The Status of Creative Industries in Yemen
Needs Assessment Report
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Report by Sarah Kuhail & Moukhtar Kocache

A report conducted in the framework of the “Arts and Culture Entrepreneurship in Yemen”; a project launched as part of UNESCO-EU’s “Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihoods Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen” project.

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE
The creative and cultural industries (CCI) in Yemen have suffered tremendously especially in the last decade. The political unrest has taken a toll on the whole nation including the Yemeni arts and culture sector. The sector’s infrastructure deteriorated, while talent lost opportunities for economic stability and sustainability. In recent years, the social stigma around arts and culture has increased and made it even more difficult to motivate youth to engage with the CCI, and it has become more difficult to advocate for the sector as a priority given the dramatic humanitarian and economic emergencies.

For the past two years however, many interventions took place to remedy the situation, including UNESCO-EU's “Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihoods Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen” program which aimed to preserve and maintain the urban heritage and creative industries in Yemen and to enhance employment opportunities for Yemeni youth. UNESCO-EU's main focus was to promote arts and culture, and to support youth towards peacebuilding, recovery and social cohesion.

In efforts to better evaluate the context and understand future areas of intervention, this needs assessment report is prepared, shedding light on the current socio-political and economic context of the creative and cultural industries in Yemen, as well as identifying opportunities and challenges. The report provides potential suggestions for sustainable venues of investment in the sector focusing on economic resilience and sustainable institutional management for cultural civil society organizations (CSOs).

The document begins by outlining the research methodology which was implemented, and challenges in the data collection process. It then proceeds to highlight the findings, and concludes with a set of recommendations for the betterment of the sector.
A series of consultation meetings with UNESCO highlighted a number of observed issues to be further explored within the report, including prevailing trends in the creative and cultural industries (CCI), challenges and barriers limiting growth and sustainability, economic improvement within the sector, gender specific challenges, health trends and impact (especially COVID-19), and potential venues for future investment in the sector.

A compound methodology was adopted to address the proposed topics above, including literature review and expert interviews.

The literature review covered an exhaustive examination and analysis of available literature on the creative and cultural industries in Yemen in addition to available online sources including recorded zoom workshops on CCI in Yemen\(^1\), websites and social media of Yemeni cultural organizations, and market analysis studies shared by interviewees. The literature review assessed relevant knowledge and identified gaps to be addressed in the data collection phase.

The field work consisted of interviews with key cultural practitioners from different areas in Yemen and in the diaspora. A total of 10 interviews with 12 cultural practitioners/managers/leading teams was implemented. The sample, which was selected with the help of the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture’s (AFAC) team, included both men and women, art practitioners and cultural workers from Hadramout, Sana’a, Aden and the diaspora, experienced in different forms of artistic and cultural expression, including visual arts, literature, cultural journalism, digital arts, music, crafts, theater, cinema, audio-visual production, photography, and dance, covering a large, yet not exhaustive portion of the CCI. The selected interviewees represent cultural CSO which have been supported by UNESCO under the cash for work project through grants and tailored capacity building opportunities. They were asked a number of questions that aimed to investigate the topics at hand, taking into consideration the culture 2030 indicators as a framework for the construction of the report.

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1. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-kF36VH24](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-kF36VH24)
The diagram below presents the general demographics of the interviewees, (for a detailed view please refer to annex 2):

Interviewees aged between (30-45)

An interview guide was developed prior to the interviews in consultation with UNESCO (see annex 3), with reflection on gaps in the literature. The guide was structured into themes to facilitate the data analysis process which adopts a thematic analysis approach. The collected data highlighted many issues that fall under the thematic umbrella of Culture 2030 indicators, yet the exact indicators seemed too rigid to be applied to such a fragile and complex context of Yemen, which requires its own attention and analysis.

Following the literature review and data collection, a thematic analysis was conducted. The accumulated data was identified and coded. Recurring ideas were organized together to form themes that are relevant to the ToR needs. The results were then combined as recommendations presented below.

The interviews took place virtually through zoom platform, over a month’s period. Many challenges were faced with setting up the interviews due to improper internet infrastructure in Yemen, and a minimal response from some participants. Some interviews needed to be rescheduled a couple of times, while others were canceled. Over 18 participants were contacted to finally be able to conduct 10 interviews.
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS
A General Overview of the Cultural and Creative Industries in Yemen

The creative and cultural industries (CCI) are defined as “those sectors of organized activity that have as their main objective the production or reproduction, the promotion, distribution or commercialization of goods, services and activities of content derived from cultural, artistic or heritage origins”², and therefore assign a commercial value to the generation of cultural and artistic products. For the purposes of our research and based on input from interviewees as well as literature review, we have taken an approach that also focuses on cultural heritage and traditional forms of creation, not necessarily for income-generation. The line is therefore blurred, and the CCI encompasses both artistic practices that aim to generate commercial value in addition to non-profit organizations that contribute to cultural production and indirectly contribute to supporting the economy through job creation.

