YEMENI YOUTH CULTURAL DIASPORA FORUM

EVENT BRIEF AND RECOMMENDATIONS
This project is funded by the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.
The conflict in Yemen has impacted the dynamism of cultural life for youth. Young artists face the challenges of security risks, declining funding in the arts, and a lack of access to organizational resources and outreach channels. Nevertheless, youth groups and solo artists have struggled to use their craft for pro-peace campaigns to promote dialogue and national reconciliation in the country.

The thriving creativity of the Yemeni diaspora thus represents a valuable resource for promoting cultural expression for Yemenis. In this time of crisis, they have invoked a sense of collective solidarity to mobilize to support their compatriots back home.

In partnership with the European Union under the “Cash for Work Project: Promoting Livelihood Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen”, UNESCO is working to protect Yemeni youth livelihoods through support for a dynamic cultural sector.

With the Yemeni Youth Cultural Diaspora Forum, UNESCO has organized an unprecedented transnational mobilization of young Yemeni cultural professionals with a view to leveraging relevant partnership opportunities between national civil society and their diasporic counterparts.

The concrete recommendations reached at the Forum will serve as a Roadmap to inform UNESCO’s upcoming work in promoting cultural programming for youth in Yemen.

I am honored that so many talented Yemeni artists have joined us today to support the Cash for Work Project. I look forward to welcoming your contributions as we work together to promote cultural pluralism in Yemen.
As part of the European Union-funded project called “Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihood Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen”, UNESCO aims to provide youth in Yemen with economic and cultural alternatives to participating in the conflict, through engagement in cultural programming that will improve youth livelihoods, revitalize Yemen’s thriving pre-war cultural pluralism, and safeguard the country’s unique cultural heritage. The project includes several support activities, such as small grants for youth-led cultural programming, youth capacity-building in cultural and creative industries (street arts, film making, coding, programing, graphic design), inclusion in policy dialogue and rapprochement with local decision-makers, and large-scale cash-for-work activities to rehabilitate public heritage and infrastructure in four different cities (Sana’a, Shibam, Zabid and Aden).

The Yemeni Youth Diaspora Forum serves as a laboratory of ideas on how to best support the Yemeni youth cultural scene, bolster youth-led cultural programming and services, and build an unprecedented transnational mobilization of young Yemeni artists and cultural professionals from the diaspora. It is designed to discuss potential partnerships and advance networking between national civil society organizations (CSOs) and their counterparts from the diaspora. The outcomes and recommendations of the Forum will serve as a Roadmap for UNESCO’s work in this area. The Forum will also help young cultural Yemenis artists abroad to channel resources to their networks and peers at home, providing advisory and supports services while gaining additional outreach and opportunities for the development of their artistic and creative works.
**Project Title:** **Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihood Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen**

**Sector:** Youth employment, cultural heritage safeguarding, peace-building

**Timeframe:** 1 September 2018 – 31 August 2021 (3 years)

**Total Budget:** EUR 10,030,000

**Implementing Partners:** UNESCO, Social Fund for Development, cultural heritage institutions, cultural CSOs, municipalities, youth, and artists

**Beneficiaries:**
- 4000 urban youth employed for 500,000 working days through cash-for-work
- 24 Yemeni cultural CSOs supported by small grants and training workshops
- Employment and training of Yemeni master craftsmen and guilds
- At least 500 women beneficiaries

**Geographic Scope:**
Four historic cities in Yemen:
- Sana’a
- Shibam Hadramawt
- Zabid
- Aden
Alhagri is a filmmaker and photographer interested in telling in-depth stories that reveal strong human feelings and desires. Ahmed aims to highlight details of the simple people’s life among which still struggle with shortages of opportunities, exploitation, and life tough circumstances. Alhagri has worked with a number of international TV outlets among which are Aj+ Arabic and Aljazeera Channel and the BBC.

Ahmed Alhagri

Asiri (Ray) is a Yemeni musician, singer and songwriter. He studied Medicine, psychology and cultural curation. Early 2011 he co-founded the art collective called 3 Meter Away. Ray is an activist for solidarity, conflict resolution, peace, and development. 3 Meters Away held projects, training, conferences and tours in Yemen, Ethiopia, Sudan and Germany. Currently, Ray is a freelance translator for the German Office for Migration and Refugees, and an educational specialist with Nestwaerme e.V. Union in Berlin.

