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ENGAGING YOUTH FOR A STABLE YEMEN 2



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Program Executive Summary

The dramatic ‘Arab Spring’ that flowered throughout the Middle East demonstrated young people’s determination to have a say in their future. In Yemen, however, uncertainty defines the political and social environment of the country as protests and reprisals continue, despite the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreement in November 2011, which ushered in the start of Yemen’s political transition. Youth throughout the country, but most especially in the South, have become increasingly frustrated with the non-inclusive character of the political transition process and its neglect of young peoples’ demands. They see the process as largely serving an exclusive group of elite political actors and not representative of their voices.

Since October 2010, Mercy Corps has implemented *Engaging Youth for a Stable Yemen Program* (EYSY), funded by USAID’s Conflict Management and Mitigation Office. EYSY reached over 1,000 young men and women in Aden and Lahj Governorates with an objective of strengthening positive connections between young people and their communities to create a foundation for youth achievement.

Based on the successes of the program, USAID extended Mercy Corps to further cultivate youth leadership and civic engagement in support of peaceful, positive change during Yemen’s political transition. During this fragile time in Yemen, Mercy Corps modified and expanded EYSY activities to cultivate youth leadership and civic engagement in support of peaceful, positive change during Yemen’s political transition.

The program is designed to reach out to 2,500 young men and women in Aden and Lahj with the aim to support youth participation in the ongoing political transition process. The year-long program focuses on urban areas in Aden and semi-urban areas of Lahj because it builds on Mercy Corps’ previous work and these are densely populated areas with large youth populations. In addition, rather focusing on the ‘elite’ youth, Mercy Corps is using a bottom-up approach focused on community-level engagement and mobilization.

Key program accomplishments against outputs during this Quarter:

| OBJECTIVES | OUTPUTS and TARGETS accomplished |
|--|---|
| 1) Provide safe, non-political space for youth organizing through Youth Action Centers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Youth Action Centers established in Aden and Lahj - 10 youth (male and female) actively engaged in the management of the centers |
| 2) Build and apply critical civic engagement skills with local leaders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 484 youth (230 male, 254 female) engaged in communication and leadership training - 90 % of youth who completed communication and leadership training demonstrated improved leadership skills - 6 community dialogues and planning sessions carried out in the target areas - 296 youth and local leaders (i.e. local council, religious leaders, traditional leader and business mentors) involved in the dialogues |
| 4) Explore feasibility of establishing governorate-level representative body to elevate youth voice and priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feasibility for governorate-level mechanisms developed (2 youth leadership councils established with participation from youth organizations) - Agreement with Lahj governor signed and EYSY2 program received support and approval from Lahj local council |
| 5) Collect information to understand youth perceptions on political transition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perception observatory survey established using SMS Mobile platform and one bulletin created outlining youth perception on youth unemployment in Aden and Lahj |
| 6) Improve local Yemeni NGO capacity to implement effective youth programming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizational Assessment and Capacity Building plans for two youth organizations (one in Aden, one in Lahj) are developed and signed by the Board of Directors of the two organizations - Two training workshops to identify improvement needs of the selected organizations completed |

Objective 1: *Provide safe, non-political space for youth organizing through two Youth Action Centers:*

Activity 1.1: Creation of two (2) Youth Centers

With the ongoing insecurity and political tensions throughout Yemen, youth require a neutral, safe and physical space for their own. During the reporting period Mercy Corps created two youth centers: one in Aden and one in Lahj, which can be used by youth to build connections among each other through social activities reducing youth susceptibility to manipulation by political elite and violent groups. Also the youth centers will work to empower youth participation in political, social and economic spheres in this transition period by building their capacity and by enhancing networking and as hubs for information sharing and learning.

Mercy Corps conducted a youth meeting in Aden on April 2nd to present EYSY2 program to them and to share the concept of youth centers. The participants in the meeting were excited with the idea and proposed that youth center should serve youth groups/ associations that are active but lack place and other resources. During that meeting a core assembly of eight youth groups was identified to support the youth center in Aden. A board of directors was elected by the eight groups as their representatives to run the youth center. Out of that meetings Mercy Corps selected 8 youth initiatives to be the core of the youth center in Aden, who elected on May 8th their representative in the youth centerboard of directors. The current board of directors agreed to hold new election in January 2014, furthermore, they will develop bylaws and enrolled youth to be members of the youth center general assembly. The bylaws will define responsibility of providing sufficient resource to implement activities, in accordance with the youth center's polices. In addition they will be also responsible for approving youth center plans, reports and agreements with key stockholders.

