

* A Space Worthy of Justice

How Did Steps Foundation Contribute to Improving
the Environment of A'taq Primary Court?



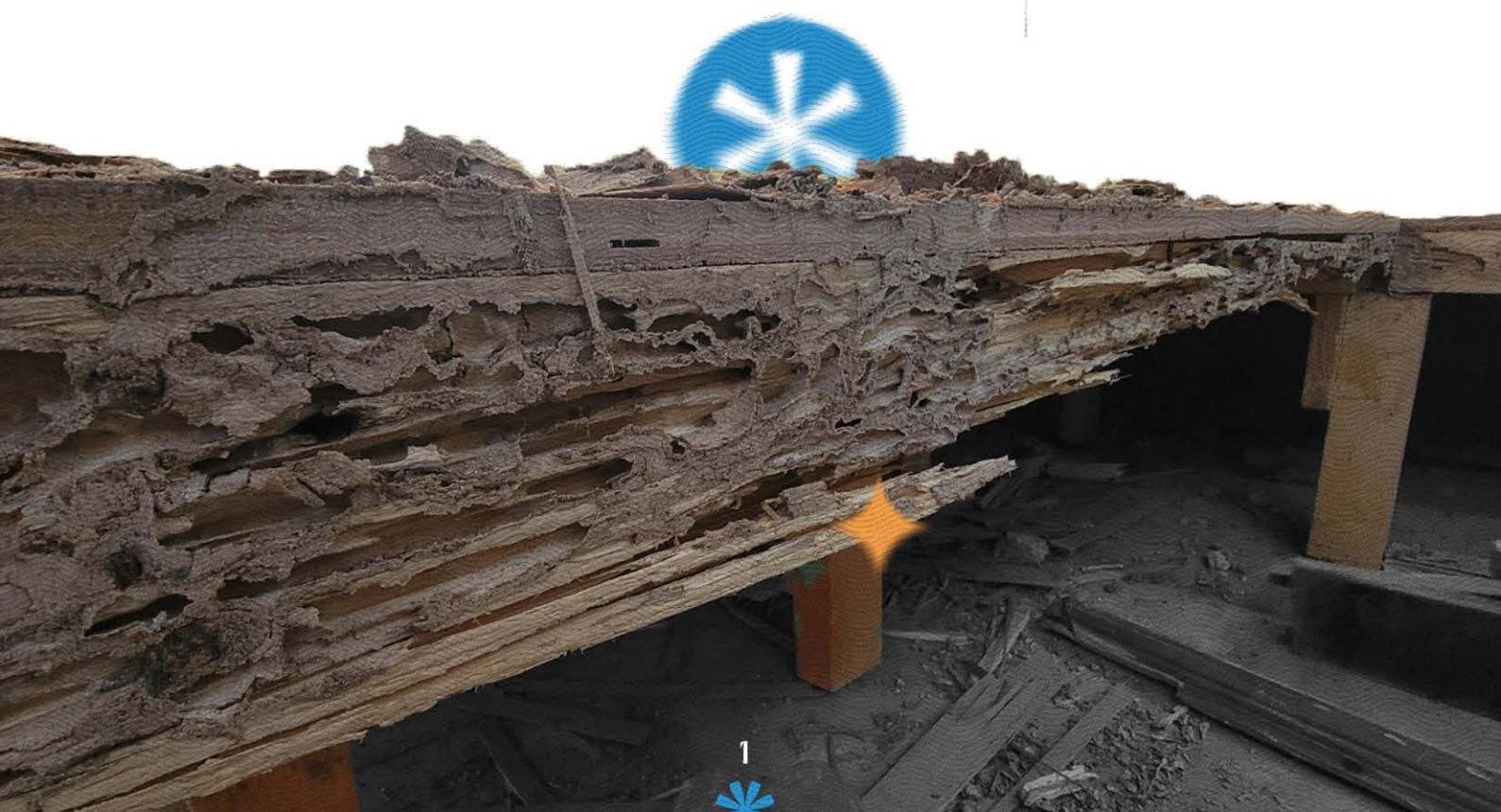


Where it begins

"The judge's voice echoed in the hall, but it was swallowed in cracked corners and old seats that barely kept the litigants seated. No ventilation, no adequate lighting. The place began as ordinary." With this scene stuck in the memory of many, **the story began**.

