Deepening Research on Cross-Sector Social Partnerships in the Middle East

Workshop Proceedings

Deepening Research on Cross-Sector Social Partnerships in the Middle East
October 24 – 26, 2011, NYU Abu Dhabi, UAE

Workshop Proceedings

Executive Summary

In October 2011, the Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) at New York University's (NYU) Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute convened 18 scholars and practitioners studying or interested in pursuing research on cross-sector social partnerships (CSSPs) in the Middle East. CSSPs are considered a promising and innovative policy intervention through which government, nonprofit and business stakeholders collaborate to address a shared social issue. Yet the challenges and disproportionate risks and benefits of collaboration make it a contested space for research and action, especially in a changing Middle East.

"Deepening Research on CSSPs in the Middle East" was the first of a regional collaborative seminar series aiming to explore the landscape of scholarly work on the topic, advance the scholarly conversation by bringing debates from multiple international contexts, and support regional scholars in opening possibilities for further research on CSSPs. The series was inspired by RCLA's previous research on CSSPs in Latin America and commitment to a collective approach to leadership that often requires collaboration across difference. Moreover, at the Center's 2010 convening on leadership for public wellbeing in the Middle East, cross-sector collaboration emerged as an important theme.

A year and a half later at the workshop on CSSPs, this topic remained salient and several new themes also emerged:

- There is a need to rethink the conventional three-sector governance framework underpinning the CSSP construct, in which each of the private business, government and civil society sectors are conceived of as equal counterparts playing a distinct role.
- While the notion of sector blurring is common in the West, it takes on different connotations in the Middle East. The relationships between the sectors can also be described as distorted, and in some instances, collapsing.
- The quality of the relationships depends on the quality of each sector. When sectors on the whole are corrupt, or ineffective, this can negatively impact the partnership.
- It is important to consider the point of departure for research. Looking for existing partnerships and studying them will yield very different findings than starting with the social problem and seeing the myriad ways addressing it have been attempted.

- CSSPs seem to be on the rise in the region. In theory, CSSPs emerge in times of high turbulence. Amidst this time of revolution it is opportune for researchers and scholars to see how CSSPs and governance more generally will be impacted.

Over the three days, the group discussed theoretical frameworks, case studies and research implications. The group departed with plans to convene again in 2012 after having done some preliminary exploratory work into further case studies and submitting short proposals outlining individual research interests.

I.   Introduction

From October 24–26, 2011, a group of scholars and practitioners met for the first in a regional collaborative seminar series at NYU Abu Dhabi, "Deepening Research on Cross-Sector Social Partnerships (CSSPs) in the Middle East." Organized by RCLA and hosted by the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute, the series aims to explore the landscape of scholarly work on CSSPs in the Middle East, advance the scholarly conversation by infusing it with international perspectives, and support regional scholars in opening possibilities for further research on CSSPs. CSSPs are collaborations between the government, nonprofits and business to address shared social problems. Such partnerships are considered a promising and innovative policy intervention, though they come with inherent challenges and risks.

The series is inspired by RCLA's interest in collaborations, previous research on CSSPs in Latin America and a convening RCLA held in Abu Dhabi in February 2010 on Leadership for the Public Wellbeing. These were the relevant takeaways at the time:

- There are no clear and distinct boundaries between the state, civil society and the private sector. At its best, leadership for public wellbeing takes advantage of such porosity through partnerships or direct policy change efforts.
- "Boundary crossing" is fundamental for leadership that achieves public value. It encompasses various practices – enabling collaboration between government, civil society and business; maneuvering and drawing on multiple identities that traverse the local and the global; blending and mixing various methodologies in tackling public issues; and drawing on historical leadership and cultural practices while challenging and modernizing tradition.

These themes remained salient in October 2011, and several new themes emerged. Among the primary tasks of the group were exploring how this important global trend is taking shape in the Middle East and considering implications for governance and democracy amidst a changing socio-political landscape. Before launching into specific examples of partnerships, though, the group took a step back and explored the applicability of the conventional three-sector governance model that is well known to Western democracies and serves as the implicit framework for CSSPs. The conversation raised some important questions about the continued resonance of this model, even in the West; surfaced interesting assumptions; and highlighted differences in how the sectors are understood across geographic borders.

Keeping this conversation in mind, the group shared experiences of collaborative initiatives and discussed live case studies. Three scholars from Singapore, South Africa and Colombia shared international perspectives based on their own research experiences into CSSPs and other conceptually ambiguous themes like social entrepreneurship and the state of civil society. The group also spent considerable time discussing research implications, identifying critical themes for consideration in future

research, raising research questions, and proposing methodological tools and challenges.

The group departed with plans to convene again, preferably in the spring 2012, and after having done some preliminary exploratory work into case studies and submitting short proposals outlining individual research interests.