The history of Yemeni art is rich yet volatile. Many interviewees have referred to the state of the arts and culture sector in Yemen since the 1980s and 1990s, describing it as vibrant, fresh, with lots of potential. Back then, you could witness different forms of arts and traditions, and customs³. The arts were looked at differently, as a platform to convey Yemeni traditions and identity. Traditional art forms prevailed, with focus on literature and poetry, as well as traditional music. However, what was once a source of pride and joy for Yemenis was soon weaponized and criticized; art became stigmatized as a shameful profession that is incompatible with Yemeni social and religious norms. This was especially exacerbated in the last 10 years with the war in Yemen. What was once a vibrant scene was soon rendered invisible. This came as the arts and culture were shunned by political parties/governments, and employed as a tool to control the masses, especially with the rise of non-traditional art forms that can be quickly labeled as expressions that are foreign to the Yemeni heritage.

Unfortunately, there is no literature that provides specific statistical data and analysis around the state of the sector in the last 10 years, like the number of cultural institutions, number of cultural practitioners, sectoral funding and investment values, or the economic value of the sector, which limits our understanding of the sector’s economic status and growth rate. Most of the literature focuses instead on providing a qualitative overview of the sector’s state.

³ https://community.globalvoices.org/2020/12/yemen-used-to-be-the-other-side-in-the-war-country/
Currently, the CCI scene is **geographically fragmented** and dispersed with few remaining institutions struggling to maintain themselves and elevate the sector as a whole. There is plenty of talent, in different artistic forms, including cinematography, theater, video and digital arts, photography, theater and performing arts, crafts, literature and poetry, storytelling and painting. However, the most **prevailing art forms** are those with a higher economic/financial potential, like photography and digital arts, or those that are more traditional as they are better accepted by local communities. On the other hand, artists lack any supportive infrastructure to learn, grow, produce and collaborate. Most artists and cultural practitioners use their mediums to promote social cohesion and peace, freedom of speech, and highlighting Yemeni culture, beauty and identity⁴.

**The cultural infrastructure** has taken a toll following the war, with many artistic platforms like cinema houses shutting down, and cultural institutions temporarily or permanently closing. As such, the number of cultural institutions that support artists and act as safe havens has decreased rapidly. The infrastructure is further geographically fragmented leading to a gap in collaboration across cities and thus limiting the growth of the sector as a whole. Each city has its own structures, own organizations and own governing norms and regulations that shape the sector. In Aden for instance, there has been a systemic destruction of the cultural infrastructure for almost 35 years. Culture is not seen as a governmental priority, and is therefore left neglected. There’s a huge gap in the availability of cultural venues like cinemas, theaters or cultural halls, rendering cultural production very difficult. In Sana’a, the context is similar, yet artists and cultural practitioners face more challenges to participate in and practice art. In Shibam, which is considered a heritage city, the context is a bit different. The genres of arts that prevail are more traditional, with focus on income-generating crafts, folk games, and traditional artistic practices. The cultural landscape however is in need of restoration and renovation, especially after the war and COVID-19 which led to the shutdown of up to 38 cultural cafes/venues, that in turn influenced many jobs, livelihood of people, and hindered the economic prosperity of the sector.

**The digital infrastructure** is also very weak and very costly across the country, and artists struggle to stay connected online, to weave partnerships across cities and countries, or to access international markets. With COVID-19 breaking out, more reliance was put on media and digital technologies to have access to audiences, to make art available online, and to provide training and workshops. However, many issues needed to be considered, including the protection and safety of artists, copyrighting, and working within ⁴- Cultural Network Yemen Project, Needs Assessment Report, Najla Al Shami, 2020
weak digital infrastructures. Moving CCI to digital platforms further poses many questions, including opportunities of success within limited reach, audience engagement, the need to enhance technical capacities, economic opportunities and profit, and finally, ensuring that the arts is for all, not only those who can afford technology and digital infrastructures.

Artists are therefore left to rely on a handful of organizations or work independently to produce their art. This means, artists and cultural practitioners have limited opportunities to enhance their skill sets. And while there are great capacities in the field, mostly concentrated in main cities like Sana’a and Aden, ranging from artistic production to curation and organization, many still require a consistent stream of knowledge and holistic training especially in terms of communication and promotion, artistic management, audience engagement, financial management, income generation and institutional development. Others may need capacitating in terms of expanding their creativity through exposure to international standards of production and markets. The available capacities need to be harnessed and developed to support the sector as a whole, yet, with tough financial and economic structures, artists are left demotivated to push forward. They also lack proper educational opportunities in the arts and culture, whether at school (art subjects were removed from public schools since the 1990s), university or training levels. More knowledge as expertise is needed in developing artistic production practices, in curation and exhibition and management.

On the other hand, as the sector lacks governmental support, it is almost entirely led by personal initiatives. This is represented in the absence of cultural policies governing the sector and supporting artists, in addition to the absence of governmental funding that could otherwise feed into sustaining and growing the sector. Instead, governments have used culture and art as a weapon to push political agendas.

