



ANNEX Strengthening Knowledge Ecosystems

15 November 2021

Lebanon Case Study

Due to the sensitivity of the topics discussed, we cannot disclose all names of authors who contributed to this study.

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peace



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Village on Mount Lebanon. Charbel Karam/Unsplash



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1. Introduction to the Knowledge Ecosystems Approach

The research project ‘strengthening knowledge ecosystems’ is part of IDRC’s endeavour to strengthen the contribution of research support in ‘high-risk’ contexts. The jointly designed research foresaw case studies to better understand research in conflict-affected contexts and to inform effective pathways and modalities for supporting research in such settings. The project comprises in-depth case studies on Afghanistan, Laos and South Sudan, which were conducted jointly with locally-based research consultants. Additionally, five shorter-term case studies were conducted in Cambodia, Côte d’Ivoire, El Salvador, Ethiopia and Lebanon, building mainly on desk research as well as key informant interviews.

This study looks at ‘knowledge ecosystems’ as a whole, covering the full process of knowledge production from agenda setting, getting funding, and selecting partners to conducting research (i.e. choice of methodology and research design, data collection and analysis, publication), to doing outreach and policy uptake (see the **Synthesis Report** for more information on the conceptual background of this study).

With this research, we aim to understand best practices of knowledge production and policy uptake of research in high-risks contexts. In order to understand knowledge ecosystems, a political economy approach was adopted, by following four ‘threads’ within these systems:

1. Follow the **persons** to understand the biography and professional life of researchers and academics;
2. Follow the **money** to understand the sources, salaries and flow of funds into research activities;
3. Follow the **organisations** (research and higher education institutions, think tanks, NGOs, etc.) to understand the operational logic and degree of influence with regard to research and policy;
4. Follow the **ideas** to understand the pathways and relevance of scientific content towards outreach and policy in the respective context.

This allowed us to assess the research environments and its actors from various angles, all departing from the respective case study contexts. To this end, a semi-structured questionnaire was developed, covering these four tracks (persons, money, organisations, ideas).

The overall research design for the entire “Strengthening Knowledge Ecosystems” project centered on capturing local perspectives and insights from researchers of the ‘Global South’. In this vein, data collection and recommendation generation for this Annex focused almost exclusively on the Lebanon context seen through ‘Lebanese eyes’. For the same reason, this report only includes additional sources or references to a limited extent.

Based on this understanding actionable **recommendations** to strengthen knowledge ecosystems in different types of high-risk contexts are suggested. Thereby, this research aims to **contribute to improved and relevant research, academic careers and policy uptake**. Thus, we aim to promote resilient, locally-driven research ecosystems, support the research community to conduct conflict sensitive research, and lastly, to improve the opportunities and the security of research partners in the Global South. Overall, this shall valorize research for development outcomes as well as towards democratic governance.









Visualising Characteristics of Knowledge Ecosystems

The knowledge ecosystems assessed in these case studies are all characterised by a low to medium demand of research that is in many cases externally driven. They are characterised by an environment that is not (much) enabling for researchers. In order to visualise these characteristics, we illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of six dimensions of knowledge ecosystems. This helps our understanding of a context and informs our conclusions as to what kind of strengthening measures could be taken by stakeholders and donors to facilitate knowledge production and research, information uptake and evidence-based decision-making in conflict-affected or authoritarian contexts.

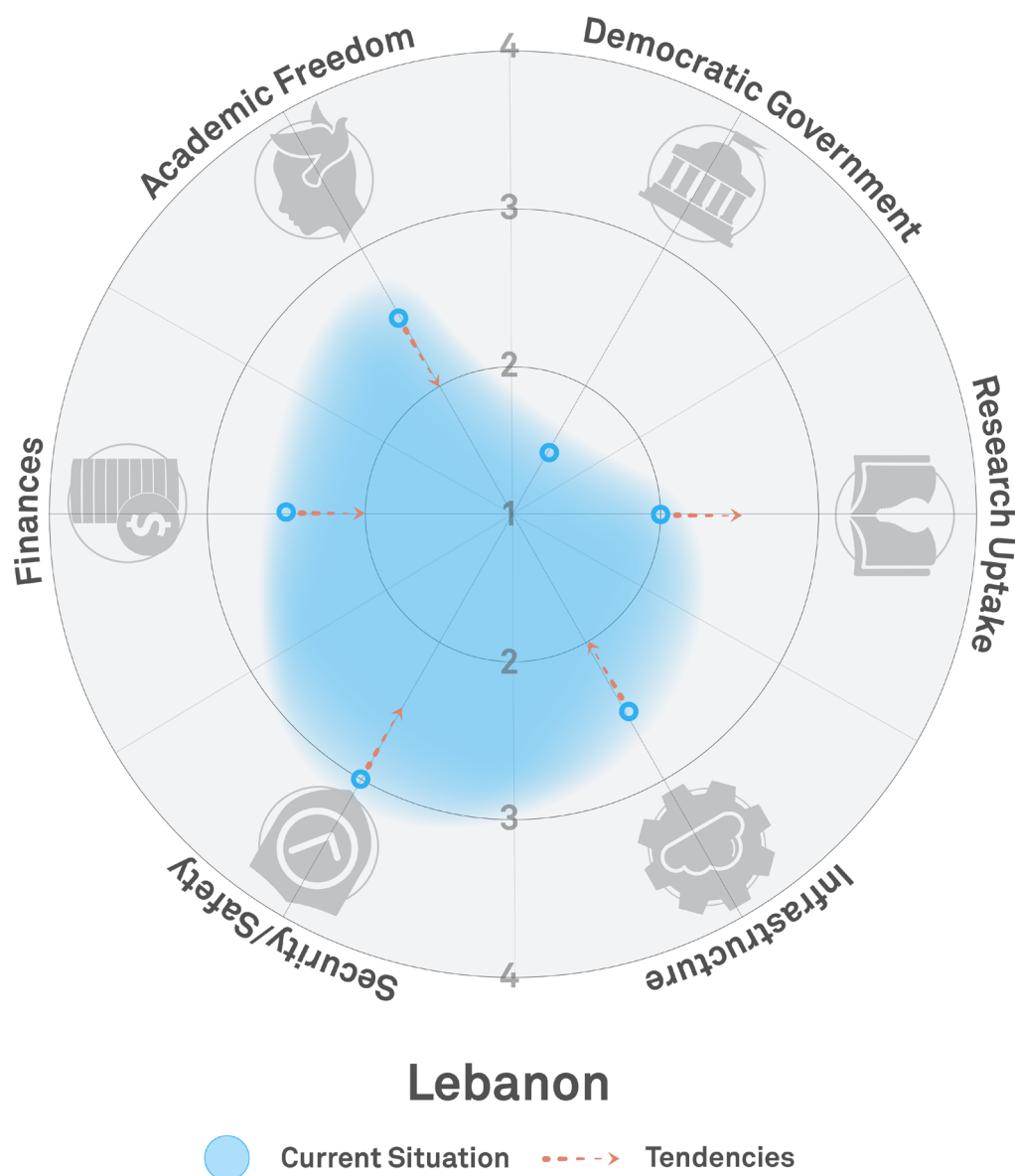
The dimensions were developed thinking from a context/researcher's perspective. The case study contexts are situated along these dimensions based on a qualitative assessment (scale: high/strong – low/weak) to give a rough indication of the system's characteristics:

