Report on the 2023 Global Research Council (GRC) MENA Regional Meeting

28-29 November 2023, Doha

1. Introduction

The Qatar Research Development and Innovation Council (QRDIC) hosted the 2023 Global Research Council (GRC) MENA regional meeting in Doha, Qatar on the 28th and 29th of November. The hybrid meeting was held at ALWADI Hotel-Doha. It was preceded by a side event which was the Research Outcome Seminars (ROS) of QRDIC-funded projects which included four parallel sessions on food security, microbiome and immunity disorders, disruptive digital technologies, and media transformations in Qatar.

The meeting saw unprecedented participation from the MENA region, including countries that participated for the first time. The participating countries were;

1. Qatar
2. Saudi Arabia
3. Oman
4. Kuwait
5. Lebanon
6. Morocco
7. Egypt (virtual)
8. Tunisia (virtual)
9. Mauritania (new)
10. Palestine (new)
11. Iraq (new)
12. United Arab Emirates (new)
13. Algeria (virtual-new)
14. Somalia (virtual-new)

In addition, the meeting included representation from the Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils (FASRC).

The main theme of the regional meeting was sustainable research, which revolved around three pillars:

- Research for sustainable development;
- Making research sustainable;
- Making sure sustainability science matters.

The first day of the meeting focused on the first two pillars, and, on the second day, attention was given to the third pillar. The meeting also listened and discussed presentations on the activities of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group, the Responsible Research Assessment (RRA) Working Group, and the newly formed, Multilateral Engagement (MLE) working group. Additionally, the event devoted a session to discuss the foresight report, and held a closed high-level meeting of the MENA region Heads of the Research Councils (HORCS). The guests were treated to an excursion of the 974 Stadium World Cup Stadium, the first fully demountable covered football stadium – showing Qatar's commitment to cost-effective sustainability and daring design.

A total of 37 participants, including two keynote speakers, engaged in this regional meeting.

The meeting agenda and the list of attendees can be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.

The meeting commenced with welcoming remarks from Dr. Hisham M. Sabir, Executive Director of QNRF programs Office-QRDIC, on behalf of Eng. Omar Al Ansari, QRDIC Secretary General and a speech from Dr. Hassan Al Ayied, representing HE Dr. Munir Eldesouki, President of King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) and GRC Governing Board Vice-Chair.

Dr. Hisham commenced the GRC MENA Regional meeting by expressing gratitude to participants, underscoring Qatar's steadfast commitment to research and innovation. He elucidated the pivotal role of the QRDI Council in shaping Qatar's dynamic research landscape.

In addition, Dr. Hisham addressed the significance of international collaboration through the Qatar National Research Fund Programs, expressing satisfaction with the heightened participation from Arab countries. Dr. Hisham highlighted this meeting focuses on research sustainability – a critical concern for both the QRDI Council and regional funding agencies. It aims to explore diverse regional experiences and address shared challenges in research and innovation.

The meeting's focus on research sustainability, a shared concern for the QRDI Council and regional funding agencies, was highlighted. The aim was to explore diverse regional experiences and address shared challenges in research and innovation. Dr. Hisham concluded by expressing QRDI council's

pleasure in the expanded participation from Arab countries, reflecting the organization's commitment to including diverse voices and experiences.

Dr. Hassan, conveying apologies for Dr. Eldesouki's absence, emphasized the imperative of sustainable research in the face of global challenges. He underscored regional potential, emphasized the necessity of collaboration, and outlined strategic measures for advancing research endeavors.

Dr. Hassan outlined key steps to enhance sustainable research, including increased investment in research and development, improved regional collaboration and coordination, the creation of an innovation-friendly environment, and the training and development of the next generation of researchers.

He noted that the meeting would include the 2nd high-level meeting for MENA HORCs, aiming to discuss and finalize the MENA region's strategic plan to meet GRC objectives. Dr. Hassan concluded by highlighting the importance of collective efforts to ensure a sustainable and impactful future for the countries of the region.

2. Introduction to the GRC and regional meeting:

The GRC Executive Secretary, Dr. Euclides de Mesquita Neto, presented an executive report encompassing the background, vision, objectives, and roadmap of the Global Research Council (GRC). The mission of the GRC is centered on fostering partnerships to create conditions conducive to international research cooperation and collaboration. The report provided insights into the GRC governance structure and key events, including the annual event, regional meetings, and interactions within the research ecosystem.

