

World Bank's Response to Qat Consumption in Yemen



Qat Plantation in Manakha, Yemen.

Over the past few decades, Qat chewing has spread from being a habit confined to the elite of Yemen to encompassing most of the population. It is now estimated that Qat is habitually chewed by 72% of all males and 35% of all females. The social stigma which had been attached to Qat chewing has declined, and the habit is now deeply ingrained in society to the extent that children as young as 6 or 7 are being introduced to the habit by their parents, elderly household members, or peers.

Qat causes major adverse impacts in the development of the country. The habit consumes 25% to 30% of household income and occupies between 6 to 8 hours per day of chewing, with the consequence of a dramatic reduction in productive work time. Diversion of income to Qat, and the land taken out of food production has led to household impoverishment and food insecurity. Qat production is increasing by 10%/year, replacing food and exportable crops. Its cultivation is a leading source of groundwater depletion, consuming

30% of the nation's groundwater extraction, and causing soil degradation by removing plant nutrients. The high use of pesticides on the crop contaminates drinking water. Qat consumption also leads to neglect of the living environment and extensive spread of uncontrolled plastic wastes.

As a narcotic, Qat induces psycho-neural effects, including wakefulness, suppression of appetite and depression. Physical symptoms include high blood pressure, tooth decay, constipation, haemorrhoids and hernias. Most serious are the alarming increases in cancers, liver cirrhosis and kidney disease, due to consumption of pesticide residues and exposure of farmers to toxic pesticides used on the plants. Equally serious is the wide-spread child malnutrition and neglect consequent on the parents' obsession with Qat and its exacerbation of poverty..

Qat also causes adverse social effects. Qat chewing reduces quality time spent with children, and reinforces gender separation. It is also believed to cause family

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“Qat is a Plant of Evil, with no Function at All.”

Manakha Council Member.



Young Qat dealer in Manakha.

conflict linked to the high expenditures on Qat and long hours away from the family. Among youth, it encourages use of other harmful substances, promotes idleness, and its inducement of depression leads to loss of hope for the future, resulting in anger and anti-social behaviour.

Qat plays a major role in the economy. It accounts for over 10% of GDP, and provides employment to 14% of the working population. 33% of the agricultural labor force is involved in Qat production, and it represents an important cash crop for the economy. However, it is also displacing other crops, which have significant export value. Farmers and especially traders derive considerable income from Qat, while provincial and district governments derive benefit from taxes levied on its consumption. The economic interests of these groups must be recognised in crafting policies and incentives to prevent and reduce Qat production, distribution and consumption. Efforts to reduce Qat consumption are being made by key government agencies, some NGOs, community groups and aid agencies, but coordination is weak and the scope of action inadequate.

While the Qat habit is socially accepted and deeply ingrained, perceptions of the habit are rather negative – 53% of men and 61% of women state that government should limit Qat chewing. As regards perceptions of household management, 48% of men and 62% of women believe that they do not have enough money to buy Qat and cover other family needs at the same time. There is, therefore, a basis of concern over Qat which could be tapped in awareness programs and for policy support.

Since 1999, the Government has adopted a number of specific policies aimed at regulating and taxing Qat but has yet to arrest growth in either production or consumption. Weak governance and inadequate implementation of taxation measures were partly responsible. The exclusion of Qat farmers from benefits weakened the effort. And there was no enforcement of restrictions of Qat use in government offices. However, Government policy has succeeded in fostering public debate on Qat and

policy makers continue to seek ways to restrain the alarming spread of Qat use. The Government is fully aware of just how difficult it will be to combat Qat and that compensatory measures are needed when curbing Qat production. The Government's Third Five Year Socio-Economic Plan for Poverty Reduction stressed that : *"the Government intends to address the Qat phenomenon in an objective, informed and gradual fashion, while striking a balance between its economic, social, health and environmental aspects"*. Emphasis in this plan deals with water conservation and the introduction of new cash crops, both of which could be expected, over time, to encourage farmers to shift resources out of Qat production.

