

# ACSS 2020

## Five-Year Strategy



المجلس العربي  
للعلوم الاجتماعية

Arab Council  
for the Social Sciences  
Conseil Arabe  
pour les Sciences Sociales

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The Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) is a regional, independent, non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening social science research and knowledge production in the Arab world. The ACSS is headquartered in Beirut, Lebanon, and began its operations in August 2012.

The mission, vision, and signature activities of the ACSS, as well as a four-year timeline, fundraising strategy, and risk assessment, were laid out by the ACSS preparatory committee in a comprehensive strategy document entitled “A New Regional Institution for the Enhancement of the Social Sciences in the Arab Public Sphere” (2008). A launch meeting of 70+ regional scholars was held in Cairo in December 2008 where this document was ratified and the first Board of Trustees (BoT) was elected. Bureaucratic delays in the legal registration of the ACSS as a “foreign association”<sup>1</sup> in Lebanon, as well as the time needed for the recruitment of a Director General, meant that the ACSS began its work in Fall 2012. In the interim (with generous funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency - Sida), the BoT continued to meet to oversee legal registration procedures and the selection of a Director General, as well as to organize workshops for planning the themes of its signature activities.

For the past four years, the ACSS has been following the roadmap laid out in the foundational document and elaborated through BoT discussions and fundraising opportunities. The ACSS signature activities described in the foundational document (**Research Grants Programs, Working Groups, Biennial Conference and General Assembly, Biennial Social Science Report, Website and Electronic Platform, and Policy Dialogues**) were all launched in a phased process and most are currently in their second or third cycles.

It is time to take stock of what has been learned in the past four years and what has changed in the regional context. This strategy document (the Strategy) gives an overview of current key activities and lays the course for the coming years (2016-2020) through establishing new objectives and activities, institutional as well as programmatic.

The Strategy is a dynamic document that will be periodically reviewed and revised (see the management plan section on page 19). Increased resources through successful fundraising would add activities, while contextual changes may lead to innovations in programming and changes in thematic priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> There are two categories of associations in Lebanon: “Lebanese” and “foreign” – the latter is allowed to have non-Lebanese individuals as members and on the Board of Trustees and needs to be approved by the Council of Ministers.

## II. Background

The Arab region confronts mounting socio-economic, environmental, political, and security challenges. At the same time it lacks strong academic and research capacities that can shed light on these challenges, analyze societal changes, nurture public debates, and inform public policy. It has long been recognized that Arab states have to address their knowledge needs by strengthening the capacity, quality, range, reach, and influence of research — and especially social research — in the region.<sup>2</sup>

The growing awareness of this need has stimulated various initiatives and strategies over the past decade to address some of the key challenges confronting knowledge production in the Arab world. New institutions of higher education and research are being established. There are a growing number of fellowship opportunities for students from the region to undertake graduate studies. A number of prizes for academic achievement are also appearing while the number of professional associations is slowly increasing. Yet, programs and opportunities that focus on the social sciences remain severely limited and such opportunities are not evenly available across the countries of the Arab region.

The official neglect of the social sciences have to do with the notions of development and

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<sup>2</sup> The UNDP's Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) of 2002 and 2003 were influential in putting the “knowledge deficit” on the regional and international agenda. See also Seteney Shami and Moushira Elgeziri “Capacity development challenges in the Arab states” *World Social Science Report: Knowledge Divides*, 2010 pp. 104-105.

modernity that have long governed educational and philanthropic planning in the region, with the traditional focus on the sciences, medicine, and engineering shifting in the last decades towards finance, management, and the diversification of the private sector. The state and status of the social sciences equally epitomize shortcomings of entire educational systems in the region and, particularly, deficiencies in institutions of higher learning where increasing enrollment has been at the price of quality. The growth of private higher education has led to marked discrepancies between educational institutions as well as to the further marginalization of the social sciences.<sup>3</sup> These developments have been accompanied by the diminishing role of academics in influencing public policy and public discussion, with mutual accusations that research is not policy relevant and that policymakers are not interested in research findings.

The fact that educational policies, concepts of development, and the restrictions on the public sphere remain largely unchallenged speaks to the weaknesses of the social science community in the region and its inability to engage in three essential functions of an autonomous intellectual domain: the ability to articulate evidence-based alternatives to hegemonic and ideological agendas; the ability to impact public discussion and policymaking; and the ability to protect and promote professional interests. Equally important, because of institutional weaknesses, Arab social scientists have not been able to participate fully in regional or global knowledge networks. The Arab social science community remains largely excluded from key international fora and vibrant research networks and does not contribute effectively to the global production of knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> For marginalization of the Social Sciences in higher education see Mohammed Bamyeh, *Social Sciences in the Arab World: Forms of Presence*, Arab Council for the Social Sciences: First Report by the Arab Social Science Monitor, 2015

The end result is that research is produced in parochial ways, is not used to inform public policies, and does not engage public interest. Given these enormous challenges including structural shifts, resource limitations, the lack of financial sustainability, and narrow mandates, existing institutions and programs have been unable to redress shortcomings in social science capacity in a systematic manner and their efforts, while often valuable in themselves, remain sporadic and/or limited to specific aspects of capacity building. The fact that very few of these institutions, associations, and programs are regional further limits their scope, opportunities, and impact.

It is in this context that the Arab Council for the Social Sciences was conceived and developed by a group of concerned Arab social scientists, who first met in 2006 to discuss ways and modalities for addressing the problems confronting the social sciences in particular and social research in general in the region.

As the initial planning process came to an end, the region was rocked by the events of the Arab uprisings starting in 2010. These events, among other things, led to an opening up of public spaces and debates and to a sense of hope and new opportunities for change. In this, the importance of questioning the status quo and the urgency of developing new visions for society as well as new ways of representing the past, present and future, became manifest. The case for the importance of the social sciences was being made in the streets.

