

**The Middle East under Pressure:
What Role for Regional Social Sciences?**

A Research Report and Recommendations for Action

By

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Prepared for the Experts Workshop in Dubai, 26-27 November 2006

“Strengthening Social Science Research in the Middle East/Arab Region:
Exploring the Feasibility of an Arab Social Science Research Council”

With financial support from
The International Development Research Centre (Canada)

Draft: For Discussion

November 2006

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Executive Summary

This paper is based upon a larger feasibility study titled “Middle East under Pressure: What Role for the Social Sciences?” which was undertaken with support from the International Development Research Centre (Canada). However, it is specifically tailored to serve as the key background document for the forthcoming Dubai workshop on 26-27 November 2006 on **“Strengthening Social Science Research in the Middle East/Arab Region: Exploring the Feasibility of an Arab Social Science Research Council”**.

The original IDRC feasibility study was motivated by a concern about the conspicuous absence of social scientists in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey from contributing regionally-based and regionally-informed analyses and ideas at a time when the Middle East is under intense pressure and scrutiny. The project started with a pressing question: Given the range of common internal and external challenges confronting states and societies in the Middle East today, why is there not a robust body of regional social science research that can help influence public debates and public policies in the region and internationally? The hope was that if that question could be answered, it would help lead to the more practical question of what can be done about it.

The original study was conducted in the summer of 2006 by Necla Tschirgi in collaboration with Dr. Kian Tajkhash and Dr. Manal Jamal. The study concluded that the social science communities in the Arab world, Iran and Turkey have followed widely divergent trajectories over the last few decades. Their institutional infra-structure is distinct; they work within very different intellectual and political environments; and their needs and aspirations are diverse. Although there are numerous benefits of more active engagement among Arab, Iranian and Turkish social scientists, the current climate is not particularly conducive to promoting deeper interaction and joint work among their social science communities in any significant way. On the other hand, there is a widely-perceived need for a new mechanism that would build upon and enhance the existing regional research collaboration in the Arab world. The study found that such a mechanism would not only serve the Arab social science community to play a more effective role in contributing to public debates and public policies in the Arab world. It would also facilitate closer links with other regional and international social science research communities, specifically in Iran and Turkey. Thus, the feasibility study proposed the creation of a new institution tentatively called the Arab Social Science Research Council (ASSRC) and offered a plan of action that would help move that proposal forward through a series of process-driven and content-specific activities.

This paper is extracted from the larger IDRC feasibility study. It first summarizes the findings of the original study. It then focuses specifically on the current state of regional social sciences in the Arab world and it makes a case for creating the proposed ASSRC. The paper is intended to stimulate in-depth discussion of its findings and recommendations. It is hoped that the paper will also serve to initiate a broader discussion about social science research and alternative futures in the Middle East region. If knowledge is a public good, it should serve public purposes—and nothing is more important today than understanding and helping to shape the future of the Middle East/Arab region.

I. Introduction and Background

Given the serious challenges that confront the Middle East in the early years of the 21st century, there is an acute recognition of the need for regional social science research institutions that focus on socio-economic-political and environmental issues that are regional in nature and that require responses beyond the individual countries in the region. In the last few years, a series of conferences and reports have served to draw attention to serious gaps in academic as well as policy research--underscoring the importance of concerted efforts to overcome the existing weaknesses in the infrastructure of social science research in the Middle East in general and the Arab countries more specifically.¹

In late 2005, several institutions and individuals independently undertook initiatives to examine and address the need to create or strengthen social science research in the Middle East region. These included: UNDP Regional Bureau of Arab States' (UNDP/RBAS) project on *Knowledge Acquisition, Generation and Utilization in the Arab Region* (KAGUAR); IDRC's research support activity titled *The Middle East Under Pressure: What Role for the Social Sciences?*; and consultations for a joint initiative between the Middle East Program of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in New York and the Regional Office of the Population Council in Cairo. Each of these initiatives had a somewhat different entry point and geographic focus. Nonetheless, at the core, they addressed the same issue: *the need to generate more effective social science research with a regional scope in order to enhance understanding of cross-cutting problems in the Arab and/or the broader Middle East region and to influence public debate and public policies through research and policy analysis.*

Since early 2006, a small group of colleagues involved in these initiatives have been working together to exchange ideas and to engage a broader community of scholars, academics and researchers in the region.² Jointly, they organized a meeting in Beirut in April 2006 which was co-hosted by UNDP and IDRC. The Beirut meeting endorsed the value of undertaking a more rigorous diagnosis of the state of regional social sciences in the Middle East and recommended a follow up meeting to discuss the results of the IDRC feasibility study.³

Based on the original IDRC feasibility study, this paper has been prepared specifically for the forthcoming experts' workshop to be held in Dubai on 26-27 November 2006. The paper is based on extensive desk and field research and incorporates the views of dozens of social scientists and academics in the Arab world as well as Arab scholars abroad. Earlier versions of the paper were shared with over 100 researchers in the region and abroad. However, given the absence of systematic research and evaluation studies on this topic, the paper's analysis and conclusions require close scrutiny.

In addition to the short introduction and conclusion, the paper consists of four parts: a) summary of findings from the IDRC study; b) review of the state of regional social sciences in the Arab world; c) the proposal to establish an Arab Social Science Research Council; and d) recommendations for next steps.

II. Summary of Findings from the Original Feasibility Study on the Middle East: Differentiated Needs and Opportunities

The research project that was originally supported by IDRC started with a pressing question: *Given the range of common internal and external challenges confronting states and societies in the Middle East region in the early years of the 21st century, why is there not a robust body of social science research and analysis that is regionally based and regionally informed?* The original research question led to other related questions: In the absence of regionally-grounded research and analysis, can the region's problems be understood (and addressed) through country-specific or externally-driven international perspectives? If not, how can the social sciences be strengthened in the Middle East to generate cross-country, comparative or collaborative research and analysis that can help influence public debates as well as public policies?

The search for answers for these questions led to a multi-country feasibility study. Necla Tschirgi was joined by Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh in Tehran and Dr. Manal Jamal in New York as they respectively undertook a review of the state of regional social science research in Turkey, Iran and the Arab countries. In addition, Necla Tschirgi undertook two visits to the Middle East in April and August 2006 to consult with a wide range of researchers and research institutes in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey.⁴

The project was clear in its key concern: the current status, promises, challenges and opportunities of REGIONAL social science research in the Middle East. "Regional" was defined broadly as research that is not focused exclusively on local or national issues. Thus, all cross-country, cross-regional, comparative and international research would fit roughly under this definition-- provided that it was also linked in some way to the realities of the Middle East.

The feasibility study was conducted during the summer of 2006 and a consolidated draft report was submitted to IDRC in October.⁵ The report provided an analysis of the state of regional social science research in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey. However, its findings did not endorse the presumed need for a regional social science mechanism that would bring Arab, Iranian and Turkish scholars under a common umbrella. Instead, the report offered a differentiated analysis of the social science research communities in the Arab world, Iran and Turkey. In a nutshell, its key conclusions were as follows:

- There is very little research on the common challenges confronting the Arab countries, Turkey and Iran from a regional or comparative perspective.
- With the exception of the Economic Research Forum in Cairo (ERF) and the Middle East Research Competition (MERC) which are regional in nature, there are no mechanisms for sustained interaction or collaboration among social scientists in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey. However, networks like the Global Development Network (GDN), the Mediterranean Development Forum (MDF) and EuroMeSCo include both Turkey and the Arab countries as part of larger groupings--thereby providing an indirect opportunity for interaction.
- Meanwhile, there many research institutions which focus on the Arab region. However, these institutions operate in a highly fragmented and privatized research

environment whereby their collective work falls far short of articulating a “regional” perspective that can serve as the basis for public debate and public policy in the Arab world.