Workshop Participants

The group was comprised of scholars and reflective practitioners studying or interested in pursuing research on CSSPs in the region. They included, in alphabetical order:

- Ahmed Hassanein, Mabani Sustainable Solutions, Cairo
- Albert Teo, Department of Management and Organization, National University of Singapore Business School
- Alaa Saber, Center for Development Services, Cairo
- Andrea Albalawi, Dubai Foundation for Women and Children
- Andrew Firmin, CIVICUS, Johannesburg
- Dima Jamali, Olayan School of Business, American University of Beirut
- Dina Sherif, Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, American University in Cairo
- Ehaab Abdou, Nahdel El Mahrousa, Cairo and World Bank Institute, DC
- Jenny Knowles Morrison, Dubai School of Government
- Hammou Laamrani, International Development Research Center, Cairo
- Mhamed Biygautane, Dubai School of Government
- Neal Favey Mather, Abu Dhabi Education Council
- Nora Lester Murad, civil society activist and writer, Jerusalem
- Roberto Gutiérrez, School of Management, Universidad de los Andes, Bogota

Conveners of the workshop from New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, included, in alphabetical order:

- Bethany Godsoe, Executive Director, Research Center for Leadership in Action
- Erica Gabrielle Foldy, Associate Professor of Public and Nonprofit Management
- Sonia Ospina, Professor of Public Management and Policy and Faculty Director of the Research Center for Leadership in Action
- Waad El Hadidy, Senior Associate, Research Center for Leadership in Action

The participants' fields of work intersected with the topic of CSSPs through both research and practice. Their experiences included spurring partnerships through their work, studying CSSPs, supporting or studying sector-blurring practices like social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility, and working within and studying

civil society. In terms of issue areas, these ranged from water policy to youth development and job creation, affordable housing, and education.

What follows is an overview of the discussions and key insights and a glimpse of future directions suggested at this convening. Given the cumulative and collective nature of the learning generated, the main themes highlighted in this report will not be attributed to any individual(s) except where session presentations are summarized and specific quotes are used. Boxes throughout the report highlight takeaways associated with the prospects of deepening research on CSSPs in the Middle East.

II.   Discussions and Key Insights

Bounding the Conversation: Overview of Cross-Sector Social Partnerships

After participant introductions, the workshop kicked off with a presentation by Sonia Ospina on scholarly discourse covering the underlying framework of three-sector governance as well as arguments for and against CSSPs. Notwithstanding that CSSPs can offer innovative solutions to persistent problems, Ospina presented the group with three provocative statements:

- *CSSPs are not natural:* Organizations will only collaborate when they cannot get what they want without collaborating[1]. That is because actors from different sectors think inherently differently, are motivated by different goals and use different approaches. CSSPs are more likely if approaches within each sector have been attempted and failed. This raises the paradox[2] that difference is what makes CSSPs work, but also what makes them challenging.
- *CSPPs that work are extraordinary and rare achievements*: Sectors are governed by different institutional logics. For instance, the tools and language offered for managing partnerships are based on the action-focused approach of business, while the governance and accountability frameworks tend to reflect the core elements of the more ponderous public policy cycle, with an emphasis on consultation and representation, transparency and rule setting[3]. Such different logics make CSSPs extremely challenging, such that when they work, they are highly commendable.
- *There is a potential dark side to CSSPs*: Taking part in CSSPs can create disproportionate risks and benefits for the sectors due to inherent power asymmetries. Critics have pointed to government absolving itself of its social

1 Bryson, J., Crosby, B. and M. and Stone, M. (2006). "The Design and Implementation of Cross-Sector Collaborations: Propositions from the Literature." *Public Administration Review*: Volume 66, Issue Supplement s1, pages 44–55.

[2] Austin, J. (2000). *The Collaborative Challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[3] Rochlin, S., Zadek, S. and Forstater, M. (2008). *Governing Collaboration: Making Partnerships Accountable for Delivering Development*, London: AccountAbility.

responsibilities when it shares them with others, and civil society compromising its watchdog role over both government and the business sectors[4].

Ospina also presented the three-sector governance framework that underpins the CSSP phenomenon. In the conventional tri-sector model, each sector is conceived of as having a distinct role: the state or the public sector has the primary functions of upholding the rule of law and providing frameworks for both the market and civil society; the market or the private sector is considered the generator of wealth, and is the realm of innovation and productivity; the civil society, through its values orientation, promotes the public welfare and the right to assembly and holds the other two sectors accountable. In this conceptualization, the lines around each sector are clearly demarcated. Scholars have argued that it is precisely because some social issues are so complex and do not lie neatly within the mandate of any one sector, and because none of the sectors alone has the capacity to address these issues, that cross-sector social partnerships form.

