



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There has been a rapid rise in the number of philanthropic institutions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over the past 15 years. In 2014, U.A.E. institutions contributed approximately 40% of all philanthropic donations in the Gulf region (Coutts, 2015a).¹ Currently, the UAE is home to 43 formal donor entities, and approximately half of these are state-run organizations (Sabry, 2014). Most of these state organizations have been established by members of various ruling families, and their activities are typically modeled on private family foundations from the United States (US), such as the Gates Foundation. Despite the growing philanthropic sector, there has been no aggregation of information related to state-funded foundations' various missions, and, in general, information on philanthropic activity in the country is scarce.

This paper, which lays the groundwork for future research on philanthropy, examines the growth of 11 state-funded philanthropic foundations in the UAE, nine of which opened in 2003 or later. These state-funded foundations are defined as those that receive the majority of their funding from various government figures or related entities. Data was obtained through interviews with mid- and executive-level staff at the foundations, as well as from publically available reports and websites. The data was then analyzed to explore the growth of foundations in the UAE, the ways in which they engage with stakeholders, their primary areas of focus, and challenges for their future developments. The paper concludes by offering suggestions for future policies and research that could lead to more cohesive, sustainable, and wider-reaching philanthropic endeavors in the country.

What is the Status of State-funded Philanthropy in the United Arab Emirates?

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Introduction

In 2014, philanthropic giving in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) accounted for the second largest share of all philanthropy in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Coutts, 2015a). U.A.E. donors, individuals, foundations, and corporations gave \$337 million USD, which was approximately 38% of all philanthropic donations in the GCC that year (Coutts, 2015a). The past 15 years have been characterized by a remarkable growth in philanthropy across the UAE, and, in particular, there has been strong growth in philanthropy related to state-funded foundations in the country.

This policy paper presents findings from an exploratory study of 11 state-funded foundations in the UAE. It begins by discussing the development of global philanthropy and a few of the historical reasons behind why foundations have been widely established in Western nations. It then considers the GCC and, specifically, the case of the UAE. The paper explores some of the ways in which local philanthropic organizations operate and engage stakeholders across the country, and it examines their primary areas of focus. It concludes with policy recommendations that are designed to address some of the challenges facing these institutions, in order to improve their sustainability and impact and to foster greater cooperation for the public good among foundations and related institutions.

Background: Growth of Western Philanthropic Foundations

The early twentieth century marked a rise in philanthropy in the West, with the establishment of philanthropic foundations such as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1905), the Rockefeller Foundation (1913), and the Ford Foundation (1936) (Roelofs, 2003). By the start of the twenty-first century, there were more philanthropic foundations operating around the globe than ever before (Anheir & Daly, 2004). In fact, more than half

¹ In 2014, across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the Coutts Million Dollar Donor Report tracked donations of one million dollars or more made by individuals, foundations, and corporations or given to charities (to learn more, see Methodology, 2015).

Figure 1: Growth of Philanthropic Foundations in the United States



Sources: Foundation Center, 2014; National Philanthropic Trust, 2015

of all philanthropic organizations in Europe and the US were established after 2000 (Spero, 2014). Figure 1 shows that, in the United States, as of 2012, there were approximately 86,200 foundations, holding \$715 billion USD in assets (Foundation Center, 2014).

While both benefactors and beneficiaries tend to view philanthropy as inherently positive, we cannot assume that generosity is always the primary driver of such work. We, therefore, must consider other motivations behind philanthropy. When we look at U.A.E. organizations, it is particularly important to understand the history of Western philanthropy because this has become the dominant global model. Historically, people in the West have established philanthropic institutions to achieve tax relief; foster positive public relations; and (on the part of wealthy individuals and governments) to exercise soft power (Brenner, 2012; Roelofs, 2003; Wood, 2015; Zunz, 2011).² While these motivations may not be universal, the rapid expansion of philanthropy and questions surrounding some of these endeavors—such as the Gates Foundation's efforts to dominate global health priorities (Edwards, 2009)—suggests that these motivations are not wholly uncommon.

