



Nuffic-Niche YEM241 Project

Overview of student work for Yemen and Saxion

Supporting the transition process and
good governance



NUFFIC-NICHE-YEM241 project:

Supporting the transition process and good governance in Yemen and Saxion

Yemen and Saxion

For most Dutch people Yemen is a relatively unknown country, in the news with famines and civil war. It's not a country that most Saxion students normally have anything to do with. Nevertheless, Saxion has chosen to support a Yemeni organisation with its professional development. For this publication, we asked students involved in the project – between 2016 and 2020 – to talk about what it meant for them. We also include brief remarks by staff members who worked closely with them.



Youth Leadership Development Foundation

The Youth Leadership Development Foundation (YLDF) is an active civil-society organisation based in Sana'a, Yemen. It was founded to support young people – particularly young women and the underprivileged – in voicing their opinions and needs and participating in Yemen's development. Young people form a broad base of the country's demographic pyramid, but they play only a small role in decision-making processes and make only a minor contribution to the economy.

Saxion is currently assisting the YLDF to play its role in society and to commit to security, gender mainstreaming, and employment (including self-employment). Saxion assists, for example, through management support for leadership, including policy development and training programmes, so as to improve the YLDF's organisational capacity to deliver, implement, and disseminate these programmes among young people and the women's organisations that it works with.



Saxion is implementing the NUFFIC-NICHE-YEM241 project for Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education. Nuffic works in line with the Dutch government's goals for development aid and education. NICHE is the Netherlands Initiative for Capacity Building in Higher Education.





Willeke Slingerland

Professor of Applied Research on Resilient Democracy; project manager

Our research group has been working closely with civil-society organisations (CSOs) on good governance, both close to home (at local and national level in the Netherlands) and far away (Romania, Bulgaria, Palestine, Aruba). A strong civil society is important in established democracies, democracies in transition, or countries where there is little or no democratic development. CSOs are an essential ingredient for development. Their roles are varied, for example providing training and information, building active citizenship, advocating for human rights, acting as a watchdog. In this project we had a unique chance to work with the YLDF, a well-established CSO which has proved, on the one hand, that it's professional and can make an impact. On the other, its tasks and responsibilities have become enormous and therefore extra challenging. As an umbrella organisation it deals with a wide range of tasks, with regional outreach, while working on specific causes with international donors. We exchanged valuable applied insights

“We exchanged valuable applied insights with the staff of the YLDF on how a CSO can manifest itself effectively in a dynamic situation full of uncertainty.”

with the staff of the YLDF on how a CSO can manifest itself effectively in a dynamic situation full of uncertainty. The resilience we found within the YLDF, its staff, and the Yemeni people was inspiring, and made it possible to adapt the project to changing circumstances.

