

WADI ALLAQUI Biosphere Reserve, Egypt

Women's Development Project on Literacy

Final reports of GAD projects: *Bedouin Women's Development Programme, Wadi Allaqi, South-Eastern Desert* (May 2002 – March 2003), *Egypt* and *Women's literacy and handicrafts programmes, Wadi Allaqi, Egypt* (April 2003 – March 2004).

Aim: to develop and sustain a basic literacy programme for women and children in Wadi Allaqi.

This project developed from the desire to learn to read and write by some of the children in Wadi Allaqi. Women told us that basic literacy skills would be useful so that they could read their security permits, the instructions on medications and their children would be able to read signs and prices at markets. Before the project started, they were reliant on others (for example, fishermen who come to the High Dam Lake will read their letters to them). Initially the project was designed for children and included the opportunity for them to draw as well as write (to make lessons more interesting). A minority of women were sceptical of the use of literacy to their children, and a number of men were worried about the possible social consequences of educated women, but this initial hesitancy has now more or less been abandoned; increasing numbers of women now want to learn themselves, and demand from men has meant that now the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency is arranging literary classes for Bedouin men.

Project activities

Before the project began, during visits to the Bedouin on other matters, one of the team would sit with the children and show them some of the letters of the alphabet and provide paper for drawing. This proved very popular (too popular, in some cases, as the children's excitement about learning and drawing was a distraction from the issues that were to be discussed). As a result, this became an aim in itself and weekly classes were arranged with children who wanted to be involved.



Fatma and Zeinab teach 9-13 year olds in Sadenab

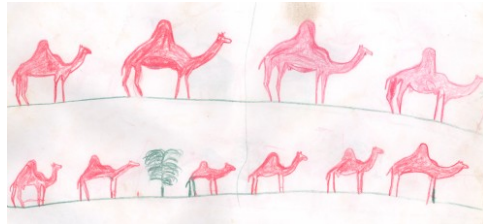
Findings and discussion

The children in the Sadenab and Bishari households, and from some of the households in Umm Ashira, are very enthusiastic about writing and drawing - it is usual that visitors from UESD to Bedouin will bring small gifts and sweets to children. However, on some occasions, enthusiasm for learning means that the children want to move onto this quickly and forget about their treats.

Initially, not all were enthusiastic about learning - some children in Umm Ashira have heard that in some schools, if students do not learn properly or make mistakes, they are punished. They are worried that they will be punished by their families if they do not learn well. Some people from Umm Ashira did not see the point of education. One asked how this would help, when all she wanted to do was eat. Another said, "what is the point of learning, when our lives are dependent upon looking after sheep?" Moreover, some members of their families are worried about the consequences of education. One man, again from Umm Ashira, explained that at present, his wife did everything around the household, and that he did not help in any way. If she was unhappy she could speak to one of his relatives. However, if she could read, he worried, she could go straight to court and complain about him, or, worse still, she might decide to leave him. Nevertheless, the majority of Bedouin in Wadi Allaqi are enthusiastic about the possibility for their children to learn to read and write, and this number is steadily increasing.

Initially, and now with the Level A classes, children were shown letters of the alphabet and would copy these out. They were encouraged to practice writing their name. As the

children progressed, they were shown more words relating to their immediate environment (wherever possible, NGO teachers would point to things the children could see and then show them the words). This meant that, in addition to writing out their new vocabularies, children could annotate their drawings. At first, NGO teachers would go to each settlement and teach all the children who came to them. As children progressed, it was necessary to split them into two, and then three groups, and teach at different levels. The more advanced students are now learning to construct sentences from text books and the fundamentals of arithmetic (again using familiar objects to demonstrate at first). As the groups of children have become larger, the NGO teachers moved from writing examples on each child's paper to using a small blackboard to show the group a word or sentence. At first, classes were held frequently but not at specific times. Now that children and women are becoming more committed, the classes are established weekly at set times, which nevertheless still have to be flexible at particular times of the year to accommodate household tasks the children have.



