

CULTURE AND INFORMATION

33.1 INTRODUCTION

Cultural development is a cornerstone of comprehensive overall development, for it is through culture that scientific capacities, knowledge and skills are raised to levels of innovation and creativity in all fields. Economic and social transformations in the Kingdom were paralleled by cultural achievements through the contributions of many Saudi innovators, thinkers, researchers, and scholars. Such contributions were sponsored by national-government and private institutions and organizations concerned with the development of culture; in particular, the Ministry of Culture and Information, literary clubs, culture and arts associations, universities, schools, public libraries, newspapers, and publishing houses. Activities were not confined to the country but were extended into the Arab, Islamic and international spheres. Indeed, endeavours to reach out to the world were made by embassies and educational and cultural attachés abroad and their information services. The endeavours culminated in sponsorship by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz, of the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue in Makkah and the World Conference on Interfaith Dialogue in Madrid.

Under the Eighth Development Plan, various cultural events were held, where various forms of expression like essays, poetry, stories, novels, intellectual theses, researches and scientific studies met with great interest. Likewise, there was mounting interest in various forms of artistic endeavour, as well as in national and popular heritage and archaeological treasures and sites. Numerous literary and cultural prizes were granted for scientific and literary excellence. Moreover, cultural events and festivals were organised each year, such as the National Janadriyah Heritage and Culture Festival. Furthermore, print and audio-visual media activity developed qualitatively and quantitatively.

Under the Ninth Development Plan, efforts to improve the quality of cultural services will continue, through organising and supporting cultural events and activities. In addition, information services will be advanced and expanded.

This chapter presents the current conditions of the culture and information sector and the developments that took place under the Eighth Development Plan. It also reviews key issues and challenges that need to be addressed under the Ninth Development Plan, assesses projected demand for services, presents the future vision for the sector and reviews the objectives, policies and targets set for it under the Ninth Development Plan.

33.2 CURRENT CONDITIONS

33.2.1 Culture

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Saudi cultural life is rich and multifaceted. The following are indicators of the achievements under the Eighth Development Plan:

- The Ministry of Culture and Information organised numerous activities and events. Exhibitions and workshops were organized at the rate of 23 annually. Through the General Administration for Literary Clubs, which number 16, a range of activities, averaging 491 annually, were undertaken, including symposia, forums, and poetry and short story evenings. In addition, the Ministry published more than 53 publications, and presented through the 13 branches of the Culture and Arts Association, which span the whole of the country, plays, seminars and lectures, at an annual average of about 27 poetry and short story evenings, 13 symposiums, 28 plays, 48 exhibitions, and 52 workshops and art exhibitions. The Ministry also held 6 educational workshops attended by 1,745 children, and supplied the 80 public libraries it oversees with more than 800 titles annually, in addition to organising the annual book fair. Among the prominent cultural activities of the Ministry was the organization of 13 cultural weeks in cooperation with Arab and friendly countries. The Ministry has also created five new

societies, alongside the philatelic society. These are: the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and the Arts, the Saudi Theatre Society, The Saudi Photography Association, the Saudi Arabic Calligraphy Society, and the Saudi Society for Fine Arts.

- For more than two decades, the National Janadriyah Heritage and Culture Festival, which is one of the most outstanding cultural events in the Arab world, is held annually under the auspices of the National Guard Command. The Festival is open for two weeks each year and includes podium activities, a heritage village and publications. The festival has so far been held 24 times comprising intellectual and scientific symposia, and poetry and short story evenings. It also published about 144 books, in addition to holding a book fair and an art exhibition. Alongside, various governmental agencies and regional governorates exhibit their achievements and heritage treasures, each in a separate wing.
- The concerted efforts of the state, together with efforts by the private sector and individuals, promoted diversified cultural authoring and production. Publishing houses totalled 448, including 321 owned by the private sector and 127 owned by government. There were some 175 thousand publications and 24 volumes, comprising 71,731 items, chronicling Saudi publications and books. There were about 1,980 libraries, including 194 specialized, 80 public, and 1,646 school and 60 university libraries. Library acquisitions totalled more than 1.9 million book titles and other materials. In addition, major libraries possess outstanding acquisitions, such as King Abdul-Aziz Library, which has about 200 thousand acquisitions; King Abdul-Aziz Foundation, which has about 800 thousand acquisitions; the National Library has about 300 thousand acquisitions; and King Fahd National Library, which has about 1.3 million items and is responsible for keeping Saudi intellectual production since the introduction of the filing system in 1993.
- The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Dawah and Guidance played an active role in the service of Islamic culture,

publishing a total of about 1,230 Arabic and translated books. Moreover, the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta' published about 270 books, and the General Presidency for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice published about 700 books.

