such a training for their young women, there is little or no enthusiasm for them to be trained abroad. Establishing a combined institute/boarding school for training women in different aspects of

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<sup>4</sup>See for a report J. Buringa 1988d



## RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

rural development could be a very valuable contribution to solving the dilemma of how to approach and involve rural women in agricultural modernisation.

### 4.2.5.

#### *childspacing*

Owing to the sensitive nature of the subject issues related to population policy easily give rise to heated arguments. Islamic scholars still disagree about whether the Koran supports or opposes the use of contraceptives. In Yemen, children are seen as a gift from God. They are loved by their fathers, mothers, relatives, neighbours and a life without children is unthinkable; for women, having children is essential for their status. Yet, bearing and raising a child is hard work, particularly for people living on a subsistence level.

Delivery complications may be caused by pregnancy at a young age. Many repeated pregnancies, without adequate time for the mother to recuperate, may reduce a child's chances of survival as well as pose a threat to the mother's health and wellbeing. Spacing of births may reverse this process by stimulating the birth of fewer, yet possibly stronger and healthier babies to women with more energy.

At present, it is common usage that married women desiring contraceptives need permission from their husbands. Supplies are both irregular and partial, in the sense that not all existing methods are available. There is a lack of trained Yemeni female family planning advisors. Knowledge about possible ways to delay pregnancy may be imported by migrant workers from abroad, yet can be quite incomplete. Women may travel long distances to obtain contraception, but it is not known whether this is due to the lack of other suppliers closer by or because they prefer the relative anonymity of a large city hospital for example.

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The Yemeni Family Planning Association, which generally supplies the country with contraceptives has begun charging clients. The impact of this relatively recent measure on women's use of contraceptives has not been documented. Most recent information on knowledge, attitudes and practices surrounding child-spacing dates from 1980 and the topic cannot be discussed frankly. Considering the potential benefit to the health of women by enlarging the interval between pregnancies might constitute a useful activity.

Experience in other areas of the world has shown, however, that neither the availability of materials nor the presence of trained personnel is sufficient for the success of a family planning campaign, as the reasons for which people decide, whether actively or passively, on any particular number of children tend to be very complex. As long as infant mortality rates remain high, women's status continues to depend on the number of children they bear, parents still depend on children in old age, children are needed for their labour, people will not be inclined to be persuaded to limit their fertility. More insight is needed into the Yemeni situation.

### 4.3.

#### stimulating Yemeni expertise on WAD

As women working in Yemeni ministries and institutions do not normally have the expertise - alongside the skills in their particular area of work - to analyse proposals or formulate their own (possibly based on some research), UNFPA has designed a project to upgrade the management skills of eight high-level female ministry officials in the area of women, population and development. Following the implementation of this project, in which people will also be trained at middle and lower levels, it is hoped that the Women's Section of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs will be capable of

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designing, implementing and coordinating WAD projects. An inter-ministerial steering committee consisting of the eight women mentioned has already been appointed.

### 4.3.1.

#### *documentation centre on women*

When this research project started, I and others involved had assumed that information on women's lives in Yemen would be quite scarce. After visiting donor organisations and a number of Yemeni libraries, I found the reverse to be true, although access is admittedly difficult as the literature tends to be scattered around.

As little analysis has been made of the many descriptive accounts one can find, and in order to increase accessibility to these records, one useful recommendation would be to establish a documentation centre on women. The most important documents would be translated into Arabic or into English, depending on their language of origin to reach a maximum number of interested people. Funds should also be made available to photocopy or buy relevant materials that are not donated. Attaching such a centre to the Yemeni Centre for Research Studies should be considered.

### 4.3.2.

#### *networking*

To stimulate the exchange of knowledge and information, Oxfam has fielded the idea of starting an informal network of Yemeni and expatriate women interested in WAD issues; most of these women feel the need for more ideas as well as theoretical concepts to debate on the subject but their insights tend to be limited to their particular disciplines or areas of work. A bilingual newsletter (English/Arabic) could be produced and distributed which any of the

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participants could contribute to.

Ideally, a Yemeni woman would be the coordinator and stimulator of such a network. Internal discussions within Oxfam to fund such a person have not yet led to a decision. Should Oxfam decide against it and/or in case no suitable Yemeni woman can be found, maybe an expatriate woman could be hired for this task. She would need to be a good communicator and networker. Theoretical knowledge of WAD issues and a personal commitment would be essential characteristics of such a person.

