

INTERVIEW: DR. FAHMI BANAFSA, LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE OF AL-ADEL UNIVERSITY IN THE YHELD PROJECT

Brief Introduction

My name is Dr. Fahmi Banafa, and I serve as the President of Al-Adel University, a non-profit institution based in Aden, Yemen. In addition to my role as president, I am also the Legal Representative of Al-Adel University in the YHELD project. I hold both an MA and a PhD from the United States, and my professional focus has always been on advancing higher education, fostering academic excellence, and enhancing international collaboration in higher education.



About Al-Adel University

Al-Adel University is a non-profit institution located in Aden, Yemen, established in the 2014/2015 academic year. Since its inception, the university has remained committed to providing quality higher education and contributing to academic and professional development in Yemen. Currently, the university has five colleges, with a sixth College of Graduate Studies in progress. Through its academic programs, Al-Adel University seeks to cultivate skilled professionals and researchers who can make meaningful contributions to society.

Experience with the YHELD Project

At Al-Adel University, our experience with the YHELD project has been both enriching and transformative. As a non-profit institution committed to academic excellence, we have found this initiative instrumental in strengthening our internationalization efforts and institutional capacity.

Through YHELD, we have actively engaged in the establishment of an International Relations Office (IRO), a critical step in expanding our global academic networks and fostering international collaborations. The project's virtual workshops and strategic planning sessions have provided our faculty and administrative staff with valuable insights and essential skills needed to navigate the evolving landscape of higher education.

Despite the challenges posed by Yemen's current socio-political environment, YHELD has enabled us to overcome isolation by facilitating partnerships with European institutions and other Yemeni universities, broadening our academic and research opportunities.

However, while we greatly value the project's progress, we strongly advocate for in-person training sessions and workshops for faculty, students, and administrative staff, rather than relying solely on virtual formats. This would significantly enhance engagement, practical learning, and the overall impact of the project.

Expectations for the YHELD Project Moving Forward

As we continue our participation in the YHELD project, our expectations are centered on sustainability, long-term impact, and continued collaboration. We anticipate the following key developments:

1. Institutionalizing the International Relations Office (IRO)
 - Fully integrating the IRO within our university's structure.
 - Developing clear policies, operational frameworks, and securing long-term funding to ensure sustainability beyond the project's duration.
2. Expanding International Partnerships
 - Fully integrating the IRO within our university's structure.
 - Facilitating new collaborations with universities and research institutions worldwide.
 - Enhancing academic exchanges, joint research initiatives, and capacity-building programs for faculty and students.
3. Enhancing Faculty and Staff Development
 - Continuing training programs and knowledge transfer from European partners.
 - Equipping our team with the skills necessary to manage international cooperation effectively.
4. Creating More Opportunities for Students
 - Expanding student mobility programs, scholarships, and international academic initiatives.
 - Providing students with greater access to global learning experiences that will enhance their career prospects.
5. Contributing to Policy Development
 - Leveraging our experiences with YHELD to shape national higher education policies that support internationalization efforts in Yemen.
 - Advocating for sector-wide reforms that strengthen global engagement within Yemeni universities.

Ultimately, our goal is to ensure that the positive outcomes of YHELD extend well beyond the project's timeline, creating a lasting impact on Al-Adel University and the broader Yemeni higher education sector.

Final Remarks

Al-Adel University remains fully committed to the objectives of the YHELD project and acknowledges its crucial role in fostering internationalization in Yemeni higher education. This initiative has not only opened new doors for collaboration but has also reinforced our vision of academic excellence and global engagement.

We sincerely appreciate the dedication of all project partners and look forward to further strengthening our collective efforts. Moving ahead, we are determined to ensure that the knowledge, partnerships, and institutional structures developed through YHELD continue to benefit our university, our students, and the future of higher education in Yemen.

EMPOWERING YEMENI UNIVERSITIES: ADVANCING INTERNATIONALIZATION AND DIGITAL LEARNING TRANSFORMATION

The YHELD project is actively supporting the internationalization and digital development of Yemeni higher education institutions (HEIs). Through the D2.1 Report on Training Needs and the D2.2 eLearning Platform Manual, the project is equipping Yemeni universities with the knowledge and tools needed to enhance global engagement and modern learning environments.