A simple scaling of these dimensions of knowledge ecosystems from 1 (low) to 4 (strong) covers the following ranges, informed by a list of indicators (see Synthesis Report for further information) as well as a context-informed decision by the respective case study researcher(s).

DIMENSIONS							
							
	Infrastructure that is inductive for research (internet, database, ...)	Safety for researchers is guaranteed vs researchers are particularly prone to risks.	Finances available for research and conducive funding modalities, reliable income for researchers	Good governance of research, academic freedom is guaranteed, independence of research	Type of government: democratic government or weak/ authoritarian government	Reliable policy relevance & research uptake (e.g. validation of knowledge, role of local researchers)	
SCALING ↓	1	no research infrastructure available	high-risk context for researchers, very difficult to guarantee any safety for researchers	zero research funds available	zero academic freedom	authoritarian or dysfunctional/ weak government	zero research uptake
	4	fully-fledged research infrastructure for researchers	safe environment for researchers, even if they work on sensitive topics	fully-funded research programme, long-term financing available for researchers	fully guaranteed independence of research	democratic government	fully-implemented science-policy dialogues, research uptake works for majority of issues



Characteristics of the Lebanese Knowledge Ecosystem



Lebanon's knowledge ecosystem offers valuable insights into the interaction between politics, research, and policy. Traditional political parties compete against one another, blocking policy trajectories that may threaten their respective interests. At the same time, to protect their collective interests, they collaborate to circumvent non-traditional political actors from influencing national policy outcomes. In the midst of a dire financial crisis, the country is highly polarised. This, in turn, partly hampers academic freedom, where evidence-based discussions are viewed with the suspicion of partisanship. The crisis moreover has impacted research funding, and consequently, the capabilities of research actors to steer socially relevant agenda. Investigating social and public policy research, from its ideation to implementation, this case study highlights the importance of enabling research actors to undertake needs-based research that responds to the current challenges Lebanon is facing. It also emphasises the centrality of policy dialogue across political divides as a cursor and pre-condition to policy uptake and implementation.



2. Lebanon: Spotlight on Social & Public Policy Research

Lebanon's knowledge ecosystem offers insights into the interaction between politics, research, and policy. The country's confessionalist political system has not only institutionalised sectarian differences but also culminated in what some consider a "political oligopoly". Traditional political parties compete and thus block effective national policymaking while at the same time collaborating to circumvent other "non-traditional political actors" from entering the political scene, resulting in a lack of accountability. As such, Lebanon has faced a dire economic situation since its 1975–1990 civil war (Höckel, 2007). This has specifically been exacerbated since the Syrian refugee crisis and more so with the 2019 economic crisis: one of the worst globally since 1857 (Karasapan & Shah, 2021; World Bank Group, 2021). This series of events has left the country more polarised across issues of class, dissatisfaction with ruling elites, and the ineffectiveness of state institutions. Knowledge production does not stand at a distance from all this and is impacted by the social, political, and economic conditions the Lebanese society confronts at large.

This case study adopts a knowledge ecosystems approach and draws on a review of academic and grey literature and eight interviews (purposeful and snowball sampling) with actors from academia, civil society, research centres, and international organisations. It explores social and public policy research, from its ideation to – possible – implementation, and proposes actionable recommendations to the donor community on how to support research-informed policymaking in Lebanon. In doing so, the case study touches upon (1) institutions of policy-relevant research, (2) actors conducting it, and (3) the ideas they produce, from conceptualisation to policy uptake and monitoring.

2.1. Context

Typologically, the knowledge-to-policy system in Lebanon could be characterised both as distorted and closing transitional.¹ There is an overflowing supply of policy-relevant research geared to national-level reforms with limited to no uptake, and a high research demand on local-level policy issues, yet with little supply (Informants no.6 and no.8, 2021). Despite of the country's reputable higher education institutions, several **structural barriers** manifest.

- **Limited Government Funds.** Research, for the most part, is externally funded. To illustrate, Government Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) in 2007 was only at 0.2% of the GDP (Hanafi, 2016). Similarly, government expenditure on tertiary education has been ranked globally at 94 out of 138 countries examined in a 2020 UNDP report.² More specifically, looking at political and social sciences: in 2016, they received only 6% of the total funding granted by the National Council of Scientific Research (CNRS) (GRP, 2017).³

¹ See the methodology section of the Synthesis Report on Knowledge Ecosystems for more information.

² This compares to an average 3.9% GDP decline between 2019 and 2020, owing to COVID, among developing economies in MENA (Iran, Saudi, Egypt). For the data set where this figure was obtained, see, *The Global Economy: on Track for Strong but Uneven Growth as COVID-19 Still Weighs*. The World Bank. (2021).

³ The percentage is based on the aggregate of 1.5 Million Lebanese, and 400,000 migrant workers identified as in need of humanitarian assistance by the UN within an overall population of 6.8 Million in 2020 as per the *World Bank*.



