

“Investing in human capital is very important for reconstruction efforts”

Interview with Rasha Jarhum on Yemen’s perspectives

What has been Yemen’s previous experience with reconstruction?

In Yemen, we have had a number of reconstruction experiences because Yemen has witnessed a number of conflicts throughout the last decades. Two of the most important projects were the reconstruction of Sa’dah in the north and Abyan governorate in the south. The reconstruction of Sa’dah came after all six wars against the armed groups of the Huthis, the war between the state and the Huthi armed groups in the

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north, and the reconstruction of Abyan came after the conflict and anti-terrorism war that targeted al-Qaeda groups who were controlling the governorate in 2009-2012. As for our experience in the two reconstruction projects as civil society organisations – we did not see any impact of these reconstruction programmes. They were not done in a constructive way. These two reconstruction projects need

to be studied so that we avoid repeating the same mistakes for the upcoming reconstruction programmes that we need to have, especially after the current war.

What are the biggest obstacles to reconstruction in the current conflict?

It is very challenging for reconstruction programmes to happen today because the conflict dynamics in Yemen differ from one area to another. We have areas that are considered to be post-conflict where there is a need for recovery programmes and reconstruction, and we have areas that are still living in conflict where it is very difficult to implement any reconstruction programmes. And then we have areas

that are pre-conflict, which means that if you invest in reconstruction you might risk actually having to have another round of reconstruction if you do not address and prevent the conflict in those areas. But generally, what needs to happen, whether we are moving forward with reconstruction or not, is to have an inclusive process for designing the reconstruction programme. That means consulting with women, consulting with civil society groups, with young people, with the victims and survivors of war who have had their properties destroyed. This process is not happening and the only process that is happening in terms of discussion of reconstruction priorities is led by civil society, which is either male-dominated or focused on specific elites in the north rather than being a more inclusive process. And this is again due to limited resources for this kind of approach to moving forward.

What is needed to rebuild a country beyond its infrastructure?

It is not only about reconstructing the buildings that have been destroyed. It is so important to focus on the human capital. If the war stopped today, we already see that a generation has been lost in terms of education and health. So investing in human capital

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“Investing in human capital today is very important for the reconstruction efforts that will come in the future.”

today is very important for the reconstruction efforts that will come in the future. It is essential to spend and dedicate more scholarships to young women and men so that they can go and study, especially in the public sector, in reconstruction, in the economy and in statebuilding and public services since all these will be needed in the post-conflict recovery phase.

How can external actors support reconstruction processes?

External actors can support these processes in two ways – financial and technical. For example, they

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could join in with the reconstruction fund that was established by the Gulf countries led by Saudi Arabia or establish their own international reconstruction fund for Yemen. In terms of technical support, they could focus on designing the reconstruction programmes so that they are inclusive. They could support and build local stakeholders’ technical capacities, whether these stakeholders are civil society or local authorities and government, to have a transparent and accounta-

ble process when reconstruction is being done. And there is huge importance in focusing not only on the reconstruction aspect – in other words, rebuilding the buildings – but also in spending time thinking about transitional justice and reparation and compensation and reconciliation programmes. All of these need to be part of a comprehensive programme that is sustainable rather than being one-time or stand-alone programmes.

Rasha Jarhum

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