### 4.3.3.

#### *research training*

Studies on aspects of women's life in Yemen are invariably conducted by expatriate women, at most assisted by a Yemeni translator. Policy makers therefore have to rely on insights generated by outsiders. It could be highly beneficial both for interpreting data collected by others as well as for carrying out and/or supervising further research to organise a possibly part-time course on research methodology for Yemeni women, several of whom in policy-making positions have expressed an interest in such a training.

In the meantime information continues to be collected in many projects on a wide variety of topics. Expatriate employees work with translators/assistants (who might be expatriates themselves) in the absence of trained counterparts. Several women have suggested organising workshops for these assistants to train them in observation and interview techniques, including when and how to summarise what both parties are saying. Such a workshop could be open to assistants from any project and separate training could be organised for male and female assistants. It might be useful to send an identification mission to Yemen to explore the possibilities of initiating such part-time research

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assistance training.

### *training in WAD issues*

Active recruitment is recommended to interested female government employees who could benefit from graduate studies in WAD, such as those organised by the Institute for Social Studies in The Hague, for instance; all female contacts in ministries and projects should receive the relevant documentation and be requested to supply names of possible candidates for such a degree.

#### 4.4.

##### **other possibilities for development cooperation**

We have seen that in order to contribute to a structural improvement to the position of rural Yemeni women, priority has been given to reducing their workload, and also that subsequent educational and extension activities targeted at these women with more time and energy could be successful. However, further possibilities for development cooperation - besides workload reduction and stimulating Yemeni expertise on WAD - are also available and they are listed below.

##### 4.4.1.

###### *income-generating activities*

In an interesting article, Mayra Buvinic<sup>5</sup> sums up the main reasons why so many income-generating projects (implying the teaching of new skills or the upgrading of traditional ones) for women in developing nations go astray and deteriorate into welfare projects (i.e., literacy courses) over time and it may be useful here to recapitulate her main points.

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<sup>5</sup>Mayra Buvinic, *Projects for Women in the Third World: Explaining their Misbehaviour*, *World Development*, Vol. 14, No. 5, pp. 653-664

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Firstly, these projects are implemented on a small scale with limited funds. Secondly, they call for simple tasks related to cooking, sewing, knitting, embroidery etc. which women are assumed to be good at even though they might be in greater need of advice on how to grow certain new crops, for instance. Thirdly, staff often consists of female volunteers who are not paid or underpaid, undermining the status of both the work and the project. Lastly, projects are run on a participatory basis: women who need to make money have no time for long discussions. It goes without saying that implementing agencies bear a historical responsibility for such a phenomenon, as Buvinic points out:

*The misbehavior of development projects for low-income women has historical roots in the creation of separate economic development and relief agencies after World War II, and is a function of three related factors: a particular project style that is conducive to the execution of social rather than productive tasks; the expertise in welfare matters of institutions that implement this project style; and the low budgets needed for, and small perceived social and financial risks of, welfare action as compared to anti-poverty and equity interventions (Buvinic 1986:661).*

Although Buvinic sees major strengths in women-only institutions, she pleads for project implementation through integrated development institutions, in order not to marginalize women further.

### *handicrafts*

Handicrafts are often regarded as a great potential income-generating activity for women, with the ever-increasing flocks of tourists to Yemen buying the resulting products. However, tourism itself is an uncertain trade and there is

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a limit to the volume of goods that can be marketed. Furthermore, Yemeni rural society does not lack cash in the sense that many other developing nations do. Income-generating projects (possibly increasing women's workloads) are not necessarily what rural Yemeni women need most.

Although the government-run Tourist Corporation has been collecting and selling handicrafts to tourists for some time, alongside the growing number of private businesses, there are still products that are not reaching their potential buyers. Before introducing any new handicrafts projects, it would be useful to draw upon an inventory of what is already produced in cooperation with the Tourist Corporation. Female manufacturers tend to receive a rather low remuneration for their work while the middlemen may make a handsome profit. One could investigate the possibility of a marketing system of handicrafts, which by-passes these and gives the women producers a higher price for their products. For example, the YWA in Ta'iz has its own shop.