“Celebration”, Wadi Allaqi Field Station, 11/12/2003



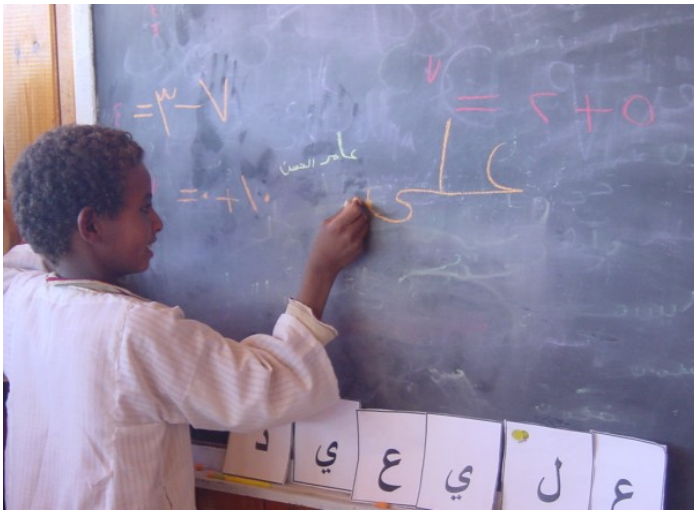
Wadi Allaqi Fieldstation



Above: Children from Aswan and Wadi Allaqi

On 11 December 2003, an event was held at the UESD's field station in Wadi Allaqi to celebrate the achievements of children involved in the literacy programme. This was to demonstrate their progress after one year to other Bedouin from the area and to officials from Aswan. In attendance were around 150 people including Bedouin, the director of the EEAA in the area, the Director of Literacy in Aswan, the Director of the Women's National Council in Aswan, the Director of the Bishari and Ababda NGO in Aswan, teachers and a group of students from the Nagieb Mahfouz French School in Aswan, and academics from South Valley University in Aswan.

Children in "Level A" are those who can recognise numbers and letters but are unable to construct words. They were given cards with letters and numbers on to form simple words concerning the local environment and their names (*right*). Children in "Level B" are able to read and write (those around 11-16 years). Guests were



invited to give the children words which they would write on the board (*left*). For example, Dr Hoda Moustafa, Director of the Woman's National Council in Aswan, asked one 12 year old boy to write "Suzanne Mubarak" which he did successfully. Exam sheets were also distributed to all the children. Children were additionally given the opportunity to demonstrate their

drawing skills, by generally depicting their local environment. Lunch was served to the 150 people in attendance, and after the examinations were assessed, certificates and presents were handed out to the Bedouin children.

Right: Anxious fathers look on. Many of these were sceptical of the literacy programme at the beginning but have now been won over.



As a result of this event, several Bedouin men requested that their children be included in the literacy programme. Some Bishari men complained because their children were not part of the project. Their participation presents a new problem with language, because their children cannot speak Arabic (and neither can some of the men). However, as some of the women speak Arabic, since the celebration, the NGO teachers have been training them. The Bishari women in turn can train their children. In addition, as a result of the success of the literacy programme, Mrs. Soad Demerdash, Director of Literacy in Aswan, and Dr. Moustafa promised support for its future maintenance.

Below: Happy and successful students



Level	Age Range	Total number	Girls and women	Boys	Achievement level
A	6-16	10	3	7	Recognising letters of the alphabet; writing their

B	4-12	18	10	8	names Recognising and writing words; basic arithmetic
C	9-18	17	9	8	Reading and writing sentences; arithmetic
		45	22	23	

Numbers of women and children involved in education at the three levels in March 2004. Level C as been added as students have progressed. There is an overlap in age ranges due to the different points at which children started the classes. Most women are in Level B and some are in C.

Future plans

It is clear that for the majority of Bedouin involved, children's education is seen very positively. Enthusiasm for the literacy programme has been far higher than we initially expected and now some women are interested in learning, and even some men. As a result, it is planned to expand this project to incorporate the education of those women who were not initially interested, but now see the benefit. The success of the project so far has been recognised by local representatives of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, and now they have begun a literacy programme for Bedouin men in Wadi Allaqi.

It is important is to ensure that this enthusiasm for education is maintained. Encouraging Bedouin to develop basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills will help them in the market place, where they have to read and calculate prices. These skills will help them with formal transactions where printed papers are involved, and greatly ease daily transactions (such as reading letters, instructions on medications and so on). All of these will strengthen household economies, in addition to enhancing the confidence of Bedouin



in their dealings with other groups of people who are increasingly found in Wadi Allaqi. Thus, our future priority is to establish a mechanism through which the provision of basic literacy can be managed in a self-sustaining way. Already, there have been discussions with local NGOs and international aid agencies.

Left: Sadenab students

Two sources of longer term support have been identified.