Participants in the convening argued that while in theory, the tri-sector division of labor seems like the key to a healthy society, in reality many factors complicate the framework, such as the disproportionate weight and size of some sectors relative to the others. The group argued that the governance framework makes it seem like each sector is homogenous, whereas in reality, each sector is fraught with internal tension. For instance, it is easy to see the private sector as an arena for competition, but the civil and government sectors are arenas of rivalry and contestation as well. Moreover, the framework reinforces the idea that certain sets of values are affiliated with each sector. In current times, each sector is driven by multiple values (a problematic idea for some participants in the group). Some participants noted that this stereotyping contributes to the failure of CSSPs.

The main takeaway from this session was that the three-sector governance framework is more of an ideal type, that is, a model that serves as a reference point against which to compare reality. The group challenged the model on grounds that it assumes parity in power between the sectors and associates a set of values to each sector in a changing world where sector boundaries are becoming more blurred.

---

[4] Miraftab, M. (2004). "Public-Private Partnerships: The Trojan Horse of Neoliberal Development?" *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (2004). 24 (1): 89-101.

Grounding the Conversation: Prospects for collaboration in the region from the vantage points of government, business and civil society

Dina Sherif, Alaa Saber and Nora Murad provided commentaries that helped to contextualize the notion of CSSPs based on the realities facing each sector in the region. Sherif discussed the private sector's often negative reputation as corruptor and its motivation to address social and public issues. She explained that this sector is not driven by altruism but by sustainability – it has recognized that its own wellbeing is tied to that of its local communities. Increasingly businesses are addressing social issues, and trying to do so in partnership.

Saber described the state as being in acute crisis in the region, which is the product of a historical trajectory. At independence from colonial rule, states reacted through authoritarian rule and social service programs. Governments in the region were consuming two-thirds of GDP and providing all social services, pursuing a nationalist and populist agenda. By the 80s, the government sector had become unhealthily large and so had its inefficiencies and problems. The remedy from the Washington consensus was summed up as: cut back on the state and expand the private sector. Several strategies were pursued, from more government to less government – none worked because they alleviated symptoms here and there but never addressed the root cause of "state illness." According to Saber, this root cause is the set of antagonistic principles around which the state built its function in economy, polity and culture. In the economic realm, the state could not let go of its commanding role in organizing economic life. It also allowed those in power to accumulate wealth. In the political realm, the notion of equality in front of the law, and in terms of economic and civil rights, was sorely lacking. In the cultural realm, the state curtailed opportunities people sought to realize their full potential, such as free expression and free association. Saber summed up the "state" in the region as "quasi-liberal in economics, deceptively authoritarian in politics and explicitly conservative in culture."

Murad presented the realities of civil society in the Palestinian context. She stressed that the three-governance framework is helpful in reminding us that each sector holds the other(s) accountable. However, depicting governance as shared between only three sectors obscures the role of a large and important set of actors: international donors. Many donors are set up to advance the foreign policy agenda of governments, and so can not be considered as separate and autonomous entities from foreign governments, though they do represent different actors.

Looking more closely at Palestinian civil society, Murad discussed three subsectors: 1) an informal grassroots voluntary sector where people can join together in taking up certain initiatives, such as cleaning up land and making a playground; 2) a professionalized layer of civil society consisting of a sophisticated set of big organizations with handsome budgets that are very dependent on international aid; 3) international civil society organizations that can have neocolonial and devastating impacts.

In reaction, participants discussed how international aid can undermine local government and civil society and how in a disturbing new trend, international NGOs are taking over local NGOs and rebranding them. Participants notes that international civil society is another powerful force that is missing from the model, along with other transnational forces such as global private business.

The commentaries about the government, business and civil society sectors in the region raised the point about sector capacity and readiness for CSSPs. The group raised the research proposition that the quality of cross-sector relationships depends on the quality of each sector. At the same time, uprisings in several countries in the region may propel further CSSPs, assuming that now highly scrutinized governments will indeed be transparent and willing to enter into such partnerships.

CSSPs: Prospects and Challenges for Social Change across the Middle East

Dima Jamali presented highlights from the commissioned paper she authored. After a brief review of the literature, Jamali held that the social issue platform orientation[5] offers the most promise for the region. In this orientation, the focus of the partnership is on relevant public or social issues or 'meta' issues in the community that partners want to tackle jointly because they are mutually relevant and salient, as opposed to focusing on issues that meet the partners' own interests and internal needs. Jamali held that focusing on societal issues is important in a region where unemployment and poverty are considerably high.

