

# Nuria Abdullahi Jami



## Key Achievements:

A committed activist for women's rights, cultural rights and for human rights, freedom and equality; one of the first women to be elected to the Harari Regional Council, where she served for two terms; President of Harari Region for just under a month, the first (and so far only) woman to be elected President of a Region; founded the Harari Women's Association- the first women's association in the country; helped set up Ada'a House- a museum working to preserve and promote Harari culture

**Current Position:** Community leader and volunteer

**Birth Place:** Harar, Ethiopia

**Birth Date:** 1950

**Current Home:** Harar, Ethiopia

## Primary School

Gai Medersa Primary School, Harar, Ethiopia

## Secondary School

Gai Medersa Secondary School, Harar, Ethiopia

## Primary Work Area

Activist for women's rights, human rights and cultural promotion; political leader

## Life Story

Nuria Abdullahi Jami's natural have led her to be a strong activist for women's rights, for cultural promotion and for the people's right to freedom and equality. For this work, her family and social background played an important role. She was the founder and the first president of the Harari Women's Association and co-founded Ada'a House, a museum and center for Harari culture. Her desire to see women's status advance has been a defining motivation for her work. She has been an acknowledged leader in her community, one of the first women to be elected to the Harari Regional Council, where she served for two terms and was elected spokesperson for five years.

Born in Harar, Nuria was raised in her father's birthplace, the small town of Fedis, until she was nine, when she returned to her birth city. Growing up in a large family of twenty children, she was a special favorite of her mother's as the only among the first children. The family had a reasonable income and all the children were well cared for. Her father was a Qadi, a Sharia judge. An inquisitive child, she learned a lot from her father, a Qadi or Sharia judge, who answered her questions frankly, even explaining to her some of the cases that were brought to him.

Upon returning to Harar, Nuria started studying at a new Harari school for adolescents where she excelled in her studies, despite the fact that most of the

students were older than her. She recalls that her stay at her school, though brief, was instrumental in her personal development. Forced to marry at the age of fourteen, she had to stop going to school. The first few years of her marriage were particularly difficult for her because she felt like a slave spending her time doing housework and raising children; and she was frustrated that she was unable to continue her education. But her husband was supportive, helped with housework and child care, and supported her in her desire to work. As she began to be more involved in her community, giving advice to other women who had problems, she found a sense of purpose and was able to handle her own problems more easily. She became an advocate for the cause of women, arguing for women's rights in discussions with men as well as women.

During the Derg regime, Nuria espoused the ideology of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and began to participate in the movement, promoting the agenda of rights, freedom and equality for all citizens in various institutions in the region. She was elected in her area of residence to the kebele administration and worked to protect the interests of the people. During those years, Nuria established Ada'a House, a culture center, along with some colleagues with the aim of preserving Harari culture. After some time, the full responsibility fell on her and she led the House for 22 years. Working to know more about the culture, she did a lot of research talking to many people and learned a lot from that experience.

When the Derg regime fell and the EPRDF came to power in 1991, Nuria established the Harari Women's Association, the first women's association in the country, even before Harari was recognized as a regional state; the organization fights for the rights of women to assure their equality. Serving on the executive committee of the Association and for some years as president, she led the organization in designing projects and provided trainings for women, working closely with the Women's Affairs office and with other organizations working for women.. The Association set up a savings and loan association for women, which has benefited many women. Continuing to work to preserve Harari culture, she organized free trainings for about 200 young women in Harari crafts; many of the trainees have gone on to create independent businesses selling traditional handicraft items. This is one of her proudest achievements. The Association is planning to create a market mall for women entrepreneurs to help them sell their goods, in addition to building a meeting hall.

Giving up her position heading Ada'a House when she was elected to the Harari Regional Council, she served for two terms in the Regional Council and was elected as President for a brief two-week term, the only woman so far ever to serve as President of a Regional State in Ethiopia; she was elected Spokesperson for the Regional Council for five years. While serving in the legislature, she continued to work closely with the Women's Affairs Office as well as the Culture House. She has served on many different committees both in government and in society, refusing to limit herself. She believes this experience has given her much more comprehensive and all-rounded knowledge than formal education could have.

Working in the Harari National League political party for many years, Nuria has faced many challenges as a result of her political involvement. Since involvement in so many activities was unusual for a woman in her community, this created some problems in her marriage. Although her husband was very understanding, helping her with housework and supporting her work, some of his friends were relentlessly opposed Nuria's activities advising him to divorce her. But her husband saw that Nuria was doing good work and that he himself gained respect because of it.

In explaining the driving force behind her achievements, Nuria says that she has always worked hard to live up to the great trust people have placed in her. In all the positions to which she has been elected, she has felt a great sense of responsibility that keeps her working even when she has to do it all alone. When people love you, she adds, you have a reciprocating responsibility to do your best to serve them. She believes that her leadership skill is an inborn quality, a gift from Allah, recalling that even as a young girl, she used to be elected as the president or spokesperson in group meetings.

Nuria has managed to achieve so much in different fields while raising her 10 children without a nanny. When her husband's business went bankrupt, she had to become the breadwinner for the family working to earn enough money to raise her children well. She recalls that these were difficult years, but is grateful that they are all a distant memory, as all her children have now become self-sufficient and take good care of her.

Nuria is currently working at the Women's Association and in partnership with the Women's Affairs Office. She also continues to be involved in the Ada'a House in order to improve and expand it. She heads the crafts club established to preserve Harari culture. She serves as the president for the union of the 16 associations of women known as Jama'a. The purpose of Jama'a associations is to help women solve their own problems dealing with issues such as how to raise children and how to preserve culture and pass it onto the next generation. She has served as president in her own Jama'a for 26 years, with the members insisting that she remain in that position through all of those years.

Nuria is always planning the next step in her work stretching forward to yet greater heights, even dreaming about them. Believing that anything is possible, she dares to venture into new things while reflecting on the things she has done so far and looking for ways to improve them. Watching the progress of women she has helped gives her great pleasure.

Nuria's plan for the future is to continue working for women hoping that the women not only in her region but also in the country as a whole will eventually overcome their financial difficulties and attain great heights. She hopes that Ethiopian women will come to know and value themselves since one cannot respect others without respecting oneself.

***Her advice for young women:*** Have patience and do not give up. There are no insurmountable problems; everything is possible. There is a time for everything; you must first focus on knowing who you are and becoming self-

sufficient, and for that education is important. You must remember that you are not only responsible for yourself, but also for your family, your community and your country. Remain true to who you are instead of imitating others. Learn from your own life experience living with other people, since it will teach you a lot more than formal education can.

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**Key Sources**

Interview with Nuria Abdullahi Jami, August 2012

**Researcher**

Hanna Arayaselassie

[http://ethiopianwomenunleashed.org/profile\\_detail.php?Pid=118](http://ethiopianwomenunleashed.org/profile_detail.php?Pid=118)