A possible problem with handicrafts or any income-generating activities is that should it become lucrative, it could be "hijacked" out of the women's hands by the men. Moreover, it is not known whether women have any say over the use of the money they make. A further consideration is that handicrafts are rarely cost-effective. Producers are usually paid only minimal wages to guarantee a final market price which will attract buyers.

Finally, in designing handicrafts projects, social acceptability should be kept in mind as well. A project is doomed to failure from the beginning, when tasks are expected of women which are totally unacceptable in the society. It is sometimes postulated that in a modern society rural women should not be working in agriculture, which is seen as men's work, but should be housewives and mothers that could earn some extra money by producing handicrafts. As we

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have seen, 68% of the female population over 10 years old is economically active. It will be clear that the handicrafts manufacture will never be able to offer employment for all these women, which means that attention should be focussed on existing income-generating and other economically viable activities.

### *textiles manufacture*

Walking around the shopping areas of Yemeni cities it is abundantly clear that almost all women's clothes and clothes-fabrics are imported, whether from Indonesia, North Africa or Japan. A feasibility study could perhaps be done to determine whether demand could be satisfied at least partially by setting up a local production facility: the study would have to investigate such issues as volume of demand, target audience, design preferences etc.

As there are no industrially-manufactured clothes made in Yemen, most Yemeni women either sew their own clothes or have them made. Factory production would probably be bought by urban women in the middle-to-higher social echelons. Contacts could be made with the textile factory in Sana'a to see whether its products could be used, though it is possible that their quality needs to be improved. This would certainly fit in with the policies of self-sufficiency the Yemeni government is trying to promote and it could also create employment at different levels for Yemeni women. Once local demand for such production has been secured, outlets abroad might be sought for dresses with a Yemeni touch.

### *women in the formal sector*

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs would like to see an increase in the participation of (educated) women in the country's labour-force. However, the scarcity of daycare centres and kindergartens is a major obstacle for women



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with children who wish to work. When necessary, expertise might be provided in teacher training and technical expertise.

For illiterate women who are employed within the formal sector, literacy courses could be encouraged under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, thus providing the same service to female as to male employees. Unicef should be involved in this endeavor as they regard female education a big priority.

### 4.4.2.

#### *health education*

Both Yemeni officials and donor organisations place great emphasis on health education, which is the domain of the Ministry of Health (MOH) as well as the Ministry of Municipalities and Housing (MMH). Regionally, health education activities are administered through the local or governorate-level Health Office, while environmentally-related work is the responsibility of the local municipality. These two major health educational channels do not work well together yet which leads to inefficient use of equipment, funds, materials, manpower etc. Given that health education is a relatively recent phenomenon in Yemen, experience with necessarily long-term efforts to change people's behaviour remains quite limited.

As well-trained Yemeni health educators are in short supply, efforts should be made to recruit suitable candidates for training abroad and to explore the possibility of starting up a local training course for both female and male health educators. There is no need to turn these into film-makers or cartoonists, as such people can be hired. What is important is that they should be good communicators who can put across messages effectively. One educator who succeeds in conveying a health message is more valuable than a large supply of video cameras. Appropriate messages would need to be defined,

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and a suitable methodology formulated, one that preferably builds on existing beliefs and concepts. Both messages and methodology would have to be regularly evaluated.

Furthermore, it might be desirable to set up a health education network, where participants could share their experiences with different types of health education materials, approaches etc., and the feasibility of such an endeavour should be seriously examined. Such a network could help establish work as well as research priorities to enhance the effectiveness of health education messages.

A variety of approaches might be considered to reach specifically female audiences e.g. the use of poems containing health education messages broadcasted on local radio, at appropriate times; these programmes could also be distributed on cassette tapes during women's parties. Local "adaptations" would probably have to be made whereby a message would have to be placed in a locally-known context and delivered in local dialect.<sup>6</sup>

In the environmental health education sector, teaching materials are needed for courses for extension workers, health educators, primary health care workers, teachers etc. Once again it has to be stressed that all such materials should draw on local knowledge, concepts and beliefs and respond to a locally felt need. Finally, a further possible avenue of work would be to consider supporting the build-up of an institutional framework for health education by supporting health educators at governorate level.