The aftermath of this period has brought about renewed authoritarianism, growing insecurity and violence, as well as wars in a number of states in the region. However, there remains a momentum in the region and emerging opportunities that should be encouraged and nurtured. The institutional landscape is also witnessing some positive changes as more and more interesting organizations and programs are appearing that provide new and exciting opportunities. This development opens up possibilities for institutional partnerships in the research-policy nexus, the research-public sphere nexus, and also for developing alternative

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or supplementary educational opportunities in the social sciences (e.g. online courses, reading collectives, ‘teach-ins’ at NGOs, etc.). Generating and protecting such spaces of free inquiry and discussion is vital for the future of the region.

In this evolving context of the region, the mission, vision, and values of the ACSS — as articulated in its 2009 foundational document and presented below — are as, or even more, valid and important.

### Mission, Vision, and Values<sup>4</sup>

By supporting researchers and academic/research institutions, the ACSS aims to contribute to the creation, dissemination, validation, and utilization of social science research and to enrich public debate about the challenges facing Arab societies. The ACSS also aims to enhance the role of social science in Arab public life and inform public policy in the region.

Specifically, the ACSS objectives include:

- Identifying and addressing the needs of social scientists and social science communities in the Arab countries;
- Enhancing social science capacities of individual researchers, as well as academic and research institutions;
- Encouraging the production of independent, high-quality research;
- Providing forums for exchange and communication among social scientists in the Arab region;
- Articulating and supporting the role of the

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<sup>4</sup> This is the statement and exact wording as ratified by the ACSS Founding members / General Assembly in its meeting in Cairo on 18-19 December 2008. See on the ACSS website: <http://www.theacss.org/pages/mission>

- social sciences in promoting the public interest;
- Promoting and supporting the principles of independent thought, critical thinking, and the academic/intellectual freedom of researchers and scholars in the Arab region;
- Supporting effective networks among research, academic, policy, and practitioners' communities as well as with the public and the media; and
- Supporting the publication and wide dissemination of high-quality social science research in the Arab region.

The vision and values guiding the work of the ACSS in meeting these objectives and operationalizing them are summarized in four main principles:

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### Quality

- The ACSS will work towards promoting excellence in social science research in both disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields
- Capacity building will be integral to every aspect of the work of the ACSS
- The ACSS will employ a variety of mechanisms such as peer review and selection committees to ensure quality of publications and allocation of research funds and other resources
- Quality of teaching and training will also be central to the concerns of the ACSS

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### Inclusivity

The ACSS will employ a broad definition of the social sciences including the following:

- The core social sciences such as anthropology, demography, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology
- Allied disciplines such as art, architecture, geography, history, law, literature, philosophy, and public health
- Interdisciplinary fields such as gender studies, cultural studies, and urban studies
- The ACSS will work to strengthen links between Arab scholars within the region and in the Diaspora.
- The ACSS will especially work on targeting and engaging the next generation of researchers.
- In many of its activities, the ACSS will work in partnership with other social science entities such as disciplinary associations, universities, NGOs, and GOs.
- The ACSS will be working regionally but also cross-regionally (south-south) and globally.
- The work of the ACSS will be multi-lingual. Arabic, English, and French will be the main working languages and other languages will be used as appropriate to particular projects.

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### Flexibility

- The ACSS is a hybrid institution that brings together organizational and programmatic features of research organizations, academic associations, training institutes, and think tanks.
- The ACSS will have a small Secretariat and administrative staff. It will be network-based and work through committees and partnerships thus mobilizing the talent and efforts of large numbers of social scientists.
- The ACSS will be responsive and accountable to its membership and General Assembly. Committees, research networks and working groups will also be formed by decisions of the Board of Trustees, the advisory committees, and the Secretariat.
- Through the multiplicity of its modalities and consultative processes, the ACSS will be able to respond quickly to new ideas, changing needs, and research priorities.

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## Independence

- The ACSS will be an autonomous NGO – free from governmental interference and from funding that imposes restrictions on the freedom of expression.
  - The ACSS will develop mechanisms for supporting scholars at risk and for promoting academic freedom and the right to freely undertake research, as well as writing and dissemination in the social sciences.
  - The ACSS will promote critical thinking and publishing while also providing channels for a constructive dialogue between researchers, policy makers, and public officials.
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## Structure and Organization

The ACSS consists of a General Assembly, including both individual and institutional members, an elected twelve-member Board of Trustees and a Secretariat, headed by a Director General. The long process of planning, discussion, and consultation undertaken in the early stages of this initiative culminated in a decision to form a *Council*, rather than a different institutional form such as an association, think tank, research institute, or a program or mechanism hosted by an existing institution. The choice of the term *Council* (*Majlis* in Arabic) is intended to signal that the ACSS is a relatively small institution in terms of staff and offices; that it is network-based; and that it establishes its work plan and thematic research priorities through broad consultations and committee structures. It is also meant to signal that the ACSS is a network of networks, an intra-institutional space that seeks to strengthen and augment existing institutions through working in partnership and collaboration. In all this, the ACSS aims not to drain resources, including human resources, away from existing institutions but rather create opportunities and incentives for individuals and institutions to enhance their capacities and performance.

Since community building is a major need in the region, it was decided that the Council would be inclusive and membership-based, open to all those with social science qualifications in the region and the Arab diaspora who constitute a General Assembly with clear rights and responsibilities. At the same time, since promotion of quality and capacity building are essential functions, it was decided that the Council would include a highly qualified Secretariat and Board of Trustees that would design and implement specific programs and interventions for the enhancement of both disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields. Finally, given the demand for relevant, meaningful, and critical research agendas, it was decided that the Council should be an independent entity, advocating for the freedom of intellectual and academic life in the region and determining its thematic priorities through consultation and interaction with different research communities and knowledge institutions across the region, while providing open fora for discussion, publication, and dissemination.