To assess internationalization training needs, a resource mapping study analyzed HEI management models, identifying key resources for effective international offices. The Report on Training Needs revealed that many universities face significant resource gaps in internationalization, including financial, human, and relational resources. To bridge this gap, the project is enhancing international offices, fostering research collaboration, and supporting mobility programs for students and faculty.

A survey conducted across eight Yemeni universities evaluated financial, tangible, human, relational, and psychological resources, helping categorize institutions based on their development stages and resource availability. This insight is guiding targeted training efforts to enhance the skills of faculty, researchers, staff, and leadership, ensuring universities can make informed decisions on where to focus their development/change efforts (T2.1).

Below is the result of integrated model of internationalisation identified in the report.

Leadership and governance surfaced as vital areas needing immediate attention. Recognizing this, YHELD introduced targeted capacity-building programs aimed at strengthening administrative skills and strategic decision-making capabilities. Through interactive training workshops, university leaders are now learning to

formulate clear internationalization strategies, understand international quality assurance standards, and build robust, globally relevant institutional policies. By fostering a culture of proactive global engagement and providing continuous mentorship, these institutions are becoming better positioned to leverage international partnerships and seize collaboration opportunities that extend far beyond local borders.

The next aspect addressed is **enablers and support mechanism**. These components play a vital role in translating strategy into action and can be progressively developed by creating mobility agreements, securing appropriate office spaces, and producing effective promotional and marketing materials. Providing comprehensive training for international office staff is essential to successfully execute internationalization initiatives. In order to realise that a need has been identified to train international office staff to ensure effective implementation of internationalisation strategies.

Moreover, the survey enlightened critical limitations within **teaching and learning practices**. Many Yemeni universities lacked internationalized curricula, as well as opportunities for student and staff mobility, severely hindering their ability to provide competitive, globally relevant education. To bridge this gap, YHELD identified a need for specialized training programs guiding faculty members to create globally oriented courses, establish joint-degree offerings, and implement short-term international exchange programs.

YHELD emphasis extends robustly into the **research** domain as well. Yemeni universities have faced considerable challenges engaging internationally, primarily due to limited financial and technical resources. Responding to this, YHELD proposed comprehensive training sessions on international research collaboration, ethical research standards, and academic publishing standards. By enhancing these competencies, Yemeni universities are projected to significantly increasing their capacity to participate actively in the global academic community, contributing to international scholarly discourse and elevating their global visibility.

Importantly, YHELD recognizes that internationalization extends beyond purely academic pursuits, highlighting the significance of the **third mission** in higher education institutions. Needs were identified to provide service-learning initiatives and intercultural community programs, aiming to address real-world issues through collaborative efforts involving students and faculty. These forthcoming initiatives are expected to solve societal problems, enhance cultural understanding, and empower universities to become transformative community leaders capable of addressing local challenges with global perspectives.

Parallel to enhancing internationalization, the project's groundbreaking work detailed in the **Task 2.2 Development of adequate digital infrastructure in order to use a “free to use” eLearning platform** outlined significant advancements in **digital learning infrastructure**. Recognizing that digital tools are essential to contemporary education, especially in regions experiencing infrastructural challenges and limited physical mobility, YHELD conducted an extensive assessment of 14 globally recognized eLearning

platforms. After careful consideration of technical ease, affordability, support infrastructure, and user-friendliness, Moodle emerged as the optimal choice. Its selection was also validated by participating universities, where the majority of universities expressed a clear preference for Moodle over other platforms.

From Selection to Implementation

Once Moodle was selected, the next step was to translate intention into infrastructure. ACEEU supported the installation and customization of eight Moodle instances (all are installed on ACEEU's web server), each corresponding to one of the participating universities:

