



## Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

# Cash for Work – empowering urban youth through cultural heritage rehabilitation in Yemen’s historic cities

Region	Middle East and North Africa
Award Scheme	Shanghai Manual
Themes	Regeneration Rehabilitation Youth & Livelihoods
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls Goal 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
New Urban Agenda Commitments	Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity and Opportunities for All Planning and Managing Urban Spatial Development

## Summary

Focusing on the preservation of urban cultural heritage in the historic cities of Aden, Sana'a, Shibam and Zabid, Yemen's Cash for Work project has simultaneously enabled employment creation for urban youth whilst restoring cultural identity and historic heritage in these four key cities.

## Background and Objective

Yemen is situated at the juncture of the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa and the Indian Ocean, and boasts a long history and splendid cultural heritage. The Old Walled City of Shibam, Old City of Sana'a and the Historic Town of Zabid are all UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The castle in Shibam, built on a cliff in the 16th century, is one of the oldest and best examples of urban planning based on the principle of vertical construction. The Old City of Sana'a has more than 2,500 years of history with a rich religious and political legacy: it was once a major centre for the propagation of Islam. And the Historic Town of Zabid was the capital of Yemen from the 13th century to 15th century; its domestic and military architecture, and unique urban plan makes it an outstanding archaeological and historical site. Aden is also rich in history and historical sites; however, the ongoing armed conflict in Yemen has posed significant threats to the unique cultural heritage with many buildings damaged by protracted fighting. In addition, the destruction of cultural heritage is further exacerbated by climate change, a long-term lack of maintenance, poor repair technology, funding shortages for restoration and the lack of capacity among local governments to ensure preservation of the ancient city due to the political security crisis. And at the same time the urban cultural environment has deteriorated with a loss of dignity and identity of the Yemeni people. The humanitarian crisis, famine and high unemployment rate has deprived young people of hope for the future which in turn increases the likelihood of their involvement in conflicts. In this challenging context, the Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihood Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen project was officially launched in September 2018, aiming to create cultural heritage preservation-related jobs for local Yemeni people and in particular urban youth. It has strived to support sustainable, community-led, youth cultural and creative initiatives to promote cultural and creative industries, increase employment in the cultural sector and improve the cultural heritage management capacity of local government and civic groups, thereby strengthening social cohesion and economic resilience.

## Actions and Implementation

Cash for Work is a supportive measure in which the government invests in the construction of public infrastructure projects and the recipients are paid for their labour instead of direct relief. The project has been structured across four years (2018–2022) and is implemented by UNESCO, the Social Fund for Development (SFD), Yemeni government agencies and local heritage institutions, and civic culture organizations with EUR 10 million in funding contributed by the European Union (EU). The project has implemented a range of initiatives to promote the conservation of urban cultural heritage in Sana'a, Shibam and Zabid, and the restoration of historic buildings in Aden, co-facilitating the development of cultural and creative industries and employment and capacity-building opportunities for local youth in the four historic cities. UNESCO, in collaboration with SFD, the General Organization for the Preservation of Historic Cities in Yemen and the General Organization of Antiquities and Museums, completed a comprehensive urban heritage damage assessment survey of the city as a key first step. The survey used cutting-edge methodologies, combining rapid-assessment tools and digital applications developed by UNESCO along with satellite visualization techniques. A classified evaluation was carried out examining the cause and extent