As of Fall 2016, the organizational structure of the ACSS is as follows:

# ACSS Organizational Structure

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Members include:

- i) Individual Arab (by citizenship or origin) social scientists (with voting rights)
- ii) research institutions in the Arab world engaged in social science research in the public domain and for the public interest (no voting rights)

Arab social scientists without a PhD & non-Arab social scientists residing in the region can join as associate or honorary members without voting rights.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### LEGAL COUNSEL

Elected twelve-member board oversees the work of the Council & the Secretariat.

A set of standing sub-committees of the Bot help establish the vision & strategy of the ACSS overall & in specific programmatic areas.

## COMMITTEES

## SECRETARIAT

Director General

Headquarters (in Lebanon) & Focal Points (in selected countries), headed by the Director General & in charge of the daily running of operations.

Associate Director

Executive Assistant

## OPERATIONS

Finance & Administration Manager  
 Senior Accountant  
 Junior Accountant  
 Administrative Assistant

## PROGRAMS

ASSM Project Manager  
 Research/Training/Fellowships/Grants Program Manager(s)  
 + Selection, advisory, & editorial committees, with rotating membership

Data Analyst  
 Research Assistant  
 Researchers (Outsourced)  
 Program Coordinator(s)  
 Programs Assistant(s)

## COMMUNICATIONS

Communications & IT Manager  
 Publications Coordinator  
 Communications Coordinator  
 Translators/Editors (Outsourced)  
 IT Support (Outsourced)  
 Graphic Design (Outsourced)

## FOCAL POINTS

Palestine (2015) (part-time senior consultant & part-time administrative & financial staff + advisory committee)  
 Algeria (2016)  
 Others

### III. Five-Year Strategy: Research for Social Change

The ACSS mobilizes research for social change through its choice of thematic priorities; its leveraging of institutional partnerships; its deployment of strategic communications; and its promotion of research uptake. The experience that ACSS has gained through the design and implementation of programs and activities (see table) over the past four years has refined and nuanced the understanding of its mission and vision. The coming phase of institutional and programmatic growth and development necessitates a strategy that will see the ACSS actively working to promote research for social change as well as strengthening its staffing, its governance structures, and its financial sustainability.

The main challenges that are addressed in the Strategy are as follows:

- How can ACSS solidify and strengthen its role as a hub for social sciences and become better known regionally and globally?
- How is ACSS identity evolving both as a donor and as an institution that helps define research agendas in regional social sciences?
- How can ACSS manage the balance between individual support and institutional support in the region and seek to build institutional capacities and networks?
- How can ACSS identify and implement processes to bridge gaps between academia, policy, and advocacy?
- How can ACSS become more financially sustainable?
- How can ACSS deal with the challenges of the difficult MENA context?

As described above, since its foundation, the ACSS has been operating in an increasingly difficult environment. Conflicts in several countries of the region are escalating including in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. In other places, such as Egypt, the research environment is

#### Current ACSS Programs and Activities

Activity or Modality	Description	Target Participants
Biennial Conference	Three-day public event with papers selected competitively as well as presentations by current grantees	Regional social scientists, general public
Biennial Research Forums	Three-day closed event for current grantees to receive feedback on draft papers as well as roundtables on research ethics, career planning, & publishing strategies	ACSS grantees
General Assembly Meetings	Business meeting for reporting on ACSS activities & election of new BoT members	ACSS members
Arab Social Science Monitor (ASSM)	Permanent Observatory for the monitoring & evaluation of the state of Social Sciences in the region, producing biennial reports, policy briefs, & background papers	Social scientists, administrators, & policymakers in Higher Education, Science policy, Development
Research Grants Program (RGP)	Open call for proposals for research under a broad theme, providing funding & support for up to 18 months	Regional & diaspora researchers at any stage
Postdoctoral Fellowships	Open call for applications for support for nine months; scholars must be affiliated with a regional institution	Junior postdoctoral researchers 0-3 years out of the PhD
New Paradigms Factory (NPF)	Mentorship program for research & advocacy	MA & PhD students/activists in the region
Small Grants Program	Seed funds for travel grants, internships, & research	Junior researchers & activists in the region
Working Groups	Collaborative & comparative research around specific themes for 2-3 years	Regional & diaspora researchers at any stage
Workshops for Grantees	Workshops for receiving feedback on on-going research projects	ACSS grantees
Training Workshops	Capacity building in specific methods or issues (such as research ethics)	ACSS grantees, regional junior researchers, students
Online Courses	Courses on specific themes to supplement offerings by regional universities	Regional students, BA, MA, PhD
Policy Dialogues	Small working meetings in partnership with national or regional organizations to bridge research/policy divides	ACSS grantees, activists & policy makers
Website & Social Media	Information, research resources, announcements, & e-publications	Regional & global researchers & general public

becoming ever tenser, with increased surveillance and intimidation of scholars and activists. This means that the regional reach of the ACSS is affected in terms of holding activities and events in different countries. In addition, ACSS grantees in certain countries have to change their plans and sometimes reduce the fieldwork component of their projects. Finally, mobility is becoming more curtailed with new visa requirements and travel bans.