Ammar Alqamash

Alqamash is a Yemeni interdisciplinary artist based in Doha. Ammar is the co-founder and the creative director of Phone Art Qatar and Phone Art Global. An investigational attitude and resilience among mediums comprise the bedrock of Alqamash’s practice. His work is based on expressive graphic art, time-based media, and photography.

Ammar Alqamash

Wagdi is a producer, documentary filmmaker, and Scriptwriter based in Qatar. Ezat has produced and directed a number of documentaries covering cases of Human rights, freedom of expression and refugees migration featured in festivals in Malaysia, Qatar and the United States. Currently Ezat produces digital media videos and stories for AJ+ Arabic. Ezat holds a BA in Mechanical Engineering from Aden University and an MA in Media Studies from University of Malaya, Malaysia.

Ezat Wagdi

Gamal (b.1983, Poland) is an independent Yemeni film and theatre director. In 2005, Gamal established Khaleej Aden Theatre Troupe, the first group to reactive the theatre scene since Yemen’s 1994 civil war. In spring 2018, production began for the first feature film ‘10 days before the wedding,’ the film premiered in Aden during the summer, becoming the first film to open commercially in Yemen since the last decade and Yemen’s official submissions to the Oscar in 2018.

Amr Gamal

Ahmed Asery

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Al-Sadi is an Information Technology Management graduate from the Lebanese American University. Currently, pursuing Masters at Hamad bin Khalifa University in Digital Humanities and Societies. Hala is a culture advocate interested in researching topics related to arts, culture and heritage in Yemen. Al-Sadi successfully presented a project proposal on digitizing cultural heritage in Yemen as a graduation capstone for the MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders program 2019.

MARIAM ALDHUBAHNI

Al-Dhubhani is a Yemeni-Russian award-winning journalist and filmmaker. Mariam is currently doing an MA in Museum and Gallery Practice at UCL Qatar. Mariam first pursued her passion for media during the 2011 Arab uprisings. Mariam’s films have been screened globally in festivals such as Carthage, Interfilm, and Oaxaca. Mariam utilizes Virtual Reality in highlighting stories from Yemen.

MOHAMED ALMEQDAM

Al-Meqdam is a Yemeni singer and composer based in Qatar. Mohamed has attended a music academy in Yemen and the Higher Institute of Arabic Music in Egypt. Mohamed’s most recent is video clip is called "حبوب غيري".

MAZEN AL-SAQQAF

Al-Saqqaf is a content creator and a social media influencer. Mazen produces satirical videos on Youtube addressing social, cultural and economic issues. Mazen received the Yemen Youtuber of the Year Award in 2018 and two awards from the regional competition for content creators Sadeem in 2019.

HALA AL-SADI

Abdulaziz is a Yemeni pianist born and raised in Qatar, studied journalism and policy planning at Qatar University. Omar started and developed his passion for piano in between university classes. Omar performed live at TedxQU, and Ajyal film festival. Omar is a regular performer at Anime cafe.

OMAR ABDULAZIZ
Khaled is a Yemeni director and producer born based in Berlin. He has made several short films and art projects telling the stories of the voices of people affected by the war in different cities across Yemen. Osama is currently developing a sci-fi feature film combined with a training program called The Helmet.

**OSAMA KHALED**

Hamada is a Yemeni actress, makeup artist, sculptor and painter. Beside her starring role in ‘10 days before the wedding,’ Yemen’s official submissions to the Oscar in 2018, Sali played leading roles in a number of Television series and theatrical plays. Sali holds a bachelor degree from the Lebanese International University in International Business Administration. In 2018, she founded her own perfume brand.

**SALI HAMADA**

Ishaq is an OSCAR® and BAFTA nominated Yemeni-Scottish filmmaker, film trainer and yoga teacher, born in Scotland and raised in Yemen. Sara co-founded Comra Films, a Yemen-based film community space for creative film-production and training. Sara’s works include ‘Karama Has No Walls,’ and ‘The Mulberry House.’

**SARA ISHAQ**

AlDhari is a Yemeni film director and musician. Shaher holds a bachelors in cinema and filmmaking from Malaysia, and is currently is working as a director in Alrayyan TV in Qatar.