- King Fahd Cultural Centre sponsored several varied cultural, scientific and technical events; from conferences, to symposiums, lectures, and theatre events.

The establishment of King Abdul-Aziz Centre for National Dialogue is qualitative cultural addition. It addresses cultural development issues and constraints, social phenomena and the challenges they pose, and it plays a significant role in disseminating the culture of dialogue.

Box 33.1: King Abdul-Aziz Centre for National Dialogue

King Abdul-Aziz Centre for National Dialogue was set up in 2003, by order of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz.

The Centre seeks to provide an enabling environment for national dialogue among individuals and social groups of both sexes, in the public interest and to preserve national unity which is based on the Islamic doctrine, through:

- Consolidating national unity within the framework of Islam through constructive national dialogue.
- Contributing through constructive dialogue to the formulation of a true Islamic discourse based on moderation and temperance.
- Addressing social, cultural, political, economic and educational problems through intellectual dialogue.
- Promoting intra-society dialogue as a means for addressing all issues that society faces.
- Promote wide participation of society members in dialogue and strengthening the role of civil societies in ensuring justice, equality and freedom of expression within the framework of the Sharia (Islamic law).
- Reinforcing national dialogue, in coordination with all relevant agencies.
- Enhancing channels of communication and intellectual dialogue with organizations and individuals abroad.
- Developing a strategic vision of national dialogue and ensuring that it will be applied.

33.2.2 Information

The Ministry of Culture and Information oversees media activities that aims to: inculcate the values and principles of tolerant Islam; enhance people's sense of national belonging; urge people to contribute seriously to progress and development and respect for the law; strengthen bonds of love and synergy and enhance the spirit of social solidarity; advance intellectual and cultural endeavours; combat illiteracy; preserve and revive heritage; consolidate traditions and customs of Arab dignity; combat destructive attitudes, expose their fallacy and the threat they pose to individuals and communities; and highlight the identity and distinctiveness of the Kingdom, the stability and security enjoyed by its society and the economic and social progress it achieved.

Information channels include television and radio stations, newspapers and magazines and media centres.

Under the Eighth Development Plan, print and audio-visual information media advanced considerably:

- There were 28 broadcasting stations transmitting 5 programmes: the Glorious Quran Radio; the Call of Islam Radio; the Riyadh-based General Programme Radio; the Jeddah-based Radio Two; and the Directed Broadcasting Radio, which broadcasts in 12 languages. In addition, there were 246 FM stations, and 149 television centres transmitting 5 channels, in addition to 4 new ones covering culture, economic issues, Holy Quran, and the noble tradition of the Prophet (Sunnah). Moreover, there were 60 new digital transmission TV centres, replacing analogue transmission.
- The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) had 21 offices. Moreover, it expanded its capacity.
- The private sector played an important role in developing the culture and information sector, through press institutions publishing 14 daily newspapers and 165 scientific and specialized magazines; more than 321 bookshops and publishing

houses; media and advertising companies and institutions; and various artistic production institutions; in addition to its contribution to the establishment of information and cultural facilities.

33.2.3 Education and Scientific Research

In addition to their vital role in the development of education, general and higher education institutions contributed effectively to enriching cultural life. Saudi universities produced numerous researches and studies; contributed to authoring and translation activities through various publications; and stimulated cultural life through scientific and cultural conferences, meetings, seminars and book fairs.

King Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology contributed to culture, science and technology by supporting more than 2,600 researches. It completed about 90 researches, 30 of which national and (60) in cooperation with international scientific institutions. In addition, it Arabized hundreds of scientific terms; produced scientific films and programmes; published more than 300 scientific books; and issued the Science and Technology Quarterly, of which 90 issues have been published.

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Through publication of books and scientific research and studies, the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) plays a significant cultural role, in addition to its core mission of training human resources. The total acquisitions of the library of IPA number about 203 thousand reference books; it published over 200 books; and continued to issue a monthly magazine, of which 195 issues have been published. Through Social Development and Services Centres, the Ministry of Social Affairs offers cultural services, such as literacy and adult education programmes; it organizes cultural competitions, symposiums, and lectures; publishes books publishing and produces programmes. Under the Eighth Development Plan, it organized about 186 cultural events were organized.

33.2.4 Heritage

There has been mounting national interest in tourism and antiquities, as well as in encouraging domestic tourism. The General Commission for Tourism and Antiquities is conducting explorations, and documenting historical sites, monuments and unique natural landmarks, in addition to collecting, protecting and maintaining national heritage and establishing museums in various regions. Some 23 registered museums were in operation by the end of the Eighth Development Plan, the most outstanding of which is the Riyadh-based National Museum. In addition, about 65 private museums were licensed. Over 1,100 archaeological sites and more than 1,000 ancient mining sites were surveyed. Mada'in Saleh, Dir'iyah and the historic centre of Jeddah were included in the UNESCO World Heritage list of historic sites. The historic cultural Okaz Market in the city of Taif was revived, and has so far had three festivals. The ancient mosque in Marid Fortress in Domat Al-Jandal was renovated, as was Al-Akhdoud Castle in the city of Najran.

