

# Performing and Responsive Social Sciences in the Western Balkans

## PERFORM

### 1. Current Situation

The link between social science research and policy making, including a meaningful public debate, is weak in Western Balkan countries. The potentials of social science and research remain under-used in their contributions to quality, evidence-informed policy making and public debate. Although various thematic research projects and networks of high quality have emerged over the past years, they still require stronger linkages with and impact on policy making.

Social science research (SSR) plays a paramount role in the critical exploration and analysis of problems related to reforms. Social sciences are able to draw attention to alternative policy options, reinforce the necessity of political reforms and nurture public debate. They can contribute to building a more open and democratic society.

Governments and societies pay a high price for an underperforming social science and research sector.

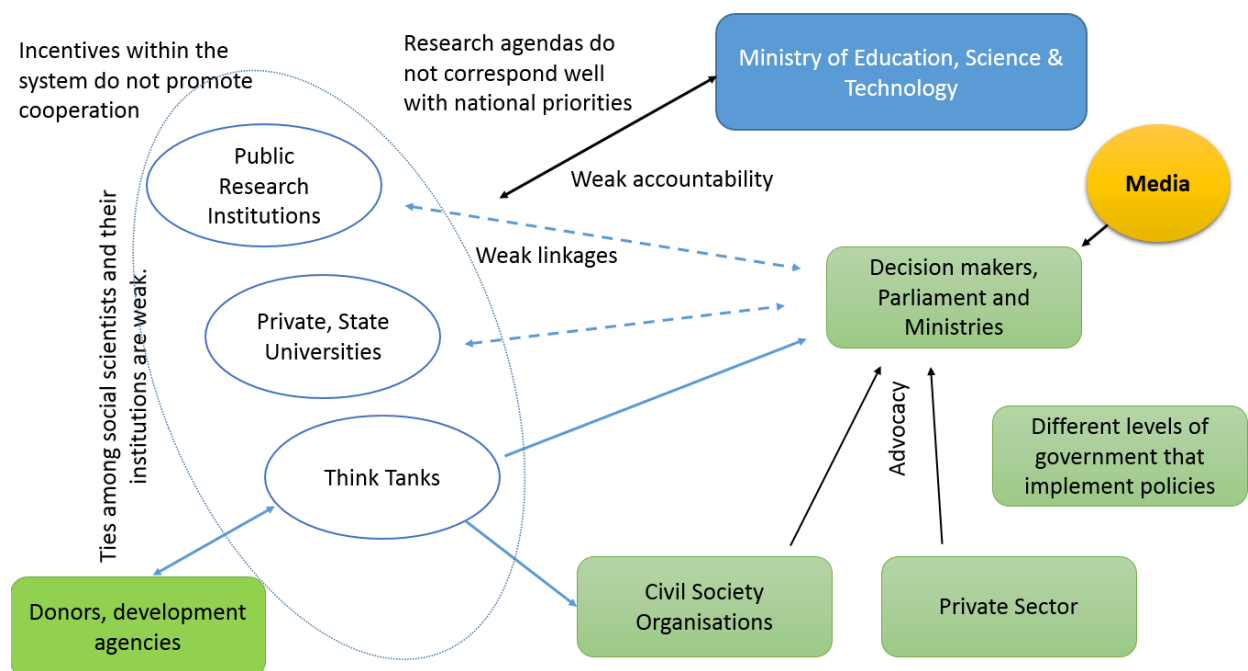


Fig. 1: Stakeholders in the wider system and key impediments

What are the main factors that currently restrain development towards an effective social science and research system? These are just a few issues:

- Ties among social scientists and their institutions are weak. Competition tends to prevail over cooperation. Knowledge sharing and exchange is limited. There is a wide communication gap between public and private universities and institutes. This weakens the attempts to advocate for good framework conditions and to ensure quality of research.
- Incentives within the system do not promote excellence and encourage linkages with the policy domain, civil society and the media.
- Present research agendas do not correspond with national priorities. Linkages with policy makers, civil society and the private sector are very weak. The social science sector tends to orbit around itself and is self-referential.
- The current evaluation system for government-funded research projects does not promote accountability nor does it contribute to supporting excellence. The proposed research projects bear little relevance to the agenda of the government and civil society.
- Government funding for social sciences is low, allocation of funds is considered to be intransparent.

