STRATEGY SESSION

25ᵀᴴ OCTOBER 2022

The strategy session took place on the evening of **the 25ᵗʰ of October**, at the Westin Hotel in Cairo. This was a high-level participation event, with leaders and senior management from government ministries, regional councils, leading research institutions, and other national and regional stakeholders across the Middle East and North Africa. In addition, representatives from key academic publishers and solutions providers also attended.

The goal of this session was to inaugurate a cross-regional dialogue concerning the development of practical policies and actionable insights for Open Science at an institutional level (both higher education institutions and research libraries).
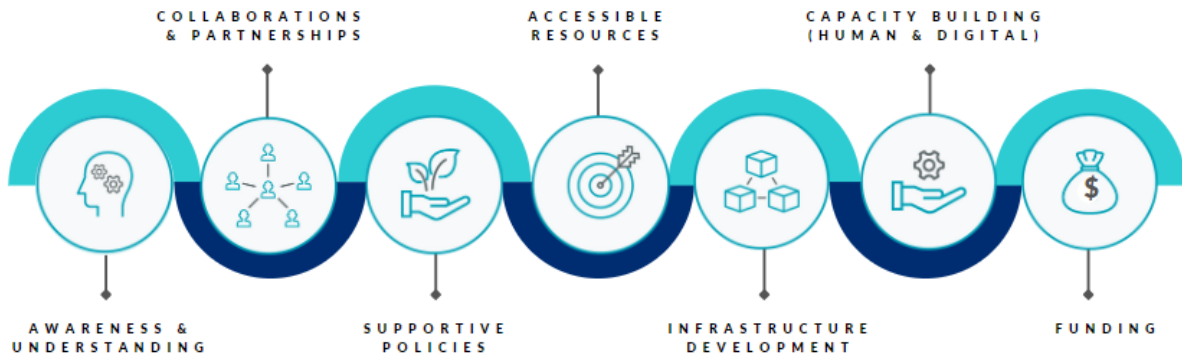
The pivotal role which the region could play in the global transition towards more accessible, sustainable and inclusive research and education models was foregrounded during the moderated discussion. This started with an exploration of the challenges exist impeding engagement with open science by the region's scholarly communities and research institutions.

During the session, 5 key challenges were identified.