A National Conference in 2002 initiated the debate and produced

a set of valuable recommendations under the following topics:

Institutional and Legislative Framework

- Prepare and implement an Integrated National Strategy on Qat, in partnership with the civil society
- Enforce the existing ban on Qat chewing in government offices, and assess effectiveness of a ban in premises used by the public
- Confine Qat sales to specific, monitored Qat markets
- Effect swift endorsement of the Water Law and formulation of its bylaws
- Apply and promote the law and bylaws on trading with chemicals, vigorously apply sanctions and criminalise globally-banned chemicals



Coffee Plantation in Manakha..

- Define residual levels of pesticides in Qat leaves and forbid dealing in Qat when levels are exceeded
- Assess, then implement a set of fiscal and financial measures aimed at reducing production, trading and consumption of Qat (see also below)

Consumption (existing and potential)

- Develop cultural, educational and media programs to increase public awareness on impact of Qat on people's lives, the economy and natural resources
- Involve community organizations and local governments as partners to develop leisure, entertainment, community services and economic development activities as attractive alternatives to Qat
- Build capacities of local governments, NGOs and CBOs for the above
- Increase tax on Qat to reduce demand
- Design research programs to study Qat value chain, social impacts and policy improvements

Production

- Assist farmers to develop and market alternatives to Qat, including high value crops (olives, almonds, coffee)
- Offer credit for farmers to shift to other high-value crops and promote the role of the *Cooperative Agricultural Credit Bank*
- Expand non-farm livelihood activities
- Establish a fund to compensate Qat farmers for withdrawing production
- Promote strategies, policies and legal measures on water resources
- Improve farmer extension services in relation to use of water, pesticides, alternative pest control measures, and fertilizers

- Establish a GIS system to monitor changes in crop production and identify newly-developing Qat areas

The level and intensity of debate over Qat needs to be raised to drive Qat up the political agenda. Measures need to be coordinated, and taken on several fronts to address both the supply and the demand sides of the problem – awareness and motivation, economic, fiscal and social incentives, regulation and enforcement. All key groups must be involved: farmers and traders, users, the public (schools, media), government.

More recently, development agencies have become active, and anti-Qat NGOs have emerged. The Bank, FAO/UNDP have worked in a number of research and analytical areas to inform the government, and have prepared a JSDF pilot to initiate a debate and action at the local level. Other aid agencies including Dutch, German, UK, and EU have expressed considerable concern over Qat, but an effective, coordinated response has not yet been mounted. Both the Bank and the external agencies should examine their sectoral assistance programs to identify where and how measures to reduce Qat can be introduced. Several NGOs and leading

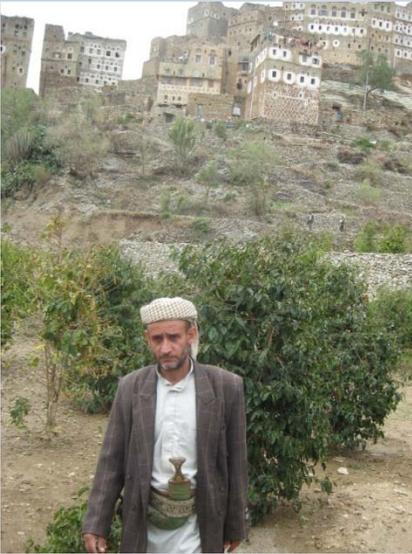
newspapers have incorporated a concern for Qat in their activities, and should be actively involved in the design and implementation of government policies and programs.

The Qat Consumption Survey produced by the Bank in 2007 raised concern and much interest and encouraged key government officials in the country who presented a set of recommendations entitled *Elements of A Qat Demand Reduction Agenda*. These included:

- Securing the Support of National Leadership engaging top leaders, in a campaign to discourage Qat consumption;
- Building Public Awareness and sensitization campaigns to inform consumers about the adverse consequences of prolonged use;
- Enforcing the post-1998 Reforms launched since 1999 to reduce Qat consumption
- Recreational Facilities based on a pressing and expressed need
- Increasing the Tax Wedge to make Qat more costly to consumers
- Preventing youth from starting the habit



Qat tree replaced with coffee tree.