Jamali noted that CSSPs are on the rise in the region, so the question of concern should not be whether they exist or not, but rather, how to optimize them. She presented four examples:

- Partnership for Lebanon (PFL): An initiative led by five global information technology companies that brought in several NGOs and the Lebanese government to support development after the July 2006 war.
- Tamkeen: A partnership between the Saudi Arabian Investment Authority (government), the consulting company Tamkeen, and the Institute of Social and Ethical Responsibility (nonprofit) to facilitate implementation of the Responsible Competitiveness Index in the Saudi business sector
- Be Entrepreneurial: A partnership between Injaz al Arab (NGO) and Deloitte to foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation and provide students with the skills they need to launch their own endeavors.

---

[5] Selsky, J.W. and Parker, B. (2005). ''Cross-sector partnerships to address social issues: challenges to theory and practice,'' *Journal of Management*, Vol. 31 No. 6, pp. 849-73.

- Ruwwad: An autonomous NGO established by the logistics company Aramex to empower youth and communities in impoverished neighborhoods of Jordan.

Jamali offered the following reflections from her review of examples in the region:

- CSSPs introduce substantial opportunities for meaningful social change precisely because of their ability to draw on the expertise of different kinds of organizations in different sectors, resulting in what is referred to as multi-level value creation[6]. However, there is a need to keep the wider good and distribution of benefits in focus. The interests of the community and the poor may not always be preserved and prioritized in the presence of powerful private actors.
- CSSPs are embedded within larger national institutional structures and dynamics. A pertinent question to repeatedly raise and address relates to the social and political conditions that are most conducive to partnership success.
- The degree of governments' involvement and mediating redistributive functions are necessary to reinvigorate and ensure partnership success. The private sector as the primary actor in sporadically addressing social needs is untenable. Governments across the region need to flex their financial, institutional and legislative muscle in pursuit of strong partnerships that serve wider policy objectives and ensure that democracy, equity and other important social values are indeed prioritized.

Jamali noted that it is important for researchers to recognize that CSSPs operate at different levels (e.g., region, province, city, municipality and neighborhood) and often operate beneath the radar of researchers' attention. Given the paucity of research on CSSPs in the region, there is a need to research and document all types of CSSPs in practice. This includes CSSPs of different sizes, scopes and purposes, ranging from dyads to multi-party arrangements, local to global levels, short- to long-term timeframes, and voluntary to mandated partnerships. Finally, it is important to encourage researchers in the region to move beyond their conventional disciplinary silos to examine CSSPs through an interdisciplinary integrative lens.

In reaction to Jamali's presentation, the group discussed the importance of community leadership, not mere involvement or consultation in such initiatives. Participants also made a point of differentiating between CSSPs, which by definition, have a social issue to tackle, and social *change*-oriented CSSPs. In the latter, the objective is to transform systems in the process, and along the way, the partners themselves are transformed, as Jamali described in the Ruwwad example. This differentiation could be the subject of potential comparative research on the role of CSSPs in transforming systems.

---

[6] Seitanidi, M., Koufopoulos, D. and Palmer, P. (2010). "Partnership Formation for Change: Indicators for Transformative Potential in Cross-Sector Social Partnerships," *Journal of Business Ethics*, Springer, Vol. 94(1), pages 139-161.

Participants then chose to join one of three smaller group conversations:

Addressing practitioner learning needs

This group gravitated toward the idea of developing a practitioner-friendly, how-to guide to CSSPs, discussing key considerations and tips for successful partnerships. This idea emerged from the practitioners' need to get the benefit of multiple experiences without having to muddle through long case studies that may be particular to each context. This group thought it was important to canvas existing partnerships in the region and to do so in a visually digestible way. This effort would enable people to recognize certain patterns, such as how many CSSPs are initiated and led by the private sector, for instance. It is also important to understand who is *not* included in the map, as often, the community is absent from CSSPs although it is the stakeholder most directly affected by the work.

The group proposed a set of categories that could be used by CSSP partners and other practitioners in assessing success. These broad categories would need to be adapted to each case, with the partners developing specific indicators. They include: initiating decisions and drivers, inclusion, power dynamics, funding, culture, leadership, and level of engagement. Researchers could also use these categories to conduct analysis across different cases.

Sustainability of CSSPs

This group linked sustainability of CSSP results to community engagement and leadership in the CSSP. The group supported taking a community/context-based strategy and seeing what issues would arise rather than starting the partnership around a specific issue (that may cut across communities). They noted that the community should take a leadership role as early as possible in defining priorities for the initiative using a place-based approach. Of course encouraging the community to be in the driver's seat comes with the challenge of finding community representation that is legitimate and accepted. However, the group stressed that in order to sustain CSSP results, the initiative should also focus on building community capacity and self governance.

The evolving nature of CSSPs

This group discussed the different phases that CSSPs typically go through from the vantage point that processes of partnering are dynamic and continually evolving. The group proposed phases around which the following research questions could be formed:

> 1. Initiation and alignment: How are partners drawn into collaboration, and how are they motivated to become aligned around objectives, goals, strategies and values?
> 2. Formation and evolvement: How do awareness, relationships and commitments among partners evolve, and how are partners themselves transformed in the process?