Emphasis was placed on the significance of regional meetings as tools to fortify the GRC at the regional level and serve as platforms for discussing GRC topics and objectives from a regional perspective.

The presentation highlighted the main focus of the regional meeting for this year: sustainable research and its three pillars.

Dr. Euclides pointed out four calls launched by the GRC for 2023:

- Call for 2025 GRC annual meeting hosts and co-hosts.
- Call for 2024 GRC annual meeting side events.
- Call for 2024 GRC regional hosts and co-hosts.
- Call for 2025 topic suggestions.

Dr. Euclides outlined the requirements to address conceptual challenges for the 2024 Annual GRC meeting at Interlaken, Switzerland, including consolidating input from regional meetings, increasing regional representation, addressing language barriers, sustaining networking forums, evaluating the first decade of the GRC through the foresight report, and supporting various working groups.

He concluded with the key remarks to sustain and enhance the role of the GRC:

- Enhance the GRC with a broader set of activities;
- Demonstrate added value in participating in the GRC;
- Establish connections between regional and annual meetings;
- Engage with other thematic areas such as AI, open science, research ethics, and security;
- Highlight the uniqueness of the public research funders' perspective.

3. Sustainable Research:

3.1 Discussion Paper

Dr. Laure Ognois presented a discussion paper on sustainable research for the 12th Annual Meeting of the Global Research Council (GRC) in Interlaken, Switzerland, to be hosted by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Fonds ivoirien pour la Science, la Technologie et l'Innovation (FONSTI). The hosts for the 2024 GRC annual meeting, SNSF and FONSTI, proposed a bid with the overarching theme of "sustainable research," encompassing three subtopics. While this departure from GRC traditions was noted, the Program Committee and Governing Board accepted the hosts' request, with additional consideration for topics such as open access, international cooperation, science communication, and equality, diversity, and inclusivity.

For GRC 2024, discussions will revolve around the role and responsibilities of funders, addressing sustainable development from three pillars:

1. Research for Sustainable Development

On one hand, research for sustainable development involves studies of the meaning of sustainable development. On the other hand, it contributes to resolving specific challenges related to sustainable development. In this context, several considerations are associated with such research:

- Complexity: Inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinary nature of sustainability questions.
- Inclusive framing: Need for dialogue with relevant societal actors and stakeholders.
- Responsive: Consider ongoing societal debates and action in questions and form of research.
- Access: Need to ensure use of sustainability knowledge globally.

In light of that, a couple of modalities in which funders can support this type of research were proposed, such as longer timeframe funding schemes and skills building and implementation to support actionable research.

2. Making research itself sustainable

Based on the premise that, just as research incurs a monetary cost, it also carries environmental and social costs, this subject aims to enhance the economic, ecological, and social responsibility of research practices. It contemplates potential structures and incentives to achieve this goal. Within this framework, several considerations are linked to such research:

- Scope: Beyond the environmental footprint of research to wider challenges of making research socially, economically, and personally sustainable.
- Levels: Consider institutional, individual, and funding ecosystem perspectives.
- Incentives and policies: Analyze what can make our research environments sustainable.

With these points in mind, this can be implemented across five axes:

1. Encouraging sustainable research practices.
2. Adopting sustainable research assessment systems.
3. Developing sustainable research cultures.
4. Creating sustainable research ecosystems.
5. Contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. Making sure sustainability science matters

Making the most of research results for policymakers and society requires specific efforts and structures. The success factors to achieve this are:

- Dialogue: Spaces for co-production or co-creation.
- Trust building: Principles to foster effective exchanges and trust between various stakeholders.
- Capacity building: Individual skills and awareness.
- Systemic approach: Conditions to strengthen the science-policy interface.

By aligning research practices with these axes, the goal is to create a more sustainable, responsible, and impactful research landscape that actively contributes to global sustainability objectives. Each of these three pillars was discussed in detail from regional perspectives through the dedicated sessions.

3.2. 1st Pillar: Research for sustainable development - Strengthening the contribution of research to sustainable development

To enhance the contribution of research to sustainable development, research-funding organizations can play a crucial role in stimulating, enabling, and supporting the development of diverse basic and use-oriented knowledge. This support should span across all disciplines and involve collaboration with both academic and non-academic stakeholders and practitioners.

Featuring presentations from prominent organizations like FARSC, QRDIC, KACST, DGRSDT-Algeria, and the National Research Council in Somalia, the session underscored the significance of supporting research for sustainable development.