International funding to the sector is also minimal vis-a-vis the needs for development. As most funding to Yemen is humanitarian-based, it neglects the CCI as an important sector with huge potential for economic development, social cohesion and peace. Interviewees also commented on the importance of a needs analysis study before designing funding programs to better address possibilities for development. Other sources of funding to the sector stem from the private sector that can sometimes show interest in sponsoring CCI
or contract practitioners for creative services. With all that said, there’s a huge thirst for **cultural practice and cultural participation** in Yemen. Audiences are thirsty for cultural activities, especially when they serve as a form of stress relief. Audiences are usually diverse, bringing together men and women, youth, and children. The youth specifically are more motivated to participate in cultural activities, and are more interested in cultural production. Arts and culture are not only seen as platforms for social cohesion, recovery and healing, but also as forms of distraction for youth who could otherwise be recruited into systems that promote violence and war. There are economic and financial barriers however that could hinder youth’s cultural production especially with artistic forms that require sophisticated, and often expensive, tools.

**Access to culture** is however often limited to local spaces within the same city. This has a number of implications on both cultural practitioners and audiences. For audiences, there are few opportunities to experience arts, and enjoy cultural events and activities. For cultural practitioners, the impact is more severe; firstly, practitioners lack the proper exposure to build their brands and promote their work. They additionally lack the opportunities to expand into potential income generating markets (whether locally or internationally). Secondly, they have limited access to networking opportunities which could be a source of knowledge sharing, expanding their creative process as they consume different genres, styles, and forms of art. Finally, they lack the potential for collaboration with other local and international cultural actors. Most importantly, this issue of access to culture which translates to **minimal participatory processes and linkages** across cultural actors limits the sector’s growth. This does not stem from an interest in individualistic work, and we actually do see sporadic attempts to work together and support each other. Practitioners are motivated to collaborate yet burdened by the tough social and economic context in which they operate.

Often, organizations and practitioners are barely keeping afloat and therefore tend to focus their efforts on programs and activities that have been mainstreamed in their organizations and have been tested and proven to ensure some kind of continuity. We see this evident in many practices; organizations tend to shy away from experimentation, they also lack the luxury to explore participatory processes or build joint projects with other organizations due to financial constraints. The dire limitation of resources has meant that over the last few years, several organizations are systematically sustained by funds contributed by founders and or board members of these organizations; which also forces them to function at bare minimum or barely enough in order not to shut down.
The political context in which the CCI operates is what drives and shapes the sector with a ripple effect on the sector’s social and economic value.

The most prevalent political challenge is that of freedom of expression. There is a great sense of fear amongst artists and cultural practitioners, evident in the literature review and the interviews. Some interviewees refused to address the political context at all while others reflected on many upsetting issues. Artists feel that they are constantly observed and under surveillance; they are censored on what they say and how they say it. Their artistic production cannot express any critique towards the governments/factions or the political contexts, while their artistic forms cannot be too provoking/western/far from conceived traditional Yemeni norms. Artists and cultural practitioners are also not physically safe as they operate in conflict areas with absence of legitimacy on the ground. One of the interviewees commented:

“We are constantly harassed, regardless of where we are. A group of our friends who practice breakdancing were reprimanded for that. It took a lot of mobilization to ensure their safety; they even had to practice in discrete and unknown areas just to avoid any backlash”. Another commented: “We prefer to always avoid addressing any political issues in our work or criticize anything. We sometimes focus on the consequences of the war, and we try to focus instead on social issues and on how we can rebuild Yemen through promoting social values.”

This fear of safety stems from rigid governmental/political parties’ practices against anyone who negates or discredits them, resulting in kidnappings, imprisonment, smearing, death threats or even killings. Therefore, most Yemeni artists and cultural practitioners avoid publicly speaking or engaging in the creation of critical art, and instead focus their efforts into reflections on how art can be used to promote social cohesion and peace, or to convey aspects of Yemeni identity. Unfortunately, this has also led many artists to flee
the country and reside in exile. Since the start of the war, a variety of practices were employed to ensure the security and safety of artists, audience members and attendees of trainings and workshops; for instance, organizations would always keep a low profile to avoid threats from political groups, organizations would not publicly promote their events/activities till after they were implemented to make sure they do not get interrupted by political parties. Events marketing also avoids showcasing women in photos or videos as a form of protection as women face more discrimination.

There's a lot of political pressure to demote the sector, potentially as political parties understand the powerful role of the arts and its ability to create peace. As such, governments create very complicated regulations for organizations and artists to be operational, and these differ from one city to the other as each geographical area is governed by different parties. For instance, organizations are required to get permits to operate or do any activity, which are only granted after a long bureaucratic process and the submission of at times over 17 documents (budgets, contracts, activities, team members, locations, annual reports, registration certificates, etc). This is another attempt to censor organizations and complicate their processes, and has actually been successful in forcing organizations to shut down. In certain areas where non-legitimate governments prevail, cultural practitioners face another layer of complication, as they refuse to address non-legitimate governments but still cannot work without their permissions. This leads many organizations/initiatives to work without registration, to avoid the continuous process of monitoring, yet in doing so, face the risk of shutting down. One interviewee commented:

“It has become tedious to keep up with all the bureaucracy and regulations, and I think this has been a ploy to discourage organizations from working in the sector. Sadly, it has succeeded in shutting down some organizations. Others that try to re-open have a hard time as they have to provide documents that go back to 3-4 years even when they were inactive”.