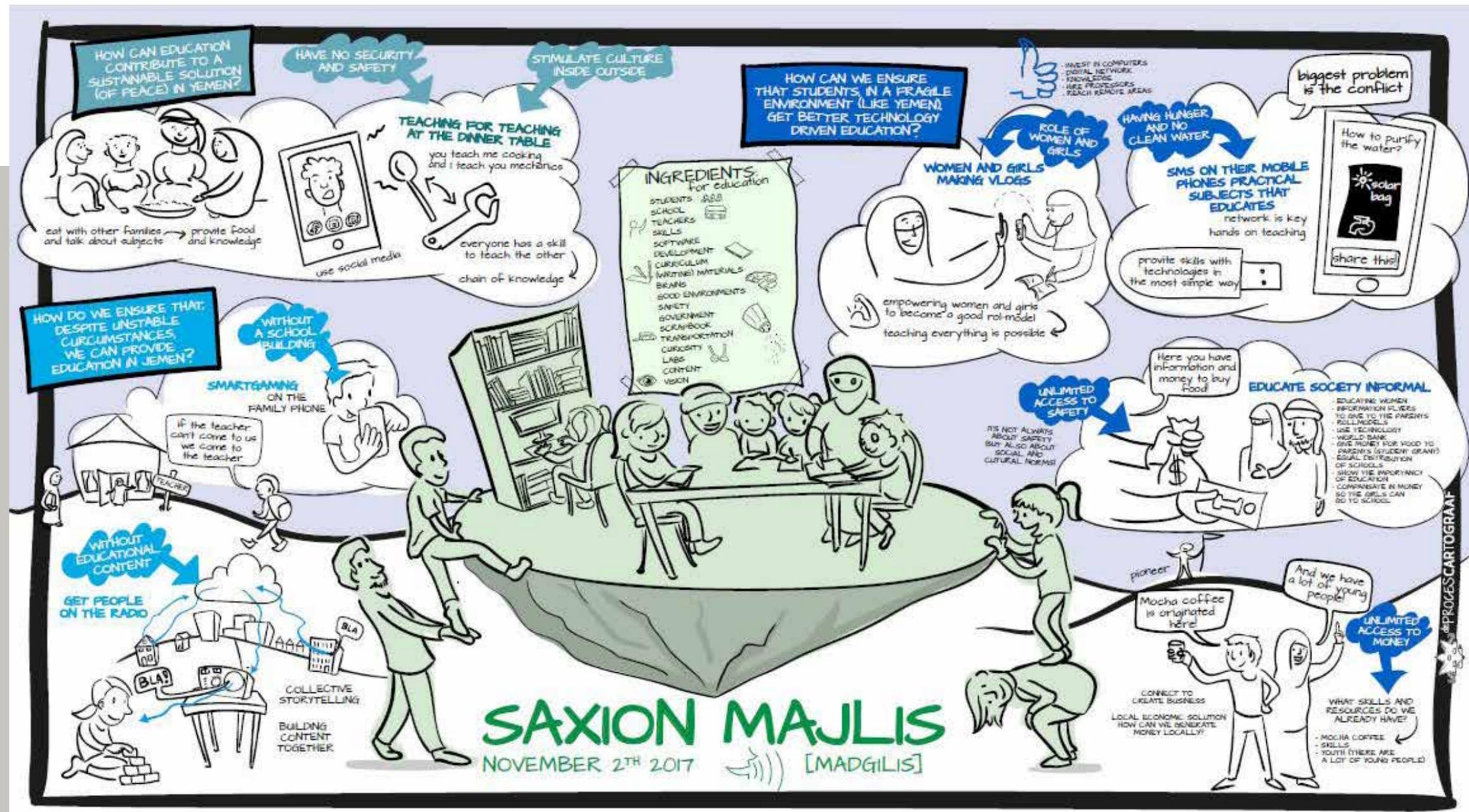
During the project we focussed on a number of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): no poverty (SDG 1), good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), peace justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17). As Saxion UAS we wish to combine the available knowledge and expertise for the benefit of our international partners. We ourselves have gained a lot of new perspectives on how to contribute practically to these SDGs, and more specifically on the role of remote learning and knowledge exchange and the use of new technologies.

Best practices on youth empowerment



One of the first Saxion students involved in the project was Hagob Ghazarian (2017–2018), from the Bachelor of Laws programme. Hagob compared the international standards on empowerment of women and young people and identified best practices of other CSOs around the world (Kenya, Somalia) which have been successful in achieving such empowerment. The role of women didn't come about by accident but through a well-directed and courageous struggle, in phases, carried out by female leaders in cooperation with the enlightened segments of civil society and the international community. The role women can play in achieving the SDGs is enormous – as mothers who educate their children or wives who advise their husband. They are a vital link between families and the community. The YLDF has been able to establish its WARD café because of these kinds of processes.

➔ Visual report Saxion Majlis



The Saxion Majlis

Providing seeds for a culture of peace in fragile and conflict-affected states

The morning of 2 November 2017 saw the start of the first Saxion Majlis in Soesterberg, The Netherlands. More than 25 participants from 12 different organisations took over the main chapel of the Kontakt der Kontinenten conference hotel to sit in a unique council of wise men and women.

The event, chaired by Willeke Slingerland, brought together students, researchers, journalists, NGO experts, radio/tv broadcasters, lecturers, and policymakers. They listened to what one another had to say, and on that basis jointly devised



new possibilities for change. Among the varied group, one in five of those attending had direct links or roots in Yemen or Syria. We were honoured that Dr Moosa Elayah shared his knowledge with us about the complex challenges CSOs are facing in Yemen. Against a background of chaos, confusion, conflict and danger, building a culture of peace isn't easy, but it becomes possible if you can find common ground.

The collective wisdom of the day was preserved in the form of podcasts, a visual report, and videos.

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

- Equality between men and women
- Children's right to protection from dangerous labour
- Mothers and children are entitled to special care and assistance.
- Prohibition of the death penalty for minors

"Both men and woman are viewed and treated in the same way and not one man or woman is seen as lesser than the other."

RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE IN SOCIETY

- Right to vote
- Right to stand for election
- Equal access to public services
- Right to protest

"Public services are intended to serve all members of a community."