3. Emergence of difference: How are benefits distributed as conditions change and the interests of some partners become less aligned?

The group acknowledged that each sector operates from a fundamentally different perspective, which would impact how the above questions are addressed by each sector. For instance, in the government and corporate sectors, there is a short-term perspective that may affect their commitment and lead to attrition. At the same time, it is important to remember that the duration of a CSSP is not and should not be an indicator of its success.

A recurring theme among the three groups was the importance of including the community as an equal partner in CSSPs, and not just assuming that civil society is the community representative. This approach is necessary because vulnerable populations are at high risk of not having voice. Researchers can play a role in unpacking the extent of community engagement in CSSPs and the relationship between this engagement and certain factors such as sustainability and alignment of multi-sector interests.

The Experience of the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC)

After workshop sessions where the group defined, conceptualized and grounded CSSPs in the Middle East context, it was a good time to turn to the description and analysis of a case as told by its protagonists. Several participants were invited from the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) to share their story of embarking on a public-private partnership for school reform in 2005. The panelists were: Neal Mather, lead cluster manager at ADEC; Ibrahim Abdalla Mohamed Aljarrah, principal at Khalifa Bin Zayed School; Brett Sloan, technical advisor at Khalifa Bin Zayed School; Fatima Al Bastaki, cluster manager at the Center for British Teachers; and Jill Clark, advisor at the Center for British Teachers. The panel was moderated by Jenny Knowles-Morrison.

Mather started by providing the context for ADEC's public-private initiative, explaining that ADEC works with nine international education improvement companies in delivering education reform under a specific contractual relationship. The project is part of Abu Dhabi's 2030 plan, which includes reforms in commerce, industry, health and housing. In education the focus is on: 1) improving student performance to international levels; 2) providing universal access and choice in schools; 3) improving student readiness for higher education and work; and 4) promoting cultural engagement and citizenship. These goals are meant to address myriad challenges facing the education sector including an underdeveloped human capital pool; outdated curriculum and pedagogy; under-investment in infrastructure; and limited access to and the unattractiveness of the teaching profession, especially to men.

In the ADEC program, a lead advisor is assigned to the principal in each school and there may be up to seven advisors from each education improvement company providing guidance at the school. The strategy is customized to each school, but generally they work on increasing teacher and principal capacity, improving English and math instruction, and enforcing discipline and attendance.

Discussants on the panel shared challenges they have faced in the project. Initially, they said, there was resistance on the part of parents, teachers and support staff to work with Western private companies. Thanks to several orientation sessions and a proactive approach with parents, these challenges were addressed. The panelists suggested that one of the key factors in the success of this partnership was the teachers' enthusiasm and willingness to make the best of their time with the coaches.

After the presentation of the case workshop and in reaction to the panel, participants were interested in exploring the difference between a cross-sector partnership and a contractual relationship. Some took the view that if one party has hire/fire power over another, then it is not a partnership. Others in the group took the view that having a contractual relationship is not necessarily problematic as there is something beyond it that comprises partnership – the trust and social relational elements between individuals in this project, which were clearly unique.

The live case of ADEC stirred a debate about the difference between partnerships and contractual relationships, and whether the latter can comprise CSSPs. The conversation elevated the importance of the micro-dynamics and incentives behind the emergent social relationships, dynamics that may be missed if the sole focus of researchers is on conceptual and definitional clarity of CSSPs.

Engaging in CSSPs: First-hand Accounts

In order to complement the deep analysis of one partnership example, this session offered breadth by contrasting examples from three different policy contexts. Ehaab Abdou, Ahmed Hassanein and Hammou Laamrani shared examples of CSSPs they had personally experienced in youth employment, affordable housing and water. Starting with a case at the local level, Abdou discussed a partnership between Cairo University (a public university) and a local NGO in setting up a career and entrepreneurship development office at the university. Among the lessons learned, Abdou stressed that it was important to discuss sub-sectors within each sector and not to treat each sector as a monolith. For example, when partnering with government, it's important to ask which level is most strategic, and whether it makes sense, depending on the project, to work with a branch of government with no access to legislative power.

Moving up one level of analysis to the national level, Hassanein provided a review of Egypt's endeavors to deal with the shortage of affordable housing. Laws that make it financially unrewarding to build for rent have produced a construction/development market geared toward the richest segments of the population and a serious shortage in affordable apartments. As a result, Egyptian poor have been living in informal settlements and the national home ownership rate is a staggering 32 percent. The problem is exacerbated because it is often easier to create informal settlements on agricultural land, which leads to its steady erosion. Ahmed explained that the government's efforts have been limited to some government-built and some public-private projects. The projects developed by the government have mostly been in unappealing remote areas. In the public-private projects, government has provided free land to private developers, who have designed homes without any of their potential users' input, and thus remain vacant.