Philanthropy in the GCC and the Case of the UAE

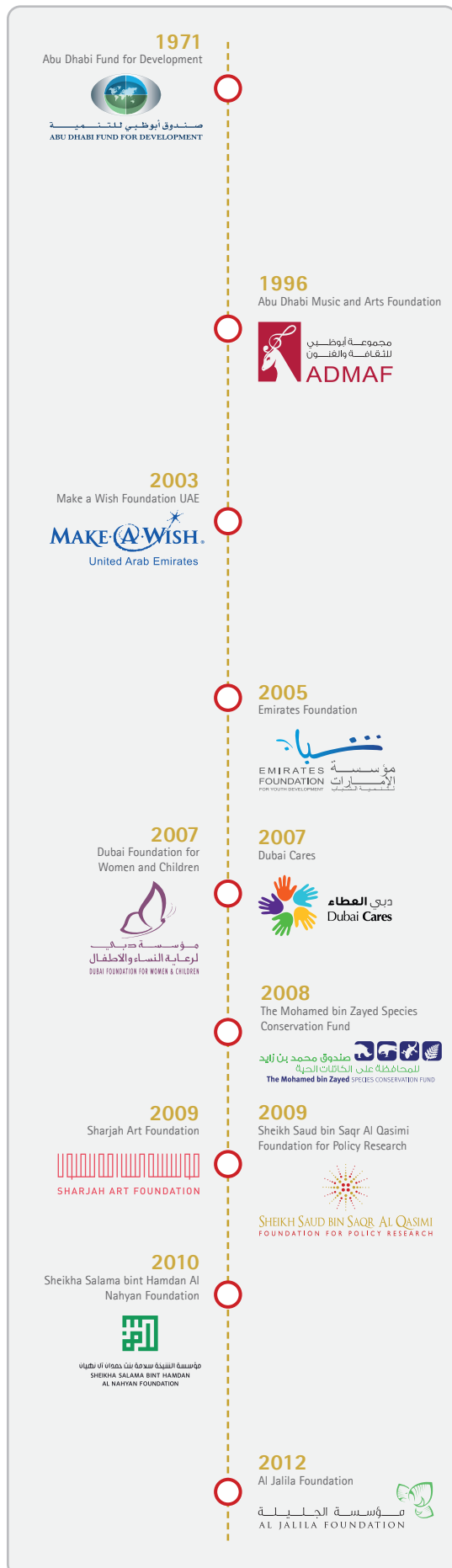
Philanthropic giving has an extensive history in the GCC, where Islam and its associated requirement of *zakat*³ have contributed to a longstanding charitable culture (Ibrahim & Sherif, 2008; Jalbout, 2014). In 2014, foundations, corporations, and families in the Gulf donated \$337 million USD to a variety of causes. That figure was even higher in 2013, at \$1.84 billion USD (including an exceptionally large five-year grant of \$1.25 billion USD, made by the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development) (Coutts 2015a; Coutts, 2015b). Within the countries of the Gulf, the UAE has proved to be home to some notably generous individuals, as both government and private donors give substantially to a range of causes.

In order to effectively explore the philanthropy landscape in the UAE, we conducted a study of government or state-funded U.A.E. foundations. To be

² To read more about other motivations behind Western philanthropy, please read the full paper (Ridge, Kippels, & Shami, forthcoming). E-mail info@alqasimifoundation.rak.ae to request a copy.

³ *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam and mandates that individuals donate a percentage, typically 2.5%, of their wealth to benefit those who are in need.

Figure 2: Timeline of U.A.E. Foundations' Establishments



included in this study, each foundation had to meet five criteria. The organization had to:

1. Be founded and/or cofounded by the U.A.E. government or by a member of a ruling family;
2. Self-identify as a "foundation" or a "fund";⁴
3. Receive the majority of its funding from the state;
4. Distribute grants, donations, in-kind gifts, scholarships, or the equivalent; and
5. Be actively operational.

We began by identifying when each foundation was established, its location, its modes of communication, and its key grant and programmatic areas. We were, therefore, able to highlight underdeveloped areas of research and identify potentially neglected and over-served areas within the U.A.E.