**SHAHER ALDHARI**

Shaima Al-Tamimi is a Yemeni-Kenyan visual storyteller based in the GCC. Her work is inspired by social and cultural issues reflective of her own personal story, and she explores themes relating to patterns and impacts of migration, identity, and culinary culture. Her long-term documentary photography project “As if we never came” was part of the Arab Documentary Photography program, supported by the AFAC. Her work has been featured in Gulf Photo Plus, Art 29, JDEED Magazine, Khaleejesque Magazine, CNN and Doha News.

**SHAIMA ALTAMIMI**
Almekhlafi is a musician. Sumaiyah uses music as a universal language that allows her to communicate through her Piano and Oud. Sumaiyah’s work focuses on delivering easy to digest music that can be appreciated by musicians and music lovers alike. Her dream is to inspire female musicians to share their art publicly in safe and encouraging environment.

SUMAIYAH ALMEKHLAFI

Faroq is a Yemeni documentary photographer and storyteller, currently lives in the Netherlands. Her work aims to achieve a personal reportage that negotiates themes of memory, boundaries, and violence. She focuses on collaborative storytelling projects to tell personal anecdotes of displacement and migration. Her work appeared in several publications among them, Aljazeera, World Press Photo, BBC, Huffington Post, CNN, and others. Thana is currently pursuing a master’s program ‘photography and society’ at the Royal Academy of Arts in the Hague Netherlands.

THANA FAROQ
Twenty two young Yemeni cultural actors and artists from the diaspora participated in the roundtable sessions, including 11 women, who were selected on the basis of prominence and experience in the cultural sector. Four cultural heritage and youth activists from the Arab region also attended the workshop.

The social representation of participants reflected Yemen’s diverse geography, gender, and artistic professions, with participation from filmmakers, musicians, actors and visual artists. The diversity enriched the panel discussions, raising issues faced by female artists and the marginalization of opportunities based on the complicated geography of Yemen.

The event achieved wide outreach and public resonance on a range of social media platforms reaching 25,000 Twitter users during the day of the event and more than 10,000 users in the day that followed. The participants, who possess 500,000 followers combined, were encouraged to utilize their social media accounts to disseminate information about the event using the hashtag #work4heritage mentioning the EU Delegation for Yemen and the UNESCO GCC and Yemen account.

Following the event, a number of cultural CSOs and around 130 individual artists have contacted the project team seeking more information about the project and possibilities for partnership, inspired by UNESCO’s interest in amplifying Yemeni voices and local expertise.

Additionally, the Forum successfully raised visibility and awareness of other elements of the Cash for Work Project, include its income-generating activities in heritage rehabilitation and heritage awareness campaigns with associated online youth surveys.
The Forum achieved a consensus on identifying the most salient challenges and productive avenues to promote equitable opportunities for sustainable cultural development for Yemeni youth. Recommendations included ideas for UNESCO to sponsor in upcoming initiatives for youth cultural programming, as well as proposals for reformulating funding modalities through innovative and gender-sensitive designs contextualized to the realities of the Yemeni cultural sector. In addition to creating livelihoods in cultural production for Yemeni artists, a positive secondary outcome of sustainability initiatives for Yemeni artistry is the emergence of greater opportunities for artistic innovation and the move from instant works to long-term and collective sustainable creative experiments.

**AWARENESS-RAISING AND TRAININGS**

Due to the long-term neglect of arts education within the Yemeni education system, there is low public appreciation for the inherent social value of cultural production. Pervasive social attitudes are dismissive of art as (a) a source of income-generation and (b) necessary for a pluralist peaceful society. The professionalization of artistic knowledge suffers from a lack of recording and systematization in training institutions. This generates the layered need to:

1. Promote programming for mobilizing youth in public for artistic and performative activities, in order to (i) strengthen the existence of artistic spaces, (ii) enhance accessibility and popular engagement, and (iii) present cultural exchange as a peaceful means of public dialogue

2. Provide and promote trainings focused on introductory, fundamental principles of artistry, such as developing and editing the story-telling process, in addition to specialized artistic skills fostering a professional industry

3. Incorporate gender-sensitive design to introductory training to address the discrimination and restrictions
against female artists and raise public awareness of the need to build safe learning and working environments for women.

4. Provide visibility and outreach to local artistic initiatives and raise awareness of obstacles to sustainable cultural development facing young artists.

**COLLABORATIVE OPPORTUNITIES**

As a result of the absence of institutionalized arts training in Yemeni schools, assistance should be structured to simultaneously invest in the creation and expansion of a sustainable professional community and network of collaboration opportunities. This community would channel the global resources of Yemeni artists to advance cultural development in Yemen via creative exchange, skills training and networking.