Finally, moving to the regional level, Laamrani shared his experience working with the International Development Research Center's project in ten Middle East-North African countries, looking into how partnerships can contribute to more efficient use of water. For example, in a public-private partnership in Morocco, the partners have realized that PPP must become PPP+P – public, private *and* people – if user efficiency is the ultimate goal. This is because it is ultimately the broad base of people who can have the greatest impact on water use. Laamrani offered two key lessons. The first is that partnerships should not be forced. When they are forced around certain resources they do not lead to the empowerment that can produce social change. Second, partnerships can not be optimized if the partners are not "capacitated", or strengthened.

In reaction to the three presentations the group discussed the importance of engaging community members and not assuming that the community automatically will be represented because civil society is present. Participants raised the point was raised that having multi-stakeholder conversations is a necessary step to begin addressing a stubborn social problem, and that this process must begin even before a partnership is formally formed.

Looking at CSSPs from the vantage point of three different policy contexts made clear that focusing on the internal dynamics of CSSPs, while necessary, is not sufficient to understand them. Serious attention must be paid to the policy context in which a CSSP is embedded. Starting with a policy area, one can look into how the problem historically has been tackled by each sector or has been addressed collectively and who the various actors are. Looking at the policy problem brings into light issues that may be obscured by looking at the CSSP as a concrete or reified phenomenon.

Research in Context: Experiences in South East Asia, Latin America and Africa

The goal of this panel was to provide insights from research on CSSPs or related topics in other geographical contexts. Three panelists, Roberto Gutierrez, Albert Teo and Andrew

Firmin, shared research experiences, commenting more on the methodological and design challenges they faced conducting research on CSSPs in Latin America, social entrepreneurship in Singapore, and a global study on civil society managed out of South Africa, respectively.

Gutierrez shared the experience of the long-term Social Enterprise Knowledge Network (SEKN), an alliance of ten universities in Latin America. SEKN started with a framework from Harvard Business School and funding from the AVINA Foundation to better understand how collaborations between private and civil society sectors (CSSPs) have been established to meet the challenges produced by weak State apparatuses and high economic, social and political inequalities.

Gutierrez discussed three choices that SEKN needed to make: 1) deciding on an overall governance structure that progressively integrated partners and created a mechanism for the collective vetting of research topics; 2) selecting an inductive approach for the research, since SEKN was in more of an exploratory frame; and 3) committing to progressively strengthening research capabilities.

The agreement among the research partners was that in a few years, the partner universities in the alliance would lead the network and Harvard's role would phase out. In the process, SEKN developed three books: one about social partnerships, the second about how to effectively manage social initiatives, and the third about inclusive business.

Teo then discussed his research into social entrepreneurship in Singapore, a context in which there is a lot of interest in the topic but little academic study. In interviewing 20 social entrepreneurs, Teo was able to develop some tentative theoretical propositions. One of the research challenges he faced was having conceptual clarity around the construct of social entrepreneurship, which is defined in fundamentally different ways by the Singapore government, Ashoka, and other institutions. Teo advised potential researchers about the need for clear conceptual parameters at the outset of research, recognizing that any definition or bounding features will be contested and imperfect.

Firmin shared CIVICUS's experience running the Civil Society Index in 35 countries. The index looks at relationships between sectors, but its primary focus is to paint a portrait of strengths and weakness of civil society at the country level and to enable comparisons. In hindsight, CIVICUS has found that the index is expensive and time consuming. It demands resources from a sector that is short on time and resources and suffers from high employee turnover. Also the index relies on convening and self-criticism in a context that may not be too friendly to self-criticism.

CIVICUS also has had to grapple with the amorphous nature of civil society – it is the "leftover" piece in the three-governance framework and harder to grasp, according to Firmin. He noted implications for the study of CSSPs: researchers need to invest in

processes to convene and self-reflect and particularly engage civil society, which may lack the strength and coherence of the other sectors. He also suggested the "domain approach," in which the focus is on civic agency rather than formal organization. It entails looking at a space of activity – for example, the water sector – and mapping the different actors to understand the points of intersection and conflict.

Sonia Ospina synthesized some points of commonality from the three research experiences:

- The importance of context driving research: Each of the three research experiences was rooted in an understanding of context.
- Preference for exploratory and inductive research and a challenging of the comparability of quantitative research: This is perhaps because in the case of SEKN, Teo's researchers were dealing with a relatively new construct and phenomenon. In the CIVICUS example, solely quantitative research has not been yielding meaningful, practical insights for civil society actors, according to Firmin.
- The challenge of conceptual definitions: In dealing with amorphous concepts, finding clarity poses a challenge.
- The demands research puts on researchers and those being studied: The time and effort required by both researchers and research participants should not be underestimated in conducting rigorous research. This is even more so in the case of participatory research.