On the other hand, the CCI were employed by political parties to promote their agendas and to lead political propaganda. Certain forms of art were used to convey political messages and emphasize social norms that political parties promote to ensure their dominance. In these instances, organizations that are willing to cooperate with governments gain their support, these are rare cases however and instead the parties usually have their own creative media platforms to do so. As such many artists have chosen to flee
the country, where others remained but face many challenges. They have to choose between sustainability and **freedom of expression**, between freedom, creativity and economic prosperity and the ability to maintain livelihoods, between objectivity and safety.

Artists and creatives also suffer **significant psychological tolls and trauma**. Often, cultural actors are psychologically demoralized due to the conflict, the restrictions on creative expression, and the forced abandonment of their existing projects in Yemen. While struggling themselves, they often understand that they have some responsibility in continuing to work to emphasize that in tough political contexts, the role of the arts is emotional and mental release, for creating and connecting communities together, and finding opportunities for solidarity.

**The Social Perception of the Arts and Culture**

In a dire economic context, **Yemeni society does not consider arts and culture as a priority**. In fact, after years of systemic cultural destruction, especially since 1994 when a religious propaganda was launched to fight the sector, the arts and culture became less respected, and the CCI was considered either useless, a luxury, or, in extreme cases, blasphemy. This is reflected in an absence of governmental funding for the sector, rigid governmental regulations, and limited venues for art education. In turn, it influenced the quality of arts production, limited access to culture, and stigmatized culture as a practice against Yemeni cultural, social and religious norms. One interviewee commented:

“the arts are associated with the Muzayen social class, which is a lower social that’s negatively looked upon, and therefore many people would venture away from the arts so as not to be labeled as such”

Such stigma creates an additional barrier for youth to practice art; if the CCI are fought socially, practitioners will lack the social and societal support to pursue their passions/careers in the arts, especially if these artistic practices are non-traditional or western. This is even intensified with the limited economic power of the sector. One interviewee commented:

“People are more prone to accept traditional cultural practices, because they have been part of our culture and social fabric for so long. However, incorporating new forms of art like breakdancing for example is more difficult for people to accept and promote.”

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5. For more info on social classes in Yemen, refer to this link: https://www.aljazeera.net/blogs/2020/7/6/العنصرية-الطبقية-في-اليمن-قانون
The Economic Context

The economic context in Yemen is severely stressed. The Yemeni Riyal continues to depreciate to new lows, incurring price increases in essential goods and increasing the cost of living. This has pushed people into extreme poverty, and has created challenging living conditions. Dual taxation systems in the north and south continue to challenge citizens, while COVID-19 has slowed international trade down, shrinking the Yemeni economy by 8.5% in 2020.

With prevailing poverty, the economic context in Yemen continues to be complex and very much influenced by political structures. Recently, the UN estimated that around 24.3 million people in Yemen in 2021 were threatened by hunger and disease. Basic goods prices have tremendously increased in government-controlled areas with salaries remaining low. In Houthi-controlled areas, salaries are not paid while the price of essential goods continues to increase.

In the cultural sector, there’s a huge sense of frustration among artists and cultural practitioners due to the limited economic power of the sector. With minimal investment, organizations lack sustainable sources of income, which translates into restricted opportunities for cultural production, minimal incomes for artists and cultural practitioners and oftentimes no restrictions for minimum wages. Artists and cultural practitioners are therefore left with no social and economic security. They are unable to maintain livelihoods through the arts, and are oftentimes forced to work other jobs outside the sector, to sustain themselves and their families. The inconsistent investment further influences the quality and regularity of artistic production, and minimizes potential to accumulate experience. One participant said:

“It’s almost impossible to live from the arts at the moment, you can barely find jobs, and even if you do, they are not well paid at all. It’s best to consider it a hobby sometimes and rely on other sectors for economic sustainability. Because of that, we are unable to grow our work or enhance our artistic skills.”

And while we see a growing level of interest from the youth, they still lack the motivation to pursue the arts vis-a-vis its limited economic value. And with low exchange rates that prevail in the country, it becomes even less tempting to work in the sector. Artists are forced to work multiple jobs at the same time, collaborate with the private sector, and offer services outside the sector.

7- https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview#1
The geographical segmentation and isolation further limits potential for income generation. Artists and cultural practitioners often find themselves excluded from international markets, especially with the weak digital infrastructure that makes it increasingly difficult to provide services internationally.

Yet, Yemeni artists are so passionate about their work, and the role of the arts, and often try to find alternatives to ensure the sustainability of the sector. Many of the interviewees have highlighted the fact that they financially support their organizations and invest in them. One interviewee commented:

“It’s impossible to sustain ourselves financially through work in the sector. In fact, it’s the other way around. We have to support our organizations, and oftentimes, we take on consultancies and other jobs just to generate income for our organizations”.

They are reflecting on income generating opportunities, like selling services, or even looking into the potential of exporting Yemeni art to international markets as a form of sustainability. This will require many linkages and networking as well as enhancing the quality of artistic production.