- Social science communities in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey have followed divergent trajectories in the last few decades. Their institutional infra-structure is quite distinct and they are working within very different political and intellectual environments. As a result, their needs and aspirations at this time are very different.
- In the Arab world, Iran and Turkey, there is recognition of the “objective” benefits of collaboration and the need for regionally-informed research.
- The absence of regional research is largely attributed to the shortcomings of the social science communities in the region—each of which has a different handicap. In the case of Iran, the main limitation is the intellectual insularity that has been imposed by the political regime since 1979. In the case of Turkey, it is the consequences of a narrow, almost exclusively Western-oriented social science enterprise. Meanwhile, in the Arab world, the critical challenge is the overall weakness of the social sciences.
- Notwithstanding the objective merits of regional approaches and networks, it is quite clear that there are formidable language, institutional, political and financial barriers that currently militate against such initiatives between Arab, Iranian and Turkish researchers. Existing political and professional incentive structures decidedly work against regionally-based and regionally-initiated efforts. Moreover, there is some evidence that the current generation of social scientists is too heavily invested in existing national and/or international networks to change course. Thus, other strategies are needed to strengthen existing links and to invest in the future.
- Among researchers who have been involved in regional initiatives under such mechanisms as MEAwards, MERC and ERF, there is support for substantive collaboration on selected issue areas (such as reproductive health, urbanization, women’s issues, education, migration, refugees, water-related conflicts) as well as regional mechanisms that can indirectly expand the autonomy and space for social research in the region as a whole. In fact, one of the strongest arguments provided for regional research was not the production of “new” knowledge but the need to create “new public spaces” that can broaden the geographic, political and intellectual scope of social and political discourses in the Middle East region. Given the severe political limitations at the national level, a regionally-based approach was seen to offer a safer ground for testing new ideas.
- Despite the current state of affairs, there is considerable support for investing in a new generation of scholars with greater opportunities for interaction and exchange among them within the region as well as internationally. It is argued that only a new generation of researchers can overcome each community’s shortcomings and initiate a process of mutual learning across the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey and to offer a “regional” dimension to current international analyses of the Middle East.
- Given the existence of large diaspora communities especially of Arab and Iranian scholars, there is strong support for mechanisms of collaboration with diaspora social scientists—especially since many of them work at the intersection of regional/international issues.
- While recognizing the merits of fostering closer relations among Arab, Iranian and Turkish social scientists, thoughtful observers of the current state of affairs also

acknowledge the lack of a general demand for regional social science research except among small pockets of intellectuals and researchers in each country. On the other hand, there seems to be considerable support for strengthening “regional” social science research in the Arab world—both in its own right and as a potential base for broader cooperation with other social science communities.

Based on the above analysis, the original feasibility study refrained from proposing a formal mechanism to promote closer engagement among social scientists in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey at this time. Instead, recognizing the promises as well as the limitations of promoting closer interaction among social scientists working in three very different environments, the report proposed a strategy that is firmly grounded in today’s realities but propelled by the many ideas and proposals that were put forth by researchers in the region during the course of this project. Thus, the report proposed a phased response to redressing the weaknesses of the social sciences in the Middle East region, building upon the formidable groundwork already laid in the Arab world while exploring concrete opportunities for collaboration with Iran and Turkey.

Several factors supported a concentrated focus on the Arab world: a) the long tradition of networking among Arab social scientists; b) the natural linguistic/cultural links among Arab scholars that facilitate intra-Arab communication and collaboration; c) the serious gaps in the infra-structure of the social sciences in the Arab region despite the existence of a plethora of institutions, activities and initiatives; d) the absence of any national or pan-Arab institution with the mandate to support and strengthen the social sciences; e) the keen interest of the UNDP’s Regional Bureau of Arab States to mobilize its considerable resources to support a regional initiative in the Arab world.

Drawing from the original IDRC study, the rest of the paper focuses exclusively on the state of the social sciences in the Arab region—followed by the recommendations that were part of the originally IDRC feasibility study.

III. The Case for Focusing on the Arab World

This section consists of four parts. The first outlines the political context within which Arab social scientists operate; the second highlights key features of the social sciences in the Arab region; the third analyses the regional infrastructure of social science research; and the final section summarizes the implications of the new institutional landscape. The discussion draws heavily from two background papers prepared by Manal Jamal which were supplemented by additional research and in-depth interviews. The methodology and the bibliography for those studies are found in the Jamal paper. The extensive field research and interviews I undertook for this project are included in Appendix 1.

The Political Context

In the early years of the 21st century, the Arab world is characterized more by its discontinuities and disarray than its unity. However, at the risk of overgeneralization, certain common features of the Arab world have direct relevance for this study. These include the unifying role of language and religion; the autocratic nature of most Arab states; the mixed consequences of the

region's rich oil resources; high incidence of war, violent conflict and political crises; high level of penetration by external actors; and the widespread public appeal of pan-Islamist and pan-Arab ideologies. The Arab world is faced with simultaneous centrifugal and centripetal factors which often lead to contradictory outcomes. The rise of satellite networks that reach every corner of the Arab world, the heightened role of Islam as a potent political force, the large-scale labor movements within the region, the rise of new social actors that work regionally, the long-standing sense of grievance generated by the Arab-Israeli conflict, the passionate opposition to the wars in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon and the militaristic policies of the Western powers in the region—these and other factors shape the Arab world as a regional (as well as an aspirational) unit.

On the other hand, the existence of 20+ states, and the narrow interests of their ruling regimes, militate against a pan-Arab project. The post-Ottoman history of the Arab world is littered with failed attempts at Arab unification. The Arab League, one of the earliest regional organizations in the world, is the epitome of Arab disunity. Various sub-regions in the Arab world are in fact better integrated than the region as a whole. There is a big chasm between the Gulf States, the Maghreb and the Mashrek; between the oil rich and oil poor states; and between the front-line states and others who are spared the direct impacts of the Israeli conflict. This is naturally reflected in the changing status and performance of their social science communities—which is discussed below.

Nonetheless, there is little question that the political context in most of the Arab countries is basically inhospitable to social science research. Without exception, analysts attribute the current state of the social sciences in the Arab world primarily to the adverse political conditions within which they have to work.⁶ The list of impediments to independent research is long: repressive authoritarian regimes which tolerate little dissent; the lack of robust mechanisms to protect basic human rights and freedoms; the hold of religious establishments on many governments; the growing appeal of religious movements and the existence educational systems based on religion; the cultural tendency towards conformism and the absence of a tradition of critical thinking in the education system; the lack of demand for evidence-based policy research; the corrosive impact of wars, violent conflict and political instability.⁷

*The Social Sciences in the Arab World**

The UNDP Arab Human Development Report (2003) notes:

The human sciences have historical traditions dating back to the time before the independence of the Arab countries, as is the case with studies of history and civilization, for instance. Social sciences as full-fledged disciplines, however, did not emerge and take hold in these countries until after independence when universities and research centres were established to teach and research these sciences. In other words, social sciences did not exist in the Arab world before the 1960s, with a few exceptions, mainly Egypt. In some countries, such as the Arabian Gulf countries, they did not emerge until a

* The definition of the social sciences is intentionally left open since it varies across the Arab world. For the purposes of this study, it includes the humanities, the social and behavioral sciences and other related disciplines. However, the focus is on academically-grounded fields of study and research.

