Beyond Government: A WANA-Specific Model for Polycentric Governance

Duration: January 2016 – July 2017

Goal: The Polycentric Governance Model (PGM) will seek to address the challenges associated with current models of democracy aid and democratisation by developing an evidence-based, multi-dimensional governance model tailored to the WANA region.

Situation Analysis: Five years after the Arab Spring and over 40 years after the transition literature was first articulated, it is clear that democracy aid and linear models for democratisation have not facilitated prosperity, political liberty and equality in the WANA region. While democratic values[1] are important, they need to be tailored vis-à-vis the region's social and political nuances. Against this backdrop, political theorists posit that WANA is home to a certain type of political system. Consequently, the linear transition paradigm, on which democracy aid is premised, is not the most constructive path towards meaningful adoption of democratic values in this region.

In response, the WANA Institute proposes to develop an indigenous model for polycentric governance, which moves beyond the transition paradigm of a two-dimensional understanding of democratic-autocratic government. The rationale is that power should not be perceived as a zero-sum game, and that by empowering multiple parts of society in decision-making processes, power is politically and socially augmented, hence not removed from existing branches of government. This way, governance can be inclusive and hence facilitating democratic values, but staying within the precepts of government concerns.

The project will be grounded on a comparative analysis of Tunisia, Jordan, and Iraq, comprising a desk review; key informant interviews and focus group discussions targeting private sector and civil society representatives, senior public administrators, women and youth; and workshops bringing together former policy leaders. From this, the project will develop an empirical data set that tests the relationship between models of governance and conflict, economic outcomes, civic cohesion and service deliverables.

1 This would include basic freedoms (e.g. of speech, association, religion, the press), rule of law, equality (e.g. in gender, age, citizenship, opportunity), accountable authorities, access to alternative sources of information, human rights.

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Project Components

The Polycentric Governance Model (PGM) will seek to address the challenges associated with current models of democracy aid and democratisation by developing an evidence-based, multi-dimensional governance model tailored to the WANA region.

The PGM revolves around five interdependent and mutually constituting pillars

(i) **Civil society**: The PGM implies the creation of an effective civil society space and multiple inclusive platforms where decision-making can take place. Civil society is not an antagonist to the state, but can provide a modality for core democratic dialogue. This project will explore which types of civil society organisations are effective in governance, and modalities for them to claim authority.

(ii) **Decentralisation**: In the WANA region, which is characterised by tribalism and informal networks, it is imperative to incorporate the local level in governance. The project will identify where decisions are most effectively made and modalities for localised decision-making.

(iii) **Bureaucracy:** Implementing authorities routinely lack the competence, capacity or will to make institution-building effective. Breaking path dependency and capitalising on the positive side of wasta structures in WANA bureaucracies is key to overcoming these challenges. The PGM will explore modalities to introduce meritocratic processes, not by dismantling wasta structures, but by promoting their accountability, transparency and effectiveness.

(iv) **Generating Knowledge:** Critical thinking and access to information are prerequisites for polycentric governance. The region suffers, however, from a detachment between policy, programming and research that can be bridged by local think tanks that facilitate opportunities for civil society, local leaders and political stakeholders to engage constructively. The project will assess the impact of knowledge generating institutions and how they could enhance a polycentric governance structures.

(v) **Resilience:** Polycentric governance is designed to withstand and evolve in crises, by promoting multiple centres of power, decision-making hierarchies and modalities for cooperation and information sharing. The PGM aims to build such capabilities by creating both horizontal and vertical redundancy, and demonstrating how redundancy is more cost-efficient than optimisation in the long-term.

Key activities	Deliverables	Outcomes
• Desk review, FGDs, informant interviews, and key data collection • High level roundtables with former poltical leaders • Workshops to explore polycentric governance modalities • Develop empirical dataset • Participation in academic conferences to present and discuss findings • Advocate the PGM to high-level policy circles • Two-day high level conference for 75 policy leaders, analysts, private sector, academics, civil society representatives and youth	• Research report developing a WANA-specific model for polycentric governance • White paper articulating actionable policy recommendations • Five-pillar data set linking the adoption of PGM to positive social economic outcomes, conflict resilience, social cohesion, and human development • Five policy briefs within each pillar • Pilot forum for polycentric governance practice, where public officials, policy analysts, civil society, youth, private sector, tribal and religious leaders will meet thrice annually to discuss progress	• The adoption, adaptation, or integration of an evidence-based, multi-dimensional, and region-specific polycentric governance model that address the political, economic, social and historic specificities of the WANA region, allowing governments and donors to overcome the challenges with conventional democratic transition