



NEWSLETTER ISSUE N° 8  
JANUARY 2009

## SOMMAIRE

Edito

Rising to Challenges  
in Yemen

Yemen, torrential rains on  
Hadramaout and Mahra

## Edito

### 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

As the world's economic system contracts and slumps, as the resulting budgetary restrictions menace the action of all international organisations and NGOs working to help the disadvantaged, it seems essential to return, 60 years after its creation, to one of the founding texts of mankind's commitment to mankind.

On December 10, 1948, in the aftermath of a war that saw every atrocity become real, and at the dawn of the Cold War, the International Community adopted by a vote of 48 in favor, with 8 abstentions (6 Soviet Bloc states, South Africa and Saudi Arabia), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, aimed at strengthening the rights of every individual at all times, in all places.

The first global expression of rights, and dignity and equality, to which all human beings are inherently entitled, the Declaration has but a declarative value, thus creates no legal obligations. However, it remains a reference text for oppressed populations and their defenders all over the world.

While many, in the name of individual culture, take issue with the Rights' universality, and while freedom and defense of these rights are regularly used as pretexts to make war, the words quoted by Eleanor Roosevelt at the adoption of the Declaration remain especially meaningful: *"They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety"* (Benjamin Franklin).

Patrick VERBRUGEN - Co director



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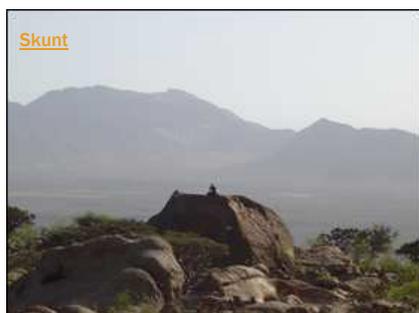
Yemen, torrential rains on  
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## Rising to Challenges in Yemen

Triangle has been running programmes in Yemen for over ten years and this is our oldest operation. We feel deeply attached to the country and its inhabitants and, in the face of so many needs, it is evident that we will continue working here. Yet despite our deep-seated commitment to Yemen, running programmes here is far from easy...

### A challenging country...

The first challenge is physical: whether it be in Aden, Hodeida, Shabwa or Socotra (the 4 places where we are based), heat and humidity make life difficult almost 8 months a year. It is then psychological: despite the indisputable interest of Yemenite culture, its remoteness from French culture can be destabilising.



Skunt



Taiz

There is also the issue of security: attacks, kidnappings, the spectrum of civil war... the situation is far from stable. Without dramatising things, risks exist and safety is a daily concern.

Finally, an ethical challenge impacts our work daily: Yemen is not spared by the corruption that plagues all developing countries. Our daily job is further complicated by the fact that we refuse to bend to corruption.

These challenges are known to almost all humanitarian missions. Isolation, insecurity, fighting corruption, cultural and climate-related shocks... are all part of the job when working for international solidarity.

But Yemen has two further specificities that add to the challenge:

Qat (also known as *Khat*), the green leaf with euphoric virtues that is chewed by 80% of men and 50% of women (according to Unicef), is everywhere in Yemen, with many consequences on health, work and allocation of family spending. It can be an ideological headache for us when the revenue generated by our projects is mainly used to buy qat, to the detriment of health or education expenses...



yemeni young girl

But the biggest challenge is the confusing status of women in Yemenite society. They could be seen as oppressed, denied of all freedom, yet, beneath their veils and black robes, women are sometimes skilled, educated and free. In this patriarchal society, men's lives are not always more enviable than women's. Keeping an open mind, taking care not to be judgemental and stereotypical is therefore primordial if we want to understand the complexity of Yemen's culture.

As an international solidarity NGO, our ambition is not to give lessons on morals or "savoir-vivre", nor to inject Arabia Felix (Yemen's mythical name) with a European mindset. It is simply to make life a little easier for the people with whom we have the fortune to work.

### ... that is worth it!

Yemen is a poor country. Some regions live in utter poverty, seemingly forgotten by development, with no access to water or education. In such contexts, every project implemented by Triangle G H is a step (be it modest) towards improved living conditions for the men and women of this beautiful country.

The Yemenites are incredible people. Proud of their culture and their way of life, they are also curious, sociable and open-minded. The work we are achieving with them is so mutually enriching, it puts every challenge into perspective.

Our programmes have helped Somali and Ethiopian refugees create a place for themselves in Yemenite society. Our WatSan (water and hygiene) and agricultural projects have given women the roles and responsibilities they did not possess before.

Through our missions, we enable the Yemenites with whom we work to raise questions, to question themselves. They are then free to find their own answers...



Olivier LECONTE<sup>1</sup>



[Sanaa](#)



[House - Hadramaout](#)



<sup>1</sup> **Olivier LECONTE** was Head of Mission for Triangle G H in Yemen from October 2007 to August 2008.  
[Photos : TGH](#)

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## Yemen, torrential rains on Hadramaout and Mahra.

**On October 23, 2008, East Yemen suffered hours of solid rainfall resulting in severe flooding in the oueds. Hadramaout and Mahra, two Governorates where Triangle has run several relief programmes over the past few years, were particularly affected.**

The exploratory mission led by Triangle in the affected areas examined two key elements: what kind of intervention suits the most urgent needs, and what remains of previous achievements after the trial of time and a rare climactic event.



*Oueds* (or *wadi*) are dry river beds most of the year; charged with seasonal water, they fertilise their banks. The *oueds* are usually arteries feeding the regions around them but in the recent, exceptional, rainfall, they became immense rivers escaping their beds; destructive forces wrecking havoc in their course. In some villages bordering the *wadi*, the water level rose to 15 meters in a few minutes.

In Hadramaout, the damage caused by the floods is immediately obvious: on top of the demolished infrastructures - water pipelines, power networks, roads and bridges - homes ruined by flooding form a bleak landscape reminiscent of an intense conflict.



[Destroyed house](#)

Another striking vision is the deployment of national aid which may come as a surprise for a country that does not benefit from the same oil reserves as its neighbours. Bulldozers and other machines are clearing the roads and closing off streets menaced by collapsing buildings. Hundreds of trucks from other regions in Yemen and border countries are conveying staple goods to the victims. Imperfect though it may be, this national response to the population's most immediate needs has allowed us to analyse the future needs linked to rehabilitating agricultural lands. As well as the damage caused to agriculture and the thousands of uprooted date palms, hundreds of hectares of fertile lands have been invaded by mud and wreckage or eroded and impoverished by the torrents. Such land must be restored.

Triangle has a major advantage in terms of realising such works. Since 2000, we have implemented two large projects to optimise the use of flood waters for agriculture in wadi Hadramaout. These programmes included building over 200 structures to canalise the water, promote silt deposition and ground-water recharge, or simply to slow down the hydric erosion reducing useful farming land.

Of course such structures were submerged by the latest, exceptional, floods. But they held. In some areas, they even limited the impact of flooding. However, they are part of a vast complex that has been severely injured by the gaps appearing in the *oued* banks and the opening of new river beds. A careful evaluation will therefore be required prior to launching arable land restoration and protection works. Thanks to our presence in Yemen, we have means that are not attached to any specific programme so we can immediately set to work. The funding terms regulating our action do not always offer the human and financial means to evaluate past programmes but today we have this opportunity and intend to use it to better serve Hadramaout's needs, like in other areas where we intervene or have intervened.

Ivan DERET - Heads of programmes



[Former TGH project](#)



[Spur](#)



[Spur built by TGH who resisted to the floods](#)