Gender, Peace and Conflict

Saxion, the YLDF, and Stillare have developed a Gender Policy and a Peace & Conflict Training Manual for the YLDF. Students from the Social Legal Services (SLS) programme produced a video and a card game for use during peace and conflict training sessions.



Marco



Asli

YLDF as an umbrella organisation

Asli Aydogan, Marco van der Bovenkamp, Rik Bessler, and Toon Barends advised the YLDF on its position as an umbrella organisation in Yemen.

Asli: An umbrella organisation is a kind of organisation that other smaller organisations are affiliated with and that provides services for those organisations. It tries to achieve its goal more indirectly by leading and training people to achieve that goal. It acts as a trainer for other companies and self employed persons, which ultimately contributes to what the country needs.

Marco: How do you get things done? What are the lines of communication? What's the contact like with the other NGOs? That's very much what we're involved with as public administration students and future professionals. The YLDF has all the features of an umbrella organisation. It takes responsibility for other organisations, with a greater joint identity.

We learned a lot about communication and privacy. We found that they can be organised differently to what we expect and find normal in the

Netherlands. Caution is required in Yemen because of the lack of security. In the Netherlands, everything is a system – it's all arranged. How goals are achieved elsewhere isn't always the same. Trying to find out how things work, and why they work that way, is really interesting. We saw how other countries deal with documents, policies, and strategies. We learned so much. I've opted again for an international assignment next year because of that.

Asli: I'm pleased that Saxion gives us the opportunity to do projects like this. We're living in a time when countries are entwined. We got a taste of what an international workplace could be like. And you know, that's something real, it's about something important. It may be online, but it certainly isn't just virtual. Personal development and work on the opportunities for young people elsewhere: that's what I want to contribute to.

We worked very enthusiastically on this project as a team. Being positive is contagious! Internationally too. That's how I think about it. Working together for the goals!



Monique Booijnk

Project coordinator 2016–2019

As a knowledge institution, we can do a lot. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Nuffic explicitly chose Saxion because of the practical approach we offer. The Dutch government sees clear added value in continuing to build development in these vulnerable countries, so as to ensure that the situation doesn't get worse and worse, and they ultimately become failed states. These projects provide an enormous boost for the local population. Life goes on there too. People want to move forward, despite the current conditions in their country.

Marco Strijks

Sustainable Entrepreneurship Coach

For me, working on the Ward cultural centre wasn't just a project. It was a gender equality project plus. Ward's aim is to be a place where women can be themselves. A women-only cultural meeting centre where they can drink coffee, fill their educational needs, attend workshops, watch films, and do other things that help a woman's development. It's a beautifully designed space. But above all, it's a safe place.

When you work on a project, it's smart to share some personal information. But how much should you tell about yourself? In my own personal situation, it was a bit difficult when they asked me about my personal life. I'm married to a man, and homosexuality is punishable by death in Yemen. I had the opportunity to share my story knowing it could harm or promote the partnership. But the result was positive, and the communication became stronger and more informal. We've planted the seeds for the future, for an optimistic gender equality project.

NAP 1325

Women, Peace and Security

Karijn Lodewijks, Tom Leussink, Jasper Diesveld, and Niek Berkelaar advised WO=MEN, a Dutch gender platform. WO=MEN links gender organisations in the Netherlands and many conflict/post-conflict countries like Syria, Congo, Colombia, and Yemen. The public administration students made suggestions for improving the profile of the organisations and their work.

Tom: We contribute to SDG 5, Gender Equality. We get to know people who do incredibly important work and that's very inspiring.



Prototype of YLDF website

Students from the HBO-ICT programme worked on the prototype for an improved YLDF website. Besides focusing on content, it's also important to design the website so that it's effective for internal use. How could it be made more professional? The students advised on better content management, and on tips and tricks for a more user-friendly layout for different target groups. They also made recommendations for protecting personal data without making the site too difficult to use.

Protection policy

Eldy Verkaar, Amanda Bolink, Mark Jan den Otter, Martijn van Diepen, and 20 other students from the Security Management programme worked on a Protection Policy for the YLDF.

Mark Jan: We started with a risk analysis of the country and the organisation. Each group then worked out part of the protection policy. My group worked on the People component: how can you work safely in Yemen in general, but also at YLDF locations and when traveling between locations. There were assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation phases. What do you want, and how can we fill in the policy gaps? I see the same processes during my current internship with the Dutch police. International standards are important. The YLDF was also looking for that. They've developed their current policy very much from the bottom up. We looked at things the other way around. Combining the two approaches was very successful.