A Successful Coffee Farmer.

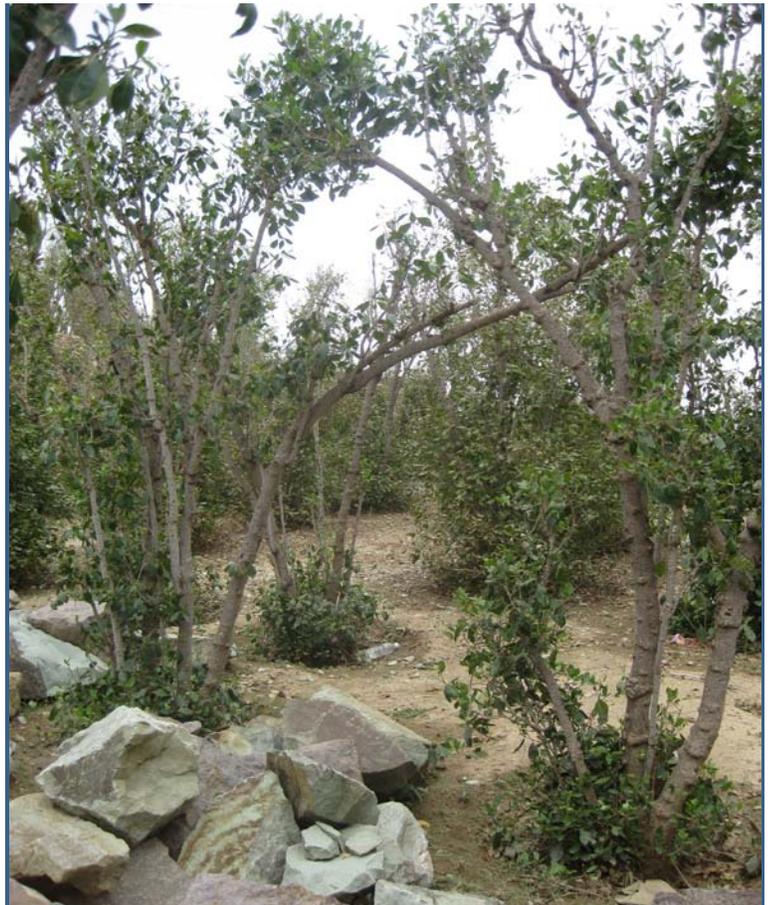
The proposed agenda for Bank engagement under the new Country Assistance Strategy (CAS), would be through a set of interventions involving close partnership with the Government, leading the effort, civil society, private sector including the media and Donor Community include

- (i) supporting a comprehensive program to raise public awareness and education on Qat consumption and its impact on people's lives particularly children, youth and women, and on the economy and natural resources;
- (ii) undertaking detailed assessments and document good practices on why certain districts and their communities have been successful in uprooting Qat and help replicate and scale up these activities in two to three other areas;

- (iii) supporting research on selected topics such as medical research on Qat consumption and social impacts on the most vulnerable groups;
- (iv) help address the overuse of pesticides and help develop alternative pest control agents and safety measures in partnership with GEF, and;
- (v) to the extent possible mainstream the efforts to reduce Qat in on-going projects financed by the Bank and other partner organizations.

- Developing Alternative Stimulating Private Sector Development and boost Employment
- Supply-side Changes through identification and promotion of viable alternative crops.
- Addressing Knowledge Gaps on the biological and social impacts of prolonged use

The Bank's Qat Dialogue Task Force, which started in late 2007, has been assisting the GoY to establish an Implementation Framework for Qat production and consumption control. The work has tried to establish a viable road map, with consensus on a set of actions, assigned responsibilities, targets, specific expected outputs and outcomes emerging from the set of recommendations and policy measures endorsed in 2002, and developed in detail at the June and October 2008 national workshops.



Qat trees in Manakha