decade later. The status of human and social sciences differs from one Arab country to the next in the level of their development, scholarship and social and political returns. There is not enough accurate data to draw an Arab map of their distribution. There are, however, general trends which can be monitored on the basis of partial indicators. While Iraqis and Syrians, for instance, made excellent contributions to the study of history and civilization, Egyptians made advanced contributions in the field of economic and political sciences, compared to other Arabs. Research traditions in sociology and anthropology seem stronger in the Arab Maghreb in terms of theory and methodology.⁸

The Arab Human Development Report rightly includes the social sciences as part of the overall knowledge deficit problem in the Arab region. As the paper by Manal Jamal indicates, reliable research on the state of the social sciences in the Arab world is quite rare even though there are numerous studies on particular disciplines, especially sociology and anthropology. Unlike other countries or regions, there are no national or regional institutions with the mandate to monitor and document the state of the social sciences in the Arab world.⁹ Instead, any historical memory resides with individual scholars or in individual archives. As a result, it is difficult to compile a comprehensive or accurate portrait of the state of the art.¹⁰ Nonetheless, individual researchers and social scientists hold strong and almost universally negative opinions about the state of the social sciences in the Arab region.¹¹ With some exceptions, analyses of the social sciences in the region reflect the broader problems of the field in general: they are highly subjective, largely undocumented, patchy and inconclusive.

Nonetheless, several broad features of the social sciences in the Arab region merit attention:¹²

- # of universities and enrollments: Due to high demand for education, the number of universities in the Arab world has increased from 10 in 1950, to over 175 in 1996. Of the region's countries, each has at least one institution for tertiary education. More than half of these universities were founded between 1981 and 1996. In the period between 1999 and 2000, there were five million student enrolled in higher education in the Arab world, of which two million, or 40 percent were women.
- Quality of Teaching & Curricula: With the exception of few elite universities, there is widespread dissatisfaction with current curricula and teaching standards in the social sciences—both at the graduate and undergraduate levels. It is consistently argued that the curricula and textbooks are outdated, and the teaching methods are inappropriate to foster analytical and critical thinking. However, much of the criticism is based on personal experiences and anecdotal evidence rather than comparative research.¹³
- Tertiary Enrollments in the Social Sciences: Social sciences disciplines have some of the highest enrollments in Arab universities. This is more a function of their under-appreciation rather than their popularity since in much of the Arab world, matriculation exam scores determine students' fields of study. Students with the highest scores enroll in the physical sciences while those with lower scores enroll in social science faculties.
- Feminization of the Social Sciences: The gender break-down of students enrolled in social science disciplines varies across the region. In Bahrain, Lebanon, and Qatar,

female enrolments account for the majority of enrolments in the social sciences, representing 69 percent, 53 percent, and 62 percent of enrolments respectively. This compares to 35 percent in Iraq, 46 percent in Jordan, 42 percent in Morocco, 37 percent in Oman, 47 percent in PA areas, 39 percent in Saudi Arabia.

- # of Institutions: A 1998 UNESCO study estimated that there were approximately 128 social science research institutions in the region, of which only a fraction engaged in regional social science research.
- # of Social Scientists: The number of trained social scientists actively engaged in social science teaching or research is difficult to determine beyond a crude estimate of overall enrollments, faculty members and researchers working at research institutions. The estimates range from 20,000 senior scholars and 30,000 are junior scholars, to only a few thousand.¹⁴
- Social Science Outputs: Again, while hard data are missing, the Arab Human Development Report estimates that the average social science research output of the Arab world per million inhabitants is roughly 2 percent of that of any industrialized country.¹⁵ If the pattern from the hard sciences applies to the social sciences, it can be assumed that much of this research is undertaken in a few institutions by a small number of researchers. According to the AHDR, only 26 scientific institutions published more than 50 research papers in 1995, while only five institutions published more than 200 papers. In terms of the quality of research outputs, there are no established mechanisms or standards to assess quality. Peer review seems to be employed only sporadically.
- Outlets for Social Science Research: There are limited outlets for serious research across the various disciplines. Even in countries where social science publications are more plentiful, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco, the vast majority of publications are produced and consumed locally, with minimal opportunities for cross-fertilization.
- Brain drain: According to the AHDR, there is a large brain drain of educated Arabs to Western countries. For example, approximately 25 percent of 300,000 first degree graduates from Arab universities in 1995/96 emigrated. Between 1998 and 2000, more than 15,000 Arab doctors migrated. Although their numbers are not known, there is a strong community of Arab social scientists working abroad.

The above trends paint a fairly bleak picture which is largely confirmed in interviews with social scientists in the region. There is high demand for university education in the Arab region, although the social sciences are not the preferred field of study. On the supply side: teaching and curricula in the social sciences are considered quite weak and outdated. Moreover, there does not seem to be a strong link between teaching and research. There is low level of research production and limited outlets for research. All of this suggests that the social sciences are basically caught in a negative web of inhospitable political climate, low demand, poor training, and weak output. The presumed high brain drain seems to cap a rather grim picture. Yet, our review of the infrastructure of regional social science research institutions in the Arab region presents a different and puzzling picture.

*The institutional infrastructure of regional research in the Arab World*¹⁶

Since the 1970s, but most dramatically since the 1980s, there has been a substantial increase in institutions involved in regional social science research in the Arab world. These include social science departments in universities (a number of which also offer MA and PhD degrees), university-based research centers, private research institutions and think tanks, regional research networks and small grants programs, professional association, advocacy networks, foreign research institutes, and regional as well as international organizations. Clearly, something interesting is happening and it requires serious attention. While commentators and social scientists in the region bemoan the state of the social sciences in the Arab world, there has been a proliferation of projects, networks and institutions that are engaged in a plethora of research activities at the national, regional and global levels. Some of the region's most prominent institutions and scholars are involved in these initiatives. However, these initiatives seem to be largely divorced from the academic realm and operate in an increasing privatized and fragmented research environment. A quick analysis of the institutional map reveals the diversity and the range of institutions engaged in social science research in the region.¹⁷

Although the distinction is somewhat artificial, the map groups these institutions into two broad categories: a) regional and cross-regional institutions, networks and award programs; b) nationally-based institutions.

a) Regional and Cross-Regional Institutions, Networks and Award Programs

Networking and collaboration among Arab intellectuals preceded the establishment of the social sciences as professional disciplines. Unfortunately, there is no formal record of those links beyond the history of the intellectual currents of the 20th century. In any case, these links were probably more personal rather than institutional. Multi-country and multi-institutional networks in the Arab world are recent creations, dating mostly to the 1990s. Pre-dating the current generation of regional networks, there were pan-Arab institutions which brought individuals from across the region together around a common project. Indeed, two of the continuing pan-Arab institutions are the Arab Planning Institute (API) and the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI). In the 1980s, there were also competing professional social science associations which were the scene of many ideological and political debates in the region. However, these institutions are now largely extinct.

Most of the 1990s generation of regional institutes and networks were created with major support from foreign donors. Many of them have since become well-established and are able to attract multiple sources of funding. The most prolific of these institutions are engaged in research on economic development or gender-related issues. The **Economic Research Forum (ERF)** is the most notable regional network engaged in policy-oriented economic research. Significantly, ERF includes the Arab region, Turkey and Iran. While API's membership is composed of Arab countries and its research focuses on development, economic management, and planning, ERF's membership is composed of individual scholars whose research is diverse and multi-dimensional.

There are three networks in the region that promote gender research: the **Center for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR)**, the **Gender Economic Research Policy and Analysis (GERPA)** initiative, and **Mashriq/Maghrib Gender Linking Information Project (Mac/Mag GLIP)**. Whereas CAWTAR has been involved in research on women in the Arab world since 1993, GERPA was created very recently to incorporate a gender dimension in a select number of high profile policy research activities. Mac/Mag GLIP, on the other hand, serves as a forum for communication on gender issues.