The main highlights of the session considering the discussion paper were:

- Many MENA regional funding agencies are actively addressing sustainable development through RDI agendas and thematic calls targeting sustainability challenges or opportunities.
- Various initiatives in the MENA region align with UN SDGs, focusing on critical areas like the water-food-environment/energy nexus, food security, and climate change.
- Arab Research & Innovation Co-Funded Alliances (ARICA) exemplifies collaborative efforts, fostering Arab scientific collaboration to address common challenges related to sustainable development.
- Emphasis was placed on the importance of multilateral collaborations, with initiatives like ARICA and participation in forums like the Belmont Forum, while recognizing the need for more initiatives.
- In order to make the appropriate balance between the basic and oriented research, it is important to acknowledge that both are important and are stages along the same stream of knowledge and its application. Among other things, this also depends on the nature of the funding agency. However, it is essential to define the common research areas for sustainable development, then to study the appropriate budget allocation for funding initiatives depending on the need, urgency, and availability of resources.
- One of the major challenges in addressing the identified research areas or domains is funding.
- Challenges in researching sustainable development were noted in some countries, such as limited data on natural resources, safety concerns, inclusivity issues, and a lack of public-private partnerships.
- Funders can encourage interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research that investigates complex topics through flexible funding allocation and longer funding schemes.
- The transdisciplinary research should be assessed by suitable review criteria and inter/multi-disciplinary review panels.

- Evaluation criteria for funding programs should reflect sustainability goals, focusing on societal impact and the ability to address sustainability objectives, including end users.
- Close collaboration with stakeholders and end users ensures that research outcomes are utilized and implemented. This starts by identifying the research questions and launching joint calls to address these questions and reporting on the outcomes.
- To this end, raising awareness of RDI's role in sustainability among society and stakeholders, including policymakers, is crucial.
- Transferring technologies into tangible outcomes can be facilitated through implementation grants connecting researchers with end users.
- Funders can promote collaboration by mandating or incentivizing inter or multidisciplinary projects.
- Encouraging public-private partnerships and supporting research that brings research outcomes into policymaking and industry practices can significantly enhance research impact (i.e., requiring research proposals to demonstrate clear engagement strategies with various stakeholders).
- Special funding for workshops bridges the gap between society and research for effective knowledge dissemination.
- Building networks and partnerships for long-term strengthens the overall impact of research for sustainable development.
- Funding research for sustainable development requires a sustainable ecosystem in terms of resources, partnerships, and systems/policies.
- Moving towards open access by allocating part of the funds to open-access publications. However, this point was counter argued in terms of the fact that publishing in open-access platforms may have the potential of commercializing the process.

3.3. 2nd Pillar: Making research itself sustainable- making research itself an expression of ecological and social responsibility

The session on the second pillar, "Making research itself sustainable," focused on the role of research-funding organizations in establishing more sustainable structures and incentives. Presentations from organizations like KFAS, CNRST-Morocco, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research-Iraq, and ASRT-Egypt emphasized the importance of building international collaborations for a sustainable research environment.

Key highlights and recommendations from the session include:

- There is a collective need for a global policy guiding funding/research institutes to unite the scientific community towards sustainable development goals.
- Funders should adopt and share best-practice protocols for sustainability, influencing the evaluation process (to be reflected on the evaluation process).
- Funders should support sharing research facilities and resources to promote sustainability and minimize redundancy and underuse.

- Encouraging collaboration and open science are essential to avoid redundancies and enhance research quality.
- Raising awareness about scientists' responsibility toward ecology and society is crucial.
- Funders should adopt strategies that encourage stakeholders to get involved into research activities as part of their ecological and social responsibilities.
- Identifying research priorities aligned with societal needs is vital, with many funders indicating alignment with the SDGs.
- Challenges include coordinating efforts across stakeholders to enhance sustainable research practices and implement guidelines effectively.
- Environmental impact studies should precede funding support, promoting environmental responsibility.
- Establishing cooperation and research mechanisms for innovative and sustainable knowledge policies at the country level are encouraged.
- Ensuring continuous development of expertise and competencies is vital for creating policies and programs that sustain human societies.
- Presenters highlighted the importance of research schemes that address resource-use optimization and waste reduction and indicated example programs in these areas such as the MAST project by the ASRT.
- AI was presented as an important tool to make research sustainable. Discussions highlighted the inevitable integration of AI into research management and development, offering valuable insights and identifying gaps.
- However, AI is also accompanied by significant ethical, legal, and practical challenges that require ongoing dialogue, policy development, and careful consideration.
- The ethical dimensions of AI in research are still under discussion. Questions arisen about AI's role as a contributor to research and the implications of its findings.
- Ethical implications of the use of AI in evaluating and monitoring research, though valuable, introduces complex challenges.
- Comprehensive regulatory and policy frameworks are crucial to govern AI's use in research responsibly and ethically.
- KASCT proposed AI for a side event at the 2024 annual meeting and will be addressing AI as a thematic topic in their meeting in GRC annual meeting in 2025 once approved. It will consider AI's potential, limitations, and ethical considerations.
- G20's engagement in global dialogues underscores the call for international standards and guidelines for AI in research.