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<sup>6</sup>For a description of such an experiment please consult Christine Ansell & Robert Burrowes, *Communicating hygiene/sanitation messages to villagers: an experiment in Wadi Ayyan, Sana'a/Save the Children Federation, 1981*

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### 4.4.3.

#### *education*

Though several donor organisations have accorded priority to both formal and informal education in development cooperation activities, from the perspective of rural women, education is unlikely to be seen as essential, primarily because current workloads do not leave much time or energy for learning new skills. Further constraints to the 'push' for education lie in the logistical difficulties, mainly a shortage of classrooms and severe lack of trained female Yemeni teachers.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the possibility should be looked into of providing a brief teacher training and supervision for those female secondary school graduates, who are required to do one year of primary school teaching.

## **Chapter 5: RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING RESEARCH**

### **5.1.**

#### **introduction**

In this chapter, recommendations are made concerning research topics which should be pursued if a solid formulation of a WAD strategy is to be arrived at in Yemen. The conducting of such research may or may not be possible for development workers attached to projects in Yemen owing to lack of time or expertise, or both.

### **5.2.**

#### **data collection**

The Dutch WAD mission of November 1986 reported the need for assistance in the "formulation, operationalisation and analysis of research questions" (1987a:6). This statement was based on a request made by a number of Dutch women working in Yemen who felt, that in general, data collection with reference to WAD would be done by them rather than by bringing in social scientists.

In order to increase data collection skills, a two-day workshop on interview and observation techniques was organised in October 1987<sup>1</sup> for women working in Dutch-funded projects. Although it went very well and women from other organisations and institutions repeatedly asked whether such a workshop could also be held for them, there was in fact no feedback by the workshop trainees

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<sup>1</sup>For a report of this workshop, see J. Buringa 1988c.

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who had been expected to put their newly-acquired knowledge of these techniques into practice in their project areas.

Considering the disappointing results of this experiment in terms of collecting additional data on aspects of women's lives by women already working in projects, it is recommended that researchers be specifically hired for such tasks. Factors contributing to the lack of response include the limited knowledge regarding research skills, the writing-up and analysis of data, the difficulties in formulating appropriate and relevant questions combined with a full time job. Moreover, while going over the kind of questions that arose, it became obvious that these did not usually become clear until most of the regular contract period was over.

A sector specialist on WAD in the Dutch Embassy could see to it that Yemeni women's interests in Dutch-funded projects would be incorporated into all phases of a project. She would be alert to the necessity of further research and could stimulate projects, the embassy and consultants to follow up on these needs in close cooperation with Yemeni ministries and institutions. Should she lack either the necessary research expertise or time, a consultant could be hired to support her.

### 5.3.

#### research related to WAD priorities

In the previous chapter priority for improving rural women's position was given to reducing their workload in combination with improving their working conditions. Recommendations for research related to the five specific areas identified are listed below.

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### 5.3.1.

#### *domestic water use and sanitation*

The Dutch WAD mission of November 1986 noted that women's needs and wishes were hardly ever taken into account in the planning, implementation and evaluation of water-related projects (DGIS 1987a:3) and that data on women's knowledge of and workload regarding domestic water use and sanitation are relatively scarce.

Hence, there is a need for the collection of relevant data that can be used in existing and/or new water projects with a domestic component. Information should be sought on women's knowledge, attitudes, wishes and needs, and their sanitary practices and beliefs. These could be used to design appropriate and acceptable drinking water and sanitary provisions as well as health education messages.

Relevant questions to consider would be: what do women do with their extra time when they do not need to be fetching water? What are the possible social benefits to women of collecting their daily water supply? Do they enjoy the opportunity of fetching water to exchange news with friends and neighbours? Or do they like to be away from their house/village for a while? Are they interested to be trained to do maintenance and repair? How is water currently transported, stored and used?

### 5.3.2.

#### *domestic energy*

Given our knowledge of the domestic fuel issue, it would be useful to explore further a number of questions, such as what, for example, is the influence on the financial dynamics of a household when increasing affluence leads to the use of butagas, thus possibly removing a source of income for the women who

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previously made dung-cakes? Also, how does the resulting spare time get used? Concerning firewood, the price of which is rising as supply decreases, it might be relevant to follow up on the findings of Beatty and Van Dijk: how much time does wood collection take? Why does it vary from village to village? How long do supplies last?