The panelists each gave one piece of advice for researchers. These were: 1) start small by focusing on a specific place/context and worry later about drawing comparisons; 2) tie research to existing work and create synergies; and 3) recognize the special nature of civil society and that one needs to do some work before bringing civil society to the table.

III. Cross-cutting Themes

The following themes emerged throughout the convening:

Studying CSSPs as a means for social change

Participants stressed that research into CSSPs should not treat the phenomenon as an end in itself but as a means for addressing intractable social problems, and ultimately for social change. They noted that one of the potential dangers of bringing a practice under research scrutiny is that zealous researchers become overly concerned with defining and naming the phenomenon, while the context and reason why the partnership exists recedes into the background. It is important for research to bring context front and center and remember that CSSPs are vehicles for social change.

Grounding research in both context and time

Although it did not come up as often as expected, some participants raised the point that if CSSPs emerge in times where other solutions have failed, or in times of high turbulence, then this would be an excellent time to study CSSPs in the Middle East as a region that is rapidly changing its sociopolitical landscape. Revolutions and uprisings will inevitably alter the relationships between the sectors, especially when it comes to increased accountability. This will impact how CSSPs emerge and function, so future research should keep the changing landscape in mind.

Rethinking the three-sector governance framework

Before launching into specific examples of partnerships, the group took a step back and explored the applicability of the conventional three-sector governance model presented by Sonia Ospina early in the convening and serving as the implicit framework for CSSPs. The conversation raised some important questions about the continued resonance of this model, even in the West; surfaced interesting assumptions; and highlighted differences in how the sectors are understood across borders.

In the conventional governance model, each sector is conceived of as having a distinct role, as discussed earlier in this report. In this conceptualization, the lines around each sector are clearly demarcated. Scholars in the convening argued that while in theory, the tri-sector division of labor seems like the key to a healthy society, in reality many factors complicate the framework in the Middle East. The weight and size of each sector are far from equal. The public sector in many Middle Eastern states is disproportionately large and authoritarian and civil society is weak and marginalized, though it is progressively gaining in strength with the advent of the Arab Spring. Depicting governance as shared between three sectors obscures the role of a large and important sector: international NGOs and donors. This is a powerful force missing from the model, along with other transnational forces such as global private business.

CSSPs as sector blurring or sector distorting

The conversations highlighted that the phenomenon of sector blurring takes on interesting variations in the Middle East. The global drivers for CSSPs, such as the push for leaner governments, the increasing complexity of social issues and the rise of corporate social responsibility, do exist in the Middle East. All of these factors contribute to increased convergence between the sectors. Sector convergence also manifests itself in the form of the same powerful elite occupying top ranks in the government, business sphere and civil society. It is common in some Middle Eastern contexts that a powerful individual wears multiple hats. While it is unclear how this kind of sector blurring impacts CSSPs, participants in the convening agreed that sector blurring, regardless of what drives it, is not desired by an increasingly astute public demanding accountability –

accountability that can be undermined by murky lines and shared responsibilities between the sectors.

While CSSPs are considered sector-blurring mechanisms and among other trends that make for more porous boundaries between the sectors, the group thought that "sector distortion" is a more apt description of the changing nature of the sectors. The disproportionate size and power of the sectors inevitably creates challenges for CSSPs.

The quality of the relationships depends on the quality of each sector

Participants in the group seemed to agree that the nature of each sector will affect the likelihood for success of CSSPs. If governments or businesses can not be trusted, can people assume that they will follow through on their role as partners? If civil society is weak and lacks capacity, can people expect it to come to the table as an equal partner? Some colleagues stressed that organized civil society needs to elevate its own capacity before it enters into partnership, while others challenged the description of civil society as weak given its role in recent uprisings. Participants noted that each sector is not homogenous, and that within each, there are some pockets of capacity and others of deficiency.

CSSPs exist in the region but may not be optimal

Long conversations ensued about the applicability of the CSSP construct to the region. However as the group started to discuss on-the-ground examples, it acknowledged that CSSPs do exist in the region and are already starting to create value. This trend indicates that there is growing awareness that one sector alone can not tackle social problems of this complexity and magnitude. The real challenge for CSSPs is how to make them more effective, considering the entry points for creating trust as an important research topic.

IV.   Research Implications

During the convening, Erica Foldy led three sessions to explore implications for research, which generated critiques of the current theories presented in the workshop, helped to identify critical issues for consideration in future research, and began to clarify potential research questions. On the last day, Foldy posted emerging themes and potential research questions on the wall and engaged the group in a participatory process to refine and focus on a few potential directions for future research.