Establishment, Location, Communication, and Staffing

In order to get a comprehensive picture of state-funded foundations in the UAE, we first asked about when these organizations were established, their locations, their communication practices, staffing, and key focus areas.

Nine out of the 11 foundations in this paper were established in or after 2003, as shown in Figure 2. This is consistent with the fact that, globally, the number of philanthropic institutions more than doubled over a similar time period (Spero, 2014). As a new foundation, which is focusing on youth and operating under the auspices of the Ruler of Ajman, was inaugurated as recently as 2015 (Abdulaziz bin Humaid Foundation, 2015), it appears that the growth of foundations in the UAE may not slow in the near future.⁵ In order to get a more comprehensive picture of state-funded foundations, we then looked at their specific locations with the UAE.

Abu Dhabi, the UAE's capital, is home to the most state-funded foundations in the country, with six located in the emirate. Dubai, the UAE's financial hub, boasts three foundations, while Sharjah and the

⁴ With the exception of Dubai Cares, which operates like a foundation but does not include either designation in its title.

⁵ The Abdulaziz bin Humaid Foundation is not shown in Figure 2 as it opened after the selection process for this research was complete. It was, therefore, not included in the study.

Figure 3: Locations of U.A.E. Foundations



northern emirate of Ras Al Khaimah each contain one state-funded foundation. The physical locations of these foundations are shown on the map in Figure 3.

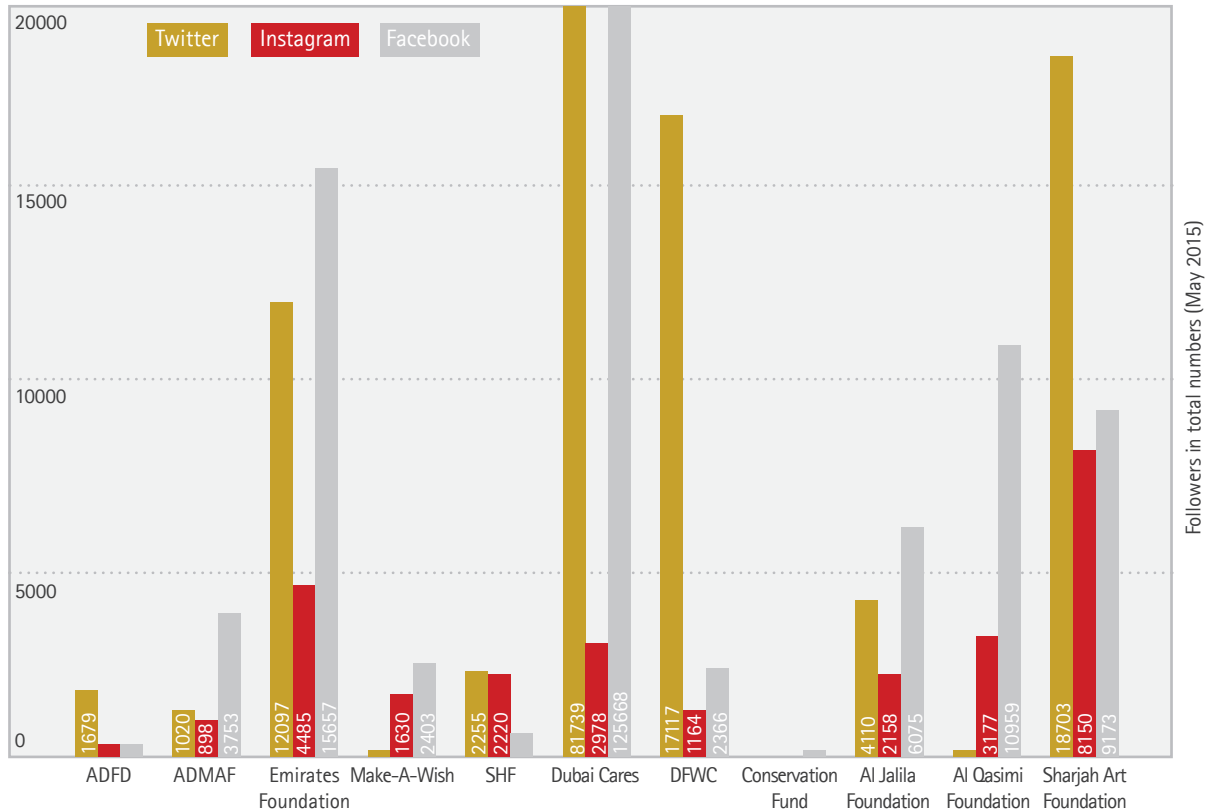
Each of the 11 foundations was also examined in terms of its staff. On average, state-funded foundations had a staff size of 34. This ranged from five people at Make-A-Wish UAE to around 100 at the Emirates Foundation. While many foundations were reluctant to reveal the percentage of nationals on staff, every foundation had some combination of Emirati and expatriate staff. Across all foundations, the majority of national staff were young. Interviews with senior management confirmed this, with one executive stating, "There is a lot of young staff, so there needs to be internal capacity building." Many employers spoke broadly about the difficulties of finding and retaining qualified national and expatriate staff.

