

May 2018

## School drama on Badia Restoration

*Al - Majeddyeh Elementary School, Jordan*

### Skit One:

- No of students required to fill the different roles =11, Grandfather, Father, Mother, Daughter, young son, Older son#1, Older Son #2, Guest 1, Guest # 2, Researcher #1 (one of the researchers can also be a girl), Researcher # 2

*A family is sitting down for tea, two of the older sons just return from grazing the animals*

**Mother:** So where did you go this time? You came quite quickly. I thought you would stay there at least for a few weeks.

**Son #1:** We had to take them to \_\_\_\_\_ about 3 hours away from here. It is getting harder and harder to find a place where we can take the animals to graze. And even if we do find something, it is not enough to last the animals more than a few days... and so now we have to search for another place....

**Son #2:** Or keep them in the barn and bring the food to them

**Father:** That will be too expensive. Do you know how much it will cost to feed the animals for a whole year?

**Son#2:** I know Baba, but what is the alternative? It is getting harder and harder to find a place to graze them and the rent of the grazing land is also getting expensive.

**Mother:** Oh when I was a young girl, my brothers and cousins would take the flock out and stay there for weeks, before they moved to another location or brought them back home.

**Son #1:** Well those days are gone!! There is not enough around even for one family let along grazing flocks of several families at the same time. *Some traditional saying similar to "gone are those days" " يضرب لسعة الصيف ويسر الحياه " ابساط الصيف واسع*

**Father:** Oh in the older days, and I mean in the times of our grand fathers', the whole community used to move together. This was the Bedouin tradition. In the older days –

families used to even cross borders and go into other countries in search of greener pastures.

**Son #1:** I tell you – you guys had it easy!! (*sounding frustrated*)

*The grandfather walks in slowly....*

**Mother:** Oh father come in, have a sit and have coffee with us. Calls daughter (*name?*) to bring more tea and give some to her grandfather

**Father:** we were just talking about the differences between taking care of our animals now and in the older days.... The boys (*son #1 and 2's names*) think that our ancestors had it easy! (*a local fun phrase* - " يا راعي الحلال المودع أما ابتع وألا ارتع "

أي يا صاحب الحلال الذي تم ابداعه مع الغير إما أن ترعى  
حلالك بنفسك وتحتمل تعبته وإما أن تبتاعه وترتاح منه  
وتريح الغير من تحمل مشاق وتعب حلالك

**Grandfather:** Well I think I would have been happy to have all these phones and other things you have -to listen to some songs and listen to the radio, have the water come to me that looking for it in the desert (*said jokingly*)

**Young son:** how was it like grandfather? Please tell us. I want to know. (*asks with curiosity and excitement*)

**Mother:** Oh be careful what you ask for son. Once you get him started on this – these is no stopping him.... (*says it jokingly*)

*Everyone laughs...including the grandfather.....*

**Son#1 and 2:** We want to hear it too. Then you will all know how hard it is for us now and appreciate all our hard work and effort.

**Grandfather:** Well it is true the land was much greener and there were more options for grazing our animals, but we had our own challenges too – it was just a different kind.

For instance, in the old days the Bedouins were quite resourceful and depended entirely on their livestock and the natural resources available within their vicinity. They did not have trucks to move the animals around, they walked everywhere. They ate what they could find in the deserts – be it animals or plants. They depended a lot on the animal products – the milk to drink and even the wool from the animals was used to make the tent.... *beit al-sha'aer*.

we spent a lot of days out in the fields and we did not have cell phones to call for help, we did not have cars to move water and animals... it was all done by foot and whatever the animals could carry...the hard way!! All the way!!

**Young son:** how come you did not have cell phones? How did you call your family?

**Mother:** Oh!! cellphones only came recently ... there were no cellphones back then

**Grandfather:** But there were many great things too....

**Young son:** Like what?

**Grandfather:** Well, like I said it was the whole community that moved several times a year to new pastures...and stayed there for several months until the food found in the area was exhausted. They moved – giving to greener pastures and gave the land time to rest and recover, and the plants to grow again.

There was also more vegetation on the land, so the dust storm was not as bad either. In those days, about 80% of the animal feed used to come from the rangeland. Now – even in a very good year, the land does not produce enough to meet 20% of the feed required. So, you have to buy much more.