Despite these difficulties, or because of them, it is more important than ever that the ACSS continues to offer support and opportunities to researchers in the region and continues to build and strengthen networks. We are pleased to note the resilience of the grantees and their determination to continue pursuing their research projects, with the help and understanding of ACSS staff. The numbers of applicants to programs and participants in events have not dwindled and interest in the ACSS continues to rise. The location in Lebanon continues to be one that generally facilitates regional interaction and affords academic freedom. In addition, the recently established Focal Point structure will help ensure more robust regional outreach. The ACSS is vigilant in adapting to the changing environment and innovating in its programming and activities, while remaining committed to its foundational objectives and values.

### The Arab Social Science Monitor Project

Central to the mission of research for social change is the **Arab Social Science Monitor (ASSM)**. This project has established a permanent Observatory that monitors and evaluates the state of the social

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sciences across the region through carefully constructed databases, matrices, questionnaires, and case studies. The ASSM thus assesses the ability of the social sciences in the region to fulfill their expected objectives: the ability to articulate evidence-based alternatives to hegemonic and ideological agendas; the ability to impact public discussion and policymaking; and the ability to protect and promote professional interests.

The ASSM is envisaged as a regional tool that addresses research excellence and research uptake, including engaging policymakers in the fields of higher education and science policy. The ASSM systematically collects and analyzes data on these matters and makes them publically available. It also produces a major biennial report, background papers, and policy briefs. The first report produced by this project in 2015, “Social Sciences in the Arab World: Forms of Presence,” was authored by Dr. Mohammed Bamyeh (University of Pittsburgh) working with a team of researchers composed of ACSS staff and consultants. The report comprehensively surveys the infrastructure and conditions surrounding the production of social science knowledge across the region.

The ASSM aims at providing important information of relevance to researchers, research institutes, think tanks, and policymakers in higher education and social research. It also helps the ACSS in assessing its activities and modalities and designing new ones to meet the needs of social scientists in the region as well as in identifying themes and topics that engage these researchers. As its work progresses, the ASSM will work with institutional partners for data collection, analysis, publication, and dissemination. Its databases and publications will be made publically available. It will thus, itself, be an example of a successful region-wide social science project aiming at social change.

### Thematic Priorities

The ACSS does not adopt one overall research agenda but rather develops thematic priorities within each of its programs, carefully assuring that

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// ACSS will work in the coming phase on strengthening its function as a **network of networks** that can enhance regional and global collaboration between knowledge institutions of different types.

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its array of topics at any one time reflects a balance in terms of relevance to regional issues as well as disciplinary and conceptual appeal to different research communities. The choice of theme for any particular activity or program also reflects the aims of the particular modality through which the theme will be pursued. Thus the choice of themes and their breadth or specificity differs for the Working Groups and for Mentorship programs, the Research Grants Program, or the biennial Conference. Decisions on thematic priorities are undertaken through discussions with the BoT and with the different specialized committees. Moving forward the Focal Points will actively contribute to the suggestion of themes and research foci. This will also ensure that the linkages between research and policy, or research uptake more generally, can be better addressed, whether through directly addressing policymakers (e.g. ASSM, Working Groups) or by addressing best practices in making linkages between research and advocacy (e.g. training workshops, NPF) or through publications and other forms of dissemination that target academic, policy, and general publics.

During the past four years the ACSS has focused on the following thematic areas:

- Inequality (socio-economic and marginalization on the basis of social/cultural difference);
- Mobility (including displaced and refugee populations);
- Development (with a focus on alternative conceptions, new actors, and local priorities); and
- Political participation and the reconfiguration of public spheres, especially in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings.

These continue to be areas of interest for the ACSS moving forward and publications and other outputs are in progress. In addition, new thematic directions are currently being developed as reflected in the new Working Groups launched in 2016, the theme of the new cycle of the Research Grants Program and the theme of the 2017 Conference:

- Critical security studies
- Environmentalism, impoverishment, and social justice movements
- Global-Regional intersections in geo-politics, state sovereignty, and violence
- Refugees, marginalization, and representation
- Politics and economics of urban and rural spatial transformations

In addition to new themes, the ACSS is also planning to build linkages with research communities in the humanities and arts in the region. It is noticeable that some of the powerful public critiques of existing inequalities and injustices in the region take the form of expressive culture, arts, and literature. Even in contexts of extreme conflict, the voices of artists, writers, and musicians continue to speak truth to power. The humanities and arts fields therefore have much to study and observe in the region today and interdisciplinary collaborations between the social sciences and the humanities and the arts could forge new insights and analyses as well as help produce new discourses on issues of social justice. As the ACSS explores new ways of communicating with its target audiences, working with scholars and practitioners in the humanities is essential.

### **Institutional Partnerships and Networking**

In mobilizing research for social change, institutional collaboration and partnerships are essential. ACSS will work in the coming phase on strengthening its function as a “network of networks” that can enhance regional and global collaboration between knowledge institutions of different types. Universities, research NGOs, think tanks, media initiatives, and other organizations can be

networked to produce, disseminate, and advocate knowledge for social change, each building upon their institutional strengths and particular communities. Such collaborations would also lead to Arab-Arab comparative learning for a range of different aims, from institutional and organizational best practices to successful funding modalities to research uptake. For the ACSS, these types of collaborations are particularly valuable in order to maximize opportunities for research uptake from the various programs and in order to reach audiences that may be beyond the immediate ACSS reach, including national and local policy-makers, advocacy groups, and international organizations. In addition, individual researchers supported by the ACSS could be usefully placed in, or connected to, these institutions in order to strengthen networking and exchange across the region and globally as well as to provide new opportunities and training for junior researchers.

### Communications, Digital Resources, and Audiences

The communications dimension of ACSS work (including publications and dissemination tools and activities) is a particular focus of strategic planning and permeates all the objectives and activities of the coming phase.