The Commission is undertaking the rehabilitation of the historic buildings built under the reign of the founder, King Abdul-Aziz, to be opened to the public as museums of the early history of the Kingdom. It is also undertaking the folkloric markets project and is developing the historic centres of a number of cities, such as Jeddah and Taif. In addition, the Commission continues work on heritage-village projects, such as: old Al Ghat, Rijal Alma, Dhi Ain Village, Jubbah and old Al-Ola towns.

33.3 ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

33.3.1 Preservation and Consolidation of National Identity

The national identity has three elements: spiritual, cultural, and national. In view of the global major shifts in patterns of thought and behaviour and the clash of cultures and interests, enabling the national identity to withstand challenges calls for deepening the culture of

dialogue and openness, providing access to various sources and channels of knowledge, creating trust and a climate of tolerance among actors in intellectual and cultural life, and encouraging dialogue that enrich the national identity.

33.3.2 Globalization and the Cultural Identity

The communications and information revolution has led to drastic changes in the global cultural discourse, due to the high speed with which information is disseminated widely and the multiplicity of options it offers, leading to globalization. It is no longer possible to control the flow of information and cultural messages. Furthermore, cultural indicators, such as literary; intellectual and artistic output; number and readership of newspapers; number of libraries, museums and symposiums; and the number of websites and internet users are now established as part of the criteria by which living standards and quality of life are measured. Hence, it is imperative to upgrade cultural and media materials, news and cultural programmes and art works, and encourage national competencies to participate in their innovation. This would help maintain a close relationship between citizens and cultural and media agencies, but it requires developing cultural and information facilities, as well as honing manpower skills.

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33.3.3 Developing Interest in Reading and Cultural Affairs

There have been ambitious initiatives to promote reading and development of knowledge. For example, King Abdul-Aziz Library has established the Festival of Free Reading, which aims to encourage citizens to make reading an essential part of their lives. The Festival incorporated several events stressing the importance of reading. In 2009, it also launched the Reading at Airports programme. With the help of its Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the city of Jeddah organized the Saudi Publisher Fair, where importance of reading and the history of books and the book industry were exhibited.

The rate of reading is an important indicator of civilizational progress.

Human development reports issued by the United Nations over the past years pointed out that the reading rate in the Arab world is low, compared with Europe and America. Even though reliable statistics and surveys are lacking, it is clear, nevertheless, that interest in reading and culture is lower than aspired levels. Hence, there is a need for incorporating free reading, research and study skills into curricula, as well as for increasing interest in book publishing and distribution, in addition to translation and Arabization.

33.3.4 Scientific Culture and the Drive Towards Knowledge Society

The Kingdom is heading towards a knowledge society and a knowledge-based economy. However, to achieve this, it is necessary to increase awareness and enlighten the community. The media plays an active role in this by using print and audio-visual educational programmes. The Ninth Development Plan envisages expanding these efforts. For its part, the scientific and technical culture has become an essential factor in economic and social development. Hence, promoting it has become ever more urgent.

33.3.5 Translation and Cultural Content

The cultural wealth of the Kingdom is increasing steadily, as evidenced by the growing cultural content, whether in traditional media, such as books, or in digital media, such as CDs. Translation is a basic factor in cultural enrichment. Interest in translation has emerged recently, but it needs to be consolidated and expanded by training competent manpower and instituting translation programmes, especially in areas of development of the culture of science, technology and innovation.

33.4 DEMAND FORECASTS

The Ninth development plan envisages significantly growing demand for cultural and information facilities and associated activities over its five years period, not only due to population growth, but also due to the growing cultural and information awareness among citizens, which

is reflected in their interest in national cultural affairs and their eagerness for information, especially among young people, who make up a significant proportion of Saudi society. Hence, the plan will endeavour to meet the bulk of the increased demand by achieving the targets it has set for cultural and information services.

33.5 DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

33.5.1 Future Vision

Prevalence of a high level of culture, inspired by the cultural values of the Saudi society, where media would play a pivotal role in serving the interests of the Kingdom, and where the culture and information sector would contribute effectively to the development process and to the drive towards a knowledge society.