3.4. 3rd Pillar: Making sure sustainability science matters – supporting scientific knowledge's benefits to policy makers and people

To ensure scientific knowledge benefits policymakers and society requires stimulation of more effective dialogue between research and society. How research results can be harnessed to answer society's pressing questions in the field of sustainable development needs to be considered. Further reflection is required on how science can support the transformation towards a more sustainable society. Presentations from MoHER-Oman, ANRSI-Mauritania, the National Council for Scientific Research of Lebanon, Science Parcs-Tunisia, and NARC-Palestine highlighted key insights for integrating sustainability science into policy frameworks. The main takeaways include:

- Sustainability science relies on interdisciplinary approaches and system thinking (employing systems to understand relationships and loops among complex environmental and social systems).
- We need as funders to stimulate effective dialogue between research and community.
- Setting up systems and policies for technology and knowledge transfer is essential.
- To facilitate open access effectively, it is imperative to implement policies that not only promote open accessibility but also establish a robust framework for the sustainable management, utilization, and reuse of research data.
- Educating and raising awareness among policymakers and stakeholders is essential. Therefore, opportunities should be exploited to showcase the benefits of science, citing examples like responses to COVID-19 and local crises.
- Policies should be responsive and adaptable to the needs of stakeholders.
- Examples were presented about building interfaces between researchers, decision-makers, practitioners, etc., including:
  - A call for researchers to address the relationship between research and decision-making, expanding into a regional format (CNRS).
  - Establishing a national platform for monitoring the sustainability of ecosystems (CNRS).
  - The National Observatory for Women in Research (CNRS).
  - The Innovation Park Muscat and Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN).
- Different models for building trust and integration between researchers and stakeholders:
  - Identify priorities in research areas and topics (top – down): This brings us back to identifying issues and actors (participants in the process).
  - Smart Specialization, identify priorities in research areas and topics from end users (bottom up): Main constrains include the existence of several and different actors, difficult prioritization, funding, and risks being significant compared to the funds available.
  - Develop interfacing (tools, institutions, programs): The main constrain is the individual benefit of each user.

The choice of the model depends on the context, visions, methods, actors, cultural aspect, and financing.

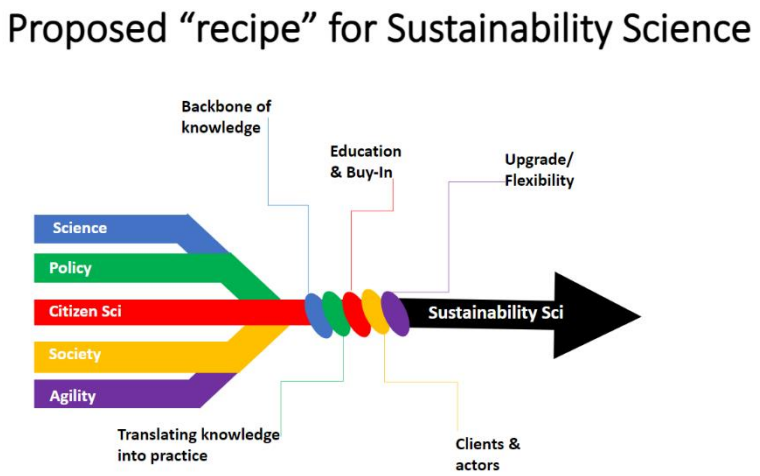

Figure 1. Courtesy of Dr. Elmouna

4. Working Groups Reports and Discussions

4.1. Responsible Research Assessment (RRA) Working Group

The Global Research Council (GRC) Responsible Research Assessment (RRA) working group, co-chaired by Dr. Mohammed Al-Shamsi, aims to drive dialogue and actions that support GRC participants in implementing RRA principles. The RRA seeks to shape research culture and uphold high-quality research, emphasizing the role of research funders as stewards influencing the research community through fund criteria. Dr. Al-Shamsi presented the group's report during the GRC meeting, highlighting key aspects and progress.