Mercy Corps and the board of directors have so far conducted 12 meetings to define the youth center identity, resources needed, bylaws, new board of directors' election, and how to manage and sustain the youth center. In additional, Mercy Corps signed a Terms of Partnership with the youth center in Khormakhsar Aden and has provided it with equipment and furniture and will extend support in rental and utility charges. In total 11 computers were provided to the center along with a printer, a photocopier and a generator. Office furniture was also provided for training hall and the center offices.

The EYSY2 team used the similar approach of engaging with youth in Lahj and invited youth for a brainstorming session, and agreed with youth representatives that the organization to be selected should represent marginalized areas, should be an active body/ team, be youth focused and should be in need of a formal/ suitable location. The EYSY2 program team in consultation with the youth leadership council in Lahj selected one organization, which was in line with the above listed criteria in Al Mahalla. A total of eight (8) requests were received from different organizations.

The team conducted seven (7) meetings with the current board of directors on the youth center identity, mandate, and good governance and how to ensure its sustainability. A location was selected, rented, renovated and equipped with suitable furniture, computer lab and Internet connection to be used by youth for their social and capacity building activities. A total of nine computers were provided to the Lahj center along with printers, photocopier and a generator.

Mercy Corps recruited (5) interns in each youth center. The interns were hired after the board of directors in each youth center defined the center structure and job descriptions: secretary, cleaner, IT, capacity building and finance and administration. Mercy Corps in consultation with the youth groups selected appropriate candidates through an open call, which was responded to by interested youth. Program team received 28 applications in Aden while 15 applications

were received in Lahj. Interviews were conducted with candidates, which resulted in selection of 5 interns for each youth center.

Mercy Corps plans to use these newly established platforms and will conduct an exercise through cell phones to inform youth about the initiatives and to seek ideas from them regarding the expectations from the center. In addition to this the team is also working with the youth groups to build capacity of BoD of the centers and explore ideas for generating revenue for sustaining operations. BoD is being engaged through capacity support in strategic planning, action planning, facilitation skills, administrative and financial skills, and volunteer's management.

The feedback from the youth is very positive and encouraging, Abu Baker – Head of youth center in Aden expressed his opinion:

“No one expect that we can work together one day, here every one is looking to work by his own, and the political division affecting us. Thank to Mercy Corps for this initiative and it will be a strong message for the community in Aden that we can work together to empower youth participation and raise their voice in a peaceful and constructive way”.

Objective 2: Build and apply critical civic engagement skills of 500 youth and engage in nine dialogues with local leaders:

Activity 2.1: Communication and leadership training

This activity aims to prepare 500 youth (250 women, 250 men) to gain the necessary communication and leadership skills to understand their role as citizens in society. Mercy Corps conducted the communication and leadership training workshops through CPS – a renowned capacity building organization – which allowed youth to learn from one another, confronted cultural barriers to build non – violent and peaceful change, made them aware of their leadership potential, improved their communication skills and strengthened communication as individual and as a team to overcome obstacles and complete problem solving challenges.