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of damage to buildings and public infrastructure from issues of armed conflict, lack of maintenance, shortage of repair funds and poor administrative supervision. Local inhabitants – notably a large proportion of young people – participated in the survey and field trips were made to communities for consultation with local residents. UNESCO used the results of the final survey as an important reference for the next step in the preservation and restoration of the city's heritage, and as a basis for identifying priority sites for future cash for work projects. Based on the damage assessment, urban rehabilitation guidelines were designed aiming to help all staff involved in the project to conduct the necessary surveying, planning, maintenance, rehabilitation and monitoring operations for buildings, public facilities and urban landscapes in the old city in compliance with recognized conservation standards and principles. Overall, the aim has been to ensure the preservation of historic structures and their use as a living environment with the highest possible level of authenticity and safeguarding. The guidelines take into consideration the extremely challenging local context with issues of armed conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic decline, humanitarian crises and fragmentation in local governance. The guidelines, therefore, do not set out explicit requirements for action as previous guidelines did but instead outline the principles and main methods of heritage preservation encouraging the local building industry to put its own restoration experience to work. It is worth noting that since most residents generally lack any knowledge of building conservation and cannot digest complex expertise, the resident-oriented guide uses more accessible language to explain conservation and restoration knowledge. Years of war and frequent natural disasters have resulted in a weak economic base and a long-term high youth unemployment rate in Yemen. Urban heritage conservation work is providing many job opportunities for local youth such as strengthening the structures of historic buildings; repairing the roofs, facades, windows and other building details; and restoring and optimizing the old bazaars, public squares, sanitation facilities and other infrastructure in the ancient city. The youth who have gained employment not only have a steady income but also gained professional training in traditional construction skills and the restoration of cultural heritage. Most importantly, the project is directly benefitting the local community. As of March 2021, 151 historical buildings have been maintained and rehabilitated with employment opportunities provided to 2,350 young people (10 per cent of whom are women), helping to improve their family situations (over 8,000 family members are beneficiaries), with more than 8,000 urban heritage elements across the four cities subject to survey and assessment. To increase access to employment opportunities for youth in the four cities, the Cash for Work project is not limited to the cultural heritage field but also aims to more comprehensively explore the potential of the cultural and creative economy. UNESCO, together with EU and the Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS), launched a small grants programme to help select CSOs improve their cultural development planning and income generating capabilities. This provided more job opportunities for young local artists and cultural industry practitioners, improving their income levels and enhancing the vitality of the country in the field of cultural creativity. The small grants programme selected eight pilot projects – ensuring geographic diversity to cover all four historical cities – including documentation of heritage architecture in private houses, preservation of heritage documentary collection and gender-focused training in handicrafts. The small grants programme will offer to fund pilot projects varying from USD 10,000 to USD 40,000, distributing it to young cultural practitioners under the Cash for Work methodology. More than 500 young people (both male and female) have already benefited from the programme. A series of cultural and creative training sessions were also organized by UNESCO and NGO RNW Media to provide small grant recipients and local cultural industry practitioners with key knowledge and skills on the sustainable management of urban heritage, museum collection conservation, the use of grants, communication, monitoring and assessment skills, and digital participation (in which 10 residents from Aden participated). In addition, online courses, including those on how to better use social media tools, were offered for creators to strengthen their understanding of local heritage diversity and tell Yemeni stories. The training directly benefited 244 young Yemenis, with direct compensation for their participation in the workshop and subsequent work. To enhance visibility on the potential of heritage preservation as a core tool for sustainable development, the Cash for Work project has capitalized on the media to unlock value. Firstly, it has produced publicity content online and short documentaries with UNESCO, RNW Media and SMEPS joining forces to launch a campaign covering 84 topics and reaching 6 million people to raise awareness on cultural heritage conservation. On Manasati30, a content platform run by RNW Media, multimedia content was viewed approximately 3 million times with 17,700 comments and 11,400 shares. With the support of popular Yemeni vlogger Somaya Jamal as a host, a five-episode video series was created illustrating Yemen's cultural heritage through a personal journey, taking viewers on a tour of the historic cities showcasing local architecture, handicrafts, traditional practices, and investment in and protection of cultural heritage. The series, *Turathna* (Our Heritage), had reached over 1.3 million views by June 2022, educating many young people on the Cash for Work programme. Secondly, organization of youth representatives to participate in cultural heritage thematic campaigns in the different cities was also undertaken. Activities included: 1) taking part in online surveys about cultural heritage and thinking about issues including the current risks to cultural heritage, methods to raise awareness on cultural heritage, strategies for its protection and methods for young people be involved in protection efforts; 2) creating and posting cultural heritage-themed audio-visual content on social media; and 3) organizing two interactive seminar training sessions where experts led young people on a field trip to experience intangible cultural heritage elements such as music, dance, food and to discuss how to start cultural entrepreneurship. A video produced by RNW Media received over 800,000 views. Thirdly, creative activities were encouraged through film production. To promote engagement among young people in creative activities and use the power of culture for personal growth and industrial development, UNESCO, in collaboration with EU, SMEPS and the New York Film Academy, produced documentaries on Yemen's cultural heritage. Twelve young Yemenis (6 men and 6 women) received professional guidance from internationally renowned filmmakers to produce 12 documentaries on cultural heritage representing the unique and diverse culture of the region from different perspectives. The documentaries have served as a key means to promote visibility on these elements.

## Conclusion

As core components, buildings, infrastructure and public spaces constitute the tangible cultural heritage of the four ancient cities. Restoration and protection work has created a large number of jobs for residents in particular youth, integrating them into formal employment thus improving their



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livelihood opportunities and long-term prosperity. As a key measure, the project emphasized the principle of ‘training for skill and expertise’ and provided young people with practical skills in construction and restoration, training workers locally. It also offered extensive cultural and creative industry training for young people engaged in this arena, enabling them to establish their own business or gain employment in the field; a measure that has reinforced the critical importance of enhancing the skills and capacity of individuals to ensure their ability to flourish independently in the long-term. It is important to note that to avoid unemployment following completion of the project, the authorities should continue skills training to enhance employment stability and sustainability. Engaging local youth in the protection of endangered cultural heritage not only provides young Yemenis with jobs to sustain livelihoods, but also offers substantial social significance. It helps to create economic value for unemployed youth, gain them social recognition and enhance their self-realization, thus providing more incentives than direct financial assistance. Where 70–80 per cent of Yemen's urban heritage is comprised of private residences, ensuring local communities are one of the main actors in urban heritage protection is paramount. Community-led expertise training can effectively compensate for the inadequacies of the traditional top-down model which leverages governments and professionals solely. Residents may gain economic benefits and enhance their understanding and recognition of heritage values and conservation concepts. Working in cooperation to protect their own community can help to bind people closer together, enhancing their sense of belonging and identity, and subsequently bolstering community cohesion and promoting more open dialogue and peaceful interactions. This human-oriented model pays more attention to the livelihood significance of individuals and the improvement of community living environments, and strives to maximize the number of direct beneficiaries of heritage conservation for local residents. Women's participation and equal pay for equal work are both important objectives in the Cash for Work project. Although much physical restoration work has been undertaken by male employees, the project also ensures the equal participation of women. Creative solutions were deployed to maximize female involvement. Their employment in cutting and removing sesame trees which threatened local agricultural resources and urban heritage is one example. In addition, with the increasing acceptance of new jobs besides traditional services and textile work, women are also encouraged to join cultural and creative industries and develop their skills into sustainable long-term career ventures. Of the 500 creative industry workers who acquired creative entrepreneurship skills, 200 were women. Despite the progress made, challenges in ensuring women's equal participation in the workplace remains with female participation in the online world still comparatively low, thus limiting the introduction of new perspectives and ideas, and hindering promotion of their digital and media literacy. In order to further break down gender barriers in the workplace, SFD established a gender-focused working group to provide online training on gender equality for people involved in the Cash for Work project and have planned to introduce gender equality checklists in future projects.