The RRA working group consists of 19 funding organizations from 16 countries, organized into four thematic groups:

1. Advocacy Group: Advocates globally for the significance of RRA, aiming for a shared understanding within GRC.
2. Guidance Group: Shares practices and guidance on implementing and embedding RRA principles among GRC participants.
3. Coordination Group: Enables coordinated action among GRC participants to implement common RRA principles.
4. Knowledge Base Group: Extends the knowledge base to address gaps and barriers.

Key updates from the RRA working group over the years include:

Year 1:

- Agreement on the vision and objectives guiding the working group.
- Collection of feedback on the vision during the 2022 annual meeting.

Year 2 & 3:

- Conducted a gap analysis of previous GRC RRA work.
- Established a common view on dimensions of RRA.
- Surveyed GRC participants in 2024 to capture an updated global understanding of RRA practices, initiatives, and obstacles. The survey was also shared and collected from the participants.
- Initiated sharing case studies on RRA from GRC participants via webinars, providing concrete details on ongoing practices, obstacles, and implementation strategies.

Year 3 & 4:

- Developing a self-assessment tool to help GRC participants and other research funders understand and self-assess their progress towards implementing RRA.

Some highlights from the session:

- On what levels shall responsible research be focused (e.g. local vs. global)? Some suggest that the primary focus should be on local, regional, then global interests. On the other hand, the world is not interested in local issues, then is why it would be rejected for publishing in well-known journals globally?
- In terms of assessment, it is important to define the indicators to assess the review criteria.
- Publishing in open-science journals is recommended to be used as criteria for assessment of research proposals. Nevertheless, other opinions suggest that this should be dealt with cautiously as open-access publishing became a tool to make money.
- Integrity is a crucial element to protect scientific research. Therefore, it is important to have clear definition of what is responsible and what is not (dos and don'ts).
- Responsible research was seen as inherently linked to sustainability, with achievement being context-dependent, particularly in highly applied research aimed at problem-solving. Clear definitions of the context and the achievement were underscored in the discussions.

4.2. Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group

Research sustainability in all its pillars require strong EDI components. EDI is crucial to attracting and retaining underrepresented groups which fit with the first and second pillars of the discussion paper. For the same reason, EDI is important to ensure that sustainability science matters to policymakers as it requires engaging with a more diverse group of stakeholders which touches upon the third pillar.

Dr. Sadim Jawhar, a MENA representative of the EDI working group, presented a comprehensive report on the group's background and activities during a dedicated session. The EDI working group was initially established as the Gender Working Group in 2019. The session outlined past activities of the group including the issuance of booklets on policies and initiatives supporting women in

research, surveys on gender-disaggregated data among GRC organizations, and papers addressing COVID-19 effects from an EDI perspective. In addition, Dr. Jawhar highlighted the EDI workshop series, directed to those involved in the development and management of EDI policies and activities or the management and development of research programmes. The first session took place on November 2022.

The EDI working group comprises representatives from GRC members across 15 countries in all five regions, emphasizing the importance of diverse representation to enhance the group's effectiveness. Thus, agencies present in this meeting were encouraged to join the group to enhance the representation of the MENA region.

The session also featured Dr. Khawla Alshayji, Deputy Director General of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), who presented her career path as a real-life example of a female scientist and leader within a research council in the MENA region. She shed light on the female researchers in Kuwait. Although female university students exceed the number of males (72% of the total), the female faculty members represent only 34% of the total members. This can be attributed to the extent of family and household duties on women are much more than men especially at the relevant age groups. In addition, the maternity requirements, from childbearing to nursing and taking care of the kids, have negative implications on women's careers. Dr. Khawla the important role of practical experience in the professional track of the researchers especially in fields such as engineering.