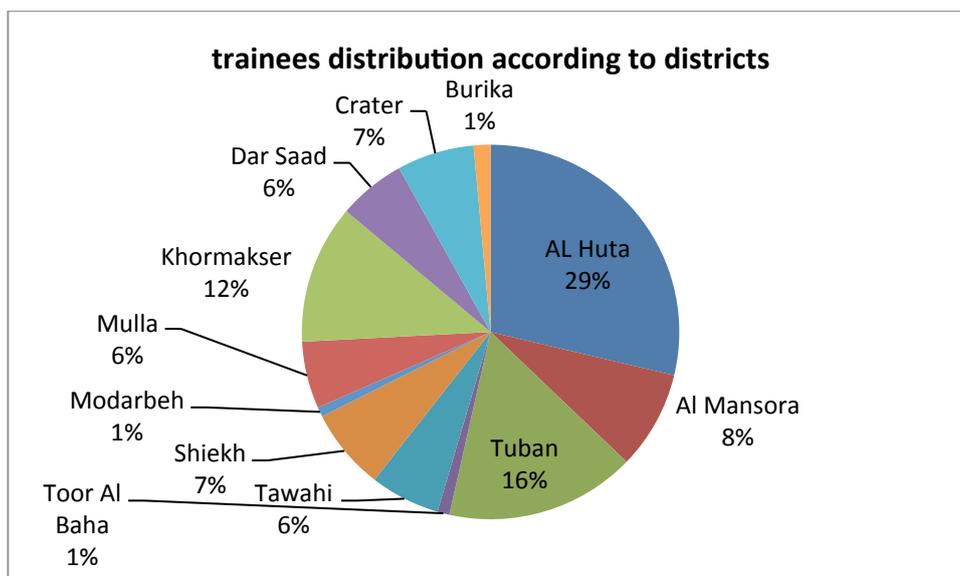
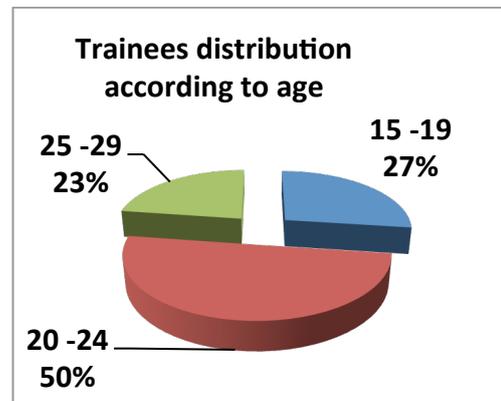
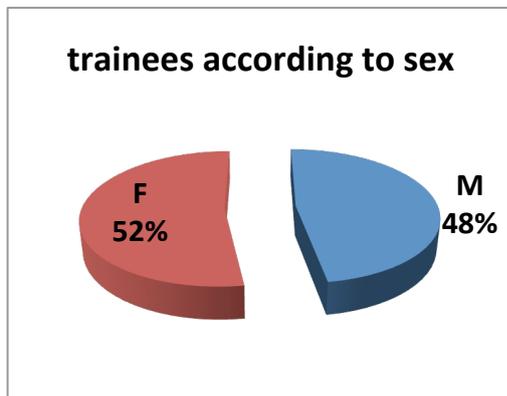
Youth were selected through a transparent process. Announcements were made at different locations requesting interested youth to apply for the training program. In total, 1,607 (962 from Aden, 645 from Lahj) applications were received which shows high level of interest from youth to participate. Mercy Corps formed 2 committees for the interviews (one in Lahj, one in Aden) each comprising three (3) persons: one from the EYSY2 program staff and two from local partner organizations. Interviews were conducted for four (4) days from 9:00 am to 17:00 pm and selection was made according to a predefined criteria: age to be between 18 – 28 years, not received this training before, level of education and personality. 412 candidates couldn't meet the criteria while the remaining 1,195 were shortlisted. A ranking exercise identified the top 769 candidates who were selected to be the trainees. The program team in consultation with the local training organizations agreed to select more than 500 trainees to deal with potential risk that 25% - 30% of youth will not show up for the training program especially those undergoing education at high school or university.

Table: Applications submitted by youth from Aden and Lahj

| Governorate | M | F | Total | Rejected | Accepted | Participated | Graduated | % Of graduate to participants |
|--------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|--------------|------------|-------------------------------|
| Aden | 596 | 366 | 962 | 328 | 634 | 356 | 257 | 72% |
| Lahj | 380 | 265 | 645 | 84 | 561 | 413 | 227 | 55% |
| Total | 862 | 517 | 1607 | 412 | 1195 | 769 | 484 | 63% |

In the reporting period 484 youth from Aden and Lahj participated in the Communication and Leadership training (227 from Lahj and 257 from Aden). Training was conducted offered through a local NGO specialized in youth training and the sessions were held between April 13th to July 3rd, 2013. The trainees were divided into 30 groups and each group received 10 interactive training sessions.

Training statistics showed high level of female participation, trainees in the age 20 – 24 are the majority in both Lahj and Aden.



The team made a comprehensive presentation on the program objectives and process in the first day of each training course to assure full understanding by the trainees to the wider objective of the program and what is the next step after they will finish the training course.