Mark-Jan

“When you look at SDGs you see that a lack of safety has a big impact on people. It causes all kinds of mistrust. If people can't do their job safely, they can't achieve their goals.”

Eldy

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Eldy: We also dealt with the equipment and information components. And we worked out an approach to tackling COVID-19, which of course has a lot to do with safety and security. Being at a distance meant that communication and understanding were difficult. You didn't know exactly what to expect. Our work was policy-based, and we made a sort of checklist of what to include. It isn't yet operational. The implementation planning is now taking place in Yemen, with training for employees of course.

When you look at SDGs you see that a lack of safety has a big impact on people. It causes all kinds of mistrust. If people can't do their job safely, they can't achieve their goals. As security managers we can ensure that companies and organisations can do their work. Consultants enable companies to do their job more safely. The YLDF can then help women and young people at the WARD café. You need to have the basis in order, and get the issues framed or fixed. That's how we work in security.

Gerry Stegeman

Project coordinator 2019-2020; coach



For me, connecting up YLDF staff members and our students and colleagues was a major challenge. We're helping the partner organisation become more professional, and we want to practice what we preach. That led to lots of brainstorming about what's needed – lots of small steps and lots of little misunderstandings, but lots of humour too. You need to reflect on what happens and learn from that. Building trust takes time, especially now, when we can only work online.

It's nice that we've worked on a varied range of strategies. With requests and input from the YLDF, students provided a solid basis from an international perspective. Our YLDF colleagues elaborated and applied that input, with local expertise. All that expertise came together during the webinars that we organised in 2020 – everything made sense and new connections were made, between topics and between people.



Hilal



Morgan

Fundraising

Hilal Sahin, Morgan Whittaker, and Jim Hendriks worked on Fundraising for the YLDF. How has your fundraising work contributed to the YLDF's work in Yemen?

Morgan: We advised the YLDF about keeping an eye on the long-term goals. Keeping the organisation on track, without too many short-term activities. Coordination between internal and external partners and donors. We focused mainly on international funds, because we have a slightly better overview of those from a distance. We didn't provide answers, but mainly tried to ask the right questions for the YLDF so that they can continue with their self-examination.

Hilal: I learned a lot about how NGOs work and how international cooperation takes shape. This was the first time that I had to write policy recommendations, and it was very helpful. I've learned a lot from that, and I can apply it now when looking at completely different Dutch organisations.

Morgan: The division of roles between Nuffic, NGOs, the university, and the partner abroad was clear, so we understand international projects better. That's of great benefit to me in my current minor on governance and development.

"Activate the network. That Saxion module helped us prepare for the type of work we did for the YLDF."