- **Obstructed Access to Information.** By the same token, while almost 80% of the population is connected to the internet, access to information is limited, following a trend of lacking overall government transparency (Informant no. 2). In 2019, out of 114 surveyed government institutions, only four had publicly available up-to-date financial reports (Gherbal, 2019).
- **Socio-Economic Discrepancies.** The Fragile States Index (FSI) places Lebanon's Economic Inequalities close to the global average (FSI, 2021). However, adjusted estimates suggest otherwise: a study of national income between 2004 and 2015 showed that the bottom 50% of the population, 1.5 million individuals, received nearly as much as its top 0.1% earners, 3000 individuals (Assouad, 2021). This is reflected within the knowledge ecosystem in several ways, including its:
 - › Production Concentration, whereby between 2001 and 2010, for instance, the country's top university, the private American University of Beirut (AUB), produced 53% of all scientific research outputs, which is almost four times more than the publicly-owned Lebanese University (LU), at 14% (Homeidan, 2011); as well as its
 - › Accessibility. Lebanon's GDP per capita was at 4,891 USD in 2020, compared to 7,583 USD in 2019 (World Bank, 2021). In the meantime, in 2020-21, AUB's tuition amounted to 21,930 USD/annum, compared to 340 USD/annum at LU (AUB, 2020; LU, 2021). In that, access to top private institutions, by and large, is reserved to the elite. This has consequences, as will be explored later, to career trajectories in research. As one interviewee expresses, "the way I would view AUB and LU graduates is the same way I look at those graduating Harvard as opposed to a community college" (Informant no.1).
- **The Financial Crisis.** In 2020 alone, the GDP witnessed a 35.7% sharp drop to 33.38 billion USD, compared to 51.99 billion USD in 2019 (World Bank, 2021).⁴ Almost 28% of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance, and many public services are on the brink of total collapse (UN, 2021).⁵ In July 2020, for instance, a group of eleven universities appealed to the government to "save higher education" to prevent the inevitable "catastrophic impact on the social reality" upon its failure (The Group of the 11 Universities in Lebanon, 2020).⁶ Universities are forced into budget cuts, impacting their ability to provide scholarships that historically circumvented some of the socio-economic access barriers (Informant no.6). Moreover, as a result, the country is experiencing a significant brain drain, including among its qualified researchers.⁷
- **Sectarian and Political Dynamics.** Amid all this, society is highly polarised, with political and sectarian affiliations as one identity marker, and "traditional political parties" and "anti-establishment" voices as another. These divisions impact not only the public valuation of research but also its receptiveness within policy circles, whereby its credibility is scrutinised against sectarian-political metrics.

⁴ For more information, see The Knowledge Project | Lebanon Profile | UNDP. (2021).

⁵ For a breakdown of funding by discipline, see, CNRS-L Grant Research Programme (GRP). (2017). To compare, looking at expenditure for social sciences, the federal funding allocated by the US National Science Foundation (NSF) to social sciences in 2016 was at 2.3%, while at 28.1% of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) project funding (to social sciences and humanities), which at the same time culminated in 40% of total projects funded. For more on NSF data, see, S&E Indicators 2016 | National Science Foundation. (2016), and for SNSF data, see, SNSF Data Portal. (2021). It is important to note however that the focus here on social sciences is only indicative and does not preclude the fact that social and public policy research is also produced within disciplines of the natural sciences, among others.

⁶ For more on the demands within this appeal, see, The Group of the 11 Universities in Lebanon. (2020). The Higher Education Sector Is at Risk and Urgent Measures Are Required.

⁷ Reviewing FSI's Economic Indicators, Lebanon's ranking among countries scoring highest in Human Flight and Brain Drain jumped 34 positions going from 111th in 2017 to 77th in 2021, indicating an accelerating overall trend.



2.2. Follow the Institutions: Multiple... But, How Effective?

Operating within the aforementioned structural conditions, public and social policy producers are numerous; they could be classified as follows.

Political Parties

Policymaking and legitimation within Lebanon's political constellation are largely spearheaded, albeit in informal ways, by traditional political parties' policy arms (PAs). Constituted of a group of advisers (e.g., academics, public intellectuals, media personalities) within each party, PAs' policy outputs cater toward legitimising policies that reinforce sect-based clientelist networks. Non-traditional groups, on the other hand, aim to outweigh this sectarian-political "oligopoly", though without major success. Beirut Madi-nati, an "anti-establishment" political coalition that ran for the 2016 municipal elections in Beirut, was established by a group of academics mostly from AUB, with Jad Chaaban, an economics professor, as their campaign manager.⁸ These groups, however, struggle to achieve traction on the local level and are perceived as "elite groups" (Informants no.6 and no.8, 2021).

Universities and University-based Research Centres (UBRCs)

Universities: Lebanon is home to 48 higher education institutions, influenced, for the most part, by French and American systems, with traces of other countries' influences.⁹ Many universities have sectarian origins, though not all, formally, maintain these identities. Looking at the country's top 5 universities: AUB and the Lebanese American University (LAU), for example, are now secular institutions, despite having been established by missionaries in mid and late 1800s. Others like the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) and the University of Balamand (UOB) still maintain their sectarian identities. In contrast, the country's only public university, LU, was founded in 1951 with the aim of being a university for all. With campuses throughout Lebanon, it is home to more than a third of the student population at the tertiary level. Though each of its campuses has a sectarian undertone, depending on the demographics of the area within which it operates, the university maintains a general image as non-sectarian (El Achi, 2020). Worthy of note however, is that despite being a top university, LU graduates may not have the same social standing as those from the elite private institutions (AUB, LAU, USJ, UOB). As such, 19 universities in total, including those top five, offer training – ranging from BAs, MAs, to PhDs – in social and public policy related specialisations, e.g., Law, Political and Social Sciences, Public Health, and Economics.¹⁰ In the meantime, the socio-economic discrepancies, reflecting on the university system, culminate in a cycle of elite production and maintenance, as far as 'what' knowledge is produced and 'for whom'.

UBRCs: The top five universities alone are home to 61 research centres (UBRCs) and initiatives producing policy-driven or -relevant work. Examples include AUB's Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, LAU's Institute for Social Justice and Conflict Resolution, USJ's Higher Institute of Public Health, UOB's Economics and Capital Markets Research Centre, and the Centre of Lebanese Legal, Administrative and Political Studies at LU.¹¹

⁸ This reflects the frustration among academics interested in policy research, with their outputs not finding a way to policymaking, and hence deciding, as one interviewee indicated, to "become policymakers themselves". Looking at Chaaban's CV, for example, he had published extensively on sectoral reforms. However, those who succeed in being part of the government may still be unable to push for their reform agenda, which usually ends with their resignation, coupled with a loss of social capital among "anti-establishment" popular circles.