5.3.3.

### *livestock*

Further study is necessary concerning the social aspects of interventions such as supplementary cow feeding and the cultural aspects of handfeeding. What would women do with increased spare time? How would a possible change in composition of the dung affect its suitability for making dungcakes? What about the loss of a social function as feeding cows tends to take place in small groups? Are women open to learning new things about their cows?

As for sheep fattening and milking, it might be useful to investigate the relationship between these essentially female activities and general developments in the agricultural/livestock sector such as increasing affluence and a shift from subsistence to commercial farming.

Most rural households keep a few chickens which are cared for by women. Industrial poultry production has seen a tremendous increase in recent years, with all the necessary ancillary services such as vaccines and advice. Due to constraints on women's opportunity to travel, and vested economic interests in large-scale poultry production, women do not benefit much from professional expertise on poultry. Could more be done to reach them? What type of poultry extension messages should be targeted at the household level? These are some of the issues that might be examined.

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### 5.3.4.

#### *agriculture*

A study is needed to document precisely women's workload in agriculture, combined with their other tasks and specifically indicating the impact of newly-introduced changes such as mechanisation, type of irrigation used, presence/absence/return of male household members etc.

No systematic data have been collected concerning the influence of increasing cash-crop production on women's work and decision making power. As we have seen, women in households engaged in subsistence agriculture tend to make their own decisions regarding their farming; and when cashcrops are introduced, men take the decisions. Women then become casual labourers at allegedly lower wages than their male counterparts. What is the influence of men's increased cash on women in this transition between subsistence and commercial agriculture? It has also been observed for instance, that in areas with much cash-cropping, home fattening of sheep decreases significantly. The influence of cashcrops replacing crops grown for household use on nutrition also needs to be looked into.

The influence of large-scale irrigation on women's workload merits attention. Increased cultivation of qat (an almost totally male activity) has allegedly led to a decrease in women's workload: less land is cultivated with crops in which production women participate. Apparently, women's workloads have increased the most in areas where tubewell irrigation has been introduced.<sup>2</sup> The impact of male migration shows regional variation and depends also on the type of agriculture practiced (ibid:35). It would be very interesting to study the

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<sup>2</sup>Najwa Adra, *The Impact of Male Migration on Women's Roles in Agriculture in the Yemen Arab Republic*, Sana'a, 1983, page 33



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influence of returning men on agriculture division of labour and women's decision-making power at this stage.

5.3.5.

### *child-spacing*

Considering that the last national report on child-spacing is almost ten years old, it might be time to update existing information with a so-called KAP (knowledge/attitude/practices) study. Because we are interested in rural women, they should be explicitly included in such a study.

5.4.

### **other suggested research topics**

5.4.1.

#### *health*

Reducing women's workload in rural areas may be of great potential benefit to women's health and, consequently, to that of their children. Nevertheless, the subject should not be approached solely from the perspective of women as caretakers of their children; their health must be an issue in its own right.

#### nutrition

Yemeni dietary patterns are inevitably changing with the introduction and increasing consumption of tinned foods and the greater availability and variety of vegetables and fruits. Large quantities of refined white flour and refined rice are imported, while soft drinks, biscuits and candy are increasingly developing into staple foods.

Despite the general preference for local foods, cultivation of traditional staples, such as sorghum, barley and wheat, is decreasing as subsistence

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agriculture increasingly gives way to cash crop farming. The ramifications of this change should be investigated with regard to women. How does it affect them as food providers? How does it affect their diet? What are the levels of malnutrition and anaemia among women and are these being influenced by the above-mentioned changes?

### malnutrition among children

Malnutrition among children is a widespread problem in Yemen. In a recently completed study examining the determinants of childhood malnutrition in four villages of the Dhamar governorate, Beatty and Van Dijk established a number of facts, including the following: that malnutrition is the outcome of a "multicausal process"; that the antenatal period and first year of a child's life are high-risk periods; that both parents can contribute in different ways to preventing malnutrition in their child and therefore nutritional messages should be aimed at both; and that literacy and wealth positively correlate with better nutritional status (Beatty and Van Dijk 1987:244-45).