The EYSY2 program team took the responsibility for final evaluation of the training courses to assure that life skills training impacted positively the youth who participated in the training courses. The evaluation form asked (17) questions about: training environment, trainer’s knowledge and skills, training materials, relation between training and real life and adult learning techniques. Answers for each question ranked on the scale (5 to 1), with five as totally agree that training is excellent but one as the opposite and express high level of dissatisfaction. Encouraging results achieved: (4.5) out of (5) which showed that youth agreed that the training was excellent. An article published in the local newspaper shows the high level of positive impact of the training courses. In that article that was published in *Aden Alghed* newspaper two of the trainees said:

“Thanks to Mercy Corps for this valuable program, which help me to engage in community initiatives and redesign my skills in a beauty and smart way. The most important benefit for me from this training program is the importance of community participation on the individual and community level“. (Samer Abed Al Rahman- Participant)

“I learned lots of things that help me to break the barriers of fears which has dominated my life before this training course, in addition that the program enhanced my self-confidence which will be reflected in cooperation with others“. (Faten Khalid Abdullah- Participant)

Comments recorded during the training period also show high level of training positive impact. The participants mentioned that they have improved communication skills and can speak without losing confidence. According to some youth the training program enhanced their ability to face problems and difficulties, they feel more responsible and accomplishing, have the team spirit, more focus on their goals, respect other opinions and being more patient.



Abeer Abdallah: EYSY2 project officer handout certificate to one of the communication and leadership trainee - Aden

Interview: July 10th, 2013 Name: Shams Ali Yousef Ali, **Age:** 20 years **Location:** Lahj – Al Huta

Q1: What have you learned from communication and leadership training?

Answer: Many things and it has been a great experience. The most important lesson I come up from this training is the meaning and value of cooperation and working with others. In addition to how to communicate in effective way to the other side and how I can put me in his position without any judgments.

Q2: How you translate what you learned in your real life? With family? Friends? Colleagues? Others?

Answer: I tried to transfer what I learned to my first circle of trust: my family especially how to be confident, communicate in proper way and how to aske proper questions in difficult situations. Also, I feel personally more confident when there is any problem or challenge. I am now more patient and good listener.

Q3: How did this training reflect on you personally?

Answer: The reflection has been major on my personality. I felt after training that I am a new person. Even though the training period is short, however, I acquired lot of information and it has enhanced my communication and leadership skills.

Q4: What kind of challenges did you face during the training course?

Answer: Some of the training games were new for us, because of cultural barriers in our traditional community. As an example the tightrope game which aims to discover your capacity to deal with problems.

Q5: What are your recommendations to the EYSY2 team, on how to enhance future training performance?

Answer: I recommend that you involve my colleagues and friends to participate in your training courses. I don't want them to miss this opportunity that I have taken part of.

Objective 3: *Develop and manage eight localized advocacy campaigns and 16 community service projects to promote youth leadership and action to support peaceful transition*

Activity 3.1: Dialogues Sessions (6) with youth groups and local authorities

Using the knowledge and skills acquired in the communication and leadership training courses by youth, and using the youth leadership councils that established during this period of reporting as program consultancy body, EYSY2 program team with local youth councils in Aden and Lahj worked to identify dialogue sessions themes to conduct three community dialogue sessions in each governorate. The purpose of the community dialogue sessions will provide youth with an alternative to violence to advocate for their needs and interests and will enhance channels of communication between youth and local authorities in a place where more than 90% of youth expressed lack of communication with local leaders as a major cause of frustration.

In Aden and Lahj two meetings were held with the youth leadership council to identify dialogue themes. The council representatives proposed eight (8) themes in Aden while council representatives in Lahj proposed seven (7) themes. Participants were invited to speak in favor of the proposed themes, which was followed by a vote to rank the top three themes. Mercy Corps and youth leadership council agreed on roles and responsibilities in managing and facilitating the six (6) dialogue sessions. The EYSY2 team managed to involve more than twenty (20) youth organizations in the dialogue sessions management and facilitation process and it was agreed with the organizations that a team of three organizations would take lead on each dialogue theme.

Six dialogue sessions at the district level were conducted during this period in both Lahj and Aden, with participation of 296 youth and community leaders in a facilitated discussion. Monitoring and evaluation of these dialogue sessions shows that there is a need for further work in building youth capacity in facilitating dialogue sessions. The program team planned to provide facilitation training sessions to youth as part of the youth centers session to enhance their skills in facilitating a workshop, a dialogue session or a meeting.