In the city of A'taq, the capital of Shabwa Governorate, the primary court stands as a legal landmark witnessing moments of social transformation, where development challenges intersect with people's aspirations, whether in its stability or its setbacks. For years, the courtroom has lacked several elements that make it a suitable place to welcome people and instill a sense of comfort.

However, just as the decline of institutions does not happen suddenly, their recovery begins with a step. This step was initiated by the Steps Foundation (Khotwat) for Development, as part of the "Governance of Civil Society Organizations Working in the Field of Human Rights (GoCSOs)" project, supported by Resonate! Yemen and funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, where a project aimed at improving the court's environment was implemented by rehabilitating its hall, contributing to creating a more comfortable environment for citizens and those working in the judicial system.





The Initial Scene

A Simple Observation Led to a Qualitative Intervention

- The story began with a field observation; **Naif Ba Qafaa, the program director at Steps Foundation, says**, "Due to my work in the field, I was aware of the reality of judicial institutions, and the image of the unsuitable A'taq courtroom never left my mind."

He adds:

"Our first visit was not official, but driven by curiosity and responsibility. The hall was exhausting, the furniture needed renewal, the listening platform was almost dilapidated, and the bars were in poor condition. The hall lacked much to be a refuge for justice."

This description was not only emotional but also was based on a precise field examination conducted by the institution to identify the main weaknesses in the court's infrastructure. Restoration needs were observed in three main areas: structural safety, creating a judicial work environment, and improving the relationship between citizens and the judicial institution. This analysis led to participatory meetings with judges, lawyers, and stakeholders, where it was clear that justice could not be improved without enhancing its environment.

With the support of Resonate! Yemen and funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands a comprehensive intervention plan was formulated, which included: fully rehabilitating the courtroom, furnishing it in a manner befitting the dignity of the judiciary, and improving the lighting and ventilation in the courtroom





Scene Two

Between the Hammer and the Initiative

- "What we were looking for was not just a new courtroom. We wanted to create a new feeling upon entering it, that this place deserves respect and is designed to serve both citizens and employees alike. This is what made us pay attention to the small details, from the lighting to the arrangement of the seats," adds Ba Qafaa.



Between the hammer – as a symbol of justice – and the initiative – as a catalyst for change, the team succeeded in turning the idea into reality within a period not exceeding ninety days. The rehabilitation work included improving lighting and ventilation, replacing old furniture with more suitable alternatives, and providing a space that makes litigants feel comfortable, both in terms of organization and privacy.