⁹ Including Egypt, and the Gulf, among others. The Beirut Arab University, for example, was initially established as a branch of the University of Alexandria. For a detailed account of the university system in Lebanon, see MERIC-Net. (2019). *The Higher Education system in Lebanon: National Report*.

¹⁰ With the exception of Biomedical Sciences and Engineering, Epidemiology, Environmental Resources Engineering, AUB does not offer other program with major direct contributions to policymaking.

¹¹ The research centres were mapped by surveying the respective websites of the different universities. The inclusion criterion was based on whether the respective research outputs could contribute directly or indirectly to social and public policy, focusing on political and social sciences, law, economics, environmental studies, public health, and media studies. Specializations from the natural sciences were only included if they had a clear policy agenda, e.g., some subthemes within environmental studies



Credibility in policy circles: UBRCs and their institutions enjoy a degree of credibility in policy circles, enabling them to act as platforms for policy dialogue. After all, many of Lebanon's political elites attended or have an affiliation to these universities. For example, 14 out of 19 ministers in the 2020 Hassan Diab Cabinet were affiliated with AUB, LU, and USJ as graduates or academics.¹² Within the same cabinet, Marie-Claude Nijm, the Minister of Justice, is at the same time the director of USJ's Centre of Legal Studies and Research for the Arab World. This credibility, however, on the one hand, is dependent upon which circles the universities or UBRCs are 'close to'. AUB's Issam Fares Institute, for example, is seen to have more resonance within liberal circles, whereby LU, as a platform, tends to have overall acceptability across the political spectrum. These varying perceptions, in turn, may impact both the policy receptiveness of the institute's research outputs and its convening power in terms of policy dialogue. On the other hand, credibility alone is not a guarantee for the policy uptake of research outputs. As one interviewee alluded, "these universities are too important to be ignored – as to not be listened to; this, however, does not mean they got to be heard" (Informant no. 8). Thus, it is important to allude to UBRCs' twofold role, (a) as knowledge producers, as well as (b) conveners of policy dialogue – across political divides.

Government Research Institutes (GRI)

Research production by GRIs is generally considered to be minimal, with few success stories. Two main factors play a role towards these successes: (1) the presence of the political will within the institute in question and the government at large, unless the institute is "too established to be circumvented" upon a change of its leadership or receptiveness within the government, and (2) the availability of funds, as most of GRIs are under-resourced. To mitigate risks of fund appropriation and mismanagement, a common modality of supporting GRIs has been in-kind contributions from government and private donors.¹³

- The National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS): A well-established GRC with a maintained political will, CNRS is (i) an advisory body responsible for formulating National Science policy, (ii) a coordinative mechanism dispersing funds to universities based on competitive calls for proposals, and (iii) a knowledge producer through four major research centres of its own, with a natural sciences orientation and contribution to policy.¹⁴ Overall, CNRS depends on government funding and international cooperation, e.g., with the World Bank, IAEA, EU, Italy, and France. Notably, in 2012, it revised its salary scale to attract and retain qualified researchers (Hanafi, 2016).
- The Central Administration of Statistics (CAS): Though traditionally a relatively unproductive actor, CAS has become an important producer of figures in relation to the financial crisis, with the support of UN agencies such as the ILO and funding from the EU. While the political elite is dissatisfied with the ramifications of these figures, CAS has achieved "too much momentum" to be stopped (No.8, 2021).
- AFKAR Program, Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR): Since 2004, the program has actively engaged civil society and public servants in policy dialogue initiatives and produced numerous manuals on dialogue design and project management within policy programs (AFKAR, 2021). The program operations further supported the enactment of several laws (e.g., the mental health law). Despite its success, with a ministerial change and discontinuation of its EU funding in 2018, the program stopped (EU Neighbours, 2018).¹⁵

¹² Four of the five ministers, who were not affiliated with Lebanon's top universities, completed their entire education abroad, mainly in the US and France.

¹³ In a 2019 report by the Gherbal Initiative, a CSO, monitoring the performance of government institutions, only 4 institutions out of 114 surveyed had up to date, if at all, publicly available financial statements. This follows a general trend of lacking transparency. For more details, see, Gherbal Initiative. (2019). *Lebanese Administrations' Portal Evaluations & Commitment to Law Obligations*. Beirut: Gherbal Initiative.

¹⁴ These are the National Centre for Marine Sciences, the Centre for Geophysics, the National Centre for Remote Sensing, and the Lebanese Atomic Energy Commission.

¹⁵ In June 2021, a contract extension was granted. However, it is exclusively for monitoring and evaluation purposes.



Non-profit Research Centres (NRCs), Private Research Organizations (PROs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Abundantly present in Lebanon, NRCs, PROs and CSOs in many cases were established in light of major political events. Their connection and attempts to influence policymaking processes differ.

- Direct Policy Dialogue: Some organisations engage directly with policymakers to influence decision making based on their research outputs, convening capacities or both.
- Indirect Policy Influence: Other organisations, owing to either (a) lack of access to government officials or (b) principled boycotts of “the political establishment”, channel their policy research findings to the public and the media as well as international organisations and donors.
- Becoming Policymakers: Another strand of attempting to influence policy directions was observed, whereby policy researchers run for government office or accept public service positions.
- As to their financial frameworks, they differ, operating within (1) non-profit, (2) for-profit, or (3) hybrid models. Generally, donor funding constitutes a significant source of income, together with private donations and business operations for some. Following are some examples; more are listed in the mapping (Annex).

Non-profit Research Centres (NRCs): The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS)

LCPS was established in 1989 towards the end of the civil war to support research-informed policymaking (Atallah, 2014). One of Lebanon’s major NRCs, it produces policy-driven outputs and acts as an incubator to some CSOs.¹⁶ The centre relies on donor funding and private contributions, which may have ramifications on its agenda-setting capacities and its reception in policy circles. LCPS has been active on the oil and gas “Direct Policy Dialogue”, which largely aimed at “preventing the elite’s hold over the important sector”. However, as the Lebanese-Israeli negotiations over maritime borders failed, the government used the event as a pretext to disengage from the dialogue all together (Informant no.6 and no.8, 2021).