To incorporate the multiple identities within the global Yemeni community, it was proposed that art that imagined Yemen as a cultural space rather than a geographic territory should be prioritized to overcome transnational divisions and strengthen partnership networks.

5. Advocate for innovative funding modalities that enable supporting collaborative group projects in addition to solo artists.

6. Consider funding CSOs or consortia of artists with established local and transnational networks and institutional training capacities.

7. Support transnational flow within projects, connecting artists in Yemen with peers and professionals from the diaspora and non-Yemeni artists and facilitating exchange of skills, ideas, contacts.

**INNOVATIVE FUNDING MODALITIES**

In addition to embedding collaborative opportunities into models of funding, participants expressed an interest in other forms of...
innovative funding modalities that would tie grants with a range of skills training and capacity-building initiatives.

8. Accompany funding with mentoring on cultural management and entrepreneurship including in a conflict-context, i.e. designing funding proposals, enhancing outreach channels, access to visibility platforms, developing critical thinking and reporting skills

9. Emphasize access to visibility platforms in funding initiatives, which allows artists to showcase their work to professional audiences and provides artists with critique beneficial for professional development

10. Consider the application of cash-for-work modality for disbursing funds in exchange for cultural production and on-the-job training to the fields of fine art

11. Foster artistic mentorship programs connecting established Yemeni/Yemeni and Yemeni/non-Yemen artists to encourage feedback culture in arts and culture scene improving the quality and caliber of artistic production

**SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODALITIES**

Participants frequently returned to the question of professionalizing the labor-intensive cultural production of young artistic networks—spheres of professional activity which primarily operate on a volunteering basis in Yemen and do not present art as a viable long-term career option. For art to offer livelihoods for youth in Yemen, cultural production is in need of sustainable business models with the full range of opportunities for professional development.

12. Provide access to business-minded trainings in cultural management for cultural professionals to capitalize on entrepreneurial models that translate initial limited grants into sustainable programming
INFORMATION-SHARING INITIATIVES
Due to the informal and unprofessionalized nature of artistic production in Yemen, there is a lack of access to comprehensive and reliable communication and exchange of information in the cultural sector. This presents an obstacle for cultural professionals seeking to expand their networks and apply for diversified sources of funding.

Furthermore, the dearth of sustainable funding for cultural professionals in Yemen significantly raises the time and labour cost for artists in managing collaborative and longer-term projects. The impact of this is a reduction in the real value of external assistance for Yemeni artists and has become one of the primary difficulties in promoting a sustainable cultural sector.

13. Develop and maintain an online platform that serves as a culture-funding watch advertising funding, training, and visibility opportunities which Yemeni artists are both generally eligible for and specifically targeted by.

14. Invest in building a professional database of emerging young artists and cultural associations, allowing for regular updates and self-registration of artists and projects.

IMPORTANT SPHERES OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION
Participants affirmed the importance of support for identified spheres of cultural activity to advance initiatives for (i) heritage protection, (ii) social cohesion and pluralist visions of Yemeni society to combat the divisive narratives of conflict, and (iii) challenging stereotypes propagated about Yemen.

15. Support digitalization initiatives for cultural heritage and stress its promotion, accessibility, and engagement with young audiences.

16. Invest in initiatives mapping intangible heritage and projects promoting appreciation of popular arts.
17. Capitalize on the transnational outreach of social media platforms through short, simple clips that capture the multiplicities of Yemen

**TACKLING INEQUALITIES IN CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES**
The participants called for contextualized funding modalities that recognize and tackle the structural inequalities of Yemeni society, which are at times reproduced in patterns of external assistance.

18. Formulate funding modalities that expand beneficiary outreach for equitable geographic balance beyond Sana’a, which receives the vast majority of arts investment.

19. Design assistance to address the specific gendered restrictions and discrimination facing female artists, through targeted funding, training and visibility opportunities.

**UNESCO-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS**
In addition to the proposals above for UNESCO to consider implementing in collaboration with Yemeni cultural CSOs, participants pointed out how the comparative advantage of UNESCO’s capacities in cultural development may be leveraged through the following UNESCO-specific strategies.

20. Mobilize a fundraising campaign for diversified sources of assistance from additional donors.


22. Organize a follow-up forum in one year to review progress made against benchmarks.