About the Council

Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government took the initiative to launch the Policy Council, a round table dialogue program, to promote meaningful dialogues that will enrich shared knowledge within government entities. The Council also aims to highlight vital public topics and policies of high priority within the framework of the renown achievements realized by government entities in the UAE in various fields, positioning them locally, regionally, and globally as leaders within their specializations. Additionally, the Council strives to encourage the dissemination of expertise, promote knowledge sharing, and ensure that all government entities benefit from the same. In this context, the School aims for participant diversity at every session, so as to include federal and local levels, central authorities, and specialized authorities, in addition to promoting the engagement of influential non-government stakeholders in relevant discussions. This will enable meaningful, comprehensive dialogues and the ability to tackle topics from a variety of perspectives, as the School seeks to restructure the Policy Council with a view to integrating it within comprehensive action agendas that will enable the Council to conduct in depth discussions of topics on the table. This, in turn, will enhance common understanding and knowledge-sharing efforts. The objectives of the Council can be summarized in providing a platform for cognitive dialogue between experts, specialists and stakeholders involved in the government sector with a view to highlighting issues of priority and importance on government and community levels. The Council also aims to document and disseminate dialogue in a balanced, comprehensive and practical manner to enrich cognitive content within government. Additionally, the Council strives to encourage individual and organizational communication and relationships, and to strengthen the cognitive network within government to enhance effective organizational cooperation. Finally, the Council strives to present insights and recommendations that will have an effective impact on joint action and the development of government performance.

Research in the UAE: Present challenges and future opportunities

Executive Summary:

Driving the UAE's move towards a knowledge economy is a strong university infrastructure as well as independent and government research institutions and foundations which support research and innovation and underscore their importance in becoming a strong contender in the global knowledge market. Furthermore, the UAE has taken measures to reform primary and secondary education; to upgrade higher education curricula in ways that promote creativity, innovation, and research capabilities; to encourage and fortify synergies between research institutions and industry; and to develop an advanced information, technology, and communication sector (ECC website).

The UAE today houses 79 accredited higher education institutions, encompassing public and private universities and a number of satellite campuses of western based institutes. Other research institutions, such as the National Research Foundation (NRF) also support research at the university level and beyond, offering competitive and peer reviewed grant opportunities to individuals, teams of researchers, institutes, and companies on a national scale. Further diversifying the research landscape in the UAE are independent research institutions such as the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research; government think tanks such as the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government; international organizations and private sector entities such as consultancies; and research departments situated within various government and non-government organizations.

Introduction:

Why Research is Important for the Arab World

"Knowledge is the defining factor of our time and knowledge decides whether countries are strong or weak, whether they progress or fall behind, whether they are active or inactive, whether they are rich or poor, whether they seize opportunities or miss them… If we are to create a knowledge-based society, we must boost knowledge creation in the Arab world." -H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

Despite the recognition that knowledge creation is imperative for the growth and development of Arab World, the region continues to lag behind many Western and Asian countries in research production.

On a global level, knowledge and discourse on the region continues to be monopolized by Western academic institutions and foreign researchers who lead in both quantity and quality of research. Improving research infrastructure, capacity, and production will enable Arabs to shape global discourse about their region and their interests and influence global perceptions and actions in ways that do not leave the Middle East vulnerable to global interests and geo-political distress.

On a local level social science research enables countries and future generations to access information and knowledge on the Arab world's rich history, and culture through documentation and analysis that is informed by local narratives and contexts. Research is also important for preserving national identities through thoughtful and reflective examination of individual lives and how economic, political and social forces act upon them as a result of globalization.

These insights help in illuminating social realities that will enable policy makers to set national agendas that are determined through an adequate understanding of local contexts. This will propel the region forward into an age in which cultural and educational institutions can produce best practices and solutions to local and global problems that are informed by local and regional experiences.

Points of Discussion:

- How can we better integrate national policies, government institutions, academic institutions and researchers to leverage research opportunities?

- How can we improve funding opportunities to ensure sustainable financial support for research?

- How can we build environments that support creative and innovative social science research and become the research and culture hub of the region?

- How can social science research benefit the nation and policy making?

Themes resulting from policy council discussions:

Current state of integration of between national policies, academic and research institutions and government institutions

Current government experiences with utilizing research indicate that, while there are no official structures and policies that ensure that academic research from local institutions is fed directly into the policy making process, entities regularly engage individual researchers or institutions for research that they deem necessary for their work.

Government has become, over the past decade, more aware of the need for evidence based policy making and the importance of engaging the academic community. As such, while efforts have not been coordinated, they are present.

Current state of research funding in the UAE

The UAE has set a goal to spend 1.5% of its GDP on research, triple its current spending. While funding has not itself been an issue in the UAE, procedures for allocating funding might benefit from reform.