The below remarks were highlighted in light of research sustainability:

- It is imperative for funding agencies in the region to collect data reflecting the career progression of women researchers. This analysis aids in understanding the impact of social factors on women's careers, contributing to developing new policies or supporting existing ones.
- Promoting the visibility of women researchers, especially in leadership positions, through dedicated programs and awards is crucial.
- Encouraging policies that support women researchers' careers, such as maternity hours, workplace nurseries, maternity leaves, and a balanced teaching-research workload, is essential.
- Including a gender perspective as an integral part of science communication fosters diversity and inclusion.
- Avoiding gender bias in evaluating research proposals and publications.
- Providing platforms for women in R&D to network, exchange experiences, and convey their needs to policymakers.
- It was concluded that attracting, retaining, and promoting women researchers' careers is important to ensure that sustainability of the research ecosystem especially in our region where women represent the majority of graduate students.

4.3. Multilateral lateral engagement working group

Dr. Osamu Kobayashi, Co-Chair of the MLE Working Group-JST, delivered an online presentation about the desktop study that was carried by the working group. He recalled that the main aim of the working group is to map the landscape of the current multilateral funding mechanisms globally in order scope the possible facilitation roles of the GRC.

In response to the imperative of understanding global multilateral funding mechanisms, the Working Group conducted a comprehensive "Desktop Study" from August to September. This initiative aims to serve as the foundation for the Scoping/Landscape Report, detailing ongoing initiatives by WG members who are public funders. The overarching goals include mapping the global landscape of multilateral funding mechanisms/programs, identifying potential roles for the GRC in facilitating multilateral engagement, and developing implementation options with a roadmap.
A key aspect of the study involved administering a questionnaire to GRC members about various multilateral programs. The questionnaire covered aspects such as program details, backgrounds, mechanisms, budgets, participating organizations, challenges, and opportunities. A total of 49 submissions were received, reflecting a rich diversity of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms, with 20 participating organizations. Among the mechanisms, 37 were bilateral, and four were multilateral, highlighting a predominant focus on bilateral engagements. The funding mechanisms exhibited flexibility in budget allocation and varied durations, typically spanning three years.

Dr. Osamu pointed out that majority of the mechanisms started to address global challenges or to facilitate entrepreneurship, tech-transfer, or commercialization. The highest research areas of the calls were energy followed by water and ocean, agriculture and food, and environment and health, in addition to other areas.

The study indicated several challenges within the mechanisms such as lack of funding, complex negotiations, and low response. It also delved into the challenges and opportunities of expanding bilateral partnerships into multilateral ones, which included issues like data sharing challenges, managing larger consortia, and the extended process that multilateral initiatives entail.
The study outlines the benefits and challenges of the EU framework programs, the complexities and advantages of the EU Framework Programmes, citing top-up funding, reporting structures, and long-term planning as unique features, while noting challenges related to relevance, complexity, and the sheer number of partners.

Looking ahead, Dr. Osamu pointed out that this an initial assessment, acknowledging that further analysis involving group members' input would be crucial. The comprehensive report, incorporating additional insights, will be shared during the 2024 Annual Meeting.

Some remarks;

- Participants highlighted the need to increase the data collected about the MENA regions.
- They also encouraged to enhance the MENA region’s participation in this group.

5. GRC Foresight Workshop

The GRC-MENA Regional Meeting in Doha, Qatar, included an important session as Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Alabdulkader, the Regional Representative for MENA Executive Support Group, presented the key findings of the 2023 GRC Foresight Study. The session aimed to recap and discuss the high-level outcomes, understand the reasons for the low survey response rate (32%), and explore whether the findings accurately represent GRC participant views.

The Foresight Study, commissioned in 2022 and executed by DJS Research, delved into the GRC's activities from 2017-2022. Its objectives included assessing past GRC activities, understanding their interconnections, reflecting on current processes, and shaping the GRC's future trajectory. The study highlighted key reflections, emphasizing the GRC's role in fostering collaborations among participants, albeit without establishing calls itself. Subsequently, the ESG are leading a follow-up workstream to extend and develop the work from the initial report in a more in-depth analysis through the Regional Meeting and with the Working Groups.

Key reflections from the report:

1. Positive feedback on topic selection, development, and discussion processes.
2. Improved engagement in the Americas Regional Meeting.
3. GRC-enabled collaborations leading to impactful activities.
4. Perception that collaboration has a higher impact than policy development.
5. Mixed views on the effectiveness of taking topics forward after endorsing 'Statements of Principles.'
6. Suggestions to review 'Statements of Principles' regularly due to global changes.
7. Perceived good connection between Regional and Annual Meetings but less inter-regional engagement.
8. A need to understand barriers to engagement and enhance communication strategies.
9. Several responding organisations mentioned the need to focus on changes in the research funding environment (e.g. EDI in Research Assessments), and technical advancements (such as Artificial Intelligence).