ACSS already has a thoughtful communications and outreach strategy in place. Over the past four

years, detailed databases have been developed and are used regularly. In parallel to its website, ACSS has active online platforms. All outreach elements central to the Strategy have been activated (though some are still in a preliminary form). In the next phase, efforts will focus on bringing the ACSS to the regional and global stage in a more robust manner as a major location for social science resources, services, opportunities, networking, and, most importantly, a site of knowledge production.

As the ACSS seeks an increasingly proactive approach to attracting loyal audiences, there is a great deal of potential for developing content production in both quantity and form, as well as to transform the knowledge-sharing platforms themselves into more effective and engaging meeting points. The ACSS has within its community both excellent scholars producing high-quality critical scholarship as well as disadvantaged scholars with limited access to resources and learning opportunities. In addition, the ACSS especially targets junior scholars. Furthermore, there are specialized and general audiences that should be reached. The chart below and opposite details the types of audiences and constituencies that the ACSS needs to reach and the communications tools that are appropriate for each group.

Target Group: ACSS Grantees (junior/up-and-coming scholars)		Target Group: ACSS Grantees (more established/senior scholars)	
2016: 82	Projection (by 2020): 260	2016: 31	Projection (by 2020): 130
Motivations		Motivations	
<i>What is the person looking for?</i> Recognition & a channel to make their name	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> Guidance & mentoring; to be part of a broader community & have a network that gives them a sense of identity; a place to use their voice & to see beyond their own generation	<i>What is the person looking for?</i> Meeting peers they haven't met before, especially young scholars; ways to stay relevant	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> Research funding; publishing opportunities; new opportunities (publishing, networking, presenting research, etc.) through the work of the ACSS
Tools Used		Tools Used	
Social media, website, mailing list, emails, event invitations, in-person interactions		Mailing list, emails, event invitations, in-person interactions	

Target Group: Active Members - Regional	
2016: 52	Projection (by 2020): 150
Motivations	
<i>What is the person looking for?</i> To participate in a more public arena; to comment on current affairs; to engage with policy makers irrespective of their similar or opposing positions	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> To have name recognition in their field & to be sought out by others for advice
Tools Used	
Mailing list, event invitations, in-person interactions	

Target Group: Policymakers	
2016: n/a	Projection (by 2020): 100
Motivations	
<i>What is the person looking for?</i> Position related to a government institution &/or special committees	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> Any resources to help them keep their job &/or get ahead (e.g. information, public platforms, networking opportunities)
Tools Used	
Social media, website, mailing list, one-to-one email/phone or in-person interactions	

Target Group: Scholar Group - International Institution	
2016: 500	Projection (by 2020): 1,000
Motivations	
<i>What is the person looking for?</i> To establish connections &/or scholarly collaborations with the region	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> Establishing connections; leveraging connections for funding, instead of looking for direct funding from the ACSS
Tools Used	
Social media, website, mailing list, event invitations	

Target Group: General Educated Public	
2016: 5,000	Projection (by 2020): 12,000
Motivations	
<i>What is the person looking for?</i> To keep up with & understand what is happening in their local &/or regional contexts	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> Support; relevance; being part of a group or network; information
Tools Used	
Social media, website, mailing list, one-to-one email/phone or in-person interactions	

Target Group: Active Members - International	
2016: 15	Projection (by 2020): 50
Motivations	
<i>What is the person looking for?</i> Recognition in the region & increased international recognition	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> Funding & more robust engagement in the region
Tools Used	
Social media, mailing list, event invitations, in-person interactions	

Target Group: Activists	
2016: 20	Projection (by 2020): 100
Motivations	
<i>What is the person looking for?</i> Expand their circles & audiences; training in social sciences	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> Developing their policy arguments through social science research, funding, publications
Tools Used	
Social media, website, mailing list, training workshops	

Target Group: Scholar Group - Global	
2016: 250	Projection (by 2020): 500
Motivations	
<i>What is the person looking for?</i> Ways to connect with & stay located in the region ( <i>Not a primary target for the ACSS, but they will be interested in ACSS events, like the conference.</i> )	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> Establish a professional/academic edge by coming to/being based in the region
Tools Used	
Social media, website, mailing list, event invitations	

Target Group: Donors	
2016: 6	Projection (by 2020): 10
Motivations	
<i>What is the person looking for?</i> Good sustainable projects to fund; ways to maintain their academic connections & keep a toe in academia	<i>What are his/her needs?</i> A network of specialists to consult &/or collaborate with
Tools Used	
Mailing list, one-to-one email/phone or in-person interactions	

ACSS plans to attract more visitors to its various online platforms through diverse strategies: by revamping the website (in 2017) and exploiting ACSS’s rich repository of knowledge, from research grants, conferences, the Arab Social Science Monitor (ASSM), and other activities, in order to create valuable online content that will draw visitors to the website on a regular basis. Added proactivity and more strategic utilization of social media — the elements of which are already in place — need to be continuously updated keeping pace with the rapid changes taking place in the online world. For example, ACSS is employing timed and sponsored Facebook posts, active usage of WhatsApp groups, specialized email lists, and Twitter. The Communications Unit is also deploying announcements across wide-reaching platforms such as Jadaliyya ([www.Jadaliyya.com](http://www.Jadaliyya.com)) and others. As ACSS institutional partnerships grow and develop, these will include digital collaborations and cross-postings.

In addition to electronic channels, ACSS also works to reach areas and institutions with no or unreliable connectivity, by developing print brochures, leaflets, audio-visuals, and other materials for distribution at local institutions all over the region.