Turning Point

From Restoration to Trust

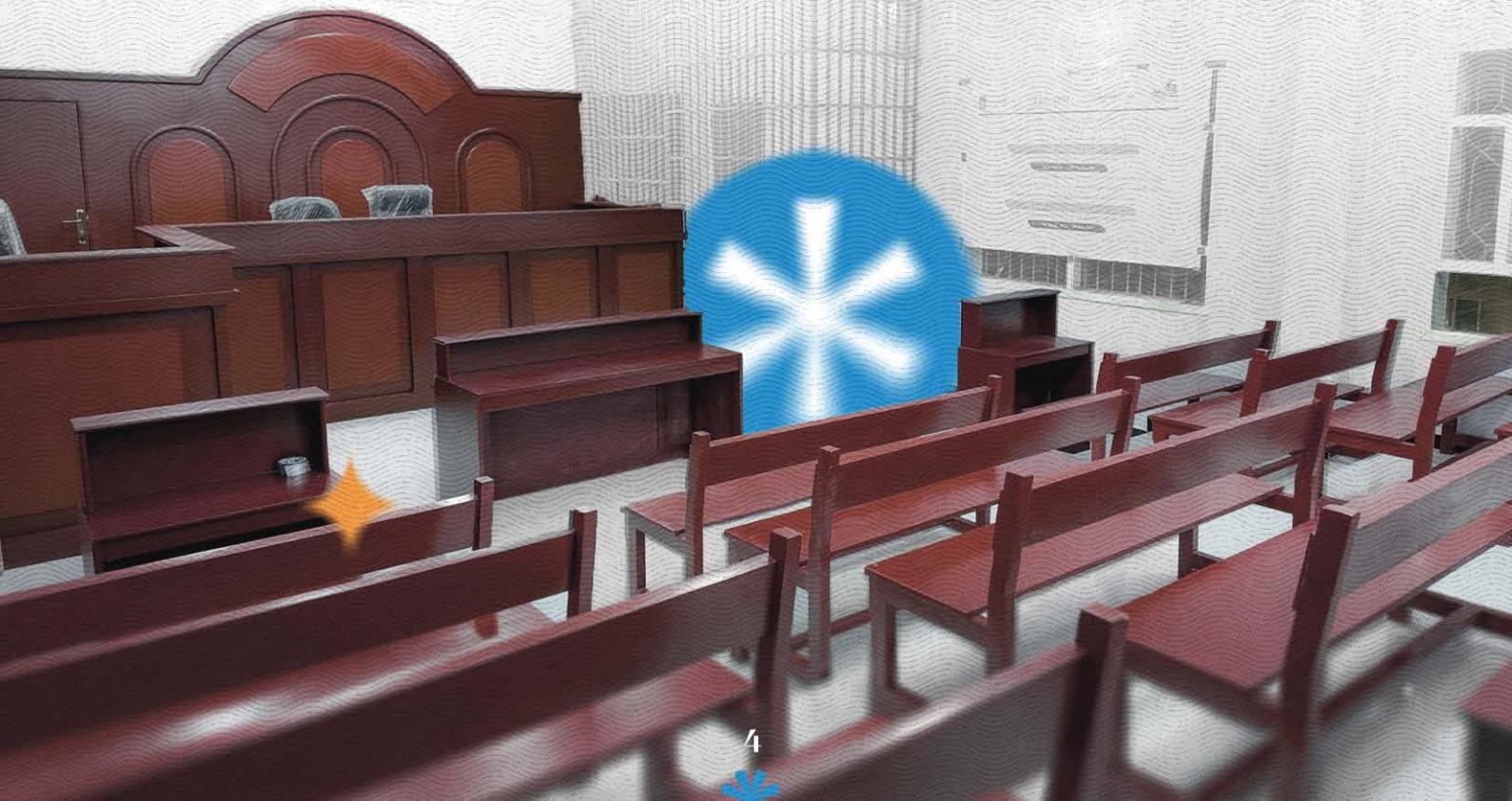
- Following the completion of the project, changes began to be felt on multiple levels, whether in the nature of citizens' interaction with the court or in the performance of the judiciary staff itself, as the number of lawyers eager to plead in court increased, and the performance of employees improved due to the motivating environment.

"The A'taq Court no longer only handles cases from the A'taq District; it has become a judicial refuge for other districts like Habban and Jardan. Now, judges, lawyers, and citizens come carrying their cases and hopes to the A'taq Court,"

says Judge Yasser Sylan, head of the A'taq Court.

He adds, "We did not expect that the physical change would have such a profound psychological effect."

The change was not only tangible in the overall appearance of the hall, but was also felt by judges, lawyers, and citizens who deal daily with the court environment and fully understand its impact on the course of justice.





Institutional Impact

How is Justice Measured?

- Improving the judicial work environment is a strategic investment that enhances judges' efficiency, reduces delays, and increases attendance at sessions, especially in a Yemeni context facing security, financial, and administrative challenges.

Judge Yasser Sylan, President of the A'taq Primary Court, says:

"Improving the court environment has reflected on our attendance and our handling of cases. The courtroom has become more suitable for sessions, and there is a feeling that we are working in a space that respects our work and values our role. This simple change has provided us with a better psychological and professional space."

The experience of the Steps Foundation (Khotwat) has proven that improving access to justice does not always require major changes, but can start with small details. However, when these details are managed within a comprehensive vision, they produce a profound institutional impact.

Through the support provided by Resonate! Yemen. The project was not just a local intervention, but a model experience in linking institutional empowerment to social justice, and integrating gender principles into judicial policies.

Naif Ba Qafaa explains:

"The project has demonstrated that the simplest material details, when managed carefully, can make a significant difference in the quality of judicial services."

He adds: *"Justice begins with details. When the courtroom is organized, well-ventilated, and equipped in a manner befitting the judiciary, it reflects on everyone's performance – from the judge to the lawyer to the citizen. This initiative was not just about rehabilitating a place, but about restoring the spirit of justice."*

For his part, one citizen expresses his experience, saying:

"I recently went to attend a session related to a family case, and I found the courtroom in a completely new state. There was order, respect, and I did not feel that I was in a psychologically exhausting place as before."

