

FROM NEED TO NEEDLE

ENSAM'S JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE

IN YEMEN



In the village of Al-Jalilah, in the governorate of Al Dhale'e, Yemen, 38-year-old Ensam Naji Ali carefully guides a piece of fabric under the needle of her sewing machine. This steady hum symbolizes her family's

journey toward a brighter future, stitch by stitch. As a mother of eight, Ensam represents the quiet strength of numerous women in her community, facing economic hardship and limited opportunities.



Ensam carefully organizes her handmade garments

For years, Ensam's life was characterized by struggle. Her family relied on unstable, informal work while contending with Yemen's skyrocketing living costs, making it a daily battle to meet their basic needs. "We were trapped in a cycle of worry," she recalls. "Every day was about survival." This economic fragility eroded not just material stability but also hope, confining possibilities.

A turning point arrived when Ensam's family, identified as vulnerable, was enrolled in the BRIGHTLY project, implemented by Yemen Family Care Association (YFCA) and funded by the British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). Initially, they received six rounds of unconditional cash assistance. "That support helped us cover our basic needs," Ensam explains. "It gave us breathing room when we had none."

“ This intervention alleviated immediate pressures and laid the groundwork for sustainable resilience. ”

Recognizing Ensam's self-taught sewing skills, the project offered her a pathway to income generation. She voluntarily chose a home-based sewing and embroidery project. "Working from home is suitable for our circumstances," she notes, viewing her social constraints as an opportunity. This choice aligned her abilities with a manageable, culturally acceptable business model.

Central to her transition was an intensive 11-day training in small business management. Ensam learned essential skills in planning, cost management, pricing, quality improvement, and marketing—knowledge she previously lacked. “The training taught us how to work in a better way,” she shares. “I began to see my skill not just as a way to mend clothes, but as a real business.” Following the training, a livelihood grant allowed her to purchase essential sewing equipment, transforming her aspirations into reality.

The impact has been profound, manifesting not as a sudden windfall but as a gradual empowerment. Ensam’s confidence and economic readiness have grown significantly. She now approaches her work with organization and strategy, leading to improved product quality and increased local demand. “After the training and the equipment, I became able to work better and plan for my project step by step,” she remarks. “Our situation is now calmer than before.”

Ensam takes notes and records measurements,



Her home workspace has transformed into a hub of productivity and self-reliance. “The project allowed me to work from home in an organized way, and with my family’s support, I was able to continue,” she emphasizes. Her vision for the future is clear: “We have benefited from these projects. Our situation is better, and we aspire to continue improving so we can rely on ourselves and not need assistance.”

Ensam's journey from uncertainty to entrepreneurship highlights a compelling model for change. Her story demonstrates how integrating humanitarian cash assistance with targeted capacity-building and self-selected livelihood projects can unlock human potential, shifting the focus from merely managing crisis to actively building resilience.



Ensam's customer hands over payment



Ensam uses her earnings to support her family



Ensam fits her daughter with a handmade garment

Ensam's experience underscores a vital lesson in women's empowerment, especially in conservative contexts: real empowerment meets people where they are. By respecting social contexts and building upon existing skills, projects can foster economic agency within the home, serving as a crucial step towards greater autonomy.

“ Despite habits and traditions, our families encourage us in such projects ”

Ensam affirms

Ensam Naji Ali's story is one of dignified perseverance. It illustrates the gradual transformation possible when external support provides the necessary thread, while the individual's strength and choice create a resilient fabric. In the hum of her sewing machine lies a blueprint for sustainable change—one stitch, one skill, and one empowered woman at a time.