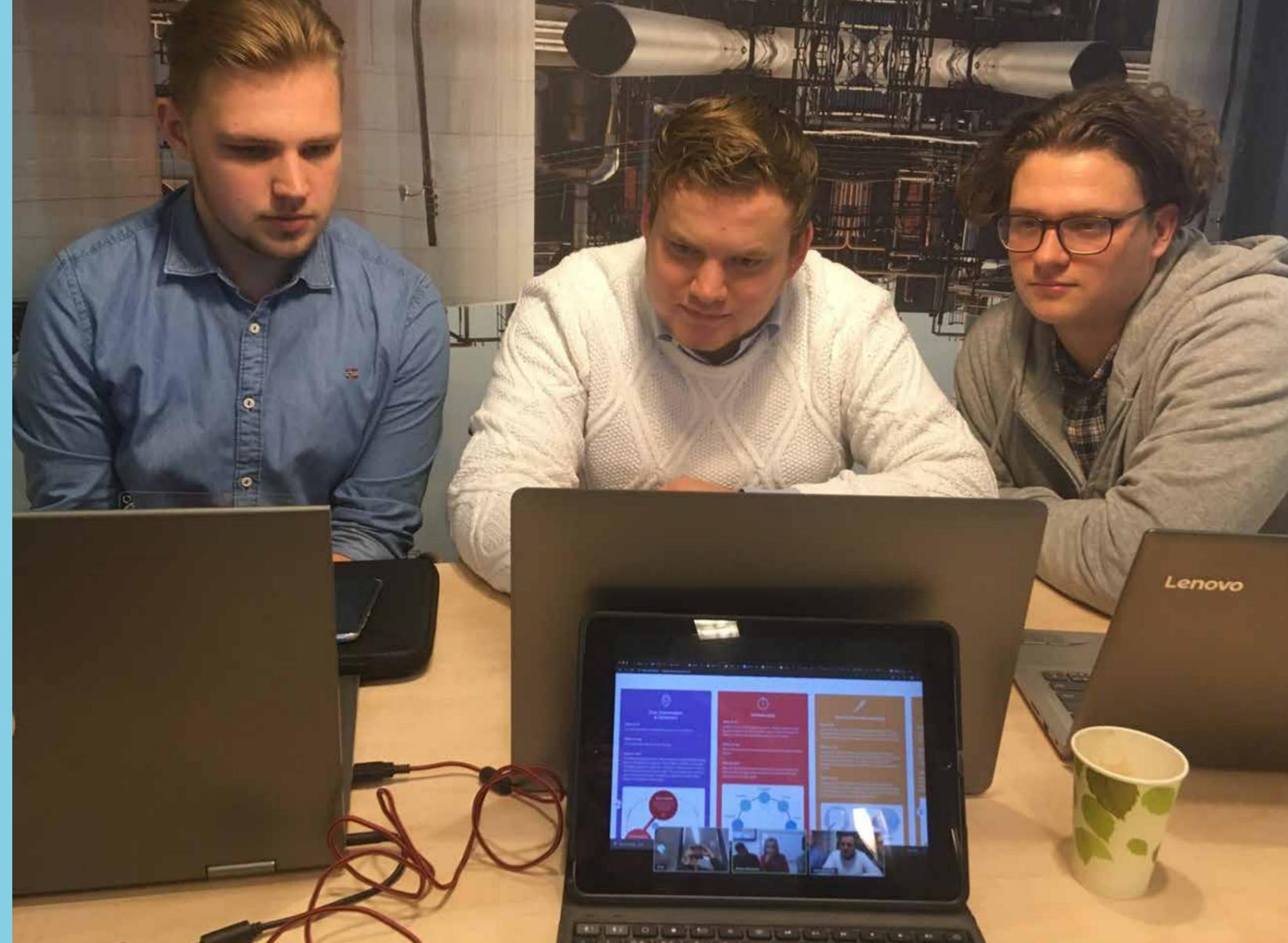
Jim: It's difficult that the corporate culture and the overall culture of the country are so different and the distance is so great. That was challenging, and at times frustrating. Fortunately, the internal cooperation was good, and our supervisor provided good advice.

Social Media Strategy for YLDF

Daan, Jim and Rik

Daan: During our Bachelor's degree programme, we'd learned about the Canvas method, which is used for business plans. We used the Social Media Canvas, specifically aimed at digital content planning. We were able to use it to analyse the situation in Yemen and to provide the initial recommendations. Digital presence is very important nowadays and the YLDF recognises that. I checked the YLDF website just now. It's already improved a lot after six months. The YLDF is really getting started with implementing the policy and with further elaboration. Great strides are being made!