The categories and subcategories of questions raised included:

- Relationships and power between partners
    - How to create accountability, and who is accountable to whom?

- How to manage power dynamics, and who adapts to whom?
- How does strength in one sector come at the expense of other sectors?
- What are the power relationships like *within* sectors?
- What are the implications of funding and other resources for partnerships?

- Sectors, actors and elements
  - Rethinking the three-sector governance framework to include the community, education and media and to depict the notions of blurring, distortion or collapse of the sectors in some cases
  - How to capture variation within the sectors
  - What is the role of donors and international organizations?
  - What processes should we put in place to inventory and weigh the actors' roles?

- Practice and implementation of CSSPs
  - What are the governance and facilitation mechanisms conducive to successful partnerships?
  - What conditions enable a vibrant civil sector?
  - How to create and promote trust
  - What legal and regulatory frameworks are needed?
  - What initial conditions allow a partnership to have potential (i.e. what are the inklings of success)?
  - What successful models of national level multi-stakeholder coordination exist globally/regionally?
  - In case of state failure or government weakness, can CSSPs still work?
  - How does leadership and authority relate to CSSPs?

- Substance of the work of CSSPs
  - What does "social" mean? What is social value?
  - What is the difference between CSSPs for social service and those for social change?
  - How do private firms create social value?
  - What is the relationship between social entrepreneurship and CSSPs? Between corporate social responsibility and CSSPs?

- Language, culture and context
  - Is the notion of CSSP appropriate/relevant for the Middle East region?
  - What kind of CSSP works better in the context of the region?
  - How do perceptions of language influence research into CSSPs?
  - What is the impact of recent revolutions and uprisings?
  - What are some Arab-specific value orientations that help to unpack the dynamics of CSSPs?
  - What is the role of educational systems?
  - How do the roles of the sectors vary depending on the nature of the problem being addressed and its urgency?

- Methodological and research design issues

- How can social forces analysis, longitudinal research and interdisciplinary research help advance knowledge of CSSPs?
- Do we need case studies of both effective and ineffective CSSPs and comparative case studies that analyze factors for success and failure?
- How to find and document CSSPs that fly under the radar of researchers
- What should be the participation of grassroots and community groups in the research?
- Should there be a study of both outcome measures and process measures?
- Is/should there be a typology of CSSPs? If yes, how to go about constructing it
- Do we have a critical mass of knowledge to question the validity and applicability of CSSPs?
- What is the value of conducting research by policy area – for example, addressing the question of how CSSPs can reduce unemployment? Or enable more efficient water usage?

One of the recurrent themes throughout the conversation was the point of departure for research. Some participants were concerned that studying CSSPs risks looking at them as an end rather than a means to addressing social problems, and that perhaps research should start with the social issue first and see how it is being addressed. The important point was raised that how a problem is defined will determine its solution and who gets to be involved. For example, a dominant neoliberal discourse holds that unemployment is the biggest problem facing the region. Defining this as the highest priority alludes to the private sector, the generator of jobs, as the sole actor, which is a highly risky proposition.

Over the three days the conversation shifted from questioning the relevance and applicability of CSSPs in the region, as framed by the three-sector governance model, to acknowledging that CSSPs are on the rise in the region and discussing the role of research in understanding them better. As one participant put it, "It is better to ask what *kind* of CSSPs are needed for the region rather than ask whether CSSPs are appropriate." The group maintained that power dynamics should be front and center of any research on CSSPs.

During the closing session several participants expressed interest in actively advancing a first round of exploratory research and committed to working within their own institutions to try to secure resources to support that work. The group departed with plans to convene again, preferably in 2012, and after having done some preliminary exploratory work into case studies and submitting short proposals outlining individual research interests.

About the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute

The NYU Abu Dhabi Institute is a major hub of intellectual and creative activity, advanced research, and higher education. The Institute hosts academic conferences, workshops, lectures, film series, performances, and other public programs directed both to local audiences and to the worldwide academic and research community. It is a center of the scholarly community for Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, and the Gulf, bringing together faculty and students from institutions of higher learning throughout the region.

For the full lineup, information on each event, and links to RSVP, visit the **NYUAD Institute Events Calendar.**

About the Research Center for Leadership in Action,
NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

The Research Center for Leadership in Action builds knowledge and capacity for leadership to transform society. Housed at NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, a top-ranked school for public service, the Center's unique approach integrates research with practice, bridges individual pursuits and collective endeavors, and connects local efforts with global trends. RCLA scholars use innovative research methodologies to advance big ideas in leadership. Public service leaders rely on RCLA for customized leadership development and capacity-building programs that facilitate critical reflection, peer-to-peer learning and transformation at the individual, organizational and systems levels.

To learn more, visit **RCLA's Web site**.