Private Research Organizations (PROs): Beyond Group (BG)

BG was founded in 2010, shortly after the formation of a “unity government”, with a telos of “we are going to stop demanding change, we will supply it” (Doumit, 2011). With a management consulting model, its policy work centres on research, strategy design and stakeholder engagement in numerous countries. However, BG’s engagement with Lebanon’s policymakers may not be as effective as in other contexts (Informant no.6, 2021). Echoing this, though without success, Gilbert Doumit, BG’s Co-founder, ran for the 2018 parliamentary elections on “anti-establishment” premises, falling into the category of research actors attempting to influence policy through “Becoming Policymakers”. At the same time, BG also engages in “Indirect Policy Influence”, being a partner to many donor agencies and international organisations in Lebanon.

16 Including the Lebanese Transparency Association and the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections.



Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): Lebanon Support (LS)

CSOs operate within an “obstructed” civic space (CIVICUS, 2021). Some of the restrictions they face include (1) low social capital, where CSOs are met with public hostility, with common perceptions such as “operating against the country’s interests” and “being proxies of foreign powers”, and (2) limited access to policymakers (Beyond Reform & Development, 2015; Informant no.1, 2021). Similar to NRCs and PROs, CSOs are mainly funded by donors and international organisations.

Established during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, LS aims to “foster social change through innovative uses of social science, digital technologies, and publication and exchange of knowledge” (Kreichati, 2019). The organisation operates somewhere between the “non-profit” and “for-profit” models. Through its flagship ‘Daleel Midani’, a membership-based network of 1,300 NRCs, PROs, CSOs and international organisations, with membership fees for non-CSOs up to 430 USD/year, LS supports its research capacities beyond its donor-funded projects. The organisation’s work is organised around what it classifies as ‘action-oriented research’ and ‘direct policy dialogue’ (Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action, 2021).¹⁷

International Organisations (IOs) and Donors

A significant contributor to knowledge for policy production, IOs do so in two ways: (1) within the framework of their programs and (2) through policy research. As much as they supply research, IOs also influence the demand side through their commissioned policy assessment work to NRCs, PROs and CSOs. Overall, IO’s credibility among and accessibility to policymakers varies owing to two main factors.

- Party restrictions: Some political parties restrict their members’ engagement with IOs. Lack of trust and perceptions of interventionism are cited as reasons.
- Donor redline: IOs may be prohibited from reaching out to some policy actors (most notably Hizboallah). In this case, owing to Lebanon’s confessionalist system, this could mean that IOs are not allowed to speak to some government ministers in charge of central policy issues (No. 8, 2021).

Similarly, donors are both suppliers and demanders of research, as well as brokers to policy uptake (explored further in Follow the Ideas). Those most active in supporting and influencing the research to policy cycle, including through IOs, include the US, Canada, the EU, and a number of European countries (e.g., France, the Netherlands, the UK, Italy, among others).

2.3. Follow the People: Researchers in Policy

Most researchers in the social and public policy sector come from Lebanon’s top universities. Many of them obtain their PhDs abroad, mainly from France and the US, depending on the background of their home university for undergraduate studies. Upon their return to Lebanon, they compete for positions in academia, think tanks, and international organisations. Other researchers, especially those who obtain their PhDs from Lebanon (e.g., LU), usually have less of a competitive advantage within academia, also owing to factors such as sectarian and political considerations (Kadi, 2021). In these cases, their career trajectories are more promising within NRCs, CSOs and IOs.¹⁸

¹⁷ Lebanon Support is the name of the organization as it was established. It is now known interchangeably as the Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action.

¹⁸ Some, for example, are appointed because their sect is underrepresented. Connections to the elite of one’s sect may have an impact on appointments. In a 2017 survey of LU’s faculty, only 24.8% had obtained their PhD from Lebanon. The majority studied in Europe (68.3%), North America (4.1%), Arab Countries (2.4%).



Conditions for researchers: Within academia, the conditions of tenure-track researchers and part-time contract-based faculty vastly differ. Irrespective of which university, some characterise the conditions of the latter as ‘exploitative’. Overburdened by teaching, they earn as low as 200 USD per month, and many were let go, without compensation, in the wake of the 2019 financial crisis. Overall, salaries vary significantly among universities. For example, the highest attainable salary of an LU professor effectively amounts to 10,752 USD/annum after the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound, which is 15 times less than their AUB counterparts, who could attain up to 160,000 USD/annum. As a result, many researchers (seek to) migrate not only to other institutions such as IOs, but also to other countries (al-Anbaa, 2021; AUB Fact Book, 2021; Kadi, 2021).

Types of researchers: Broadly speaking, social researchers can be divided into two categories: professional researchers and policy researchers. The latter, engaging in policy-related consultancies, are usually favoured by IOs. The former, however, adopt a distant approach towards policy, preferring “objectivity”, which perpetuates a cycle of elitism and irrelevance of research to policy. This further contributes to a “lack of competent social researchers” in the policy world, with a perception that policy researchers are not “sufficiently critical”. After all, many policy researchers become only ‘experts’ on the subject of their outputs upon the request of those who commission them – e.g., donors and media (Hanafi, 2011; Informant no. 5, 2021).

Career progression: Incentive structures within elite private universities culminate in internationally published peer-reviewed articles that are neither necessarily accessible to policymakers nor relevant. As an example, between 2010 and 2021, AUB social researchers produced 2,161 outputs, while their LU counterparts produced only 492 outputs in total (22.7% of AUB’s output). However, this does not account for Arabic publications, a common medium of production for LU researchers, including towards policymakers. In addition, since 2002, LU has dedicated one of three internal funding schemes to ‘applied research’ with the aim of “tackling immediate and crucial issues within the Lebanese society”. A tension thus exists between, on the one hand, being locally relevant while globally unimpactful, and on the other hand publishing globally without local contribution. To counter this, some elite universities such as AUB are adopting “knowledge translation into policy” as an indicator of research excellence towards promotion (Hanafi, 2011).

Risks of policy research: Conducting policy research carries a degree of reputational risk for professional researchers, notably that of being perceived as partisan. This comes in a context where “traditional” political parties draw on politically aligned academics, among others, for internal policy creation and legitimisation. As a result, it becomes rather difficult to distinguish the two domains of “explicit” sect-based policymaking and nationally oriented, whole-of-society geared policy research (Informant no.6, 2021).