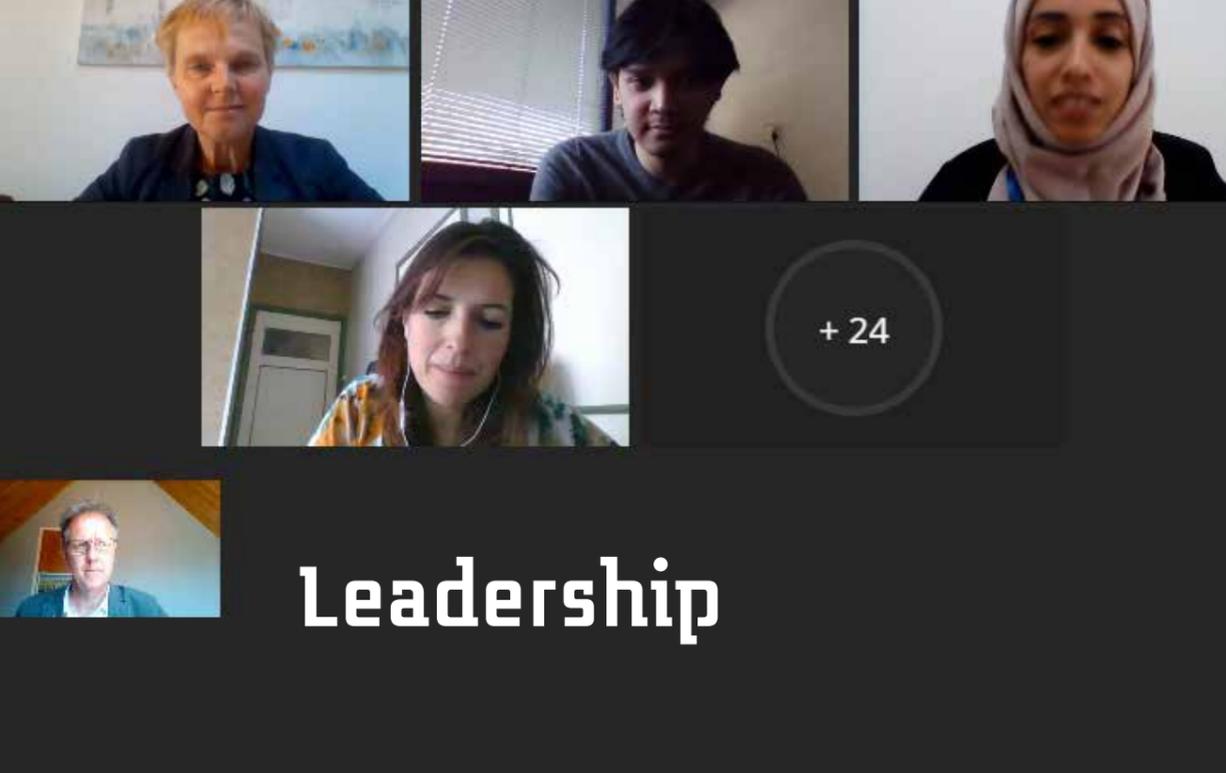
Jim: I also researched the social media situation in the Middle East. The practices and possibilities are different there. That led me to research from a whole range of universities in the Yemeni region. Facebook still plays an important role among young people in Yemen, but it's expected to follow the international trend. To my



"It's already improved a lot after six months. The YLDF is really getting started with implementing the policy and with further elaboration. Great strides are being made!"

surprise, English was the language of communication for many Facebook channels, not only Arabic.

We wanted to do something for women and young people in Yemen. That's what made us choose this project. It's a pity there was no direct contact, and coordination was sometimes a bit difficult, including due to technical problems. The webinar on 30 June worked well and I thought that was a really cool event. It was nice to see how all those groups contributed to a larger whole. Many YLDF staff members took part, and they had good questions and were very enthusiastic. The WARD cultural centre was also taking shape.



Leadership

Bagus and Ignacio supported the YLDF in encouraging it to think about different types of leadership and their effects on the organisation and its staff members. What does moving from transactional to transformational leadership entail? Their suggestions and questions require the YLDF to reflect on where it stands and where it wants to go. What does that demand of employees? How do you support them? It's not just enthusiasm but also structure that's needed.

Collaboration for the goals is an important SDG. The structure of your organisation and being able to reflect on your own organisation and its position in society is sometimes forgotten because of the issues of the day, but they're very important for long term progress.

The marketing function within YLDF

Twan Damhuis, business management student: I researched how the marketing function is organised at the YLDF. Traditionally, marketing has been completely linked to projects. The project leader was responsible for marketing and communication. The decisions were made by management, which made things too dependent on the particular project leader – whether that person paid attention to marketing and advanced it within the organisation. One of my recommendations from the business management point of view was to have a marketing manager within the management of the organisation. Someone with clear responsibilities and powers. If you tackle things this way, your organisation will perform better and you'll also be more visible to your stakeholders, such as donors and partners in the country itself.

An important advantage is also that you can act faster. That does require a real shift of responsibilities and delegation. But it seems that the YLDF is doing well. I saw that Yemen is more hierarchical than the Netherlands. That sometimes slows things down, at least from our perspective, and that applies to this process too. But I also saw a group of smart and enthusiastic professional people at work.

Twan



William Sanchez

Saxion International Project Desk, initiator

When we designed this project in 2014, the biggest challenge was how to define its long-term impact on the YLDF and on young people in Yemen. It was like looking into a crystal ball. Trying to see through the swirling of mist formed by the intricacies of conflict, the cry for peace, and pursuing the beacon of hope that the YLDF represents. In 2014, the Girls' Cafe was an idea born out of the need to offer a safe haven for women and their children. In 2020, that idea has blossomed into a beautiful flower called Ward. And Ward isn't just a meeting place, it's become a symbol of women's achievement and their impact on Yemeni society. I hope Ward will be operational when we celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 2021. It will then also symbolise what can be achieved through international cooperation.

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