

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IN THE MIDDLE EAST/ARAB REGION

EXPLORING THE FEASIBILITY OF AN ARAB SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

A workshop co-sponsored by

**The West Asia and North Africa Office of the Population Council
The International Development Research Centre
The Social Science Research Council
The UNDP Regional Bureau of Arab States
The Dubai School of Government**

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and the Dubai School of Government**

**November 26-27, 2006
The Dubai School of Government, Dubai**

This workshop is a follow up to recommendations which emerged in earlier discussions on the enhancement of social science research in the region (Beirut, April 11-12, 2006). The purpose of this meeting therefore, includes a review and discussion of the findings of a feasibility report prepared by Dr. Necla Tschirgi, in collaboration with Drs. Manal Jamal and Kian Tajbakhsh, on the state of regionally based and regionally informed social science research in the Middle East.

The original feasibility study involved a mapping and assessment of existing institutions in the Arab World, Iran and Turkey with the mandate and capacity to undertake regional social science research. Its final report concluded that the social science research communities in these countries are sufficiently distinct and work within very different intellectual and political environment. As a result, the study shied away from proposing a formal collaborative mechanism among Arabs, Iranians and Turks at this time. Instead, it recommended the creation of an Arab Social Science Research Council. Thus, the Dubai workshop will discuss the merits and structural modality of this mechanism, possible thematic engagements, in addition to consolidating the partnership's next steps.

The focus of the two-day workshop will be primarily on the Arab countries, but the workshop will also examine intra-regional linkages between Arab, Turkish and Iranian social scientists. Colleagues from these two countries will participate actively in the Dubai meeting.

AGENDA

DAY 1 – Sunday 26 November, 2006

09:00 – 09:30 Welcome and Introductions

Session 1

09:30 – 11:00 The Background to the Dubai meeting

The Informal Partnership, the Beirut Meeting, the findings from the IDRC Feasibility Study

Chair: Necla Tschirgi

Speakers: Necla Tschirgi, Azza Karam, Ragui Assaad, Kian Tajbakhsh

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT: Paper by Necla Tschirgi

11:00-11:30 Coffee Break

Session 2

11:30 – 1:00 Review of the Arab World

Presentation of the Institutional Map and State of the Art Review

Chair: Abdel Wahab Ben Hafaiedh

Speakers: Necla Tschirgi, Manal Jamal

Discussants: Oussama Safa, Hoda Rashad

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: Paper by Manal Jamal; Institutional Map of Regional Social Science Institutions in the Arab Region

1:00 – 2:00 Lunch Break

Session 3

2:00-3:30 Discussion of Key Issues Identified in the Report

Privatization and Fragmentation of the Institutional Infrastructure of Research

Lack of Region-wide Institutions to Support Social Sciences

Key challenges of Social Science Research (quality, training, volume, etc.)

Chair: Fares Braizat

Discussants: Dina El Khawaga, Paul Salem

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT: Paper by Necla Tschirgi

3:30 – 4:00 Coffee Break

Session 4

4:00-5:30 Discussion of the proposal to establish an Arab Social Science Research Council

What are the pros and cons of such institutional arrangement?
What would be its main roles and functions?

Chair: Hani Hourani

Speakers: Ragui Assaad, Srirupa Roy

Discussants: Karim Makdisi, Heba Handoussa

DAY 2 – Monday 27 November, 2006

Session 5

9:00 – 10:30 Information and Communications Technology and Social Science Research in the Arab World – Employing ICTs for Social Science Enhancement

Chair: Antoine Zahlan

Speakers: Elizabeth Bouri, Ziad Hadara, Sherine Ghoneim

10:30 – 11:00 Coffee Break

Session 6

11:00-12:30 Designing an Appropriate Social Science Research Council for the Arab World

Characteristics, Roles (including links with other research communities in Iran, Turkey and elsewhere), organizational structure, governance mechanisms

Chair: Tarik Yousef

Speakers: Azza Karam

Discussant: Ahmed Galal

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT: UNDP Note with CESPAC Proposal Summary

12:30 – 1:30 Lunch Break

Session 7

1:30-3:30 How Do We Move Forward on Establishing an ASSRC?

Role of existing partners, funding strategy, location, interim leadership, next steps

3:30-4:00 Closing Remarks