Unlike ERF or CAWTAR, there are several multi-institutional networks that were created since the mid 1990s. The most prominent of these are the **Global Development Network (GDN)**, the **Mediterranean Development Forum (MDF)**, and the **EuroMeSCo-European Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)**. Initiated and funded by international organizations and donor agencies, these networks have generated considerable activity and research as well as competition for limited human resources in the Middle East. The GDN and the MDF both focus predominately on socio-economic development issues. EuroMeSCo focuses on policy and security related issues. The MDF partnership is comprised of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) think tanks, the United Nations Development Program, and the World Bank Institute. A critical component of the MDF partnership is a Forum which is held every two to three years. The GDN, on the other hand, operates as a network of regional partners from around the world. MENA is represented by ERF which also manages the regional window of GDNet. The EuroMeSCo brings together institutes of five southern EU members and a number of institutes from Southern Mediterranean countries. None of these networks are specific to the Arab region, and in fact they all include Turkey. Of these networks, GDN represents an interesting model because it was originally founded by and managed by the World Bank; however, it became independent in 2001 and has its institutional home in India.

Some argue that these international networking are created to promote particular policy agendas rather than to support regionally-relevant research; thus, their research outputs are seen as incidental. However, many of the conferences and meetings organized by these networks are substantive in nature and clearly foster the production, dissemination and discussion of new knowledge on issues of direct concern to the Middle East. Moreover, their close links to national as well as international policy networks attest to their policy influence. In the case of GDN, its internet based research platform (GDNet) is a major repository of electronic research in the region. The GDNet (along with ASSR which is discussed below) is a significant resource for the social science community.

Two recent networks with international connections are the **Arab Reform Initiative (ARI)** and the **Consortium of Research Institutes to Promote Regional Security and Cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa**. The Consortium, as well as several sub-regional networks on strategic and security issues in the Gulf region, requires further research since they have just been added to our institutional map.

The Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), on the other hand, has been developing slowly and steadily. Devoted to the study of political reform in the Arab World in order to advance knowledge and develop a program of home-grown democratic change, ARI's membership consists of 10 local

institutions and five Western partners. Its founding members include some of the better known and more active research centers in the Arab world, such as the Al-Ahram Center, Biblioteca Alexandria, Center for Strategic Studies at Jordan University, Lebanese Center for Policy Studies and the Gulf Research Center. It should be noted that several of these same institutions are also members of GDN, MDF and EuroMeSCo. The implications of the density of the relationships between several Arab institutions and their international/global partners certainly deserves further examination—especially since there is a widespread view that the region’s pre-eminent think tanks and research institutes constitute a club of “usual suspects” whose major work is increasingly defined in light of their participation in global networks.

Actually, many of the “usual suspects” were instrumental in creating a sui generis pan Arab institution in the late 1990s called the **Arab Institute for Studies and Communication** (AISC) to support research organizations in the region and to assist researchers, particularly in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. AISC, in turn, established the Arab Social Science Research (ASSR) as its net-based resource and research platform. Although AISC is now moribund, ASSR remains one of the most important research tools in the Arab world—alongside the UNDP’s Program on Governance in the Arab region (POGAR) gateway. Much of the research for this project was initially undertaken on the ASSR virtual library (www.assr.org) and its government-oriented counterpart www.pogar.org. Surprisingly, ASSR has for some time been running on a long-distance, part-time basis from Texas.¹⁸ Meanwhile, AISC, which was founded by some of the region’s best connected institutions and individuals, discontinued its operations due to several familiar factors: lack of adequate and sustained funding, and the changes in the personal trajectories of several of the key individuals who had been instrumental in its creation.¹⁹

Regional grant programs funded by foreign donors have historically played an important role in the promotion of social science research in the region. Among the best known of these programs are the **Middle East Awards Program in Population and Development** (MEAwards) and the **Middle East Research Competition** (MERC). MEAwards was established by the Population Council in 1978 and continued its grantmaking activities for over two decades. It also served as the model for MERC which was established by the Ford Foundation in 1986. Whereas MERC supported social science research in all disciplines in the Arab world and Turkey, the now-defunct MEAwards grants program supported social science research primarily linked to demography and health-related issues in the Arab world, Iran and Turkey. During its 26 years of operations, MEAwards played an important role in knowledge generation, capacity building and networking. In addition to its research competition, MEAwards initiated and supported study groups, workshops and research working groups. Its Reproductive Health Working Group is an ongoing network with an evolving research agenda. It is considered to be one of the most successful and sustained collaborative research initiatives in the Middle East involving researchers from the Arab countries and Turkey.

MERC’s trajectory is instructive in terms of the challenges of institutional development in the region. During its first ten years, MERC was situated in Cairo and administered directly by the Ford Foundation’s Cairo office. The program grew over the years, expanding its disciplinary and geographic scope. As part of its strategy to give autonomy to MERC, the Ford Foundation facilitated the program’s move to a regional institution. From 1997-2001, MERC was administered by the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies in Beirut. From 2002-2005, it move

back to Cairo and was administered by the Center for the Study of Developing Countries at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science in Cairo University. In 2006, MERC relocated to its new institutional home, the Center d'études et de recherches économiques et sociales (CERES) in Tunisia. Both MERC and MEAwards have been externally evaluated. In both cases, the evaluations have pointed to the impressive contributions of the two programs to individual research support and capacity building. However, MEAwards' eventual demise and MERC's successive institutional rotation point to chronic problems confronting social science research initiatives in the region.

Although not directly involved in regional social science research, a number of advocacy networks have also been undertaking research as part of their advocacy work. They include the **Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR)**, the **Arab Network of NGOs**, the **Arab NGO Network for Development**, and the **Arab NGO Network for Environment and Development**. They all aim at coordinating and strengthening Arab civil society organizations. However, some justifiably argue that including advocacy and activist groups under social science research organizations unnecessarily dilutes the study's primary focus on theoretically-informed, empirically grounded and cumulative research.²⁰ On the other hand, the same test of quality also needs to be applied to other "formal" research institutes which currently is rarely the case. The need to find effective ways of assessing the quality of social science research is, of course, a perennial problem.

b) Nationally-Based Institutions

Nationally-based institutions play an important role in regional social science research, and indeed provide the institutional membership for many of the regional and international networks described above.

Although universities are expected to be the primary producers of knowledge, it is widely claimed that little research takes place as part of the core mandate of most universities in the Arab world. This is largely attributed to various factors: the poor qualifications of academic staff and their unfamiliarity with research methodologies; the political risks of doing social science research; the heavy teaching load of academic staff in national universities; the brain drain from the region's "research" universities to the new "teaching" universities in the Gulf; the absence of financial or professional incentives in doing research; the lack of research facilities, and especially research libraries; the absence of a vibrant and competitive intellectual environment that encourages research; the shortage of venues for dissemination of research; the negative role of the "old guard" who serve as the gatekeepers for research opportunities and research funds; and the poor language skills of many academics. Any mix of these factors would certainly explain the claimed paucity of research produced in universities.²¹

While academic research is in short-supply, there are numerous university-based research centers--mainly in the elite, capital city-based universities. For example, Cairo University (established in 1908), especially its Faculty of Economics and Political Sciences, stands out as a hub of research centers. The Faculty hosts over half a dozen research centers which respectively cover Asian Studies, Developing Countries Studies, American Studies, European Studies as well

as Centers for Public Administration Research and Consulting, Center for Surveys and Statistical Applications.

Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine have the highest number of university-based research centers. Birzeit University in Palestine is particularly noteworthy in having established and maintained several innovative research centers under harsh political conditions. Its Institute of Women's Studies and Institute of Law have remained connected to regional and international networks despite continuing travel restrictions. In Jordan, the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) stands out as a university-based center that has become an active node of research and regional collaboration with a range of other actors. CSS has particularly been singled out as a success story based on its ability to train and reproduce its own research staff.

The institutional map is decidedly weak in covering university based institutions in the Magreb as well as other Arab countries like Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The University of Yemen, for example, hosts one of the few Women's Studies Centers in the Arab World—alongside similar centers in Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt. Meanwhile, there are several active research centers in the Gulf, including the Center for Gulf Studies at Qatar University; the Center for Strategic and Future Studies, and the Euro-Gulf Research Unit in the Department of Political Science at Kuwait University; the Economic Policy and Research Center at Zayed University in UAE. In addition, there are new public policy schools such as the Dubai School of Government which represents a hybrid institutional model in the region.

The two American universities rooted in the region, AUB and AUC, have historically played, and continue to play, significant roles in the development of the social sciences in the region in terms of their curricula, research focus and extensive research facilities including the most advanced libraries in Lebanon and Egypt respectively. They have also been in the forefront of establishing new fields of study as well as undertaking multi-disciplinary and collaborative research through in-house research centers. The Center for Behavioral Research (CBR) and the Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH) at AUB and the Social Research Center at AUC are involved in cross-disciplinary projects. More recently, the newly established Issam Faris Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB as well as the Center for Arab Philanthropy are poised to open up new areas of research based on the two universities' extensive financial and human resources.

Turning to non-university based research centers, many of the older institutions are based in Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan which have traditionally been the most hospitable venues for social science research. These institutions, founded primarily in the period between the late 1960 and late 1980s, include the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, the Arab Thought Forum, the Center for Arab Unity Studies, the Institute for Palestine Studies and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.²² These institutions represent sustained research efforts with prolific publication records which are available in Arabic and English. To our knowledge, there are no evaluation studies on any of these institutions. As a result, it is difficult to assess their performance, productivity and effectiveness beyond a mechanical bean-counting.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, there have also been numerous new institutions in the Gulf which focus primarily on the Gulf region. These institutions include the Bahrain Center for

Studies and Research, the government-supported Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, and the private Gulf Research Center. With considerable financial resources and good research facilities, these institutes already constitute a critical mass of knowledge and expertise in the Gulf region; they also serve as a magnet for researchers from around the Arab world and internationally. Some have twinning arrangements with similar research centers in the US and are poised to become the local counterpart of foreign universities and think tanks such as the Rand/Qatar project. Their growing role is reminiscent of the early years of the new universities in the Gulf region. Many academics and social scientists left their home institutions in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine to take up teaching positions in the Gulf. Some argue that this brain drain to the Gulf for teaching is partially responsible for the low productivity of many promising scholars and academics.²³

In addition, there has been a proliferation of a new breed of research centers which are variably described as “boutique” research centers, “research shops” or “dukkan research”. Many of these centers are engaged in “soft” research that is mainly client-driven. As a result, their output is generally not in the public sphere and ends up in the drawers and bookcases of their various clients. The relative role of these institutions vis-à-vis other producers of research is currently difficult to assess—although their rapid expansion has been a growing area of concern to the academic research community.²⁴

From the “dukkan” research to the multi-institutional networks, there is clearly a diverse range of institutions involved in social science research in the Arab world. Nonetheless, there is a strong perception that individually and collectively these institutions are largely driven by their donors. It is well known that there is very limited public money for research in the Arab world. Thus, research is primarily funded through other channels—including government agencies, the private sector, regional and international organizations and various foundations and funding agencies. Thus, donors play a pivotal role in shaping and determining research agendas—as reflected in the over-emphasis of certain topics and research themes relative to others which was noted above. Nonetheless, this is not to suggest a one-way influence. In fact, as is true in many other regions, there is often a symbiotic relationship between donors and the research institutes with considerable correspondence of their respective interests. Such correspondence might affect research priorities but it need not affect the quality of research. In an environment where “private” and “foreign” funding is increasingly the norm, the main criteria for assessing the autonomy and public utility of the research enterprise have to be the quality and the relevance of the research itself rather than the source of its funding or the priorities of the funder.²⁵ The perennial problem with privately-funded “soft” research is its short-termism and transience. Indeed, in the absence of public funds, sustainable (non-project) funding for research institutes to undertake long-term research remains a major problem throughout the Arab region.²⁶ Some institutions (such as the API and GDN) have been quite successful in diversifying their funding base to reduce their dependence on a single donor and to ensure sustainability. Others are increasingly turning to doing consultancy work to remain in business.

The Implications of the Changing Landscape of Social Science Research in the Arab world

As the above review demonstrates, there is considerable research activity and a fast changing map of institutional arrangements for research and policy analysis in the Arab region. The

research landscape has gradually been shifting on three fronts: from the traditional countries in the Magreb and the Mashreq to the Gulf; from public universities to private institutions; from single institutions to collaborative networks and institutional arrangements.

One of the key findings to emerge from this project is that much social research is undertaken outside the universities by a diverse range of private institutions. As a result, such research is often driven by transient institutional or policy impulses rather longer-term basic research agendas that serve the public good. Although there is a growing number of university-based research centers, they also operate in the same research market place as private think tanks.

Another important finding is the emergence of a set of interlocking partnerships among several elite institutions with strong external links. These so-called “usual suspects” have close connections with the policy and donor community and as a result attract both envy and criticism. While they are highly regarded internationally, their domestic constituencies seem to be fairly limited because they are in high demand and have finite capacities.

Finally, entrepreneurship has entered the research marketplace as research institutes seek to generate funding by undertaking operations research and doing consultancies for the private sector, governments and international organizations. With the proliferation of new institutions, the research community is quite fragmented and the collective body of knowledge is almost universally characterized as patchy, uneven and ephemeral. Besides the university-based research centers, there are very few institutes that have a track record in a particular issue area. Instead, despite their small size, many regionally active centers tend to be multi-thematic in their coverage and highly responsive to changing opportunity structures.

The implications of these changes in the institutional landscape of social science research are difficult to ascertain at the moment. However, there is a strong perception that Arab social scientists have basically become contract researchers rather than public intellectuals with a social function. Whether this is a fair assessment is hard to judge. Nonetheless, it needs to be considered in light of the following observations offered by Arab social scientists themselves:

- a) Despite the proliferation of new institutions, there is only a limited number of academic social scientists in the region who conduct “social science” research—i.e. critical, theoretically-informed and empirically grounded research.
- b) The first generation of foreign-trained professional Arab social scientists who helped build the social sciences in the Arab world is on its way out. The next generation of academics and researchers—many of whom are home-grown—lack the tools and skills that are essential for rigorous social science research. These include limited language skills, poor training and unfamiliarity with the global body of knowledge in the social sciences, lack of robust mechanisms of quality control, lack of access to research libraries and resources, limited links to regional or international researchers.
- c) There is a large gap between academics in universities who are primarily engaged in teaching, and researchers in non-academic institutions who do social research. This bifurcation of teaching/training and research is ultimately untenable. From university-based research centers to

private think tanks, there is strong demand for professional researchers. However, it is not clear where and how these researchers are being trained, whether they are acquiring good research skills and if Arab universities are able to reproduce their own faculty.

d) Within universities, academic researchers are often involved in social research projects that deal with issues of critical importance such as health, environment, population, and development.²⁷ However, given heavy teaching loads and distorted incentive structures, this is often at the expense of contributing to the development of their own disciplines and fields of study.

e) Notwithstanding the growing flurry of research activities and projects funded by a multitude of research donors and undertaken by an increasing number of research institutes, there has been little accumulation of social science knowledge or significant contributions to the social sciences originating from the Arab world in the last 10-15 years.

f) Instead, the Arab world has a high number of “commentators”, “pundits”, “policy entrepreneurs” and “research impresarios” who have not produced any new research in the last 10-15 years but still serve as gatekeepers.

