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YEMEN

SUCCESS STORY

At last! Women in School



Al-Hussein Bin Ali School is 3 kilometers north of Al-Qimah village in Amran governorate at the foot of Thula Mountain; and, is known for its conservative people, and small closely grouped houses.

Forming a mothers' council at this school had never been done, because if women were to go to school they might mingle with male teachers, which wouldn't be accepted.

The social workers and community participation coordinators working for the USAID funded education project got help

from Hajj Al-Rowni, a 70 year old Sheikh, who thought that forming a mothers' council and organizing for women's activities did not conflict with culture or religion. He agreed enthusiastically to help, and even encouraged his own daughters to go with the social workers when they visited almost all the women in the village at home. Women started to accept the idea, when they saw Al-Rowni's daughters, and the first women's meeting was conducted at Al-Rowni's house.

The women voted, and a mother's council was successfully formed. They conducted regular meetings at the sheikh's house; and, expressed their need for activities that will help them in their everyday life, such as learning how to read, cook, and sew. The council asked the project to help them form a summer camp, which was controversial at first, until Sheikh Al-Rowni convinced the community that it was respectable. Similar support came from the imams of the mosques, who stressed that such camps need not introduce western culture, but would help women and girls to learn new skills at no cost to the participants. The mothers' council (including a daughter of Al-Rowni) encouraged all the neighborhood women to participate.

About 85 girls and 15 mothers participated in the camp. Most of the mothers did not know how to sew despite the fact that a number of them had sewing machines that they didn't know how to use. After three weeks at camp, they learned how to sew, make handicrafts, provide first-aid in emergencies, and were more aware of health issues in the home. Most of the women found that the first-aid and health information helped a lot, as there are no health clinics near Al-Qimah village. The camps broke the ice between the parents and the schools. Mothers' councils are acceptable, and new bonds between the school and the community have been forged.