Given the impact of women's workload on their children's nutritional status (a statistical correlation was established between the length of time the mother spends away from her child and the likelihood of the child becoming malnourished), the authors recommended that efforts be made to diminish this workload; however, they were also fully aware that some of their recommendations to help prevent some of the health hazards currently posed by certain practices would actually increase the women's workload.

All the same, a major result of the study which generated a wealth of information was to highlight how much more needs to be known before clear guidelines can be established. Thus, for instance, it would be useful to carry out further research into the causes of diarrhea in young children, given the

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impact of gastroenteritis on malnutrition. Also, owing to the correlations found between birth-size and an infant's nutritional status, studying the antenatal period in detail might be enlightening (ibid: 290-294).

### therapy choice

Educational messages will have difficulty coming across when they are formulated outside the frame of reference of the target group. It is therefore important to come to a detailed understanding of prevailing conceptions about the causes of health and illness. At which point do people decide to consult somebody about a perceived physical problem? And whom are they consulting, a traditional healer (which kind), a primary health care worker, a private doctor, a health centre, a midwife, a doctor, the hospital or a pharmacist? It may be very useful to have insight into the mechanisms involved in making this decision to consult a health worker.

It is suggested to investigate the possibilities for reintroducing traditional health care, including herbal knowledge, through health centres. For many Yemenis, who consider almost any health worker (traditional or modern, trained or untrained) as a doctor, the different services offered can be very confusing. A drugstore keeper without any training, who prescribes a plastic bag full of drugs to an unseen patient (quite possibly female), may be judged as more competent than a western-trained health worker who holds a long speech about preventive behaviour to his/her client.<sup>3</sup> Related to this study are

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<sup>3</sup>Drugs are a problem in themselves. Officially available only on prescription, they are very easy to obtain without one. To keep up a good image, many health workers prescribe a great variety of drugs. A study in the use and abuse of drugs, the understanding of the local population about its possibilities and pitfalls could serve a useful purpose in educational activities. Drugs are often stored in private homes under inadequate temperatures and beyond their expiry date.

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questions on habits regarding drug use and storage, in the light of widespread illiteracy (esp. among women who administer drugs to themselves and their children) and prescriptions/sales without proper examination of women.

### 5.4.2.

#### *intra-household structure*

The Dutch WAD mission reported that

*Many project planners, project staff and government officials expressed the need for further insight and knowledge into intra-household division of tasks and responsibilities, including decisionmaking, expenditure of income of women, and the changes therein resulting from recent developments in the Yemeni society (Netherlands 1987a:4).*

Interest in intra-household structures is based on the relatively recent realisation that households are not necessarily harmonious units with common goals and interests. Household members may have conflicting interests, which may be influenced by developments on a macro-level. Gaining insight into such mechanisms and their impact on developments at household level could be of great relevance to development planners.

The mission suggested that women currently working within Dutch-funded projects should gather more data on this topic. However, before embarking on this it is essential to specify exactly how to address the issue. Given the rapid rate of socio-economic change in Yemen and the relative scarcity of information documenting how such change is affecting relationships between household members, a number of questions can already be formulated.

For instance, what is the influence of cash-cropping (where men take the

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decisions and make more money) on women's sheep-fattening activities? Or on subsistence farming? On nutritional intake? Do women benefit by the introduction of cash into a "subsistence" household and how? Does a woman's position within the household change after, say, she has taken a literacy course? Another area of interest concerns decision-making on health matters. Who in the household decides when it is time to take a sick child to a health centre of hospital? Can the decision, if taken, be implemented? If not, why not? These and other questions could be examined to help clarify what impact developments on a national scale have on an individual level.

### 5.4.3.

#### *socialisation of children*

Little is known about the socialisation of children. The most far-reaching study relevant to children's socialisation in Yemen was done by Nadeem Ashuraey<sup>4</sup> who focused on adolescents and culture. Male and female students in secondary schools, teacher training institutes, religious and vocational schools were asked to participate in psychological tests to gain insight into their ideas and feelings about education, their future, relationships, sexuality, family, themselves and society. A number of his findings may be interesting to pursue with some further research.