IV. RECLAIMING THE PUBLIC ROLE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH: THE PROPOSED ASSRC

Two key conclusions emerge from the above analysis:

- a) Currently, there seems to be a pressing problem about the production and reproduction of social sciences in the Arab region.
- b) Social science research in the region is increasingly privatized and fragmented and has basically retreated from playing a public role—in informing public policy or stimulating public debate.

When combined with the range of socio-economic, political and security challenges that confront the Arab region in the early years of the 21st century, the prognosis seems bleak indeed. The energies of Arab social scientists are taken up by a flurry of short-term projects, programs, networks and operations research that are often defined and conducted on behalf of a host of government agencies, the private sector, regional or international organizations or donors. However, there seems to be little demand for and limited supply of social science research that is independent, critical, cumulative and not tied to short term policy or institutional agendas.

Moreover, there are no institutions at the national or the regional level to support or monitor the performance of the Arab social science community, to provide services to address collective needs, and to facilitate a process of collective agenda and priority setting. There is no counterpart in the Arab world to the Turkish Academy of Sciences or to the regional social science research councils like CLACSO in Latin America, CODESRIA in West Africa or OSSREA in East Africa. From addressing the question of curriculum review to the brain drain, from establishing mechanisms of quality control and standards setting to ensuring access to new research tools and resources, each institution basically has to fend for itself and rely on their

clients or a small pool of (primarily) foreign donors. Operating in highly restrictive political environments and enjoying very limited autonomy and freedom of action, Arab social scientists do not have an independent professional platform that can both serve and support them. As a result, their efforts fall short of the region's acute need for research and analysis that can help inform public debates and public policies.

The idea of creating an Arab Social Science Research Council (or a more appropriate title) has been discussed repeatedly in the past, but it was never fully pursued.²⁸ For the reasons outlined in this report, there is an urgent need for an institution with the clear mandate to promote and support the production and reproduction of social science research in the Arab World and to serve as the professional link of the Arab research community to other researchers in the Middle East and globally. The main objectives of such a Council would be to:

- a) strengthen the capacity, quality, range, reach and influence of social sciences in the Arab region through programs and activities that serve the current and next generation of individuals and institutions engaged in social science research
- b) provide an autonomous professional platform for research agenda setting, resource mobilization and the enhancement of the role of the social sciences in the Arab region
- c) enhance the contributions of Arab social sciences to public discourse and public policy, and to the betterment of Arab societies
- d) facilitate intellectual and professional exchanges between Arab social scientists with their counterparts in the Middle East region and internationally

Modeling itself on similar mechanisms, the Council would have a set of specific functions which would be elaborated as part of the creation of the new institution. However, based on the experiences of other similar councils in both industrialized and developing countries, the following are some of the most important functions of an Arab Social Science Research Council:

1. Promoting and/or conducting training and capacity building programs (methodology workshops, textbook translations projects, joint graduate programs among universities)
2. Identifying and serving to meet the concrete needs of the social science community (language training programs, Arabization of essential resources such as statistical packages, twinning programs between institutions)
3. Facilitating the professionalization of the social sciences by developing standards, codes of ethics, review and quality control mechanisms (on-line peer reviewed journals, Advisory Committees, review of PhD programs)
4. Identifying unmet research needs and incubating new ideas (starting task forces or working groups on new topics such as “refugees”, “migration”, “non-traditional security”, gender-based research in assorted issue areas)
5. Initiating or kick-starting new projects of service to the community (commissioning a review of social science curricula, compiling histories of the social sciences in the region, conducting oral histories with “walking institutions” in the Arab world; providing opportunities to attract diaspora social scientists)
6. Providing a platform for interest aggregation, networking and advocacy (interfacing with donor agencies, governments and other stakeholders, fundraising)

7. Serving as the originator or repository of resources of interest to the entire community (possibly adopting the ASSR project; working with other research councils in the world to gain access to their resources through new technologies)
8. Offering new programs and projects to enhance the effectiveness of the social sciences (research grants, exchange programs, fellowships, “scholars at risk” programs)
9. Convening conferences, meetings and other activities to promote intellectual exchanges and to disseminate research findings
10. Creating or supporting links with other research communities in the Middle East region as well as internationally (student/faculty exchanges, joint research projects, periodic visits)
11. Promoting and disseminating high quality publications (through hard and soft media)
12. Supporting more effective linkages between the research, policy and practitioners’ communities as well as the public and the media (effective communications and outreach programs)

This list can be expanded or contracted in light of the needs of the Arab social science research community. Simply going through this list to determine whether anyone is currently providing any of these services is probably sufficient to confirm the need for an Arab Social Science Research Council (ASSRC).

ASSRC is not intended to be an inward-looking and insular professional association to serve the social science community. Instead, it is intended to strengthen the social science community to fulfill its social function. The challenges confronting the Arab social sciences are by no means *sui generis*.²⁹ There is, in fact, a burgeoning body of literature on the role of information and knowledge in an increasingly interconnected world where traditional models of education, knowledge production/reproduction and information sharing are changing rapidly. There are global debates on the function of universities in knowledge societies; the role of the developing countries in the global production of knowledge; the scope and boundaries of the social sciences in addressing social issues; the evolving relationship between research funders, knowledge producers and knowledge users; and the emergence of new models of collaboration across disciplines, institutions and the new range of actors involved in social research.³⁰ It is increasingly recognized that the traditional dichotomous categories of research (universal vs. particularistic, domestic vs. foreign, physical vs. social, academic vs policy-oriented; theoretical vs. empirical) are no longer valid. Research is produced and disseminated in multiple ways by various actors. All of these issues have direct resonance in the Arab region. The main difference is that in other countries and regions there are institutions with the specific mandate to examine these issues and to generate ideas for broader public debate and appropriate policy responses. The absence of such an institution in the Arab world is a tremendous void.

The creation of an Arab Social Science Research Council would fill a major gap in the Arab region. It would also be an effective instrument through which Arab researchers can work with Iranian, Turkish and international colleagues on issues of common interest. Based on the findings of the IDRC research project, Iran and Turkey are natural partners for initiating targeted activities and research projects. These can include the following: student/faculty exchanges; dissertation and research grants; periodic conferences and workshops on a regional topic; parallel and/or joint projects on specific topics such as urbanization, the welfare state, or the future of the

region's mega cities; investment in a new generation of researchers to study each others' countries; fellowships for language training; twinning programs between different universities; and joint publications and selective translation programs.³¹

Undoubtedly, there are numerous obstacles to the creation of a new institution, including legal status, venue, political autonomy, funding, personnel, etc. On the other hand, there are unprecedented opportunities for converting this idea into reality at this moment. In the wake of the Arab Human Development Report, there is strong interest in the Arab World as well as the international community to create institutions to address the region's "knowledge deficit." The "Knowledge Acquisition, Generation and Utilization in the Arab Region" (KAGUAR) project of UNDP/RBAS is testimony to this. Indeed, throughout its partnership in this project, UNDP/RBAS has expressed a strong interest in supporting a regional social science research initiative in the Arab world. UNDP/RBAS' international status and previous success in institution building (e.g. CAWTAR) is a tremendous asset.