**Young son:** Was it fun to move around like that?

**Grandfather:** *chuckles a bit and says...*it had its moments. Packing up and loading the animals was not fun. We had some excitement of what the new place would be like and practicing our tracking skills .... but did not enjoy the long walk too much ...especially when you cannot drink as much water as you would like.

But after the new camp is set up, sitting out in the desert by the campfire with some sweet tea, and listening to songs and stories was something we enjoyed. We learned how to use the sun and the stars to navigate through the dessert, how to identify and track different footprints, how to collect herbs and make different medicines, and so much more. Our forefathers did not get a chance to go to school but they were quite knowledgeable.

**Young son:** I wish I lived at that time. It sounds like a lot of fun! And no school!!

**Son #1:** Are you sure about that? Do you really think you will be happier with no electricity, no fan, not much water, and no cars?

**Young son:** Well, maybe a little bit of both!

## *They all laugh*

**Young daughter:** How about the women, grandfather? What were their lives like?

**Grandfather:** Well, it had its benefits and challenges as well. They did not have much to cook with, or much water to wash cloths or other things – so one might say ‘they had less work’. But it was a hard life. They still had to stretch whatever was available to feed the family, they had to care for their sick with no doctors or medicine, they had to take care of the sheep and the goats while the men took care of the bigger animals. It was a hard life indeed. Oh! but they were strong women, resourceful women, and were a proud member of the community.

**Mother:** We still work hard now and carry a lot of responsibilities. But yes, I must agree, we work under much better conditions than our foremothers did. I think the work is now much harder for the men who must find ways to feed the animals and provide for their families with limited resources.

**Son #2:** And nature is not helping at all. It seems to be getting worse and worse every year. Drought is becoming more frequent, the barley is not growing much anymore, and even the native shrubs are not growing anymore.

**Father:** Well if you think about it... we are asking too much from the land. We are ploughing it every year. It does not have time to rest. Whatever grows is grazed and grazed to the bone. The land is tired!!!

**Son #1:** But we do not have the luxury of going anywhere we want! whenever we want! It is not like the old days. This is the land we have and a few other options in nearby areas. But I am sure that eventually even that will be beyond our reach and we will all have to look for something in the towns or something to earn a living.

**Young son:** So, what are you saying? That we will no longer be Bedouins?

**Father:** We will always be Bedouins!! He is just saying it is getting harder and harder to earn a living on these lands - not if it keeps deteriorating like it is now, and at a very fast pace too (*Sounding and looking sad*)

**Young son:** There must be something we can do. I don't want us to lose our identity. What can we do grandfather? What can we do? (*Sounding desperate*)

**Grandfather:** Well my son, times have changed. Not everything that worked in the past will work now. The challenges are different. And son# 1 is right. One can no longer move about the Badia freely and settle where he wants. There isn't much free land out there. So, we have to learn to take care of the land we have, so it can take care of us.

**Young son:** But how?

**Mother:** Isn't this what all these people from ICARDA and NCARE and others do in our village? Trying to find ways to make our environment better?

**Young son:** How mother? How? I want to know what we can do to reverse this? We cannot lose our home? Our tradition? Our history? I don't want to move to the city. I like my life here. (*getting a bit emotional*)

**Father:** Maybe we should call one of those researchers and have them tell us all what we can do. It will definitely be sad to watch it disappear. And maybe, it is not too late yet!! and there is still something we can do to restore it.

**Son#2:** I know one of them. I can invite him for tea tomorrow and maybe he can tell us what can be done to restore our environment.

**Grandfather:** I think it is a good idea. I too will be interested to hear it. One is never too old to learn!

## **Skit 2**

The family is gathered around the room waiting for Son #2 to bring one of the researchers.

**Son #1:** *walks in the room* Good afternoon everyone. I was telling the guys about our discussion yesterday and they are also interested to hear from the researchers, so I invited them as well.