In the past couple of years however, and with UNESCO-EU’s investment in the sector, there have been many improvements in the livelihood of cultural practitioners. Interviewees witnessed an increase in the number of cultural activities, an increase in job creation and enhanced skills of artistic practitioners, including artistic management, communication, and institutional capacity building. Some organizations were able to resurface after years of suspended work, which in turn can bring more interest for other international donors. This directly contributed to enhanced livelihoods as it provided job opportunities, while also contributing to reviving the sector at large and preserving Yemeni culture and heritage. UNESCO-EU’s intervention brought in more opportunities for cultural collaboration and networking, and more awareness around the importance of culture.

Gender-Specific Challenges and Trends

With all the above-mentioned challenges, women face specific gender-related challenges that influence their cultural and artistic practice and participation. This may differ as certain restrictions are more relaxed in cities like Aden and Sana’a in comparison to other places like Shibam. Such challenges are embedded in
social and religious norms, and are reflected on all aspects of the society including the CCI. However, we see them taking different forms depending on the role or activity. For instance, it is socially acceptable to attend cultural events and be part of an audience (even if at times men and women are seated separately). This is also true to participating in workshops or training, and in fact women are oftentimes more active in such events. On the other side, cultural practice and production is a bit more restricted; women can be cultural practitioners and artists, yet their production is that of art forms that require the least exposure. As such, it is socially acceptable that women produce literature, poetry, visual arts and crafts, yet it is frowned upon if they are into cinema, theater, music or dance.

The social stigma of the arts is intensified for women who are expected to perform certain domestic roles (mother, wife, home keeper, etc), instead of working in the cultural field. Often, governments/political parties use violent and intimidation tactics to threaten and defame women artists and cultural actors. Many organizations are aware of such dynamics and realities, and therefore take certain measures to ensure female participation, like making sure they don’t photograph women or don’t publish anything about their participation on social media and or provide safe spaces that are exclusively reserved for women and girls. One interviewee highlighted:

“You have to know the rules of the game in order to be able to go around them. It’s tough to practice arts as a woman and we have to make some compromises. There are certain forms that are completely unacceptable, like dancing, but it’s easier to be a poet. We take that into consideration, and we also understand the social context and play around it, so for example if we’re planning workshops and we want women to participate, we make sure to plan workshops specifically for women”.

The Status of Yemeni Public Health

The Yemeni health system has collapsed as a result of the war, leaving people in danger of diseases and health issues. In the last few years, multiple overlapping contagious disease outbreaks took place, such as cholera and dengue. With the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the already weak health system suffered even more. A report by the World Bank estimates that over 20.5 million Yemenis do not have access to clean water and sanitation, leaving them subject to disease, while around 16.3 million are facing the consequences of malnutrition due to food insecurity.
As such, and with already difficult health structures, the Yemeni people, who are facing more pressing diseases, did not react the same way as the rest of the world to COVID-19. In fact, when asked about how COVID-19 affected the cultural sector, interviewees mainly said that they have looked at it as the common cold or flu. This comes as a result of many factors; many did not have the luxury to quarantine or self-isolate when needed as it hindered their ability to maintain jobs, while others had other more serious diseases to consider instead. Some tried to create awareness campaigns around COVID-19 and its dangers, while others tried to implement some social distancing restrictions. One interviewee commented:

“there’s so much going on to even care about covid-19, we live in poverty, and we face much more severe diseases, Covid-19 somehow falls to the background.” Another commented: “people lack awareness around health issues, and they don’t consider Covid-19 as a threat, maybe awareness campaigns could help a bit”.

Those who tried to shift their activities online, through zoom and social media, suffered from the poor internet infrastructure. Others who continued to offer activities had a lower rate of attendance. On the other hand, COVID-19 impacted people’s mental health as well, especially those who suffered from the loss of loved ones due to the pandemic.
Cultural and Creative Industries

Identified Needs

Based on the analysis above, a number of pressing needs prevail to enhance and elevate the sector that vary from education and access to resources to infrastructure, funding and further investment. For a sectoral development, it is vital to work on different levels that can support the physical and virtual infrastructures, build the capacities of cultural workers, develop supportive and just cultural policies as well as work on solidifying networks that support a process of collective growth and success.

1. Cultural Education and Capacity Building (Culture 2030 Thematic Indicator: Knowledge & Skills)

The research highlighted a huge need for cultural education and capacity building. There is no artistic education inside public schools, and limited opportunities for BA degrees or technical education.

Cultural education helps:
• Creating social awareness around the importance of arts and culture, and their role in bringing peace and social cohesion.
• Fighting the stigma around the arts and culture, and highlighting the economic potential of the sector.

Skills that need improvement include:
• Cultural management skills;
• Communications and marketing skills;
• Creative and technical production skills in all artistic fields: most practitioners are self-taught and therefore require specialized support in developing their artistic practice, like photography, sound design and engineering, filmmaking, script writing, music;
• Institutionalization and institutional management skills including fundraising, financial planning and self-sustainability, business planning;
• Networking skills;
• Risk management;
• Digital skills: digital presence, digital security, archiving, social media.