Research environment in the UAE

The UAE's academic and research environment has changed tremendously over the last thirty years. Today, the UAE benefits from a burgeoning research environment that has a strong infrastructure, a multitude of academic institutions, and many foreign and national researchers. Today, thousands of pieces of research are produced in the UAE on a yearly basis. In many fields, this research remains exploratory but promising.

Research capacity in the social sciences remains relatively low in the UAE. However, many universities, like UAEU and Zayed University have made strides in these areas.

Role of research in policy making

Government entities actively utilize research for strategy setting and policy making. However, coordination between government entities and academic institutions remains low. There is a reliance on hired consultants and individual researchers for the production of policy related research. Typically, this research remains with the institution that commissioned it, and is not readily available for other entities to benefit from as well.

Summary: UAE's Challenges and Opportunities towards Improved Social Science Production

Challenges:

- Focus on vocationalism and instrumental knowledge

- Universities cultures devalue social science production

- Institutional red tape and bureaucracy

- Lack of academic resources

- Dearth of locally based human resources

- Disinterest of students in research

- Scarce use of Arab and Emirati authored teaching materials in core curricula

Opportunities:

- Strong university infrastructure

- Financial stability

- Independent government and research institutions that support research and innovation

- Primary and secondary education reforms

- Upgraded higher education curricula

- Investment in synergies between research institutions and industry

- Highly advanced ICT infrastructure

Recommendations resulting from the policy council discussions:

Increasing integration between national policies, academic and research institutions and government institutions

Government should be viewed, not as the primary financial support for research, but rather as the driver of research whose main role is to provide a supportive research environment.

Research agendas and government agendas need to be aligned

The private sector must also be engaged and incentivized to support research in national priority areas

Research and teaching areas and strengths need to be more transparent and public to enable collaboration

The roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in the research ecosystem must be made more clear.

مجلس السياسات
POLICY COUNCIL

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SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

Improving research funding in the UAE

Studies need to be done by the government to understand where the funding it currently provides is going, and what it has accomplished, in order to understand the gaps and successes in research funding.

There is a need for entities whose mandate is to set national budgets for research and to allocate funding to a variety of fields regardless of the applied benefits to any particular sector or industry.

Research cultures need to be nurtured and encourage private as well as public sector entities to spend on research, whether from their excess budgets or in service of their CSR efforts.

Research funding must be viewed as a long term investment with long term benefits rather than short term returns.

Research must be funded on a competitive and transparent basis.

Improving the research environment in the UAE

Researchers in the UAE should be supported to produce research even if it has no particular aim. Research should be supported as a "culture" and not because it supports particular industries and projects.

Support for non-profit universities needs to be improved and universities should be encouraged to become non-profit.

More UAE nationals need to be trained and prepared for careers in research.

UAE nationals need to be prepared from a very young age to embark on research projects. This means that school curricula need to be reformed to breed an interest and passion for research and discovery.

In areas that require collaboration with other countries and universities across the world, agendas need to be set for collaboration and cooperation.

Research projects need to be inclusive and must engage university students as well as researchers, and professors.

Intellectual property rights need to be improved to encourage research in both the sciences and social sciences.

Assessments of Universities and their areas of strength need to be made public.

Journals need to be set up that publish research that is unique and more sensitive to the social differences of the Arab world and the UAE.

Ensuring the production of sound research that informs government policy

Databases need to be set up to house research that is conducted by and for government institutions. This database should be open and readily available to all other government entities.

The discrepancies in statistical data present in social science research in the UAE need to be remedied through the research institutions becoming more transparent in their research methods. They should open them up for independent verification and to be shared with others.

There should be unification in accepted rigorous research standards, terminologies and methods among researchers in government and academia to ensure that research standards are maintained and are not questioned.

Government must act as a driver and allocate more support to research that is in its priority areas.

Public universities that are funded by government must be required to produce a certain specified number of research outputs. Funding for public universities must be connected to research KPIs.

Academics need to be incentivized to conduct policy evaluations that help government to assess the impact of its policies.

Third Session Participants:

Moderator:

• Dr. Ali Sebaa Al Marri – Executive President, MBRSG

Participants:

• Dr. Abdullah Al Hammadi - VP Strategy and Performance, DEWA

• Ms. Aisha Miran - Assistant Secretary General, Strategy Management and Governance Sector, The Executive Council of Dubai

• Ms. Laila Faridoon- Director, Chairman office/Executive Office, Roads & Transport Authority

• Prof. Mohammed Baniyas- Academic Consultant, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

• Prof. Raed Awamleh- Dean, MBRSG

• Dr. Riyadh Al Muhaidib- Vice president, Zayed University

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