1. The Women in Literary Agency in Aswan.

This agency has offered to provide some of the NGO teachers a contract and salary to continue the education programme. Despite the initial attraction of this offer, it has not yet been followed up because of two constraints that this

co-operation would have on the nature of teaching in Wadi Allaqi:

- i. A requirement to follow a set course of teaching. This is unsuitable for children in the desert because the themes are sometimes inappropriate or irrelevant, and are geared towards children living in urban areas. This will make it difficult for Bedouin children to learn effectively, and it will mean they will probably examine poorly and lose motivation;
- ii. For every 10 children educated, the agency would give LE1000 (approx. £100 sterling) to support handicraft development. However, while this seems like a good arrangement, again there are limitations. The tools provided are very large, which is inappropriate for semi-nomadic people, and they are complicated to operate. In addition, all products must be marketed through the agency and the profits go to them to support literacy training. Bedouin women will not get any of the money from their handicrafts, which will mean that already busy women are unlikely to devote time to handicraft production.

Despite these problems, discussions are continuing between the NGO and the Literacy Agency.

2. The Bishari and Ababda NGO in Aswan. The Director of the NGO attended the literacy celebration in December. He was very impressed at the progress that the children had made and reiterated his earlier suggestion of sending teenage girls from settled



Bedouin families in Aswan to help to teach younger Bedouin children. This would be a cheap and sustainable method of ensuring the continuation of literacy training and would also provide the girls with the opportunity to experience the desert life of their kin in Allaqi. Again there is a limitation in that the girls would need accommodation in Allaqi.

Left: Manal teaching young children.

The Director of Social Affairs in Aswan has provided two rooms in a house in the Village of Wadi Allaqi (which would be shared with others involved in social issues). Although the structure of the building is in place, the interior is unfinished, but in the longer term, this should provide a solution. The building was first seen as a place for teaching but it is unlikely that Bedouin children, and especially women, would be able to attend, due to the fact that for some it would be a time-consuming (and in summer, exhausting) journey. Teaching must be taken to the dispersed Bedouin settlements which highlights the importance of funding for transport, both for getting the girls to Allaqi, and then transporting them around while there.

An application has been made to the Aswan governorate from both the Allaqi and the Bishari and Ababda NGOs requesting funds for this activity, and it is generally believed that this option will offer the greatest potential for long-term success. An additional advantage of this approach is that some of the Bishari girls will be able to speak directly with the Bishari children in the desert, so aiding their learning. The following support needs to be found in order to:

- complete the accommodation in Wadi Allaqi (including the purchase of furniture);
- provide transport for teachers from the NGO to get to Bedouin settlements;
- provide salaries for women from the NGO for teaching, and for Bishari girls if they become involved;
- provide books, writing materials, and other basic supplies.

Appendix 3: Example of students' achievement in the literacy programme

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 بِحَمْدِ نُوْرِ كِي اِسْمَاعِيلَ نَمُو الْعَامُ وَكَانَ
 مَثَقَسَهُ كَعَلَانَتَهَا
 بِجَهْدِ أَقْدَانِنَا فِي الْقَفِيلِ وَقَرَرْنَا
 وَالرُّدَّ وَوَالِدَةَ نُوْرَ أَنْ يَكَاوِفْنَا
 هَا بِرَدِّهَا لِي إِحْسَنَ الْقَدِّ كَالسِّيَابِيَةِ
 فِي إِجَارَةِ نَصْفِ الْعَامِ الْبَرِّ رَاسِي
 كَيْ شَرَفَ الشَّرِيْفِ نَشْرَبُ جَنَّةَ سِيْبَاءِ
 نَجْمَتِ نُوْرِ كِي اِسْمَاعِيلَ نَمُو الْعَامُ وَكَانَ مَثَقَسَهُ كَعَلَانَتَهَا

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 الْمَدِينَةِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
 الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 مَا لَمْ يَكُنْ دِينٌ يَكَاوِفُنِي
 وَيَكَاوِفُنِي نَسْتَعِينُ
 أَهْدِنَا صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
 عَلَيْهِمُ وَعَلَى خَالِيكَ
 آمِينَ
 الْمَكُونَاتِ مَجْمُوعَةٍ فَمَا لَمْ يَكُنْ نَمُو الْعَامُ
 الْمَكُونَاتِ نَسْرَبُ الْعَمَارِ



Above: Examples of writing and drawing by one 11 year old Sadenab boy who is in the Level C class.

Right and below: Words, numbers and a drawing by a six year old girl in the Level B class.

صالح	٢٠٠٠	١٠٠٠
صالح	٢٠٠٠	١٠٠٠
صالح	٢٠٠٠	١٠٠٠
صالح	٢٠٠٠	١٠٠٠