## **2. Swiss Development Cooperation Supports Social Science Research**

The Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) considers social sciences to be of major importance with regard to fostering the socio-economic and political reform process in the Western Balkans. The SDC Research Concept emphasizes that the use of research findings in policy and practice is equally important as the quality and evaluation standards, interdisciplinary approaches and cooperation partnerships. Social science research should follow certain principles such as:

- Relevance for current political reforms;
- Independence of the research community;
- Systemic linkages between scientific research and the spheres of politics, media and society at large.

SDC supports several research programmes in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, including the SCOPES and the RRPP. Both programmes will come to an end in 2016.

The new programme PERFORM focuses on strengthening the relevance of social sciences for political reforms. SDC expects this new programme to address national research systems in Albania and Serbia with a possibility to be extended to other countries in the Western Balkans in the future.

### 3. The Framework of PERFORM

#### Overall goal of the project:

A strong, confident and publicly positioned social science research community meaningfully contributes to socio-economic and political reform processes

The overall goal can be achieved through the following three components (outcomes)

#### **Strengthened social science community**

This component will aim to improve horizontal structures and cooperation within the social science community as well as to enhance capacities of research. This will contribute to developing a relevant research agenda, better knowledge sharing and cooperation, and subsequently to better quality research. A stronger community will have a more audible voice, enabling an effective advocacy on issues such as an enabling environment for social scientists and financing mechanisms for social sciences.

#### **Systemic linkages to political reform processes, civil society organizations, private sector and media**

Component 2 will focus on facilitating the development of mechanisms and systems for the collaboration between social science and other domains of society. Through which mechanisms can social science coordinate with other domains to develop and update its research agenda? What will be required for social science to deliver the evidence from its research which policy makers and civil society need for their work?

Stronger alliances of different interest groups may be required to ensure that research results will enter in and impact the policy cycle.

#### **Favourable framework conditions and financial mechanisms**

PERFORM will work with the respective government institutions to facilitate and contribute to improved conditions in the overall framework for social science and research. Successful system changes under component 1 and 2 will also result in the creation of favourable framework conditions and financial mechanisms.

#### **Grant Facility**

PERFORM will have a grant facility, which is intended to support the systemic change objectives of PERFORM under its three components. This may include for instance:

- Initiatives that contribute to closer horizontal cooperation and exchange within the SSRS (Social Science Research Systems);
- Innovative mechanisms, platforms and instruments for linkages and cooperation between the stakeholders in the wider system of change (social scientists, policy makers, civil society and private sector);

- Specific advocacy initiatives.

The grant facility will be used as a complementary measure contributing to the project's systemic change objectives (including the promotion of scaling-up effects). It will be operated in a discretionary mode, allowing the use of the fund for innovative initiatives and opportunities. The allocation system will be transparent and follow fixed criteria and steps.

#### **4. How will PERFORM work?**

##### **Systemic approach**

PERFORM will take a systemic approach, focusing its interventions on sustainable system changes in the areas described by the three components.

The choice of a systemic approach has significant implications on the role of the project and its relationship with partners and stakeholders in the social science research system, and government. PERFORM will encourage and support actors within the SSRS and government to take initiatives for systemic change. The project will constitute a neutral facilitator that stands outside of the system and catalyses changes within. This also has implications on how the project uses its resources: The grant facility, for example, will not fully cover the funding of research projects, but will be complementary (co-funding) or it will fund preparatory work required to obtain funds from somewhere else. The grant facility will also support research into more effective systems of cooperation and communication.

##### **RRPP and PERFORM**

PERFORM will build on RRPP's results and networks. It will communicate closely with the RRPP network, explore opportunities for synergies and will use these synergies for the benefit of both projects.

##### **PERFORM's Implementing Partners**

The project is implemented in a partnership of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation<sup>1</sup> with the University of Fribourg, Interfaculty Institute for Central and Eastern Europe (IICEE), which also hosts the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.helvetas.org](http://www.helvetas.org)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unifr.ch/iicee/en/institute>; [www.rrpp-westernbalkans.net](http://www.rrpp-westernbalkans.net)