**Mother:** Of course, please come on in. *Calls the daughter and asks her to bring more tea*

**Father:** *asks the guests* How are your families?

*The daughter brings in some tea and serves everyone.... two researchers arrive with Son #2*

*The hosts get up and greet the researchers and show them to their seats.... they offer them some tea/coffee....*

**Son #2:** *Introduces the researchers...one as a specialist in water and land management and the other a specialist in rangeland and livestock management*

*The family welcomes them. The father thanks them for honoring their invitation and for coming to talk them*

**Researcher #1:** This is a great opportunity for all of us. We have been coming and working in this area for so long. This is indeed a great opportunity to share with you what we have learned here, and from our experiences.

**Grandfather:** Yes, thank you for coming. I don't know how much my grandson told you about our conversation... but, we are quite concerned about the state of our environment and its ability to support us and the future generation.

**Researcher #2:** Yes, he did tell us about your concerns.

**Father:** Our forefathers had their own ways of taking care of the environment and ways to support themselves. But the times have changed, the challenges are not the same, and neither are the opportunities.

**Researcher #1:** Indeed, a lot has changed and will continue to change. The climate will continue to vary. Drought will be more frequent, rainfall patterns will continue to vary, and with the more sedentary life people are leading nowadays– the pressure on the land and water will continue to increase. So, this is actually a great time to have this conversation.

**Son #1:** So, you think it is going to be worse? Huh?

**Researcher #2:** Well that is the prediction. But there are also greater opportunities than there were in the past, so all hope is not lost.

**Father:** Yes, we are definitely seeing and feeling the changes. The question is – what can we do about it? IS THERE something we can do to reverse it? or stop it from getting worse?

**Researcher #1:** I think the first thing is to understand how we got to this point. As I said earlier, part of it – like the climate variability, restrictions in movements across the border, etc. are beyond your control but there are other reasons as well. And this is mainly related to *management practices* – how we manage our land, our water, and our animals.

**Researcher #2:** Exactly. Based on our studies, some of the major causes of degradation relate to our farming and grazing practices. In the older days, the Badia used to provide over 80% of the animal feed now it does not even cover 30% of the demand. There is a huge imbalance between the number of livestock, and people in the Badia and the carrying capacity of the land.

**Researcher #1:** You see, in the older days – the demand was met by moving from place to place or selling their livestock in times of drought. Now they bring the food to the animals because the available resources are not sufficient to meet the demand.

**Researcher # 2:** The current practice of continuous ploughing of all types of land to plant barley is also counter-productive. Barley is suitable to grow in only certain parts of the Badia such as the Marabs and the contour strips. Marabs are the low lands or flat plains that are suitable for agriculture.

**Researcher # 1:** You see, continuous ploughing and planting of barley destroys the native vegetation, you also lose the seed bank in the soil, and with it, seeds of indigenous shrubs or native vegetation.

Grazing the barely to the ground also exposes the soil to erosion – both wind and water and exposes the area to desertification.

**Researcher #2:** Grazing is also about timing. Animals are very smart – if left to their own choice, they will eat the new growth or shoot of the plant, and the tasty ones such as salsola (روثة). And unless they are forcefully removed from the area they will do so until it is all gone. They will never choose to graze from other shrubs such as Artiplex (قطف) when there are salsolas in sight.

**Researcher #1:** Yes, the timing is very important. Animals should not be allowed to graze shurbs during their budding stages. The plants need time to grow and make more seeds. But at the right time, grazing is also important. It will help the plant grow better and the hooves of the animals' help crack the soil crust to let water go in. So there are great benefits from grazing animals – but like I said – it has to be at the right time, and for a controlled period of time.

**Guest #1:** But we don't have time to let the land rest, and for the shrubs mature. Besides, even if we don't graze them – somebody else will.

**Researcher #2:** It is important to understand that this is not a one person or one family problem. This is a community problem. And the first thing that needs to happen is to come together as a community and make a COMMITMENT as a community to work towards change.

**Researcher #1:** For instance, if we look at the water management – the area experiences short but intense rainfall events that result in serious erosions and runoffs – often breaking the land and forming gullies (وديان).

**Guest #2:** There is nothing we can do about that. That is nature.

**Researcher # 1:** Oh! but there is! You can slow down the runoff and allow it to enter the soil as opposed to washing it off. You see the Badia soil is quite different. The extensive heat has made the soil quite solid, by making a crust on the top. And so, it does not allow water to enter easily. That is why the water just runs over it.