33.5.2 Objectives

- Preserving and strengthening the Arab and Islamic identity of the national culture.
- Developing the intellectual and cultural structures that constitute a cornerstone of civilization.
- Supporting authoring, translation, Arab media production and cultural activities within the Kingdom and abroad.
- Dealing positively with the impact of globalization, with the aim of enhancing national culture and consolidating its standing among world cultures.
- Developing and improving efficiency of media and cultural agencies and strengthening their links with various economic, social, scientific, cultural, educational and recreational activities.
- Producing competitive, influential, and attractive programmes and materials.
- Increasing private sector participation in the provision of cultural and information services.
- Achieving a regionally balanced dissemination of culture.

The aforementioned objectives involve four dimensions:

1. Economic, which requires strengthening the role of cultural industries in the development of the national economy, keeping pace with modernization and globalization in cultural fields, and providing opportunities for young people in various fields of culture and information.
2. Educational, which requires developing and modernizing educational programmes.
3. Institutional and regulatory framework, which requires establishing partnerships and complementarities among those concerned with cultural affairs, including government and private institutions and the civil society; raising the standard of quality and performance in the cultural sector; and cooperation with international and Arab cultural institutions.
4. Social, which requires mainstreaming a new cultural experience that emphasises the Saudi cultural identity, while emulating globalization.

33.5.3 Policies

- Encouraging domestic production and marketing of cultural materials and disseminating them.
- Increasing and supporting all forms of cultural and media production and enhancing its role in development.
- Providing a modern, contemporary infrastructure, particularly for means of communications, in order to promote cultural development.
- Building capacity in culture and information, including scientific culture.
- Developing educational programmes to suit the aspirations of youth and labour market requirements in cultural and media activities.
- Strengthening the role of educational institutions in raising the cultural level.

- Addressing duplication - if any - in government work in culture and information.
- Formulating a modern information and culture strategy and supporting it with clear practical implementable mechanisms
- Developing a strategy for culture and another for the advancement of the Arabic language.
- Stimulating the civil society and the private sector to establish new information and cultural institutions.
- Launching specialized activities to help develop the cultural sectors.
- Raising performance quality in culture and information.
- Increasing cultural and media interaction with the outside world, and developing Arab and international partnerships in culture and information.
- Making the Kingdom a key player on the Arab and Islamic cultural scenes.
- Motivating young people to show interest and participate in the discussion of cultural issues.
- Increasing the contribution of the cultural and media sector in the drive towards a knowledge-based economy.
- Developing a database on national culture.
- Increasing interest in scientific translation from and into Arabic.
- Intensifying efforts to conduct studies and research into culture and media, and establishing national and regional research networks.

33.5.4 Targets

First: in cultural services:

- Establishing 4 new literary clubs.
- Opening 3 branches of the Society for Culture and Arts.
- Establishing 7 cultural centres.

- Establishing 8 new libraries.
- Organizing 20 cultural weeks.
- Organizing 50 theatre events.
- Organizing 80 folk art events in the Kingdom and abroad.
- Organizing 100 plastic art events in the Kingdom and abroad.
- Organizing 110 book exhibitions in the Kingdom and abroad.

Second: In Information Services:

- Establishing 23 new TV broadcasting centres.
- Replacing analogue TV broadcasting centres with digital ones, covering the First, Second, Sports and News Channels.
- Adding 38 new FM stations and establishing 5 FM stations on the highways.
- Establishing a shortwave radio station, in addition to updating 7 radio stations.
- Modernizing 28 radio stations.
- Establishing two radio-broadcasting studios in Makkah and Madinah.
- Opening 4 new Saudi Press Agency (SPA) offices.
- Opening 3 internal information centres.

A summary of the targets set for the cultural and information facilities by administrative region under the Ninth Development Plan is illustrated by Table 33.1

Table 33.1
Cultural and Information Services Targets
by Region
Ninth Development Plan

Region	TV Centres	FM Radio Stations	Digital Centres	Ministry Branches	Cultural Centres	Libraries	Society for Culture and Arts	Literary Clubs	Updating Radio Stations Stages 1+2
Riyadh	3	5	4	–	–	1	–	1	4
Makkah	3	4	3	–	2	–	1	–	5
Madinah	5	4	3	1	–	1	–	1	2
Qassim	–	2	2	–	–	1	–	1	2
Eastern Region	2	5	3	1	1	1	–	–	5
Asir	2	4	3	1	1	1	–	–	2
Tabuk	1	3	3	–	1	–	–	–	1
Hail	–	2	2	–	–	1	–	–	2
Northern Borders	1	1	2	–	1	1	1	–	1
Baha	2	–	2	–	1	–	–	–	–
Jazan	2	2	1	–	–	–	–	–	2
Najran	–	3	3	–	–	–	1	1	1
Jawf	2	3	1	–	–	1	–	–	1
Total	23	38	32	3	7	8	3	4	28

Source: Ministry of Economy and Planning.

33.6 FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

The financial allocations for information and cultural programmes under the Ninth Development Plan are SR12.1 billion.