For example, he found that female students are more likely to be encouraged by their mothers than male students (32% to 14%), while more females (40%) than males (14%) receive no encouragement at all. When looking at students' plans for the future, 42% of the females reported disagreement with their fathers, against only 15% for males; female students were also more at odds with their

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<sup>4</sup>Nadeem Ashuraey, *Adolescents and Culture in Yemen*, Ph.D. Thesis. Boston University, 1986

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mothers about their decisions (31%) than male students (11%) (Ashuraey 1986:162-163).

In reply to a question trying to uncover the participants "ideology" which asked why life in Yemen is better than elsewhere, religion and tradition were cited most often. Women's behaviour, the code on sexual relationships and the kind of relationships with others were cited as the most important aspects of tradition. Life in Western countries was valued for its achievements in development and its standard of living (ibid:172).

Many of the student's parents had not been to school themselves making it difficult for them to have an informed idea about what their children were doing or planning and therefore hard for them to give advice. In the case of women, Ashuraey found that decisions are usually made by the family with the maintenance of social norms uppermost in their mind (ibid:220).

This study only dealt with children currently in school. But how do other adolescents look at their future, what are their expectations, what are the differences between boys and girls, why are they not studying? What are the expectations of parents regarding their children and how does this differ between rural and urban areas, between boys and girls? All of these are questions which could be investigated further through additional research.

### 5.4.4.

#### *history and cultural expressions*

Activities to preserve Yemen's cultural heritage also have their place in Dutch development cooperation and assistance has already been provided for the restoration of a mosque in Rada' and for the National Museum in Sana'a.

Another expression of a nation's cultural heritage can be found in its modes

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of dress, ornamentation and architectural style. Given the richness of variety of Yemeni women's clothes, particularly the intricately decorated dresses and embroidered trousers, which are gradually giving way to other fashions, it is suggested that the history of this heritage be traced: where do the textiles originate from? Who makes these clothes? When are they worn? Who wears them?

There are obvious parallels between architectural decoration, women's ornamentation (henna patterns for instance) and designs in basketweaving, which often are women's responsibility. This could prove to be a fascinating subject and it needs to be documented before such practices disappear. Also, it could deepen our understanding and appreciation of Yemeni society, in general, and of women's role and contribution to it, in particular.

Moreover, keeping in mind the speed of change, now is the time to document women's narrations of their lives, their ideas, their knowledge of a wide variety of subjects including farming, livestock, traditional healing practices etc. Such an undertaking would contribute immensely to our understanding of women's position in what is only the recent past, and might have a lot of influence on Yemeni women's concept of identity and self-image, as has been the case in other societies.

### 5.4.5.

#### *credit needs/saving groups*

Saving groups, known as jama'iyya, are quite common in urban areas of Yemen. Each month, members contribute an agreed sum, and the total goes to one individual according to an order established in advance. Both men and women participate in these saving groups and may even be members of several at a time. No work has been done in this area nor is there any data available on women's specific credit needs. Women tend to need relatively small amounts,

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which may be more difficult to obtain than larger sums and it is not clear whether women can obtain credit from the Agricultural Credit Bank, for instance.

### 5.4.6.

#### *television*

Television has spread over the greatest part of the country. Women watch Egyptian soap operas, see commercials portraying women who are very unlike themselves and showing a way of life that is very alien to the average Yemeni woman. What impact does television have on a Yemeni woman's perception of herself? Also, do extension and educational messages make sense to women?

Many rural women have problems understanding the dialect used on television. During the evening when they have time to watch television they are often very tired. Education in the form of lectures bores them and they cannot grasp underlying concepts. They may blame themselves for being lazy, which suggests that they are probably receptive to learning new ideas (Beatty and Van Dijk 1987:159). Therefore there is a need for reducing their workload and for a different approach in preparing educational programmes if women are to be reached.

A Yemeni woman is currently working on a Ph.D. on mass communication abroad, dealing with the influence of television in remote areas of Yemen. Her findings ought to be followed up in any attempt at further research into this area.

### 5.4.7.

#### *women's networks*

Some interest has been expressed in women's formal and informal networks.



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Women always participate in networks based on family relationships, savings groups, residence etc. They may sit together daily to handfeed their cows, they may accompany each other on trips to collect water and fuelwood. After a birth the women in one network will all assist the new mother. In short, there is very much solidarity and support between women. How does information travel between women? Who influences and convinces whom?