**Researcher #2:** When you have more vegetables - they crack this top soil, slow down the run off and allow the water to go inside. So, if you plant the right types of shrubs in the upstream areas, then you will reduce the effect down below. And you can use the lower lands to grow barley and other shrubs.

**Researcher #1:** you can also harvest or save the water through various techniques. We will be happy to show you some of the ways to do that. And also, ways to close the gullies and restore the land. This are all methods we have been experimenting in your village and are seeing great results. You are more than welcome to visit the sites and see for yourself.

**Son #1:** But it takes time to grow shrubs and wait for them to reach a certain stage. What do we do with our animals until then?

**Son #2:** Yes, the free grazing helps us cut the cost of feeding the animals. It is very expensive to use a feed-lot system (the system of bringing food to the animals) all the time.

**Researcher #1:** Well, we have to keep two things in mind here. 1. the free grazing right now only provides feed for one or maximum two months. 2. you have among your livestock many unproductive animals you are supporting.

**Young son:** what do you mean *unproductive*?



**Researcher #1:** Well not all the female sheep can give birth and help you increase the size of the flock or give you milk. You should instead use your limited resources to feed and care for the productive ones. That is wise investment.

**Young son:** how can you tell if an ewe is productive or not?

**Researcher #1:** Well, there are many ways to do that. The most efficient one is through an ultra-sound. You can have specialists examine your flocks and help you identify the non-productive ewes. You will benefit more, from selling these off and buying productive ones.

**Researcher #2:** And it is true, you will have to use the feed-lot system or seek other grazing areas to let your land rest – but compared to losing it for good, I think giving the vegetation time to grow, allowing the seed bank in the soil to grow, for a couple of years is a much better choice. Don't you think so?

*They all murmur and shake their heads in agreement or make other gestures of agreement*

**Researcher #1:** Increased vegetation cover, including native species, will also in the long-run provide nutritious feed for the animals, enabling families to make dairy products of a very high quality. And we have specialists who can help you with that.

**Son #2:** So, if what you are saying is true, and we have lost most of the seed for the native plants due to continuous ploughing, where will we get the right seeds to re-plant in our area?

**Researcher #2:** Actually, one of the projects in your community is testing such seeds. It is important to use the right seeds – not just in the variety but also in the way the seedling was nursed. It must be a suitable seed, that has adapted to the areas rainfall and drought conditions. Because the better the quality of the seed, the higher its chances to survive.

**Researcher #1:** You know if you are interested, you can even have your own community seed nursery where you can grow seeds of different shrubs and medicinal plants for re-planting in your area and even for sale to other communities.

*He takes out the different seedling containers and explains the differences....in how the roots of the trees are structured to survive in water stress areas, etc.*

**Son #1:** So, you are saying if we act now, there is hope to restore the land and continue with our way of life.

**Researcher #1:** Well, there is hope. But not if you continue your way of life as you are now. The Badia can only be sustainably restored if you change your ways of managing your resources.

*Turns to the audience and asks: "Do you have any other questions? We have other colleagues here amongst us as well (pointing to the staff from ICARDA, SEED, and NCARE) who could provide you some answers. If they have other questions, then we will have a bit of an interactive session here.*

**Researcher #2:** We understand that this might seem like a lot, but it really is not. If you really want to preserve your environment, and if you really want to see your children and grandchildren to remain in this land – then you must act now! **We can only show you how. In the end it is your decision if you want to do something about it or not.**

**Grandfather:** Well – “no pain no gain” – ( "اشقى تلقى" )

(للحث على العمل) They are absolutely right. The problem is not going to fix itself unless we do something about it. It is now up to us – up to our community to decide and act.

**Father:** It is a good thing that we have you close by, and you are open for discussions and questions.

**Researcher #1:** Indeed. We will be happy to discuss with you anytime. Thank you for inviting us.

**Father:** Thank you for coming. We will be happy if you could stay for lunch.

**Researcher #1:** Thank you but we must get back to work. Have a good day everyone.

*They all say goodbye to each other and leave the room.*

**THE END**