In terms of programmatic areas, we found that, consistent with global philanthropic trends, U.A.E. foundations tend to focus on causes that are close-to-home (Coutts, 2014a), as most of the foundations in our study focus on domestic issues. Eight of the 11 foundations focus primarily on domestic issues, and they typically dedicate the majority of their resources

to a specific emirate and then to the country overall. Only three foundations focused on international issues (Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD), Dubai Cares, and Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund), and these did so primarily by distributing funds or grants to specific areas of focus in non-UAE countries.

Regardless of where their activities were focused, all foundations stressed the importance of effective communication with stakeholders. In a country in which expatriates represent a large percentage of the population ("Expats Make Up," 2011), the language of communication is critical for foundations. While Arabic is the official language of the UAE and the region, English is frequently used among residents. As such, to reach a range of stakeholders nationally, regionally, and internationally, ten of the eleven foundations in the study maintain websites in both Arabic and English. During interviews, foundation staff explained how vital bilingual materials were for the effectiveness of their programs, which serve both Emirati and expatriate communities. One high-ranking staff member interviewed at a foundation in Abu Dhabi noted, "Everything is bilingual. Given our associations, what kind of message would it give if [our online

Figure 4: Foundations' Social Media Use in Terms of Followers⁷



presence] wasn't [sic] in Arabic?" Foundation staff also described how they strove to connect with their stakeholders—including the local community, donors, government entities, and other groups—using a variety of bilingual channels.

As a part of their efforts to interact with stakeholders, the majority of foundations used several social media platforms to promote their activities. The most widespread was YouTube, with all 11 foundations posting at least one YouTube video during the 2014–2015 year.⁶ Figure 4 illustrates how foundations use Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to varying degrees in order to promote engagement. Figure 4 indicates that, in 2015, Facebook was the social media channel with the largest reach in terms of the foundations' average number of followers (16,094). Because Facebook attracts diverse and international followers, one foundation uses advertisements in conjunction with initiatives on its Facebook account. On average, Twitter maintains the second largest number of followers (12,630), followed by Instagram (2,319). Despite Instagram's having the fewest total number

of followers, the staff of some of these organizations noted that Instagram seems to be increasing in popularity among their stakeholders and that they find it particularly valuable as a platform for reaching younger, national audiences. One senior interviewee in Abu Dhabi stated, "Instagram is of special interest because of the oral culture here." Similarly, a staff member from another foundation commented, "We had the most success reaching and attracting local youth after developing our Instagram account."

Key Grant and Programmatic Activities

Turning to grant and programmatic activities, we found that there was a variety of both taking place across the different U.A.E. foundations. Most institutions typically awarded grants through a formal application process, although, in some cases, grants were given to nominated individuals. Some grants were awarded to U.A.E. nationals to send them abroad, whether by funding their studies overseas, supporting their participation in international workshops, or

⁶ For this paper, "actively using" refers to uploading one video during the period of August 9, 2014 to August 9, 2015.

