Regional consultation on
"Ethics in Scientific Research and Technology Applications in the Arab Region"
Beirut, 11-12 July 2017

Concept Note

I. Background

Research is a systematic, socially organized quest for new and better insight. Scientific knowledge is of value in and of itself. Many research results can also be useful for improving social conditions. The ultimate responsibility of research is to seek the truth. Accordingly, scientific integrity is a key aspect of research ethics. In many disciplines, there is disagreement over fundamental questions of scientific theory. However, honest documentation and consistent reasoning are absolute requirements, regardless of scholars' position with a view to theory. In the humanities and social sciences, research is distinguished by researchers' views on society and humanity, a factor that is usually enriching. However, this requires that researchers consider how their own attitudes can colour their choice of topics, data sources and the balance between possible interpretations (De nasjonale forskningsetiske komiteer, 2006).

Scientific research and technology applications intersect with society in many ways; they often bring about societal impacts that raise ethical dilemmas. Advanced genetic engineering and testing, autonomous systems such as driverless cars, and big data collection are just a few examples of science and technology developments with serious ethical implications. Climate change is also emerging as a topic of ethical discussion, in light of the scale of its current and projected impacts on society and nature, as well as the impacts of the adaptation and mitigation strategies that are being put forward.

Appropriate and innovative strategies, tools, more inter-disciplinarity and coordination among stakeholders are needed at the institutional, national and regional levels to promote reflection and debate on ethical issues in science and technology, raise awareness among specialists and the general public, educate researchers, and ensure scientific research and technological applications are respectful of human dignity and freedom.

Recognizing the above need, Arab countries have shown an increasing interest in ethics issues. Approaches followed to date include setting up national ethics committees, and

developing national standards, codes and legislations in the field. For example, in 2016, the Lebanese National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS) partnered with the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO, the National Advisory Committee on Ethics in Biology and Health, and a number of scientific and academic institutions, to prepare the National Charter of Ethics and Guiding Principles of Scientific Research in Lebanon. The document aims to guide institutions to develop detailed policies aiming to protect the transparency and the credibility of scholars and research and to promote scientific research and creativity for social development.

In Egypt, led by a presidential initiative, a National Committee was established under the auspices of the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (ASRT) to study the ethical implications, including those related to the environment, of large-scale projects such as the phase II of the Suez Canal project, the Sinai Peninsula development projects and others.

Responding to the growing trend that many social and development research are conducted beyond university boundaries, the Arab Council Social Sciences (ACSS) produced guidelines on Research ethics in social sciences.

What can be learned from the various national experiences in the Arab countries? What elements of these national approaches could constitute a basis for a regional ethics approach? In connection with these issues, a regional meeting on Ethics in Scientific Research and Technology Applications in the Arab Region will be organized by UNESCO, the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO, CNRS and ASRT according to the objectives, structure and format presented below.

II.   Objectives and outcomes

The regional meeting on Ethics in Scientific Research and Technology Applications in the Arab Region aims to explore a regional approach for promoting ethics in scientific research and technology applications in the Arab region.

The specific objectives of the meeting will be the following:

1. To highlight a number of national cases from the Arab region where tools have been developed and applied to promote ethics in scientific research and technology applications, and learn from these experiences;
2. To discuss common elements among the presented national approaches, and explore the possibility of elaborating a regional approach (for example a regional charter) that could be applied by institutions and countries in the region;

The meeting will result in a set of recommendations for advancing national and regional tools that promote the ethics of scientific research and technology applications in the Arab region.

Moreover, the afternoon of the second day will benefit from the presence of ethics experts to discuss the future role and focus areas of the Regional Documentation and Information Centre for Bioethics and Ethics of Science and Technology (RDIC-BEST), hosted at the ASRT.

III.   Date and venue

The meeting will be organized at the Bristol Hotel, Beirut, Lebanon, during the period 11-12 July 2017.