### 5.4.8.

#### *informal labour market*

It has already been noted that women's participation in the formal labour force is rather limited. By far the largest proportion of women work in agriculture and livestock-rearing. Information on other aspects of informal labour women engage in is very scarce: they are market vendors, musicians, breadbakers, pottes and basket-weavers, they sew clothes and decorate other women, and yet relatively little is known about all these activities.

A study in Algeria<sup>5</sup> found that women who are forced to fend for themselves because they are widows, orphans, divorcees etc. do not conform to established social roles and norms. As a result, they not only help to define the norm, but also challenge it. How do they manage? How do they view themselves? These questions could be examined further with relevance to Yemeni women.

### 5.4.9.

#### *legal position*

Recently a project proposal, submitted by UNFPA, has been approved on improving the managerial skills of high ranking Yemeni women in ministries, regarding 'women, population and development'. One of its objectives is to

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<sup>5</sup>See: Willy Jansen, *Women without men*, Leiden, Brill, 1987

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inform women about their legal position. It is not known to what extent women are aware of their rights or if they perceive conflicts between their own interests, their legal rights and their social environment.

**ANNEX**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE J. BURINGA**

The expert will give technical support to the female expatriate staff and interested female counterparts working in development projects funded by The Netherlands, by collecting basic information needed to improve the position of rural Yemeni women.

She will:

- make an inventory of questions expressed by female expatriate staff and interested female counterparts;
- give instruction and advice on how to obtain and analyse data needed for improved work performance;
- pass on existing and relevant information from institutions and organisations to the women in the field;
- write a report describing and evaluating her activities.

The report will be presented in the English and the Arabic languages. The expert should have some working knowledge of Arabic and preferably have experience in doing field research in Arabic speaking countries.

### *List of organisations*

BOCD	British Organisation for Community Development (UK/volunteers)
DED	Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst (West Germany/volunteers)
DGIS	Directorate General for International Cooperation (Dutch governmental institution)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (West Germany)
ODA	Overseas Development Administration (British bilateral aid arm)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Oxfam	British Non-Governmental Organisation
Peace Corps	US Volunteers
Rädda Barnen	Swedish Save the Children
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
USAID	United States bilateral aid arm

*List of abbreviations*

CHRDP	Central Highlands Rural Development Project
CPO	Central Planning Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRHP	Dhamar Rural Health Project
EHE	Environmental Health Education
FFYP	First Five-Year Plan
FLS	Forward Looking Strategies (Nairobi 1985)
HE	Health Education
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
MCH	Mother and Child Health
MMH	Ministry of Municipalities and Housing
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOLSA	Ministry of Labour, Youth and Social Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RIRD	Rada' Integrated Rural Development Project
RLIP	Range and Livestock Improvement Project (Dhamar)
SFYP	Second Five-Year Plan
TFYP	Third Five-Year Plan
WAD	Women and Development
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic
YWA	Yemeni Women's Association

*Glossary of Arabic terms*

'Ain	evil eye (possibly causing illness in children)
Akhdam	lowest group in social hierarchy (single: khadim)
Al 'Uqari	spirit believed to live in uterus during pregnancy
Bakil	federation of tribes
Bani Khums	craftsmen
Bar'a	tribal dancing
Bay'a	urban merchants
Baladi	locally produced in a traditional way
Dir'	loose-flowing long dress
Diya	bloodprice
Faji'a	fright (possibly causing illness in children)
Hashid	federation of tribes
'Id al-Adha	religious feast marking the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca
Li'ba	tribal dancing
Nagis	craftsmen
Naksh	decoration of parts of the body with henna
Qabyala	set of values governing behaviour of tribesmen
Qabili	tribesmen
Qadhi	judge
Sada	descendants of the Prophet Mohamed and religious elite (single: sayyid)
Shaf'ei	a Sunni school of Islam whose followers are found in the west and south of the YAR
Shar'ia	Islamic law

Sharshaf set of black over-clothes and scarfs worn mostly by city women over their own clothes when going out

Sitara very large brightly coloured cloth covering worn by women when going out; it is less 'chic' and bougeois than sharshaf

Suq market

'Urf customary law

Zar religious ceremony for healing mental and physical illness

Zaydi Shi'ite religious school particular to Yemen; its adherents live mostly in the central and northeastern part of the country

Ziyara visit to tomb of local saint

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