

## **Women in Yemen: Partners in Change**

### **Empowering Yemen's Poorest Young Women with Education and Training**

Partners for Democratic Change is launching a fundraising campaign to help support our work empowering young women in Yemen. We have uploaded a project to the Globalgiving challenge for the month of April and would like to encourage you to donate to this effort

#### **The Challenge**

Wardah lives in one of the rural tribal areas of Yemen. Her community is representative of the conservative values that exist in Yemen towards women, where tribal and traditional society have accorded women a low status in the family and the community; where women are seen as “the sisters of men.” We asked how we could begin to overcome the systematic discrimination faced by Yemeni women. We asked how we could change Patriarchal social norms that restrict the freedom of movement for women, where young girls are married off for dowries, where over half of women aged 15-17 are illiterate and only 1 in 4 continue on to secondary/high school. We asked how we could support young women, like Wardah, play fuller roles in their communities when official and social biases have led to comprehensive exclusion of women from Yemeni political life.



#### **Women Leading Change Together**

The answer we came up with was to take a collaborative leadership approach where our Partners-Yemen staff engaged constructively with tribal leaders and worked within local customs to identify women who we recruited and trained in community engagement, facilitation and basic health, education, and economic development issues. We trained 75 women like Wardah who recruited a further 800 female social volunteers who went on to host over 6,000 community meetings reaching over 127,000 women in the governorates of Mareb, Al-Jawf and Shebwa.

#### **Real Change**

Our evaluation of this project demonstrated it was highly successful in changing the perceptions of women about themselves and also changing men's attitudes. The project opened up new opportunities for thousands of young women. The Evaluation tells of stories about girls and older women going back to school, about women's increased self-respect and willingness to help other women, about women who now have a say in their families and in their communities, about members of the community getting together to solve community problems. There are stories about women starting to make their own money from small enterprises, about women who get together for charity, about women now understanding the causes of the illnesses of their children. There are stories about children getting

immunized, pregnant women getting the right vaccines. Women are even better loved by their husbands because of what they have become as human beings.

### **Women's Voices**

Some of the quotes from the women who participated provide an insight in to these stories...

#### Self-Respect:

*"I felt being valuable for the community, I am educating the people about matters that are of concern for them"*

*"We felt that a change was achieved through words and patience" and the results "will remain as a memorial of our hard work and our efforts"*



Source: PDC Training of Women Leaders in Yemen

#### Education:

*"Many women have changed as a result of this program, especially the women in Naze'a village, where no female education is found. The change is that people started to send their daughters to schools".*

*"They used to say in our community that they do not want girls to learn, they rather want her to stay at home and feed the sheep. Now, it is over."*

*"We achieved girls going to school and we realized that we have rights like the men; however we did not know this before."*

#### Health:

*"They did not vaccinate before and claimed that vaccination caused diseases and infertility but now they are getting vaccinated."*

*"The program made a notable change in our traditions and habits. In the past, mothers used to clean their newborns immediately after their birth with camel waste, which was seen as good for baby's health. But now, they use infant powder and napkins instead".*

#### Changing Patriarchal Views:

*"My father was listening from a close distance to me conducting a sessions, and he heard me raising awareness about education; he encouraged me..."*

*"I used qat sessions to tell people about the importance of women attendance in the awareness sessions and about the good and beautiful changes that happened to my wife, so they must encourage their wives to attend the sessions and reconsider the traditions" – husband of a social volunteer in Shabwa*



*"The society [the community] has changed a lot; my wife visits other women in the neighborhood and educates them after she understood her role in the community [as social volunteer]. She also talked to women and persuaded them to send their daughters back to school. She became one of those believing that she has a mission to educate others. In the beginning, she faced some problems as there were some persons who claimed that my wife was pushing their wives to do things they would not accept, but I explained to them further'. – husband of a social volunteer in Shabwa*

#### Enterprise:

*"I educated the women about small projects, and then my uncle's wife started a small project of her own in a bag (portable shop). We came to her house and she had sugar and rice and she said she earned money as a result of a small project that she could buy the food she could not afford before".*

*"Women started a savings and lending group which collects some money from each member, and then give a portion to one woman every month on a rotating basis."*

*"I've honestly benefited personally from the small projects, I've started a micro pharmacy at home and I am working and treating the whole neighborhood".*

The short video tells the stories of Wardah, Lima and others whose lives were changed by this project. It shows how Partners-Yemen provided the guide for women who desperately wanted change. Please support Partners in this work. With your support we will continue to broaden our work with Yemeni women and replicate our approach to leadership in other countries of the region. Please make a donation now.

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