## ACSS on Facebook

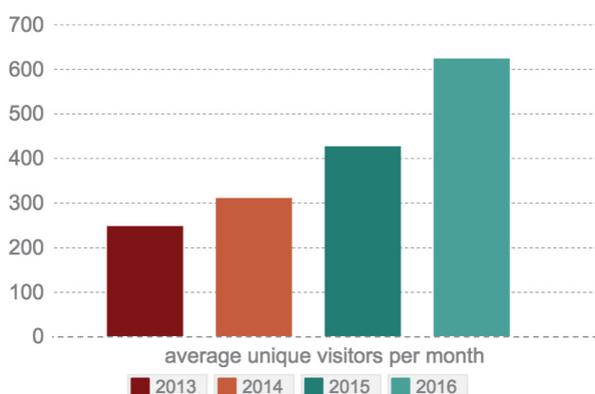
1. Facebook Likes (as of 3 November 2016): 5,557; 3,100 in 2015
2. Average number of new Likes/month: 250
3. Post Reach: Posts reach an average of 2,500 people/day
4. Average number of posts/day: 3 posts scheduled to go out during key hours (up from 5 posts per week in 2015)



## ACSS on Twitter

1. Followers (as of 3 November 2016): 845
2. Average number of new followers/month: 30
3. Average number of tweets/day: 4
4. Average tweet impressions/month: 50,000

## ACSS Website



## ACSS Members WhatsApp Group

1. 104 members
2. Average of 100 messages per week

## Research Uptake

As more and more research is being produced through ACSS programs and grant making, possibilities for a more robust engagement with different constituents for social change are increasing. By “research uptake” the ACSS signals that it aims to work with different actors and institutions in the region. This includes policymakers at the regional, national, and local levels. However, it also includes advocacy and activist groups as well as less organized groups or movements that are seeking to understand and change social realities.

It is important to emphasize that some of this will happen organically. A large number of the researchers that the ACSS supports emphasize in their applications and reports the ways in which they seek to use their research to inform different publics and effect change. However, it is clear that many of these individuals need training and guidance in these matters. Thus part of the “research uptake” tasks of the ACSS is training for reflexive research that can question social realities and address possibilities of change. Part of the task

is also training in best practices whether in the research itself, or in communicating and disseminating findings in different formats and languages as well as styles.

When it comes to influencing decision-making processes, it is clear that the ACSS needs to work in partnership with other institutions including development NGOs and think tanks. These organizations will have better access to decision-making individuals and groups in their local and national contexts and will also have more experience in how to communicate research effectively. Partnering can include designing research together, linking ACSS researchers to other knowledge institutions, joint workshops, and jointly organized policy dialogues as well as joint publications.

Finally, the ACSS will seek to broker useful relationships that can lead to research uptake in the medium and long term. For example, grantees and fellows may be placed in think tanks or development organizations for the duration of their grant, leading to new networks of knowledge and policy.

## IV. Action Plan

The Strategy described above proposes general aims that will strengthen the ACSS as a regional institution and help it reach its full potential. The ACSS currently undertakes a variety of programs and activities (see the “Current ACSS Programs and Activities” table on page 7 for brief descriptions) that all feed into its overall and specific objectives. The *Overall Objective* of the ACSS is “To achieve a functioning institutional structure that

identifies and supports improved social science in the region” and this is broken down into three *Specific Objectives* described below. As each new activity or modality is designed, it is done so with a view towards its fit within the mission of the ACSS and its contribution to the three Specific Objectives. In the coming phase and in line with the Strategy, new activities will be designed and launched that will strengthen the Overall and Specific Objectives.

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**Overall Objective of the ACSS: To achieve a functioning institutional structure that identifies and supports improved social science in the region**

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### **(1) Specific Objective: To improve and expand production and use of social science research to address regional issues**

This objective addresses the importance of promoting high-quality, independent knowledge production in the region. In addition to supporting research through funding, this objective entails providing opportunities for research collaboration especially across countries of the region as well as globally. Publication and dissemination are also crucial, especially Arabic language publications that would be accessible to broad audiences across the region and would help create new audiences for social science research. In addition, this objective focuses on research uptake and use by a variety of actors producing change in the region.

**Current activities include:** the Biennial Conferences/Research Forums; Four grants programs (Research Grants Program, New Paradigms Factory, Postdoctoral Fellowships, Working Groups); Workshops for grantees; Training workshops; Policy Dialogues

**Activities being planned include:** Promoting access to, and digitization of, research resources/archives; Enabling scholar exchange and mobility within the region, south-south and globally; Programs enabling collaboration between research institutions and civil society as well as the private and public sectors

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## (2) Specific Objective: To foster a new and larger generation of social scientists integrated into regional networks

The ACSS is firmly committed to junior scholars in and from the region and directs most of its resources and activities to this emerging generation. This cohort lacks opportunities for funding, networking, and publishing and are particularly insecure due to the uncertain research job markets in the region and globally. Networking to address inequalities through mentoring and providing additional resources for those studying or working at national, public universities is also an important dimension of ACSS work in this regard. Finally, the ACSS has an important role to play in setting standards and guidelines for research practices in the region, including the important issue of research ethics.

**Current activities include:** the Biennial Conferences/Research Forums; Three grants programs that target junior scholars (New Paradigms Factory, Postdoctoral Fellowships, and Small Grants Program); Training workshops; Online courses and outreach activities

**Activities being planned include:** A Biennial Summer Academy (for training in theory, methodology, regional studies) and Curriculum Development activities (in collaboration with universities); Combining training and networking activities into a comprehensive “ACSS fellows program” that would lend support (through training, networking, and mentoring) to students from the early stages of undergraduate studies all the way to the post-PhD phase

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## (3) Specific Objective: Achieve institutionalization of ACSS as a credible recognized network of researchers

The ACSS has a distinct niche within the landscape of research institutions in the region. Its unique identity (combining the structure of a membership association with the functions of a research council) and its ambitious goals means that it has to be attentive to its governance processes and practices, transparent in its relations with different constituencies and responsive to changing needs and opportunities in the region. Part of the legitimacy of the ACSS also stems from being a clearing house for information and a medium for exchange and discussion through networking individuals and research institutions.