Table: Six (6)-dialogue session’s detailed information

| Aden Dialogue sessions | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|--|------------------|------------|----|
| | Location | Date | Objectives | Total attendance | Attendance | |
| | | | | | M | F |
| 1 | Gold Mohar Hotel | 30 June 2013 | Vision and the role of youth about the current social problems | 35 | 22 | 13 |
| 2 | Saba Palace | 17 June 2013 | Challenges for youth in working places | 37 | 23 | 14 |
| 3 | Saba Palace | 18 June 2013 | School dropout | 43 | 24 | 19 |
| Lahj Dialogue sessions | | | | | | |
| | Location | Date | Objectives | Total Attendance | Attendance | |
| | | | | | M | F |
| 4 | Alhotah youth Center hall | 25 June 2013 | The deterioration of secondary education | 32 | 18 | 14 |
| 5 | Alhotah youth center hall | 27 June 2013 | Unemployment causes and solutions | 37 | 18 | 19 |
| 6 | The Governorate office Hall | 8 July 2013 | Role of the Youth in Dialogue | 114 | 63 | 51 |

Activity 3.2: Community projects

Action taken provides youth with the chance to apply new knowledge and skills to create real impact for their community. Mercy Corps focuses on raising youth voice through concrete action to promote a peaceful transition. By demonstrating their ability to contribute to real change in their communities, the youth will begin to gain credibility with local leaders as well as the larger community.

The EYSY2 program team in partnership with youth leadership council in both Aden and Lahj envisaged 16 community projects. Mercy Corps conducted a workshop with youth center, youth council and active youth to define community projects.

To ensure constructive discussion, participants followed the following methodology:

- Each group made a map of selected community problems
- Selected 3 – 4 major problems
- Addressed root causes and effects for each problem
- Proposed community project that can solve or mitigate the problem
- Presented the four community projects in brief
- Each participant asked to vote for eight projects

The result in Aden was:

- ❖ Career counseling in Aden University for graduate students (14 votes)
- ❖ Promote reading among students (14 votes)
- ❖ Create a cartoon film on volunteerism (12 votes)
- ❖ Restoration for Castle Sira (12 votes)
- ❖ Support disabled youth center in Aden (12 votes)
- ❖ Raise youth voices, respecting diversity and differences (11 votes)
- ❖ Library in each school (11 votes).
- ❖ Support Aden Youth Federation of Gymnastics (10 votes)

The EYSY2 team in partnership with youth organizations, youth council and active youth in Lahj used similar methodology and eight community projects were identified. Mercy Corps raised sustainability, community support and youth voluntary work as three main evaluation criteria in accepting community initiatives. Mercy Corps will contribute in-kind to these initiatives with an estimated budget of 2,500\$ for each initiative. Further work will be conducted in the next quarter to develop initiative teams, implementation plans, refine activities and estimate budget for each. All community initiatives will be implemented in the coming quarter.

Objective 4: Explore feasibility of establishing governorate-level representative body to elevate youth voice and priorities

Activity 4.1: Creation of Youth Consultancy Leadership Council (2)

Two youth leadership councils in both Lahj and Aden were established as a coordination body between youth organizations. Mercy Corps and Youth agreed in these two councils that the main vision is to empower youth participation in political, economic, and social spheres. They also agreed that their main mission is to raise youth voice in peaceful ways and to enhance coordination and cooperation with local authorities.

On April 28th, 2013, 58 representatives (33 male, 25 female) of youth organizations and groups elected the 13 members of the executive committee for the youth leadership council in Aden. In Lahj on April 30th 47 representatives (25 male, 22 female) elected the 11 members of the executive committee, who developed the bylaws/terms of reference of the youth leadership council and coordinated its monthly meetings.

Feedback from youth organizations and initiatives are positive. Shadia (Head of Board of directors – Change your life youth organization) said:

“It’s the first time that youth organizations sat and agreed to work together. We in Yemen are fragmented by political differences and no one accepts to work with “others” through this youth council we are creating real change in our mentality and how we approach each other. One main challenge we need to take care of is, that some people betting on the failure of this youth leadership council for that there is no alternative except success and we are sure of that “.