Autonomy: Some professional researchers manage to carve out a space within their departments, maintaining a degree of autonomy, especially vis-à-vis their research agenda. In contrast, others are less successful for several reasons, such as their membership in clientelist sectarian networks and funding restrictions. As for policy researchers, the space to set one’s agenda is more restricted. Most of the research they supply is seen as explicitly catering to donor agenda. As such, researchers at CSOs voice frustration with how they are unable to explore structural dimensions of social problems as opposed to “symptomatic” aspects that address short-term donor needs – e.g., refugee counts (Informant no.3., 2021).

Relationship to society: Research is generally devalued in the public eye. Aware of these sensitivities, some institutions (e.g., AUB) asked their faculty to not reveal their university association upon writing for the media. Those who engage publicly or in community research could be perceived by their academic peers as “too widespread” or “lacking rigour”. While there is an emerging trend of policy-relevant topics among professional researchers, it could possibly be attributed to increased international demand; as one researcher describes, “LU talks to (the) society, AUB, LAU and Saint Joseph talk to the international world” (Hanafi, 2011; Informant no.3., 2021).



Prominent methods: This perceived distance from society may be reinforced by the dominant use of quantitative methods within the social sciences. Seen by some as a possible limitation to policy-relevant research, this is mainly owed to a lack of qualitative training among advanced professional and policy researchers alike. As some allude, this results in the loss of in-depth insight and understanding offered by qualitative methods in contrast to quantitative analysis (El Achi, 2020; Informant no.4., 2021).

2.4. Follow Ideas: Outputs, their Communication, Policy Uptake and Monitoring

Research Outputs

Social and public policy research outputs are spearheaded by UBRCs, NRCs, PROs, CSOs and IOs. Primarily, two interacting major paradigms permeate such outputs: the rights approach, centring on policy prescription against normative constructs, usually related to the human rights framework, and the capabilities approach, while maintaining normative preferences, chartering policy directions towards improving the quality-of-life for individuals, in terms of achievable outcomes as opposed to striving towards normative milestones (e.g., SDGs). Within both paradigms, policy-relevant outputs could be seen as a system of five interrelated clusters: 1) Structure-based (e.g., political system, local governance institutions, sectoral service providers), 2) Ecologically-based (e.g., Urbanism, Environmental Policy), 3) Resource-based (e.g., Energy policy, Economic Development), 4) Identity-based (e.g., Youth, Women, Refugees), 5) Mobilisation-based (e.g., CSOs, Media).

Outputs in the policy world may be produced at a fast pace, responding to policy issues in a timely manner. This contrasts to universities where peer-reviewed publications – a pre-condition for career progression – usually require lengthy time frames. To illustrate, AUB's Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Centre publishes 'Rapid Response' briefs to answer pressing questions posed by policymakers, most recently on COVID – explored further in Communication of Research Findings below (Biermann, 2019). Overall, the following output production trends can be observed:

- Non-Profit Research Centres (NRCs): Looking at LCPS as an example, the organisation covers many of the themes within the clusters above. However, two main trends stand out: (1) a focus on normative concepts such as inclusion, peace, accountability, and transparency, coupled with (2) special attention to structures and resources: through understanding (a) trajectories for the reform of their regulatory frameworks – decentralisation and local governance, elections, and representation – and (b) the political actors operating within them (political parties, parliamentarians and impacts of clientelism) (LCPS, 2021).
- Private Research Organizations (PROs), such as Beyond Group, cover a wide range of themes and subthemes, intersecting with NRCs. Surveying 20 policy outputs between 2013-2021, the organisation's knowledge production has centred on: (a) reforming structures, most prominently of the social protection system, social entrepreneurship, local governance, sectoral coordination, and anti-corruption (45%), (b) empowering social groups, across diverse identities: women, youth, refugees, and people with disabilities (35%), as well as, (c) strengthening mobilisation spaces, through supporting civil society initiatives (20%). BG's outputs emphasise whole-of-society approaches to policy reform, leveraging normative constructs such as peace, inclusion, social cohesion, and stability (Beyond Group, 2021).
- Civil Society Organizations: CSOs are similarly diverse, spanning across the rights and capabilities approaches in their policy-relevant knowledge production, with an overall focus on the interrelation between structure- and identity-based issues. For instance, on the rights end of the



spectrum, organisations such as Alef monitor a range of Human Rights issues, producing reports to Watchdog Mechanisms, primarily the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (ALEF, 2021). On the capabilities end, Sawa for Development and Aid's publications pay particular attention to how refugees, migrants and women are impacted by existing laws and livelihood conditions (Sawa, 2021).

- International Organisations (IOs), like CSOs, touch upon a breadth of policy-related themes in their research and programming, which often includes research elements, especially, as aforementioned, needs assessments. Looking at its 2020 report, the UN-supported national policy-making in numerous ways; rights-wise, it accompanied updating and holding policy dialogue on the anti-corruption legislation and the passing of the 'National Legislation on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace'. Capabilities-wise, it assisted the Ministry of Social Affairs in formulating a 'National Strategy for Older Persons' and analysed the cross-sectoral 'National Social Protection Strategy'. In 2021–22, its priorities include supporting the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) to allow informed policymaking and the National Human Rights Commission toward normative goals of inclusion, transparency, and accountability (United Nations Lebanon, 2021).

Communication of Research Findings

Communication of research findings on social and policy-relevant research takes several forms:

- Academic Publications. Looking at policy-relevant outputs by AUB's Department of Political Studies and Public Administration, many were published in high-impact factor journals, yet not translated into policy accessible outputs.¹⁹ Four out of twelve full-time faculty were available as "experts" for the media, and only one was engaged in national policy advice with a ministry and two national commissions.²⁰
- Policy Briefs. Established to "encourage knowledge translation into policy" in the health sector, AUB's K2P publishes policy briefs in different formats. In addition to its above-mentioned "Rapid Response" briefs, it publishes "Evidence Summaries", conveying research findings to policymakers, and "Media Bites", supporting evidence-based reporting on health in the media (K2P, 2021). With similar modalities, LCPS has also opted to communicate abridged policy papers to parliamentarians via postal services.
- Periodic and Project Reports & Launch Meetings. Common to most knowledge producers, reports are usually accompanied by launch events, such as the public events organised by the Carnegie Middle East Centre, AUB and USJ. Such events could also target a private audience of policymakers, which staff of European and North American embassies at times play a role in organising, especially when the research organisation does not have direct access to policymakers. IOs also capitalise on this format, with parliamentary sub-committees and ministerial focal points working on a specific policy issue (Informant no.7, 2021).
- Media Targeted Communications. Many organisations are currently focused on translating their policy research outputs into media-discernible material. For example, organisations like Think Triangle have journalists on their staff to help translate research into popular media platforms.