In addition, IDRC, the Ford Foundation and Swedish SIDA/Sarec have been following the evolution of this feasibility study and are prepared to consider recommendations emerging from it. Other donors have also expressed an interest in supporting a regional initiative in the Arab world. But perhaps most importantly, individual researchers in the Arab World have proposed the creation of an institution that would not only serve them—but serve the interests of their own societies at a particularly dismal and disheartening period in their history. Such a Council would overcome the fragmentation and disarray of the Arab intellectual community, inject new ideas into the region's academic institutions, and open new spaces for thought and action.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: NEXT STEPS

The analysis contained in this paper is based on extensive research and consultations. However, it is certainly far from conclusive and needs to be validated through further examination and debate. The Dubai meeting provides a valuable platform to review the analysis and recommendations contained herein. If the basic ideas are broadly endorsed, then the proposed ASSRC can move to a different phase.

The next phase of the project will require action on various fronts:

- Identifying and commissioning additional research to complement the gaps or the missing elements in the present paper;
- Creating a more formal "partnership" between the original partners (UNDP/RBAS, SSRC, IDRC and the Population Council) as well as other institutions that are interested in supporting the initiative;
- Convening a meeting of interested Arab and foreign donors to discuss the results from the Dubai meeting;
- Developing an IT-based strategy to support the creation of the proposed ASSRC;
- Establishing contacts with other national, regional and international research council to benefit from their experiences;

- In light of the growing “feminization” of the social sciences in the Arab region as well as the persistent gender gaps in the region, convening a special Advisory Committee to ensure that the gender dimensions of the proposed ASSRC are addressed front and center.

Building upon the deliberations of the April 2006 Beirut meeting, it is hoped that the Dubai meeting will move this agenda several steps further—towards addressing some of the systematic challenges confronting the social sciences in the Arab region.

Appendix 1

Resource People Consulted during the Course of the Study

Project Partners

Ms. Nada al Nashif, UNDP/RBAS, New York
Dr. Azza Karam, UNDP/RBAS, New York
Dr. Ragui Assaad, Population Council, Cairo
Dr. Seteney Shami, SSRC, New York

IDRC Program Staff

Dr. Tim Dottridge, IDRC, Ottawa
Dr. Brent Herbert-Copley, IDRC, Ottawa
Ms. Roula el Rifai, IDRC, Ottawa
Ms. Eileen Alma, IDRC, Ottawa
Mr. Charaf Ahmimed, IDRC, Ottawa

Project Collaborators

Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh, Tehran, Iran
Dr. Manal Jamal, Berkeley University, California
Dr. Nahla Abdo, Carleton University, Ottawa
Ms. Ipek Tuncer, New York

Interviews and Written Correspondence

Dr. Ali Abdel Gader, Arab Planning Institute, Kuwait (e-mail correspondence)
Ms. Alia Al Dalli, UNDP, Jordan
Dr. Shirin Akiner, London University, London
Dr. Ahmet Alkan, Sabanci University, Istanbul
Dr. Simon Anderson, DFID, UK
Dr. Nadia Atef, anthropologist, Egypt (phone interview)
Ms. Gawaher Atef, United Nations, New York
Dr. Judy Barsalou, former program officer, founder of MERC, Ford Foundation
Dr. Asef Bayat, ISIM, Netherlands
Dr. Leila Bisharat, former program officer, UNICEF, Jordan
Dr. Elizabeth Bouri, ASSR, Austin, Texas
Dr. Fares Braizat, Center for Strategic Studies, Jordan
Dr. Ayse Bugra, Bogazici University, Istanbul
Dr. Fred Carden, Director, Evaluation Unit, IDRC, Ottawa

Dr. Dina Craissati, Former IDRC program officer; UNICEF, New York
Dr. Ilhan Dulger, State Planning Institute, Ankara
Dr. Dina el Khawaga, Ford Foundation, Cairo
Dr. Ustun Erguder, Sabanci University, Istanbul
Dr. Ayse Erguven, Turkish Academy of Science, Ankara
Dr. Sherine al-Ghoneim, GDNNet, Egypt
Dr. Maurice Godelier, professor, Paris
Mr. Jan Henningsson, Director, Swedish Institute, Alexandria
Dr. Homa Hoodfar, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada
Dr. Barbara Ibrahim, AUC, Egypt
Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, AUC, Egypt
Dr. Suad Joseph, University of California in Davis
Dr. Cigdem Kagitcibasi, Koc University, Istanbul
Dr. Ali Kazancigil, International Social Science Council, Paris
Dr. Caglar Keyder, Bogazici University, Istanbul
Dr. Samir Khalaf, AUB, Beirut
Dr. Rima Khalaf Hunaidi, former Assistant Administrator of UNDP/RBAS head, New York
Mr Rami al Khouri, director designate, Issam Fares Institute, AUB (e-mail correspondence)
Mr. Riad al Khouri, economist, Jordan/Lebanon
Dr. Bassma Kodmani, Director, Arab Reform Initiative
Dr. Ann Lesch, Dean, Arts and Sciences, AUC, Egypt
Dr. Noha al Mikawy, UNDP, Lebanon
Dr. Steve Morgan, Economic and Social Research Council, UK
Dr. Cynthia Myntti, former Ford Foundation program officer; current consultant, AUB
Dr. Leyla Neyzi, Sabanci University, Istanbul
Dr. Ayse Oncu, Sabanci University, Istanbul
Ms. Emma Playfair, Regional Representative, the Ford Foundation, Cairo
Dr. Yasar Qatarneh, Director, Regional Center on Conflict Prevention, Jordan
Ms. Eileen Quttab, Birzeit University, Ramalla (e-mail correspondence)
Dr. Eglal Rached, Regional Director, IDRC, Cairo
Dr. Adel El-Zaim, Program Officer, IDRC, Cairo
Dr. Huda Rashad, AUC, Cairo
Dr. Yezid Sayigh, Cambridge University, UK (e-mail correspondence)
Ms. Elissar Sarrouh, UNDP, Egypt
Dr. Nadim Shehade, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London
Dr. Tim Sullivan, Provost, AUC, Cairo
Dr. Belgin Tekce, Bogazici University, Istanbul
Dr. Tariq Tell, historian, Jordan
Dr. John Waterbury, President, AUB, Lebanon
Mr. Alasdair Warhaugh, DFID, London

Participants at Sabanci University Meeting, Istanbul, 6 April 2006

Dr. Ayse Oncu
Dr. Leyla Neyzi
Dr. Sabri Sayari

Dr. Ali Carkoglu
Dr. Ayse Betul Celik
Dr. Sibel Irzik
Dr. Dicle Kogacioglu

Participants at the Beirut Meeting, 11-12 April 2006

Maureen Abdelsayed, Program Assistant, Social Science Research Council, New York
Nada al-Nashif, Chief, Regional Programme, UNDP- RBAC, New York
Ragui Assaad, Director, West Asia and North Africa, Population Council, Cairo
Abdelwahab Benhafaiedh, CERES, University of Tunis
Jocelyn DeJong, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, AUB
Noha elMikawy, UNDP, Beirut
Charaf Ahmimed, IDRC, Ottawa
Dina Elkhawaga, Program Officer, Ford Foundation, Cairo
Nadir Hadj-Hammou, UNDP-SURF
Heba Handoussa, Research Director, Gender Economic Research and Policy Analysis
Azza Karam, Senior Policy Research Advisor, UNDP-RBAC, New York
Marwan Khawaja, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, AUB
Christian Koch, Gulf Research Center, Dubai
Yasmine Nader, Senior Research Assistant, Gender Economic Research & Analysis
Salim Nasr, UNDP, Senior Adviser, POGAR
Hassan Rahmouni, Professor, Hassan II University-Mohammedia, Morocco
Hania Sholkamy, Social Research Center, AUC, Cairo
Belgin Tekce, Bogazici University, Istanbul

¹ See, for example, the 1999 Lebanese Center for Policy Studies-World Bank EDI meeting on “Think Tanks as Civil Society Catalysts in the MENA region: Fulfilling their Potential” and the 2002 LCPS and UNESCO meeting “A Social Science Strategy for the Arab States.” Also see the 2003 Arab Human Development Report, and the meeting held by UNDP in Beirut in advance of KAGUAR.

