

Women build nations”: stories of female empowerment in wartime Yemen

REPORT

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Written By: Hind Abbas, Communication Assistant

War is a word consisting of three letters. Reading and hearing about it in books and movies sounds terrifying but living in it is a completely different scenario. Sometimes I feel I am trapped in a seemingly endless conflict. Sometimes I think how the sound and effect of war are very fast and devastating and how the sound and effect of building are very quiet and empowering.

As a young woman living in a war-torn country, I lose hope in everything around me when all doors are strictly closed. But I believe there's hope because since I was a child my father used to tell me, “women build nations”. I never understood the meaning of his words until I grew up. In the beginning it was a theoretical understanding which I learned from books, discussions and historical movies. But when the war started I was able to understand the true meaning of his words I lived it, felt it and heard it in every Yemeni house through powerful stories of women who's filled with an exceptional resilience spirit.

Through my work as a communication assistant I heard stories from different women who completely changed the way I look at life. Although it is filled with suffering underneath it are powerful stories of survival, and resilience in the midst of war.

I remember in one of my first field visits I was so amazed when I saw an image I will never forget: women in the market selling vegetables, traditional perfumes and homemade sweets. I met Samar who owns a bakery shop in the middle of the market. She said to me me, “Every day in the morning when I open my shop, I find garbage in front of my shop. Sometimes I laugh, sometimes I get angry and sometimes I get frustrated, but I have to continue for my children and for other women to not be afraid of working.” This made me think how we live in a male-dominated society where men are considered the sole providers of the family, but when the war started, men's presence decreased. They are either on the battlefield, wounded,

jobless, or dead. This forces women to become the breadwinners of the family without giving them the choice. But today, hundreds of Yemeni women are breaking taboos.

I remember Bushra, who sews men clothing- in my experience, a first in Yemen. I remember that while talking to her, I was so amazed by her strong personality. When I heard her story, I was so surprised and inspired by how a woman like her runs an enterprise and works in a company from morning until evening, and then works to sew clothes until midnight just to meet the essential needs of her family and to put her siblings through school and university. To me her story is full of strength and determination. Bushra taught me how to be passionate about my work, and she also taught me if a woman sets her mind in something, she can do it through sheer determination and belief.

I remember meeting Hamamah, who ran for survival with her three daughters after her house was hit by an airstrike and her husband was killed. To me it was so beautiful to witness her desire to live and motivate her daughters to go back to school. I remember she told me with tears flowing from her eyes, “It was a new house. We were a happy family, but this shall pass. I have to be strong for my daughters. We have to cope.” For the longest time we were led to believe that women are inferior to men, that they are incapable of participating or contributing to the public realm of society. Because of this belief, women were kept from accessing knowledge. Today, women in Yemen are great examples of empowerment and participation, not in just any society but in Yemen, the country which is facing war. Listening to their stories of struggle and survival is full of painful memories that makes the heart ache but it is very inspiring how these women are find coping mechanism to survive and how each one of them has a different story of struggle but they all share the resilience spirit.

The world should stand up and salute all Yemeni women for their courage, for their determination, for their belief in themselves, for their strength and for all their sacrifices. Let's empower them and support them because it is women who build nations in the midst of war.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/women-build-nations-stories-female-empowerment-wartime-yemen>