In addition to education and capacity building, access to knowledge and resources in Arabic is essential to truly support the continued development of artists and cultural practitioners.
2. Supportive Funding Structures (Culture 2030 Thematic Indicator: Environment & Resilience)

The creative and cultural industries in Yemen need elaborate funding structures to re-build, sustain and grow. Current funding is important yet not enough to address the state of the sector after years of systemic destruction. Smart collaborative schemes should be put in place that can support the sector financially, contribute to job creation and economic empowerment, capacity building, (re-)institutionalization, and support for cultural and artistic production. Most importantly, alternative funding opportunities should be explored in support of start-ups, initiatives and non-registered organizations. Additionally, any support for Yemeni creative industries must take into account that many members of the community and certain entities are currently exiled out of the country and should be included in future support and funding schemes to ensure a holistic and a consistent approach and to alleviate isolation and fragmentation.

3. Cultural Policy Work (Culture 2030 Thematic Indicator: Prosperity & Livelihoods)

The sector is in need of governing cultural policies that promote freedom of expression, creativity, decent economic value, safety and security for artists, cultural practitioners and organizations, as well as promoting networking and collaboration across cultural organizations. Policies should also incorporate gender sensitivity and support to ensure women's rights to safe and secure artistic participation.

4. Networking (Culture 2030 thematic indicator: Prosperity & Livelihoods, Knowledge & Skills, Inclusion & Participation)

Networking, both locally and internationally, is a great need for the sector and can do wonders in its sustainability and growth. On a local level, networking can foster collaboration and cooperation across cultural actors, and can contribute to developing economies of solidarity where cultural actors rely on each other for their own success and growth. It can also serve as a platform for knowledge transfer and sharing, as well as opportunities to reflect on the common needs of the sector and find collaborative solutions. On an international level, it will promote Yemeni art, provide opportunities for exposure, and access to residencies, art fairs, as well as new markets for Yemeni artistic production. It’s also essential to reflect on the needs of artists residing in exile, and ensure they are part of the
discussion when we address the CCI scene in Yemen. Ideally, Yemeni artists based in the diaspora could facilitate potential networking and collaboration opportunities.

5. Support for Infrastructure (Culture 2030 Thematic Indicator: Environment & Resilience)

Investment in infrastructure development is essential for the recovery and growth of the sector. Without cultural venues and platforms, cultural practitioners have a hard time promoting their work, organizing activities or networking. There is a need for platforms that can incubate artistic initiatives as well as create a cultural landscape and scene. The digital infrastructure is also in need of further development; currently the internet is extremely expensive and often unstable. A digital infrastructure is needed to allow for further production, exhibition and dissemination, as well as to help circumvent and address the many challenges on the local level.
RECOMMENDATIONS
Funding and Investment

1. The CCI in Yemen is in need of reviving through steady and continuous investment that ensures economic empowerment and livelihoods for cultural actors, through job creation and maintenance of sufficient wages. If we are able to guarantee that practitioners are able to sustain themselves financially through work in the CCI, we can be certain the sector is able to grow. Long-term core-based consistent investment in cultural organizations across different geographical areas is required to ensure their sustainability as they recover from tough socio-economic and political structures. Short-term project interventions can help, but won’t provide the security and sustainability that is needed for long-term development. In the meanwhile, emergency funding can provide initial support.

2. UNESCO-EU’s investment over the past 2 years has made a visible impact on the status of CCI. There is still a need to bring in additional partners and funding institutions from the region, like Culture Resource and AFAC who already contribute on a minor scale, and also international foundations. UNESCO-EU could help facilitate a broader initiative of convening international funders and support networks, where partners could learn about the Yemeni creative sector and explore investment needs.

3. There is a need for alternative forms of funding and income-generating schemes for initiatives and organizations that are not registered, to ensure their potential for growth and sustainability. These could be in the form of start-up grants, or small scale grants. It’s also worth exploring private sector funding to the arts. This proves to be of importance to avoid the bureaucratic and costly procedures incurred on organizations by political parties/governments, making it almost impossible to get formally registered or to sustain their work.

4. Further investigation into the potential of exploring philanthropic approaches to funding, like the creation of a fund or council through philanthropists interested in the Yemeni cultural sector. Such a council could be established through identifying potential philanthropists locally and internationally. It could also serve as a platform for discussion on gaps and needs, and potential areas of investment. This body can also help encourage foundations and international agencies to pool resources into such an effort and would facilitate challenges in terms of administration, transfer of funds and measures of accountability etc.
5. With limited statistical data around the sector, our knowledge about its economic value and human capital is limited. While we see many active organizations and cultural practitioners building the sector, we could benefit from a statistical survey that provides us with quantifiable data around the number of active organizations, geographical distribution, number of cultural practitioners, economic value of the sector, investment and funding, labor force, and other relevant statistics that can shed light on the sector and offer invaluable input on specific and quantifiable developmental needs beyond a qualitative analysis.

Building the Ecosystem

6. Investment in cultural infrastructure is seen as a priority for the sector which lacks ample spaces for production, collaboration, networking, learning, and promoting artistic work. This can be done through the provision of new spaces (including co-working spaces), supporting current ones, and preservation of heritage.

7. Investing in developing fair and just cultural policies that govern the sector is seen as a priority for cultural practitioners, and is considered vital for growth and sustainability, for good governance, for copyrights and protection.