⁷ Figures taken from the foundations' social media sites during the period of May 20–28, 2015.

encouraging them to volunteer in foreign countries. Grants were also used to bring foreign and local talent to foundations to conduct research, run short-term training programs, and lead other programmatic activities.

In terms of program access, the eight foundations that run programs in-country generally offer them for free. While most programs are typically open to all members of the U.A.E. community, there are some programs geared specifically towards particular groups of people (e.g., some of the Emirates Foundation's programs have been designed to develop Emirati youth primarily). Beyond access, we explored the key programmatic areas on which these foundations focus. As Figure 5 below shows, the main areas in which state foundations invest programmatic resources are education and youth, health, arts and culture, and infrastructure.

The most common area of focus among U.A.E. foundations was education and youth, with six foundations working in this area. In Ras Al Khaimah, the

Al Qasimi Foundation runs programs in collaboration with U.A.E. schools, including programmatic activities for students, teachers, and administrators from both private and public schools. The Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation (ADMAF) and the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation also run educational programs outside of school hours for students, families, and teachers based in Abu Dhabi. The Salama bint Hamdan Foundation also collaborates with major international universities, such as Yale, to develop early childhood programs in Abu Dhabi. With 45,000 young people in its database, the Emirates Foundation has created a series of educational programs across the country for local youth, focusing on areas such as entrepreneurship, mentoring, and organized volunteering. Meanwhile, the Sharjah Art Foundation runs education programs related to the arts. Finally, Dubai Cares focuses on education in international contexts, financing primary education projects (e.g., establishing libraries, translating books, and building schools) in over 35 countries.

Figure 5: Main Programmatic Areas of 11 State-funded U.A.E. Foundations

Focus Area	Foundation(s) Operating in Focus Area(s)					
Education and Youth (6)	Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation	Emirates Foundation	Sharjah Art Foundation	Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation	Dubai Cares	Al Qasimi Foundation
Health (5)	Al Jalila Foundation	Make-A-Wish Foundation UAE	Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation	Dubai Cares	Al Qasimi Foundation	
Arts and Culture (4)	Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation	Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation	Sharjah Art Foundation	Al Qasimi Foundation		
Infrastructure (3)	Abu Dhabi Fund for Development	Dubai Cares	Al Qasimi Foundation			
Environment (2)	Abu Dhabi Fund for Development	Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund				
Family and Well-being (1)	Dubai Foundation for Women and Children					

Health is the second major area that state-funded foundations are focusing on in the UAE. This is the sole focus of the Al Jalila Foundation, both in the UAE and the wider region. The organization supports health interests by providing scholarships and supporting research. The Make-A-Wish Foundation is also dedicated to health and, in collaboration with hospitals, works to grant wishes to children aged three to 18 who have life-threatening medical conditions. Another foundation working in this sector is the Salama bint Hamdan Foundation, which runs health awareness campaigns, funds health research grants, and works on system reviews with public health authorities. In Ras Al Khaimah, the Al Qasimi Foundation also engages the health sector through the provision of grants for visiting researchers in the field of public health. In contrast to focusing on domestic health, Dubai Cares has tended to fund public health programs overseas, such as child deworming projects in developing countries like India, Angola, and Liberia.

U.A.E. foundations also invest considerable resources in activities devoted to arts and culture. Foundations focusing specifically on these areas include the Sharjah Art Foundation and ADMAF. The Sharjah Art Foundation runs exhibits, funds projects, publishes a variety of artist publications, and leads community art events, primarily in Sharjah. ADMAF, on the other hand, devotes resources to education endeavors, community outreach, and cultural events associated with the arts, primarily in Abu Dhabi but also across the country. While not focusing exclusively on arts and culture, the Al Qasimi Foundation and the Salama bint Hamdan Foundation host events to engage the community in these activities. For example, the Al Qasimi Foundation hosts monthly Community Gatherings events and the annual Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival while the Salama bint Hamdan Foundation funds scholarships for nationals and long-time residents to study the arts, in addition to supporting domestic arts and cultural programs.