LANGUAGE   AWARENESS   POLICIES   CAPACITY   FUNDING

The first challenge was **Language**, a category which included the need to establish regional definitions for Open Science categories that accurately defined these classifications in the Arab language. This category also included the difficulties posed by language barriers (hampering the ability of Arab stakeholders to engage with existing communities and resources) and the lack of RTL (right-to-left) functionality in established digital solutions and infrastructures. The second challenge identified was **Awareness**, which encompassed both the dearth of accessible educational resources and the limited understanding of the benefits of Open Science amongst many regional stakeholder groups. This category also includes the widespread damage caused by predatory practices and the need to address the mistrust and misapprehensions caused by these activities. The third key challenge concerned **Policies** – both the negative impact of policies emphasising university rankings and the 'publish or perish' culture they foster, and the need for more robust national and institutional policies explicitly promoting Open Science activities and outputs. The fourth challenge related to **Capacity**, ranging from the need to develop essential skills and knowledge in key stakeholder groups to the importance of ensuring adequate infrastructures and structural frameworks are put in place. The final challenge identified was **Funding**.
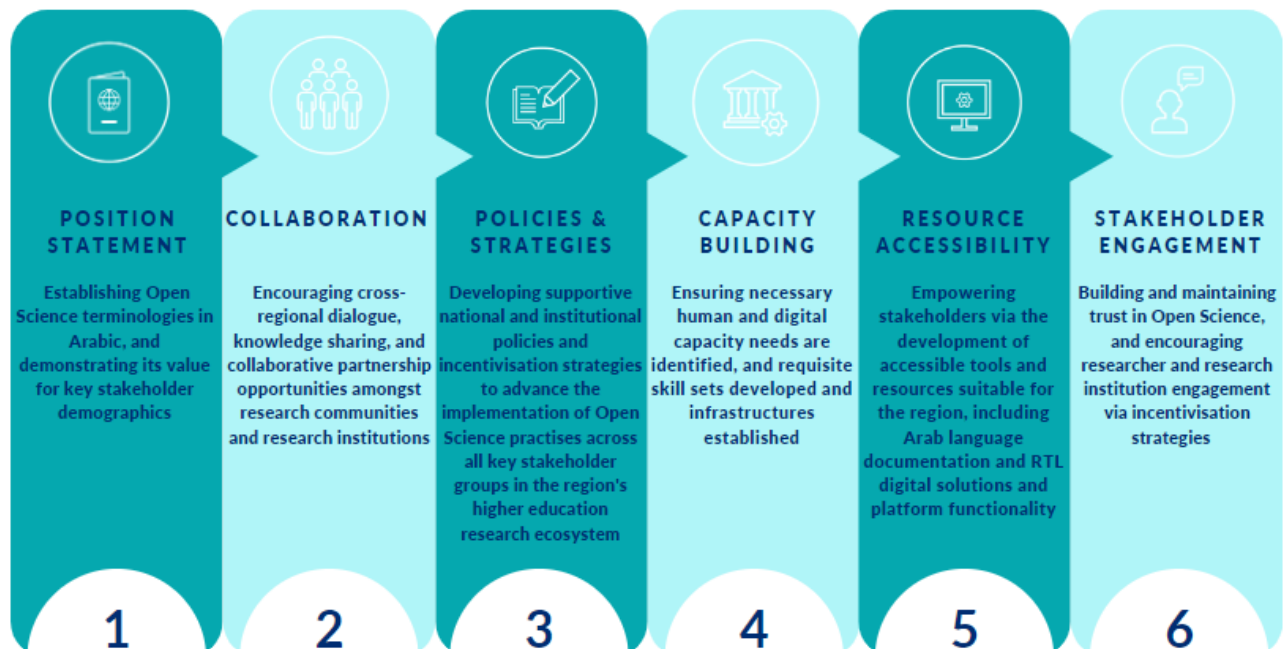
During the strategy session, a number of solutions to these five challenges were proposed.

The main focus areas identified were:

- Building better understanding and awareness of the nature and benefits of Open Science for researchers and research institutions
- Encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing by key stakeholder groups and institutions
- Developing more supportive policies and structural frameworks
- Ensuring more accessible resources were made available (especially in Arabic language) and ensuring stakeholders are aware of existing resources
- Developing better regional, national and institutional infrastructures to support the advancement of open science (ranging from structural frameworks to cloud-based networks and platforms)
- Capacity building
- Reallocation of funds to support advancement of Open Science

The moderated discussion ended with the identification of 6 strategic priorities for the next three years, which aligned with UNESCO's broader Open Science Recommendations but reflected the specific needs of the region's research institutions.

POSITION STATEMENT	COLLABORATION	POLICIES & STRATEGIES	CAPACITY BUILDING	RESOURCE ACCESSIBILITY	STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
Establishing Open Science terminologies in Arabic, and demonstrating its value for key stakeholder demographics	Encouraging cross-regional dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaborative partnership opportunities amongst research communities and research institutions	Developing supportive national and institutional policies and incentivisation strategies to advance the implementation of Open Science practises across all key stakeholder groups in the region's higher education research ecosystem	Ensuring necessary human and digital capacity needs are identified, and requisite skill sets developed and infrastructures established	Empowering stakeholders via the development of accessible tools and resources suitable for the region, including Arab language documentation and RTL digital solutions and platform functionality	Building and maintaining trust in Open Science, and encouraging researcher and research institution engagement via incentivisation strategies
1	2	3	4	5	6

The session concluded with a brief overview of the Knowledge E Foundation's proposed new initiative, the Forum for Open Research in MENA (F.O.R.M.), a non-profit membership organisation designed to encourage and facilitate the exchange of actionable insights and development of practical policies relating to Open Science for libraries, universities and research councils across the Arab world.

The proposal was well received, with attendees offering valuable insights regarding the governance structures, the naming of the initiative, and key initial milestones.

Qualified endorsement was received from organisations including the Qatar National Library and the Arab Universities Association, as well as interest from UNESCO and the Arab States Research and Education Network (ASREN). In addition, over 80 individuals and institutions registered their interest to join the Forum.

F.O.R.M.

Forum for Open Research in MENA