8. Promoting economies of solidarity; cultural actors can benefit tremendously from working together in support of shared values and visions. The concept of solidarity economy highlights and prioritizes social profitability and gain instead of purely financial profit. Employing this concept will foster collaboration across cultural actors, and contribute to elevating the sector as a whole. Such an approach can come as a response to minimal available resources and capabilities, and can support cultural actors and the sector at large. Conducting awareness sessions on the benefits and potential of this approach for cultural actors could allow them to better understand how supporting each other can translate to supporting themselves as well as the sector. Interviewees highlighted the need to create a collaborative network that brings all cultural actors together; such a network could be formulated in a way that allows regular meetings, knowledge transfer and motivation for collaboration. Cultural actors can promote skills, spaces and tools that they can share, and a process of exchange among them can take place. For example, one organization can offer its spaces in exchange for tools or capacity building training.

9. Special attention should be given to ensure Yemeni artists in the diaspora do not fall through the cracks and continue to be isolated from the broader community at home. In fact, they can
be seen as a bridge that facilitates international cooperation and collaboration as well as knowledge exchange. They can share tools/expertise/opportunities that can be better suited for local artists and cultural managers. On the other hand, it is vital to ensure they are included in any future investment in the sector, even if they are not physically there.

10. Fighting the stigma around art and creating awareness around the power of CCI in promoting peace, equality and social cohesion is essential. While youth are engaged in the arts, they gain invaluable skills. Including critical thinking, and they are less likely to engage with or employed for violent acts/war. Suggestions to do so include linking the arts to its economic value and potential. In times of poverty and tough economic structures, it becomes essential to partake in jobs that have good financial value, and the CCI in Yemen was not able to do so. However, if cultural activities and artistic services are monetized, and if cultural actors are able to generate income through their work, this could potentially reframe the view of the arts as a “luxury” and reposition it as a viable source of income, which will in turn help fight the stigma around it. Highlighting the economic potential of the arts and creating economic value for the sector will help fight the stigma and motivate youth to engage more. On the other hand, potentially experimenting with participatory arts or community-based arts might encourage a better perception of the sector. This was evident in one of the examples shared by the interviewees: they have faced constant harassment about their work, which was labeled as a non-yemeni practice, yet, they continued to explain their work and continued to invite and engage people who disagreed with them, eventually, as the become more open to try and therefore change their views completely, and instead become supporters. Designing programs that engage audiences and families can slowly shift the stigma around arts and allow for more acceptance.

Capacity Building and Skills Development

11. In addition to promoting initiatives that build youth capacities, knowledge-based initiatives are important, like residencies, cultural magazines, festivals and public events, as well as the provision of production tools. Twinning initiatives could also be explored, bringing together Yemeni organizations with regional/international counterparts, to facilitate knowledge exchange, access to mentorship, access to networks, and new areas of practice.
12. Marketing and communication around potential opportunities should be done differently to ensure it has reach beyond known cultural actors. It potentially could be circulated across internal networks and referral systems and not only social media. This would ensure an expanded geographic reach as well as access to organizations who lack digital presence.

13. Specific measures should be put in place to ensure the active participation and engagement of women in the CCI. Suggestions include positive discrimination or the provision of women only training/workshops. It’s also suggested to target families to change perceptions, and understand social confinements to better be able to work around them.

Exploration of New Artistic Practices

14. Art therapy as a practice for healing and rebuilding might be a potential area for further exploration. This has proved successful in the many examples the interviewees have shared. They emphasized the role of the arts in bringing social cohesion, and in protecting youth away from war or drugs. Possibly it can be a practice that promotes reconstruction and collective healing beyond the war.

15. A deeper analysis of social media creation (i.e. Instagram and TikTok as production tools) to investigate its ability to bring more people into the process of cultural creation, and to help diversify the pool of practitioners. It could further resolve movement restrictions, and might circumvent issues of censorship. It can ideally lend itself for easier local, regional and international distribution to reach wider and diverse audiences. There are many examples of employing social media as a tool of artistic production and festivals for exhibition and distribution, like mobile film festivals. This could also open the door for further exploration of other forms of digital arts including gaming, data visualization, and animation.

Long-term Visions

16. A need for long-term strategic vision that looks beyond current needs, and considers reconstruction beyond the war. Further investigation is required to reflect on potential capacity building needs, infrastructural development, as well as archiving, memorization and other potential necessities for collective healing.
ANNEXES

Yemeni House of Music radio series rehearsals - 2021
Annex 1: Bibliography

UNESCO-EU, 2019. Yemen Youth Cultural Diaspora Forum, s.l.: EU.
### Annex 2: List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1. Aden</td>
<td>Mazen Sharif</td>
<td>Aden Again</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Sana’a</td>
<td>Shaima Gamal</td>
<td>Basement Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Aden</td>
<td>Yaser Abdel-Baqi</td>
<td>Jaderia Association For Development and Media</td>
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<td>4. Aden</td>
<td>Muhammad</td>
<td>Khaleej Aden Theatre Troupe (KATT)</td>
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<td>5. Diaspora (Australia)</td>
<td>Hamza al-Bukari</td>
<td>Al-Madaniya Magazine</td>
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<td>6. Sana’a</td>
<td>Fouad Ali Abdo Al-Sharjhabi</td>
<td>Yemeni House Music of Arts</td>
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<td>7. Shibam</td>
<td>Awad Salem Afif</td>
<td>Association for The Development of Heritage Crafts in Shibam</td>
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<td>8. Sana’a</td>
<td>Maha Naji Salah</td>
<td>Ebhar Foundation For Childhood and Creativeness</td>
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<td>9. Hadramout (interviewees currently based in KSA)</td>
<td>Shayma Bin Othman Mohammad Bawazir</td>
<td>Meemz</td>
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<td>10. Malaysia (Diaspora)</td>
<td>Ahmed Al Hijry Waleed Al Ward</td>
<td>Yemen Used to Be</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Annex 3: Interview guide

Prevailing trends in the CCI of Yemen (capacities, geographic concentration, networks...)