¹⁹ Examples include journals like: Politics and Policy, Middle East Quarterly, Middle East Law and Governance, and Peacebuilding.

²⁰ This is based on what is publicized on the department's website, which might not exhaustively list the engagements of faculty members, though may be indicative



In addition to featuring in newspapers and on TV, to enable public accessibility of research, organisations are partnering with emerging media platforms such as Megaphone News (an online platform publishing policy-research-based articles). However, this strand of outreach tends to cater to “anti-establishment” voices, more so than policymakers.²¹

- Policy-dialogue. This is known to be the most effective form of research communication to policymakers. Numerous research organisations engage different policy actors through this format, depending as indicated on which policy circles they have access to or are accepted by, credibility wise. The Common Space Initiative (CSI), for example, seeks to convene actors in an inclusive manner. In that, CSI values the importance of policy dialogue as a peacebuilding tool that could allow positions to converge as actors get to understand where “each of them comes from” (Informant no.6, 2021).

Policy Up-take Trajectories

Structural policy changes on the national level (amounting to constitutional laws requiring a two-thirds majority to pass) are rather challenging processes. For example, in 2012, the prime minister tasked a special commission to draft a decentralisation law. After an extended policy dialogue, a draft law was passed to Parliament in 2016; up until today, it remains “under discussion” (Baroud, 2021). On the other hand, other laws on administrative reforms may pass, such as the recently approved public procurement law.²² As such, some conditions, when available, may “allow for” policy uptake (Informants no.6 & no.8, 2021).

- On the National Level, for a policy to pass, several enablers may have to come into play.
 1. The policy has to be “unthreatening” to the totality of the “traditional political parties”. In that, if it substantively jeopardises their local clientelist networks or business interests, it will not pass; the decentralisation law is an example.
 2. The policy must achieve a degree of convergence among political parties (through their PAs).
 3. For a policy to achieve convergence, however, parties must engage in policy dialogue, either bilaterally among allied parties or in a collective dialogue, such as those organised by NRC, CSOs, and IOs.
 4. A policy could achieve this convergence, despite its possible harm to the interests of traditional parties, if it similarly reaps collective benefits, as the case with the procurement law, in which parties saw a source of political capital before the possibly upcoming general election.
 5. Generally, policy propositions are likely to succeed in being part of the political parties agenda should they attain the “buy-in” of political party PAs, who in turn enable substantive policy dialogue within and across party lines.
- On the Local Level, policies have a higher probability of passing if they serve the interests of local politicians. In most cases, policies enhancing service provision receive traction. Thus, local policy uptake trajectories may face less overall resistance than those on the national level.²³

²¹ This does not mean it is irrelevant to the policy cycle. Some interviewees emphasized social uptake as an enabler of policy uptake.

²² The public procurement law as spearheaded, as an initiative, by a Government Research Centre (GRC), the Institut des Finance, providing a yet another example of GRCs that have exceptionally productive outputs in policymaking.

²³ It was reported that upon the implementation of successful development projects on the local level, when the said success is heard of in other areas, this creates a demand whereby local actors are eager to have the “know-how” of implementing the same intervention in their respective community. This hence qualifies local government officials as demanders of knowledge, though it remains unclear how much they drive overall demand.



Policy Monitoring

Should policy propositions turn into law, issues in relation to accountability vis-a-vis the implementation of these very laws arise. Hence, a holistic understanding of knowledge to policy cycle necessities establishing monitoring mechanisms of policymaking on the national and local levels. It is important also to distinguish two forms of policy uptake: instrumental and substantive. Some politicians might, instrumentally, adopt the messaging aspect of a specific policy proposition if it achieves political capital without taking the necessary steps to make these policies substantively materialise. Pre-Election periods also play a role in politicians' adoption of these narratives or even pushing to pass some of them into law, as mentioned, as long as they are not too "politically costly".²⁴ Therefore, policy monitoring could take place in the form of supporting CSO and Media watchdogs. The Gherbal Initiative is a good example of CSOs active in monitoring government compliance with laws that had come into force. However, there is often a risk of falling into the "naming and shaming" trap without prescribing alternative ways forward. A balance and division of labour between those who monitor and those who prescribe may be necessary.

2.5. Recommendations: Support Organisations, their People and Ideas


Supporting the knowledge ecosystem in Lebanon must be coupled with an in-depth understanding of the political context and the knowledge-to-policy trajectories. Applying a conflict-sensitive lens is essential in navigating the country's complex system, ensuring that interventions, to the extent possible, 'do no harm'. Incorporating political economy approaches while supporting knowledge to policy pathways is crucial to navigate this support with an awareness of whom these interventions benefit, who they possibly marginalise, and how. Overall, political and economic reform in Lebanon may positively impact knowledge to policy trajectories, including facilitating more equitable access to quality higher education, retention of qualified researchers, and availability of data, among others. Towards that end, the following are most pressing, interrelated, recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen public institutions

The Lebanese University (LU): Owing to limited capacities in project reporting and risks of fund absorption into running costs, donors exhibit a degree of aversion toward supporting LU. However, LU is strategically important as a national knowledge producer: with its affordable tuition, it houses almost 40% of the student population (from all sectarian backgrounds). It also enjoys relative credibility among policymakers (Informant no. 6, 2021). Concretely, support to LU could touch upon the following areas:

1. Facilitate access to funds as well as the capacities for their management by enhancing the skill sets of researchers on grant writing and reporting; improved capacities increase the "fund-ability" of researchers vis-à-vis external donors.
2. Encourage the reform of research incentive structures, advising that the promotion system should include policy-related outputs in review metrics. This could range from setting this a requirement for accessing funds to signalling in funding calls that it is seen as a "plus" during the review of applications.
3. Enable UBRCs, through core funding support to their structures, e.g., the Institute of Social Sci-

²⁴ It is important to note that when a law is passed, this does not necessarily mean it will be substantively implemented. Political parties may agree to adopt a law merely for the sake of political messaging, e.g., before an upcoming election, serving their collective interests vis-a-vis their constituencies. Parties, however, may have no intention of taking the steps required to effectively enact that law.



ence, as well as establishing consortia-based funding schemes, catalysing partnerships with elite private universities, NRCs and PROs. These partnerships not only raise the visibility of UBRCs, but also strengthen national and regional networks, collaboration and knowledge co-production.