Discussion questions were strategically crafted to solicit feedback from regional perspectives;

- Impact and influence
- Statements of Principles (SOPs)
- Regional and Annual Meetings
- External engagement
- Discussion topics

- Survey response rate

Discussion for some of the questions took place. The main hallmarks of the discussion were

1. **Commitment to Sustainability:** There is a strong commitment to sustainability, particularly in the evaluation of research proposals. This commitment emphasizes the need to assess the direct consequences of research proposals in the context of sustainability.
2. **Time and Awareness:** Creating awareness within the research community and research funding organizations requires time.
3. **Bringing Issues to the Table:** The session highlighted the importance of bringing various issues to the discussion table, such as identifying topics with direct and indirect impacts, developing policies for recycling equipment, and understanding the dynamics of research needs in different countries.
4. **Research Ecosystem Analysis:** It was emphasized that analyzing the research ecosystem in each country is crucial. Identifying strengths and weaknesses in each country's research landscape is essential for effective collaboration and knowledge-sharing.
5. **Connecting MENA Region with Others:** There is a need to establish connections between the MENA region and other regions, such as America and Europe.
6. **Low Response Challenge:** Dealing with challenges related to low response rates in surveys was acknowledged. It was suggested that the repeated to better understand the number perspective and address challenges.
7. **Analyzing Regional Research Ecosystems:** Each region has its distinct research ecosystem..
8. **Experience Reports:** Having reports on the experiences of regional meetings is important. Each region's uniqueness should be documented and shared to contribute to the overall success of GRC.
9. **Focal Points for Funding Agencies:** The suggestion to appoint focal points for each funding agency within GRC was made. This would help in better coordination and utilization of GRC resources.
10. **Utilization for Impact:** The more GRC is utilized, the greater the impact it can have overall.
11. **Changing Landscape of Science and Diplomacy:** Participants acknowledged that the landscape of science and diplomacy has evolved. One proposal was to organize side events specifically focused on science diplomacy. This would provide a dedicated platform to address the evolving dynamics at the intersection of science and diplomacy.
12. **Uniqueness for Global Impact:** The need for GRC to establish a unique trademark or identity that can enhance its impact on a global scale was emphasized. Creating a distinct profile can contribute to the effectiveness of SOPs.

13. **Centering Around Funding Organizations:** Given that GRC is centered around funding organizations, there was a suggestion to conduct SWOT analyses (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to thoroughly analyze the challenges faced by these funding agencies.
14. **Campaigns:** Launching targeted campaigns dedicated to promoting survey participation was proposed. Campaigns could utilize various mediums, such as emails, newsletters, and social media, to effectively reach members.

The session concluded with a roadmap for the next steps, including key milestones such as the Governing Board Meeting in December 2023, the Executive Support Group Meeting in February 2024, and the Annual Meeting in March 2024.
The timeline outlined actions to be integrated into the Executive Support Group's workplan, ensuring that updates on key messages and outcomes are delivered to GRC participants during the Annual Meeting in 2024.

Appendix A: Agenda

Day 1: Tuesday 28 November 2023

8:30-9:00 am	**Registration**
9:00-10:30 am	**Research Outcome Seminars (Side Event)**
10:30-10:45 pm	**Break**
10:45-11:05	**Welcome Notes** • Eng. Omar Al Ansari, Secretary General, Qatar Research, Development and Innovation Council (QRDIC) • Dr. Hassan Al Ayied, on behalf of HE Dr. Munir Eldesouki the President, King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST), GRC Governing Board Vice Chair
11:05-11:15	**Participants Introduction**
11:15-11:35	**GRC Executive Secretary Report** **Speaker:** Dr. Euclides de Mesquita Neto, São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), GRC Executive Secretary
11:35-12:10	**Topic: Sustainable Research; Introduction and Background Paper** **Speaker:** Dr. Laure Ognois, Head of International Collaboration, Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)
12:10-13:25	**Group Photo and Lunch Break**
13:25-14:55	**1st Pillar: Research for sustainable development - Strengthening the contribution of research to sustainable development.** **Moderator:** Dr. Sadim Jawhar, RDI Program Manager, QRDIC **Speakers:** • Dr. Abdelmajid BenAmara, Secretary General, Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils (FASRC) • Dr. Omar Boukhris, RDI Senior Scientific Expert, QRDIC, Qatar • Dr. Abdulrahman Alotaibi, General Manager for Desalination Technologies Institute, KACST, Saudi Arabia • Dr Mohamed LOUCIF SEIAD, Deputy- Director of International Research Programmes, The Directorate-General for Scientific Research and Technological Development (DGRSDT), Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Algeria (Virtual) • Dr. Anas Madar, Head of National Research Council in Somalia (Virtual)
14:55-15:10	**Coffee Break**
15:10-16:40	**2nd Pillar: Making research itself sustainable- making research itself an expression of ecological and social responsibility.** **Moderator:** Dr. Sara Abdulla, RDI Scientific Expert, QRDIC **Speakers:** • Dr. Ali Bumajdad, Consultant, Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS), Kuwait