IV.   Participants and format

It is expected that the meeting will bring together around 50 experts (1-3 participants from each of the 18 Arab countries). Participants will mainly include high-level representatives of universities, research institutions and research councils in the Arab countries, including vice-presidents, deans for research, and directors of research ethics.

The meeting will have an interactive format. For the duration of the meeting, the programme will include a mix of presentations, group work and group discussions to cover the two main themes, namely promoting ethics in scientific research, and ensuring ethical integrity in technology applications within large-scale projects.
The working language is Arabic.

V.   Partners

The consultation meeting will be organized by the National Council for Scientific Research, CNRS, Lebanon and the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO, in cooperation with the UNESCO (Beirut and Cairo Offices), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology in Egypt. Each of the partners brings an in-depth knowledge of the tabled issues.

- CNRS-L: Since its establishment in 1962, CNRS-L is serving the scientific community in Lebanon covering all scientific disciplines. Its main objective is to encourage scientific research and support future human resources development along the general scientific policies adopted by the government. CNRS-L is committed to keep the scientific community in Lebanon connected with advances achieved worldwide and at the same time dedicate its resources to meet local development objectives. In 2016, in collaboration with many experts in ethics and with the support the Lebanese National commission of UNESCO, the CNRS-L developed a charter of ethical principles in the field of scientific research that was adopted by 19 universities and research centers in Lebanon.

- LNCU: The Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO is a national body that liaises between the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as well as the Arab League Educational Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO)and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures (ALF) on one side, and the Lebanese government and the Lebanese civil society on the other in the area of Education, Sciences, Culture and Communication.

- UNESCO:
  Through research, foresight and management of social transformations, UNESCO strengthens the **link between knowledge, policy and practice**, by drawing on the competences of the social sciences to advance innovative thinking that holds the potential for transforming societies across different facets of the SDGs. Foresight will introduce the use of the future in comprehending the nature of the SDGs and developing a wider range of human responses to the challenges and aspirations of the post-2015 agenda. UNESCO continues to build and reinforce linkages among ethicists, scientists, policy-makers, judges, journalists, and civil society to assist

Member States in enacting sound and reasoned policies on ethical issues in science and technology. UNESCO is currently leading the elaboration of a declaration on the ethics of climate change.[1] UNESCO Beirut Office is the Arab regional office for education, whereas UNESCO Cairo Office is the Arab regional office for science and technology.

- ESCWA: ESCWA provides a framework for the formulation and harmonization of sectoral policies for member countries, a platform for congress and coordination, a home for expertise and knowledge, and an information observatory. ESCWA activities are coordinated with the divisions and main offices of the Headquarters of the United Nations, specialized agencies, and international and regional organizations, including the League of Arab States and its subsidiary bodies, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. In an increasingly dominating global economy, the need of harnessing science, technology and innovation (STI) has become quite evident. As globalization has enhanced the dissemination of knowledge and expertise, there is a pressing need to couple STI outcomes with business enterprises and practical applications in the industrial and technical domains. ESCWA established in 2010 a subsidiary unit in Amman Jordan, ESCWA Technology Centre to assist member countries in strengthening their capabilities to develop and manage national systems, develop, transfer, adapt and apply technology and to determine the suitable technology for the region and facilitate its development.

- ASRT: ASRT is the main coordinating body for scientific research in Egypt. At the regional level, ASRT has established since 2010 the Regional Documentation and Information Centre for Bioethics and Ethics of Science and Technology (RDIC-BEST), with the support of UNESCO. RDIC-BEST supports the provision of educational resources to students and teachers in the region.

VI. Organization Committee

CNRS-L: Dr. Fawaz Fawaz, Senior consultant
      Ms Najat Ayoub, Assistant
LNCU: Ms Ramza Jaber Saad, Assistant Secretary General
UNESCO: Dr Seiko Sugita, SHS Programme Specialist, Beirut Office
      Ms Jana El Baba, SHS Programme Specialist, Cairo Office

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[1] http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/comest/ethical-principles/.