**Current activities include:** General Assembly meetings; Focal points; The Arab Social Science Monitor/Arab Social Science Report; Website, social media, and networking sites; Travel grants for members; Members page

**Activities being planned include:** Network of institutions for research ethics; Grants programs for research institutions and universities; E-newsletter; Online resources (the Digest; the ACSS members page)

## Targets for the Five-Year Plan

Over the next five years, six Targets will be addressed by the ACSS. The table that follows describes these goals, their relation to the Specific Objectives, and the proposed timeline and assigns

responsibility for their planning and implementation. The Action Plan will be annually reviewed to develop details as well as establish benchmarks and measures.

Target 1: Governance Fully revised & functional charter, by-laws, & internal processes				Target 2: Financial Sustainability			
Timeline: 2016-2017		Objective 3		Timeline: 2016-2020		Objective 3	
Aims: Strengthening institutional capacities; smooth BoT elections, leadership transitions, & conflict resolution; effective Board-Director-Staff relations				Aims: Adequate core funding; Long-term co-funding partnerships; Endowment			
Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility	Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
Revisions of the text of Charter and By-laws	May 2016	January 2017	BoT, Director, F&A Manager, & Lawyer	Discussions with donors concerning core funds	June 2016	Ongoing	Director
Revision of chart of authority & addition of some internal policies	May 2016	January 2017	BoT, Director, & F&A Manager	Financial consultant for endowment	November 2016	April 2017	BoT A&F sub-committee, Director, & F&A Manager
Ratification of revised Charter & By-laws by members & associated legal procedures	March 2017	September 2017	BoT, Director, F&A Manager, & Lawyer	Endowment fundraising	January 2017	Ongoing	BoT, Director, & F&A Manager
Staffing	September 2016	Ongoing	Director & F&A Manager	Developing 3-4 strategic co-funding partnerships	January 2018	Ongoing	Director & F&A Manager

Target 3: Regional Reach Functioning focal points & regionally representative membership pool				Target 4: Institutional Support Complement the focus on individuals with support & networking for universities & research organizations			
Timeline: 2016-2018		Objective 2		Timeline: 2017-2019		Objective 2	
Aims: Diversity of regional participation in governance & activities				Aims: Effective programs & activities designed & implemented in order to achieve the desired balance			
Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility	Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
Algeria Focal Point established	June 2016	December 2016	Director & F&A Manager	Development of plan for institutional collaborations & networking	January 2017	June 2017	BoT, Director, & Staff
Targeted membership drive	March 2017	Ongoing	BoT Membership sub-Committee, Director, & PA	Develop one new program for institutional support	January 2018	December 2018	Director & BoT
Development of two more focal points	January 2018	December 2018	Director & F&A Manager	Develop one new program for institutional support	January 2019	December 2019	Director & BoT
				Activities for networking institutions at ACSS biennial conference	January 2019	December 2019	Director & BoT
Target 5: Publications Publications support & development of new dissemination outlets & formats				Target 6: Research Uptake Supporting collaboration between academic & non-academic researchers & institutions for policy & public impact			
Timeline: 2017-2020		Objective 1		Timeline: 2018-2020		Objective 1	
Aims: ACSS becomes a major source of publishing & disseminating new social science knowledge about the region				Aims: Effective programs & activities designed & implemented to enhance policy impact & broader societal engagement			
Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility	Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
Fully launch Working Papers, Field Reports & Directory, quarterly e-newsletter	January 2017	December 2017	Publications sub-committee, Editorial Review Board, & Communications staff	Develop one new program for university & civil society collaboration	January 2018	June 2018	Director & BoT
Develop 1-2 new web outlets for dissemination	January 2018	December 2018	Publications sub-committee & Staff	Develop one new program for research & private sector collaboration	January 2019	June 2019	Director & BoT
Planning the New Social Sciences Journal	January 2019	December 2019	Publications sub-committee, Editorial Review Board, & Communications staff	Develop one new program for research & public sector collaboration	January 2020	June 2020	Director & BoT
Launch <i>Journal of Social Sciences in the Arab Region</i>	January 2020	December 2020	Publications sub-committee, Editorial Review Board, Director & Staff				

## V. Risk Register

As described above in sections I and III, the regional context in which the ACSS is operating is highly challenging both in terms of specific research conditions as well as general political conditions. The ACSS undertakes regular risk

management discussions and closely monitors the changing environment. Below is a summary of the main risks identified and measures undertaken by the ACSS Board of Trustees and Secretariat.

Risk Identified	Likelihood	Possible Consequences	Measures	Who is Responsible?
Endowment is not obtained &/or grant funding is reduced & resources are not available to cover the operating costs & activities	Medium	Reduction of programs to fit the available budget until further funds are obtained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good relationships with donors</li> <li>- Accountability &amp; good practices in using grant funds</li> <li>- In-house expertise in grant writing</li> <li>- Diversification of income sources developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Director</li> <li>- Finance &amp; Administration Manager &amp; Director</li> <li>- Director &amp; a senior staff member</li> <li>- Director &amp; BoT</li> </ul>
Political instability in Lebanon	Medium-High	Potential closure of the head office in Beirut, Lebanon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alternative regional location identified</li> <li>- Basic administrative &amp; financial resources put in place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BoT &amp; Director</li> <li>- Finance &amp; Administration Manager</li> </ul>
Severe repression of academic freedom in countries across the region	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inability of grantees to conduct critical research &amp;/or write about them</li> <li>- Control over the activities that the ACSS does</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decision to stop activities in certain countries</li> <li>- Measures taken to help protect researchers &amp; personnel affiliated with the ACSS &amp; its activities</li> <li>- Advocacy for academic freedom BoT &amp; Director</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Director &amp; appropriate staff</li> <li>- BoT, Director, &amp; partner institutions</li> </ul>
Staffing problems	Medium	Delay in finding specialized staff who possess the skills &/or competencies required for certain positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Outsourcing</li> <li>- Continuous recruitment efforts, including word-of-mouth</li> <li>- Combining tasks when a right fit is identified</li> <li>- Professional development of staff</li> </ul>	Director & appropriate staff