² The core group included Azza Karam and Nada al-Nashif from UNDP/RBAS, Seteney Shami from SSRC (NY), Ragui Assaad (PopCouncil) and Necla Tschirgi (IDRC consultant.)

³ The minutes of the Beirut report as well as an analytic synopsis are available for review.

⁴ See Appendix 2

⁵ The IDRC report is available separately.

⁶ As Suad Joseph rightly noted: conditions for social science research have not always been bleak in the Arab world. In fact, during the nation and state building phases of Arab political development, the social scientists played an important role.

⁷ For a thoughtful review of this issue, see Lisa Anderson’s Presidential address at MESA in 2003 entitled “Scholarship, Policy, Debate and Conflict: Why We Study the Middle East and Why it Matters?”

⁸ UNDP, Arab Human Development Report, p. 74 citing Al-Ta’her Labib’s background paper.

⁹ In Turkey, for example, the social sciences fall under the mandate of the Turkish Academy of Sciences. In some regions like West Africa and Latin America, regional institutions like CODESRIA and CLACSO play an important role in the development of the social science in the region.

¹⁰ Our research was greatly hampered by the lack of a professional tradition of information sharing and collaboration among social scientists in the region. Knowledge is still treated as a rare commodity to be hoarded and shared only sparingly. Thus, in numerous cases, it proved impossible to gain access to documents, papers and reports held by certain colleagues and institutions. Without a commitment to sharing information and analysis and exposing them to the critical eyes of other researchers, social sciences are bound to remain at the “cottage industry” level of knowledge production. With the advent of new information technologies, there are no longer any excuses for not making public knowledge publicly available.

¹¹ See for example the feasibility study undertaken by the Gulf Research Center for UNDP/RBAS on CESPAC, the proposed Center for Economic and Social Policies in the Arab Countries. The interviews conducted for this study also consistently revealed a deep dissatisfaction with the state of the social sciences in individual Arab countries as well as the region as a whole.

¹² Unless otherwise indicated, these are drawn directly from the accompanying paper by Manal Jamal.

¹³ This issue was discussed at length in the April 11-12, 2006 Beirut meeting. There are various current initiatives to address this problem, including a proposal to set up a new Arab Social Science School as well as a comparative study of social science curricula in the Arab region.

¹⁴ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, “Arab Social Science Research in the 1990s and Beyond: Issues, Trends, and Priorities,” *Research and Development in the Middle East and North Africa* (Cairo: International Development and Research Center, 2000), p. 129. Ibrahim recently clarified that this figure actually represents university graduates from social science disciplines rather than the number of social scientists with appropriate professional, research-oriented training in the social sciences.

¹⁵ *Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations* (NY: UNDP: Regional Bureau for Arab States and Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development, 2002). This figure, however, is problematic for a number of reasons. First, there are no established publication indexes in the Arab world. Moreover, ISBN numbers are not always preserved or used in the reproduction of books. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of publications in the Arab world.

¹⁶ The institutional map and the analysis that follows are far from conclusive. They have been distributed widely for input throughout the region. Incoming additions, corrections and comments have been incorporated. It is hoped that the map will serve as a useful baseline that can be built upon.

¹⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, the following sections are drawn upon but go beyond the review of the institutional map by Manal Jamal. The analysis has been deepened through my own knowledge of the field as well as interviews and conversations with a large number of Arab colleagues who were directly involved in these initiatives.

¹⁸ Telephone interviews and e-mail correspondence with Dr. Elizabeth Bouri, who started ASSR while she was associated with the Cairo office of the Ford Foundation.

¹⁹ While accurate information is not available, the anecdotal evidence is that with the departure of Salim Nasr from the Ford Foundation and Saad Eddin Ibrahim’s legal problems, AISC could not survive.

²⁰ See, for example, communication with Dr. Marwan Khawaja.

²¹ There is no easy way to document the volume and quality of research produced in national universities. The absence of basic tools such as well-stocked university libraries with reliable catalogues, bibliographic data bases, citation indices, etc. makes it virtually impossible to undertake quantitative research. However, if individual research is taking place in universities, it is certainly not accessible in the public domain.

²² The Institute for Palestine Studies is a unique institution in terms of its specific focus on Palestine and its offices in several countries. Its work, although not regional in nature, clearly incorporates regional perspectives.

²³ Conversations with Profs. Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Suad Joseph.

²⁴ Without further research, we have decided not to include and/or explicitly identify these institutions in our institutional map.

²⁵ The role of funding agencies is a highly sensitive topic in the Arab world. It has been studied at great length in many other regions. That it has not been the topic of extensive research project in the Arab region is indicative of the research climate.

²⁶ In this context, the model of Policy Research Consortia supported by DFID deserves closer examination since it provides a mix of project and institutional funding.

²⁷ One university president noted that there is little basic “social science research” even in the best universities. However, he also indicated that many social scientists are involved in social research on critical areas such as

demography, education, and health—bringing valuable social science perspectives to these issues. He likened the research in the social sciences to a dough-nut, with “basic research” as the missing hole in the dough-nut.

²⁸ Interestingly, one of the first attempts to create a regional network of social scientists goes back to the 1970s and involved researchers from the Arab countries, Turkey and Iran. The “Organization for the Promotion of Social Sciences in the Middle East” (OPSSME) brought together some of the prominent social scientists of the period (Laila Hamamsi, Serif Mardin, and Mubeccel Kiray) to create a regional institute. Its origins, short history and eventual demise are carefully stored in the memories of those involved in it. While various people made references to it, we were unable to find any documentation on OPSSME which apparently had its first meeting in Egypt and its second meeting in Kuwait before disappearing from the scene. More recently, in 1996, UNESCO was instrumental in the creation of the Conseil arabe des sciences sociales / Arab Council of Social Sciences (ARABSSCO). The Council was intended to be the Arab equivalent of CODESRIA in Africa and CLACSO in Latin America. The organization was created as an independent NGO and held its first conference with the participation of many Maghreb and Mashrek social scientists, and adopted a constitution and plan activities. With a legal status and structure, ARABSSCO became an associate member of the International Social Science Council (ISSC). However, there is no record of its activities since then and it is not clear if it still exists. (E-mail correspondence with Dr. Ali Kazancigil, Secretary-General, ISSC.)

²⁹ Numerous national, regional and international social research institutions are currently involved in assessing the role of the social science in a global world. For example, a two day meeting hosted by the International Social Science Council in Paris on 5-6 July 2006 focused specifically on the social sciences in the developing countries and in the global production of knowledge.

³⁰ A detailed discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the bibliography contains a list of key resources consulted for this project. These debates (such as new mechanisms of funding and collaboration, the role of ICTs in knowledge production, the various “social science foresight projects” undertaken in other countries, and current efforts to strengthen the social sciences globally) are incorporated into the discussion as appropriate.

³¹ It should be noted here that such a program already exists and is funded by the Open Society Institute. The Next Page Foundation supports a South-South translation project which currently involves translation of selected books from Turkey, Iran and India into Arabic.