The final significant area of focus for foundations in the UAE is infrastructure. Both the ADFD and Dubai Cares focus heavily on improving infrastructure, but their efforts take place primarily at the international level. Dubai Cares takes on infrastructure projects, such as funding the creation of schools in developing countries, while the ADFD acts as a development-aid agency of the Abu Dhabi Government. The ADFD supports international infrastructure projects by

funding the construction of roads and houses as well as other initiatives around the world. On a smaller scale, the Al Qasimi Foundation works on infrastructure policy issues by funding research into urban planning issues in the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah.

As state-funded foundations across the UAE are working in a variety of sectors, their efforts have been instrumental in developing education, health, and arts and culture. However, during this study, it became clear that there are some sectors in which many foundations are working while other sectors may not receive enough philanthropic investment.

Moving Forward: Areas of Oversupply and Undersupply

In order for the philanthropic efforts of the UAE's state foundations to be effective in terms of national development, they must allocate their resources to different sectors based on the relative needs of each sector. This preliminary examination identifies possible areas of both oversupply and undersupply in terms of resource allocation.

When looking at the core activities of state-funded foundations in the UAE, it is clear that education and youth are areas that are popular across many foundations, with more than half of the organizations we looked at working in this area. In particular, education programs targeting high-achieving Emirati youth are found across the country. These programs exist alongside many other opportunities for gifted youth sponsored by different ministries, local government agencies, and other entities. As a result, it seems that the needs of this segment of the Emirati population have been relatively well met. In fact, this oversupply of opportunities for gifted youth may lead to competition among organizations whose mandates focus on a very limited pool of beneficiaries. Conversely, there are very few programs targeting at-risk male youth. Supporting this demographic is a focus for only one foundation (Al Qasimi Foundation), despite the low international test scores and high dropout rates among male students in the Emirates (Dhal, 2014; Ridge, Farah, & Shami, 2013; Ridge, 2014).

Another important focus area for state-funded foundations to consider is the elderly. In the UK, approximately 25% of foundations do work associated with older people (Pharoah, Goddard, & Jenkins, 2014). However, in the UAE, no state-funded foundations

focus on this segment of the population, even though the average life expectancy in the country has increased from an estimated 53 years in the 1960s to 80 years for women and 74 years for men (Khaishgi, 2015). The lack of programs focusing on the elderly is notable given the aging population and the increasing public discourse around elder care (Bell, 2014; Khaishgi, 2015).

In spite of a host of serious environmental issues in the UAE, the environment remains another underserved sector. Pressing environmental issues include a shortage of fresh water, vulnerable and endangered native animals, and threatened ecosystems (Al Rashed & Sherif, 2000; Goursi, Rapaie, & Mehmood, 2015; Nayeem, 2014). In the UAE, the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund is the only foundation solely dedicated to the environment, but it largely operates outside of the Emirates. As such, environmental issues stand to benefit greatly from more domestic attention from individuals or state-funded foundations.

Family well-being also appears to be a relatively neglected area (see Figure 5), with only the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWC) working specifically in this field. DFWC was the first licensed shelter in the UAE created to provide assistance for at-risk women and children and help in the fight against human trafficking. While there are other government initiatives working on family issues across the country, this is a space that would also benefit from greater attention from philanthropic organizations because increasing rates of divorce, domestic violence, and human trafficking have left women, children, and families acutely vulnerable (Webster, 2015; Wam, 2014; Thomas, 2011).

Areas for Development

The landscape of the UAE offers insight into the potential of state-funded philanthropy to impact a wide range of sectors. In addition to areas of oversupply and undersupply, our interviews also revealed other areas in which there is room for improvement. Suggestions for continuing to develop the philanthropic sector include:

- exploring ways to enable greater financial sustainability;
- supporting stronger evaluation practices;
- improving staffing pipelines; and

- strengthening collaboration.