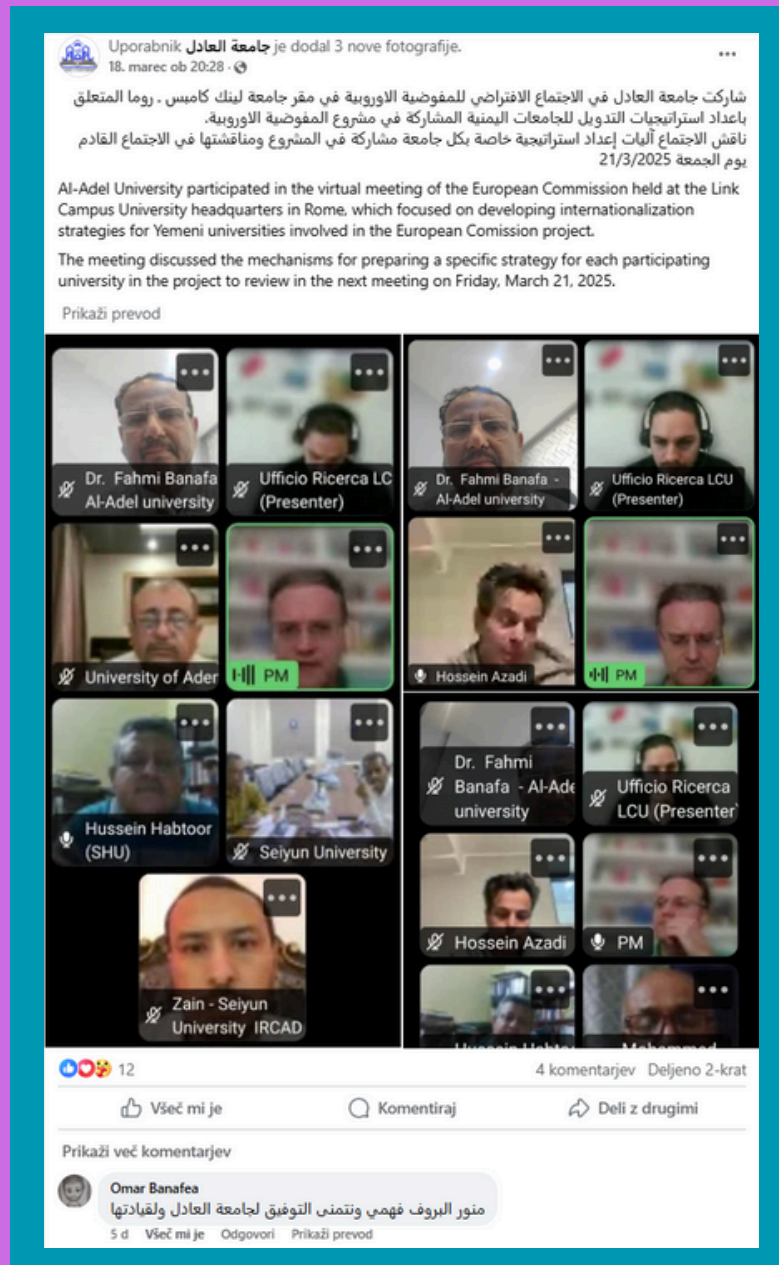
1. University of Abyan (abyan.yheld.eu)
2. University of Aden (aden.yheld.eu)
3. Hadhramout University (hu.yheld.eu)
4. University of Lahej (lahej.yheld.eu)
5. Seiyun University (seiyun.yheld.eu)
6. Shabwah University (shu.yheld.eu)
7. Taiz University (taiz.yheld.eu)
8. Al-Adel University (aladel.yheld.eu)

Each platform was tailored to reflect institutional identities and equipped with administrator training. Recognizing most faculty and staff had limited prior experience with digital education tools, YHELD provided ongoing professional development, ensuring sustainable platform integration and effective use of digital pedagogies.

To ensure long-term success, a comprehensive online manual (<https://manual.yheld.eu/login>) was also developed, providing continuous support and guidance for faculty and administrators navigating the digital classroom effectively. This activity (T2.2) focuses on integrating free-to-use distance learning tools, such as Google Meet, ensuring universities have adaptable and accessible digital education infrastructure.

By addressing both internationalization and digital learning transformation, YHELD is paving the way for a more connected, globally engaged, and technologically empowered higher education system in Yemen. Stay tuned for more updates as we continue to enhance Yemeni HEIs capabilities and abilities at international level!

SOCIAL MEDIA DISSEMINATION IN JEMEN (AL-ADEL UNIVERSITY)



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