Photo: Youth leadership council in Aden



Photo: Youth organizations meeting in Lahj

The EYSY2 program team and youth organizations representatives are convinced that the success of these youth councils will be a model of cooperation to be followed by others in this transition period. Program team in partnership with youth leadership councils planned to conduct 10 meetings with community leaders and local authorities in the next quarter to discuss issues of interest for youth and local communities.

Objective 5: *Collect information to understand youth perceptions on political transition through one perception survey and six Mobile Perception Observatory bulletins*

Activity 5.1: Youth Perception Survey

Mercy Corps in collaboration with Souktel conducted mobile technology assessment in Yemen through the three main telecommunication companies: MTN, Y- Mobile and Saba-phone. A platform that allows Mercy Corps to send alerts and short surveys to mobile phone users was also established with 1,992 youth contact records/ cell numbers. The program team targets expansion of the database to 5,000 till the end of the program.

The EYSY2 program team in consultation with the youth leadership council in both Aden and Lahj discussed the surveys themes. *Unemployment; violence among youth; early marriage; and drug abuse* were identified as the key topics for the surveys. The focus for the next quarter will be to use the platform to conduct three (3) short surveys to capture youth perceptions about unemployment, violence and drugs among youth.

Objective 6: *Improve two local Yemeni NGOs’ capacities to implement effective youth programming*
Activity 6.1: Capacity Building Support to Two Local Organizations:

Currently in the south many of the youth organizations were created after the revolution, but they lacked the capacity, strategic depth, good governance, direction, and management and permanent staff. In addition some of these organizations are offering youth focused programs but do not apply participatory approaches to designing and implementation of the activities.

During this reporting period, Mercy Corps worked to build capacity for two local partner organizations (Change Your Life and Al-Hamra Youth Association) in Aden and Lahj. Mercy Corps started with Organizational Capacity Assessment to define the gaps in their capacity, using standard OCA tools, which categorize capacity of any organization in various organizational management levels.

The OCA showed that “Change your Life “is at the nascent phase, meaning that the organization exist as a group and starting towards becoming an organized unit. In order to move up through the stages the organization will require work on its strategic planning, activation of the Board of Directors, building administrative delegation policy, upgrading the volunteers system, developing advocacy plan and to enhance networking with local stakeholders. The OCA of “Al-Hamra Youth Association” showed that is in the pre-nascent phase, which means that they are working as a group of members who have gotten together for various non-unified reasons. Currently the association works specifically on a finite goal/project and they lack the broader approach. In order for the association to move to the next phase they need to develop a strategic plan, organizational structure, financial system, volunteers management etc.

Based on the assessment, Mercy Corps team considers working with the two organizations to provide depth to youth programming. Once the capacity issues are resolved, the organizations will provide outreach not only to the Mercy Corps program team but also provide resources to other National and International Organizations. A capacity building plan for each organization has already been developed and will be executed during the coming quarter.

Head of Al Hamra women association commented on Mercy Corps support to build their capacity:

“We started this association by our own money, but without support we cannot continue. One day we had computer-training course for lot of youth in our area, but they received theoretical training because we don’t have any computer in our neighborhood or in the school. We are optimistic that Mercy Corps can take us to another place by building our capacity and provide us with a suitable place, and this is for the sake of youth and stability, otherwise our youth will be the victims of fundamental groups “.

Challenges

Political and security situation continues to be the main challenge and constraint to program implementation. The civil disobedience in Aden and Lahj two days per week is an obvious challenge for the movement of the program staff and to implement any program activity in these two days especially in the morning time (6:00 am – 12:00 midday). Furthermore, lack of sufficient formal documentation to prove ownership of property (land rights) has been one of the main challenges that required major work to have proper rent for the two youth centers in both Lahj and Aden.

Planned Activities for the next Quarter

- Conduct civic engagement training for 500 youth in Aden and Lahj.
- Design and print the civic engagement manual.
- Conduct 25 youth center sessions to build the capacity of the board of directors and Youth Center staff in good management for the two youth centers.
- Implementation of the capacity building plans for two organizations.
- Conduct 3 youth perception surveys.
- Conduct 10 meeting with local ministries offices and local authorities.
- Develop and implement 16 community projects/ initiatives.
- Develop and implement 8 advocacy campaigns.