Firstly, exploring how state-funded foundations can ensure their own financial sustainability would benefit their long-term success in terms of outreach. Only one foundation in this study operates with an endowment, which means that it does not have to spend time being concerned with the financial situation of the country or shifting policy priorities. As a result, this foundation is able to focus more on its daily operations. Changes in this area might include considering some ways to leverage *waqfs*, (religious endowments in Islam), for greater financial sustainability.

Secondly, more in-depth and accessible evaluations of programs that are run by U.A.E. foundations would be a meaningful addition to the limited amount of literature on this topic. Interviews revealed that the long-term impact of programmatic work conducted by these foundations is generally not being evaluated, either internally or externally, and such knowledge would help to determine whether grants and programs are achieving their desired outcomes. Such examination could also ensure funds are being efficiently used. Evaluations are something that many foundation staff recognized as important, whether or not their organizations had evaluations in place at the time of their interviews. A vast number of studies on evaluations in philanthropy exist in the West (Backer, 1999; Coffman, Beer, Patriz, & Thompson, 2013), and these could help U.A.E. foundations tailor their own evaluations to their country's unique context and to develop suitable benchmarks for their performances.

A third area for development is linked to the staffing pipeline, particularly finding and retaining skilled staff. This was a challenge that foundation leaders raised in interviews and that has gained national media attention (Al Subaihi, 2015). As foundations work with communities and other partners, having a high turnover of staff can decrease morale (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000); damage good relationships among stakeholders; and decrease staff productivity (Guthrie, 2001). Thus, additional research on this topic should explore how current philanthropic staff have been recruited, how long they remain with a specific organization, and how retention rates might be improved.

Finally, in interviews, foundations mentioned challenges related to maintaining long-term, beneficial relationships with other institutions. Interview feedback characterized collaborating with other foundations, ministries, and government bodies

as difficult, yet necessary. Philanthropic organizations find partnering challenging because they often have mandates in the same areas in which local, state-funded organizations are operating. Foundations spoke about the difficulties of working with government agencies, stating they sometimes meet opposition when trying to gather data or run programs, even though these agencies are also state-funded. As such, research on how to bring these entities together as well as how to clarify the responsibilities and mandates of individual foundations in relation to other government entities would be beneficial.

Policy Recommendations

A deeper understanding of the above issues could lead to more effective and wider-reaching philanthropic efforts. Ultimately, the U.A.E. government and the various ruling families have demonstrated a strong desire to help both Emiratis and expatriates through the establishment of these foundations. Moving forward, there are a number of areas both governments and various stakeholders in the UAE could focus on to ensure that existing foundations are sustainable and effective:

1. Encourage existing and/or new foundations to operate domestically in neglected areas. This would include a deeper investigation of sectors that are underserved by state-foundations, including the environment, care for the elderly, and family well-being.
2. Explore areas in which there is an abundance of overlapping programs, such as programs serving

high-achieving national students. Following this, better coordination among foundations could be implemented to avoid duplication of programmatic activities.

3. Empower foundations to ensure long-term financial sustainability as they typically receive funding on an annual basis. This could include forming *waqfs* to help support long-term goals.
4. Conduct and promote more research on foundations in the country, in some cases noting best practices among international non-profits or foundations. Specific research areas include:
 - a. Developing evaluations of grants and programmatic activities;
 - b. Investigating policies that would attract a wide variety of talent, both national and expatriate, to work in the UAE's philanthropic sector; and
 - c. Exploring policies and procedures that would strengthen foundation partnerships with other foundations and with government bodies.

The UAE is becoming well-known as a center of philanthropy that benefits people both near and far. It is expected that these endeavors will continue to develop, and, with greater support and more research, the country could serve as a model for philanthropy in the region.

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Based in the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah, the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research is a non-profit foundation that was established in 2009 under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi, United Arab Emirates Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah. The Foundation has three broad functions:

- to inform policymaking by conducting and commissioning high quality research;
- to enrich the local public sector, especially education, by providing educators and civil servants in Ras Al Khaimah with tools to make a positive impact on their own society; and
- to build a spirit of community, collaboration, and shared vision through purposeful engagement that fosters relationships among individuals and organizations.

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