## VI. Management Plan

The Strategy will be managed as follows with periodic reviews and adjustments as necessary:

- For items that are the responsibility of the Secretariat/staff: these will be reviewed every three months during special staff meetings, two of these meetings will be preparatory for the BoT review.
- For items that are the responsibility of a particular sub-committee of the BoT (e.g. membership or financial sustainability): these will be reviewed three times a year to assess progress and make adjustments as needed.
- For items that are the responsibility of the BoT and Secretariat: these will be reviewed every six months during regular BoT meetings. In January every year the Director will present an assessment to the BoT regarding progress made with recommendations for adjustments in timelines or in descriptions of action items. These will thus be reviewed thoroughly in January of each year and adjusted accordingly.

## VII. Concluding Remarks

The Strategy guides a second phase of institutionalization of the ACSS. The original roadmap from 2009 helped the institution establish its niche, main functions, and signature activities. This second phase will help establish the ACSS as a leading institution, with the required institutional capacity and financial sustainability for supporting and promoting research for social change, through grant making, assessment of the social science landscape, institutional partnerships, communications, and proactive research uptake. This requires the launch of a number of new activities, programs, and modalities, some of which will be necessarily experimental in nature and will entail a learning

curve. An essential ingredient for the success of this second phase of growth will be the human resources required for successful implementation. The ACSS, like all regional institutions, faces a major challenge of finding competent and experienced staff. Resources need to be made available for the recruitment of new staff and the professional development of existing staff. Finally, processes need to be put in place to minimize disruption from turnover and to plan for smooth leadership changes.

Despite many challenges and the bleakness of the regional outlook, the experience of the past four years has shown that the ACSS has a clear mission and fulfills a clear niche in the region. The importance of research for social transformation and capacity building for a new generation engaged in knowledge production and dissemination has never been clearer. The ACSS is on solid footing and, over the next five years, will further consolidate and develop its structures, modalities, and outreach.

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“ The importance of research for **social transformation** and **capacity building** for a new generation engaged in knowledge production and dissemination has never been clearer.

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## Annex I: Process of Producing the Strategy

The inputs that inform the Strategy include the following:

- Internal learning through experience and periodic reviews by staff
- Board of Trustees (BoT) discussions and planning in their bi-annual meetings
- The process of implementing and periodic revising of the Results-based Management (RBM) LogFrame (appendix II)
- An operational audit conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in two stages in 2013
- Two external evaluations:
  - \* by Dr. Karima Khalil, undertaken in July 2015-February 2016, focusing on programmatic aspects and impact
  - \* by Ziad Moussa, undertaken in September 2015-February 2016, focusing on institutional aspects and learning
- A draft outreach strategy written by BoT member, Bassam Haddad
- Consultancy provided through the Carnegie Corporation to define ACSS target audiences and communications strategy
- The first survey of ACSS grantees undertaken in January-February 2016 which will be henceforth administered annually
- The results of the research and analysis for the first Arab Social Science Report (ASSR) produced by the Arab Social Science Monitor project.

The process for producing this document has included the following steps:

- Presentations by the two evaluators to the Board of Trustees in their January 8-9, 2016 meeting
- Review of the Evaluation Reports by the Board of Trustees and by the staff
- Draft five-year strategies developed by each of the four sub-committees of the Board of Trustees: the Administration and Finance Committee; the Publications Committee, the Membership Committee, and the Conferences and Seminars Committee
- A meeting of an ad-hoc BoT committee for the Strategy held on February 25, 2016 with the participation of the Chair of the BoT (Abdulkhaleq Abdulla,) the Vice-Chair (Sari Hanafi,) the Treasurer (Mona Harb), and one member (Manzoul Assal). The meeting discussed the outline and draft of the strategy plan and determined the priority Specific Objectives for the coming five years
- Discussions of the second draft of the document with donor representatives in April 2016
- The full draft was written by the ACSS Director General, Seteney Shami
- The full draft was discussed by the BoT in their June 5th, 2016 meeting
- The Strategy was finalized in discussion with the Administration & Finance sub-committee of the BoT in their October 17, 2016 meeting
- The Strategy document will be distributed to a select number of ACSS constituents, including ACSS members and program officers from current donor organizations and will be posted on the website.

## Annex II: Relevant Background Documents

The following relevant background documents are available upon request:

- ACSS Founding Document “A New Regional Institution for the Enhancement of the Social Sciences in the Arab Public Sphere”
- ACSS LogFrame for Results Based Management
- Operational audit conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in two stages in 2013
- External evaluation by Dr. Karima Khalil, undertaken in July 2015-February 2016, focusing on programmatic aspects and impact
- External evaluation by Mr. Ziad Moussa, undertaken in September 2015-February 2016, focusing on institutional aspects and learning
- Action plan for addressing recommendations of external evaluators (as approved by the Board of Trustees in their meeting of June 5, 2016)
- Outreach strategy written by BoT member, Bassam Haddad
- The first survey of ACSS grantees undertaken in January-February 2016 (questionnaire and results)