4. Boost employability and professionalisation of researchers through strengthening PhD programs, including through (a) establishing joint PhDs, exchanges, and mobility programs with elite private universities (AUB, LAU, USJ) and universities abroad, and (b) conference attendance grants.

Government Research Centres (GRCs), ministerial focal points, and other relevant public institutions are of similar strategic importance, given the spaces for policy reform they ‘push from within’. To ensure their continuity more independently of the political will surrounding their operations, the following is recommended:

1. Digitise national and local records, and support national bodies and municipalities in making them available for public use. This enables researchers to access data necessary for informing policy and allows the monitoring and evaluation of policy uptake, implementation, and outcomes.
2. Strengthen research infrastructure, including, for example, ICT equipment, subscriptions to databases, and statistical software. This could be done through in-kind contributions, mitigating misappropriation risks.
3. Leverage partnerships through consortia funding modalities and joint project implementation with universities, UBRCs, NRCs, PROs, CSOs, and IOs. Similar to LU UBRCs, partnerships are meant to enhance GRCs visibility and implementation capacities. Such partnerships also strengthen a collective convening power for policy dialogue, instrumental for policy uptake.
4. Encourage GRCs to revise their salary scales, enabling them to attract qualified researchers.
5. Support productive GRCs, including the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS), the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), the Institut des Finance Basil Fuleihan, and reinstate the AFKAR initiative with the Office of the Minister of State on Administrative Reform (OMSAR).

Recommendation 2: Incentivise in-country collaboration

Among universities, UBRCs, NRCs, PROs and CSOs alike, there seems to be a degree of territoriality as far as policy research is concerned. It is more likely to find partnerships between an international and a Lebanese organisation than that among Lebanese partners. Moreover, as previously noted, this may be exacerbated by the linguistic divide between what was described as locally relevant Arabic outputs and globally geared non-Arabic publications. Towards more efficacy, strengthened lobbying and convening capacities toward policy circles, the following is recommended.

1. Enhance research collaboration across universities working on similar policy issues and between universities, PROs, CSOs and GRCs, through funding pots dedicated to co-implemented projects, as well as across and between disciplines.²⁵
2. Encourage policy-relevant initiatives such as AUB’s Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Centre, working on knowledge translation into policy to export their model.

²⁵ The International and Transitional Justice Resource Center, created by professors from 11 different universities, provides a good example of such possible collaborations.



Recommendation 3: Enable researchers

With the brain drain the country is witnessing, supporting researchers who remain is highly advisable. This also includes prospective researchers.

1. Fund research positions, allowing both more tenure track positions and an increased space within teaching responsibilities for policy-relevant research, as well as more post-doctoral positions.
2. Offer scholarships to support students from less-privileged backgrounds to attend Lebanon's elite universities. Modalities could include direct disbursement agreements with individual recipient universities who manage the selection process. Alternatively, donors could also engage in the selection process for conflict sensitivity considerations.
3. Strengthen qualitative research capacities within policy-relevant university programs to enable proximity to and in-depth understanding of social and public policy issues. As aforementioned, while quantitative methods yield valuable results, they are seen as both falling short on capturing important qualitative insights and perpetuating a distance between researchers and society.

Recommendation 4: Encourage needs-based research

As interests of development actors and local politicians may converge, especially in relation to enhancing local service provision, support to research at the local level is advisable. Specifically, food security and access to water and electricity have been highlighted as priority topics, as well as local governance and bottom-up policy change, more generally. This will be particularly important as humanitarian assistance projects increase with the current economic crisis. In that, the development-humanitarian nexus shall symbiotically come to the service of knowledge production and, importantly, its translation into policy.

1. Provide core funding to NRCs, PROs and CSOs to minimise dependency on private and project-based donor funds, enabling more autonomy in agenda-setting and more time for researchers to pursue need-based topics.
2. Allow more time and flexibility: With a donor tendency to commission short-term studies, policy researchers struggle to provide in-depth analysis of structural issues and remain at a "symptomatic" level. With pre-set outcomes and rigid project requirements, policy researchers grapple with finding value in their outputs. Longer project timeframes (minimum of 6-9 months) and more flexibility are paramount.
3. Urge program-based policy-relevant outputs through dedicating additional funds for practice projects to publish and disseminate their program findings to research organisations and policymakers at all levels (e.g., national, inter-municipal, local).

Recommendation 5: Foster inclusive policy dialogue

4. Encourage evidence-based inclusive dialogue. To avoid ineffective policy dialogue and NRCs, PROs and CSOs being perceived as partisan, ensure dialogue initiatives are evidence-based and inclusive of all political groups. Further, this can be reached by creating spaces for policymakers across the political spectrum and by including policymakers in research agenda-setting.



5. Support knowledge translation into outputs accessible to policymakers and the public, including through increased capacities in policy-writing and advocacy. Several organisations work at this juncture, such as Synaps, Gherbal Initiative, Megaphone Media, and the Civil Society Knowledge Centre.
6. Bolster access to policymakers through regular networking events and bilateral linkages. These events could be organised by donors, as, for instance, some CSOs may not have the convening capacity nor the acceptability vis-à-vis policymakers. Moreover, organisations that possess such convening power and credibility (e.g., LU and the Common Space Initiative) could also be financially supported to organise the said events.
7. Establish a digital policy-supply forum, whereby government agencies and officials on national and local levels could seek out NRCs, PROs, CSOs, IOs and Donors for policy advice on urgent issues. This could also be done through existing platforms such as Daleel Madani, the Donor Coordination Platform, or in the framework of a newly-established platform.



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