	• Dr. Omar ATTOU EL YOUSSOUFI, Project manager, Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique et Technique (CNRST), Morocco • Dr. Lubna Mahdi, General Manager, Ministry of higher education and scientific research, Iraq • Dr. Gina El-Feky, Acting Vice President, Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (ASRT), Egypt (Virtual)
16:40-16:45	**Wrap-up and Teaser for the Day**
19:00	**Travel to Bayt El Talleh-Katara**
19:30-19:30	**Dinner at Bayt El Talleh**

Day 2: Wednesday 29 November 2023

8:30- 10:00	**3rd Pillar: Making sure sustainability science matters – supporting scientific knowledge's benefits to policy makers and people.** **Moderator:** Mrs. Riham Daher, Scientific Research Director, QRDIC **Speakers:** • Dr. Issa Al Shabibi, Acting Director Assist. Research and Innovation Programs, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHER), Oman • Dr. Ahmed Elmouna, General Director, Agence National de la recherche scietifique et de l'innovation (ANRSI), Mauritania • Dr. Tamara Elzein, Secretary General, National Council for Scientific Research of Lebanon • Dr. Reem Saeed, Director of Science Parcs, Tunisia (Virtual) • Dr. Mohammad Abu-Eid, Director General and Dr. Zaher Barghouthi, Deputy Director General of National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC), Palestine
10:00-10:30	**Responsible Research Assessment Working (RRA) Group Report** **Speaker:** Dr. Mohammed Al-Shamsi, Co-Chair of the RRA Working Group, Professor, KACST
10:30-10:45	**Coffee Break**
10:45-11:15	**Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Working (EDI) Group Report** **Moderator:** Dr. Sadim Jawhar, EDI Working Group Member, RDI Program Manager, (QRDIC) **Speaker:** Dr. Khawla Alshayji, Deputy Director General, Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS)
11:15-11:45	**Multilateral Collaboration Working (MLE) Group Report** Speaker: Dr. Osamu Kobayashi, Co-Chair of the MLE Working Group, Director International Affairs, Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) (Virtual)

11:45-12:30	**GRC Foresight Workshop** **Moderator:** Dr. Ahmed AlAbdulkader, Regional Representative of the MENA Research – GRC Executive Support Group, (KACST)
12:30-12:40	**Closing Remarks by the Host** **Speaker:** Dr. Hisham M. Sabir, Executive Director, QNRF-QRDIC
12:40-13:25	**Lunch Break**
13:25-14:55	**The 2nd High Level Meeting for MENA Region Head of Research Councils (Closed Meeting) and Group Photo** **Speakers:** Dr. Hassan Al Ayied**,** Senior adviser to the President (KACST), MLE Working Group Member, Mr. Abdulla Alkhaled, Business development consultant - MENA Secreterate (KACST) **Moderator:** Dr. Ahmed Elmouna, General Director (ANRSI)
15:00-17:00	**Excursion to 974 Stadium World Cup Stadium,** the first fully demountable covered football stadium – showing Qatar's commitment to cost-effective sustainability and daring design.

Appendix B: Link to Photos from the 2023 MENA Regional GRC meeting

Below are the links to the meeting photos. Please feel free to use them with acknowledging QRDIC whenever these photos are utilized for content dissemination.

- Day 1: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/tbigt3lhxo2ofxil88efe/h?rlkey=aatopuj7zl08n9f85zisonkjn&dl=0
- Day 2: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/2542ngb5q0yp21l65ywzc/h?rlkey=9ub5bl7b7gule5aawrxl0wld8&dl=0