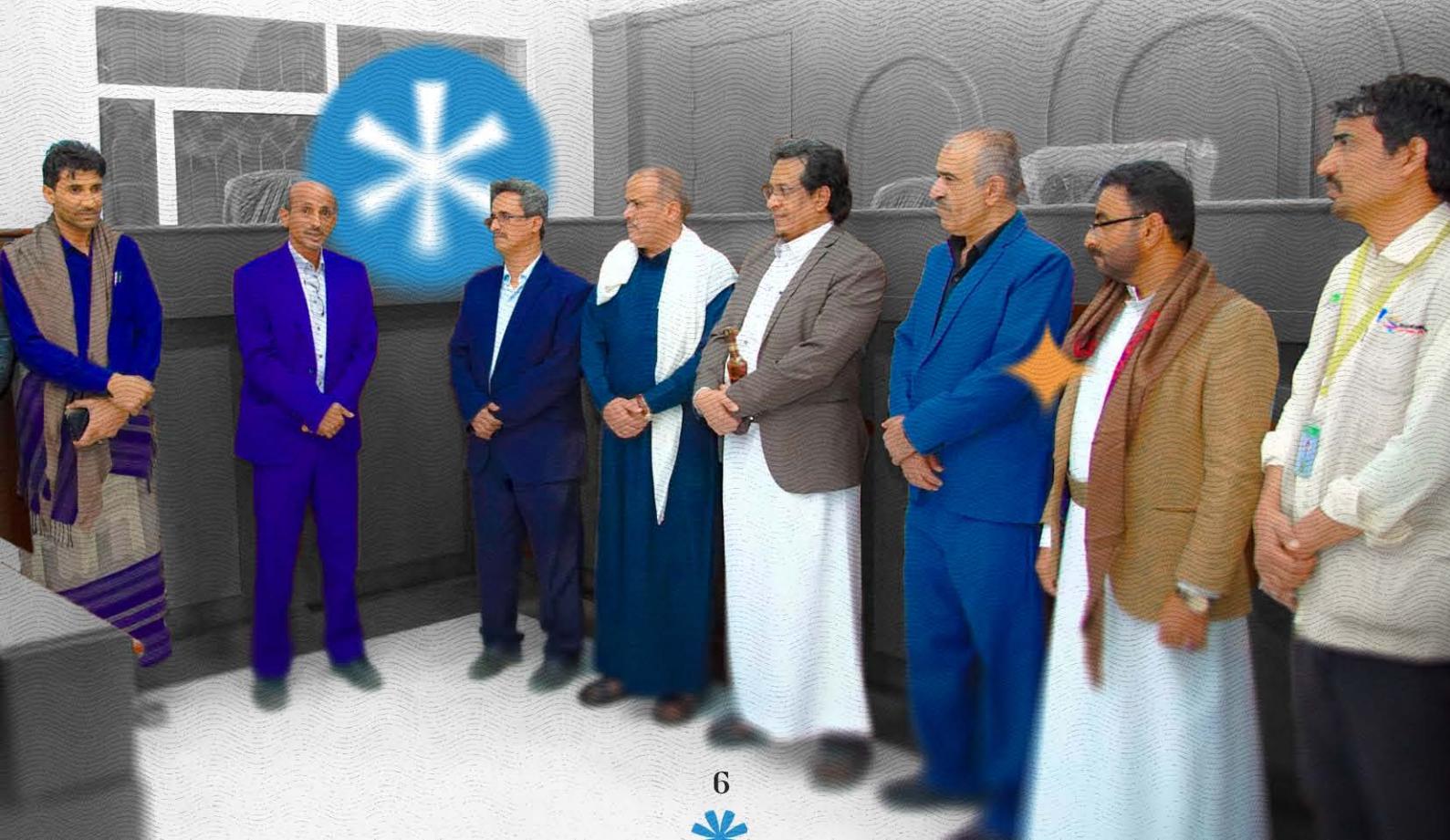


Conclusion

Steps That Made a Difference

- From a modest hall to **an environment worthy of justice**, and from a civil society institution to an active partner in the community. The intervention of **the Steps Foundation (Khotwat)** has proven that improving access to justice does not require major interventions, but rather starts with understanding reality and paying attention to details.

This project is a living example that change is possible when there is faith, partnership, and a genuine understanding of people's needs. Today, as the foundation attempts to replicate the experience in other courts within the governorate, the hall of the A'taq Primary Court remains a testament that justice is not only born in laws, but is made on the ground.





Ministry of Foreign Affairs



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