• What does the cultural infrastructure look like in terms of facilities, organizations, geographical connections, governmental support to infrastructure?
• Who has access to culture and cultural participation? Why, why not? How inclusive is the sector?
• Are there any participatory processes and linkages between cultural actors? What are they? Is there a need for different forms/types of linkages?
• Is there any form of collaboration among cultural actors? How can we facilitate collaboration among cultural actors, and why?
• What are the current capacities in the sector? Are there enough artistic and creative skills? How about art management, business planning and education?
• What are the most prevailing funding trends? How is the sector financed? Do we see governmental support, donor funding?
• Are cultural actors able to self-sustain? Do they rely on their own sources of income?

Challenges and barriers limiting the growth and sustainability of CCI operating in the field

• What are the main political challenges the sector faces? How do they influence the sector?
• How does geographical fragmentation influence the sector?
• How do multiple governments/political parties influence the sector?
• Describe the current economic context in Yemen?
• How does the economic context impact the sector?
• What can be done to minimize the impact?
• How can we create awareness on the importance of culture among youth?
• Are there international and transnational connections and collaborations? Or is there a sense of isolation among cultural actors?
• How can we develop connections in support of economic success, market access, exportability?
• How is culture perceived socially? How does this influence engaged with culture?
• How did COVID-19, and other diseases impact the sector?

Economic and livelihood improvement impact on the sector

• Has there been an increase or decrease in the number of cultural businesses?
• How did the livelihood improvement influence the sector? (Production wise, motivation, inclusion, etc)
• Are you able to sustain yourself through creativity and art?
• Has there been an increase in your income thanks to art/culture?
• Were you able to track these changes differently based on gender. If so, why do you think that is?
• Did UNESCO-EU intervention in the last years improve your livelihoods and the sector’s wellbeing? If so, how?

Gender specific challenges and trends

• What are gender specific challenges that women face in the cultural sector, as artists, audience members, managers, researchers, etc?
• Are these challenges different depending on the role you do?
• Does the government place specific challenges to women?
• How are social norms integrated within the challenges?
• What can we do to ensure that CCI also result in better livelihood for women?
### Appendix 4: List of compiled cultural organizations/actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name of Organization</th>
<th>Artistic and Cultural Focus</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Website/Social Media</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Basement Foundation</td>
<td>Diverse cultural platform</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>Filmmaking and photography</td>
<td>Sana'a</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>Hadramout</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Takween</td>
<td>Cultural heritage</td>
<td>Hadramout</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Romooz</td>
<td>Yemeni arts and culture</td>
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<td><a href="https://www.facebook.com/romoozfoundation/">https://www.facebook.com/romoozfoundation/</a></td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Yemeni House of Music Art</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Sana'a</td>
<td><a href="http://www.yemeni-house.org/portal/">http://www.yemeni-house.org/portal/</a></td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>The Arabic Forum of Arts</td>
<td>Painting, calligraphy, music, theatre</td>
<td>Sana'a</td>
<td><a href="https://www.facebook.com/arabforumarts/">https://www.facebook.com/arabforumarts/</a></td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Luqia Youth</td>
<td>Cultural awareness and social engagement</td>
<td>Hadramout</td>
<td><a href="https://www.facebook.com/luqia180">https://www.facebook.com/luqia180</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Name of Organization</td>
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<td>12. Culture Nejam Salon</td>
<td>Socially engaged art</td>
<td>Hadramout</td>
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<td>13. Al Maqah Magazine</td>
<td>Literature and culture</td>
<td>Sana’a</td>
<td><a href="https://m.facebook.com/elmaqah/?_rdr">https://m.facebook.com/elmaqah/?_rdr</a></td>
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<td>15. Yemen Will Triumph (YWT)</td>
<td>Socially engaged art</td>
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<td><a href="https://www.facebook.com/YWTORg">https://www.facebook.com/YWTORg</a></td>
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<td>17. Al Madaniya Magazine</td>
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<td>18. Reading Club</td>
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<td>19. Club Story</td>
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# SUPPORTING CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

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<th>CSOs received grants valued between 10,000 and 46,000 USD</th>
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<td>13</td>
<td>59 capacity building opportunities offered</td>
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<td>555 young cultural managers and operators were supported with capacity building and income</td>
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A report conducted in the framework of the “Arts and Culture Entrepreneurship in Yemen”; a project launched as part of UNESCO-EU’s “Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihoods Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen” project.

Read more: en.unesco.org/doha/cashforworkyemen