ANNEX 2. PROJECT FOR A DATABASE ON KNOWLEDGE IN THE ARAB REGION

Over and above its inadequacies, the available data on knowledge in the Arab region is characterised by being widely scattered, difficult to obtain, and unavailable in aggregated form at the regional level or at that of groups of Arab countries. Because of the weakness or absence of coordination between producers of such data, or between them and users of the data, the data varies in its methodological underpinnings, its chronological attribution, its classification, and other specifications. For the most part, knowledge data in the Arab countries is prepared in a fashion similar to that in non-Arab countries without any attempt to draw up definitions, methodologies, and measurements that conform to the reality of knowledge in the Arab region. These factors set major constraints to the possibility of using available knowledge data for comparative purposes among the Arab countries and for preparing measurements and analyses that serve the knowledge economy in the Arab region.

The vital role played by statistical data in the knowledge economy demands that the shortcomings in the data on knowledge for the Arab region -- its fragmentation, its methodological unsuitability, and the weakness in the coordination of efforts to make it available -- be dealt with. The best step to achieve this at present may be to set up an integrated database on knowledge in the Arab region that is subject to ongoing update and development and that opens up prospects for cooperation and development. Creating and maintaining such a database could play an important role in strengthening interest in knowledge in the Arab region, stimulate debate and dialogue among concerned parties, and

provide a scientific basis for pertinent decision-making and for follow-up on these decisions. The current trend towards the publication of periodic Arab knowledge reports strengthens the importance of the mentioned database. It is expected that these reports will, on the one hand, greatly benefit from the proposed database and will participate, on the other, in supporting the database through the data they gather, synthesize, and analyse, and the measurements, comparisons, and analyses they draw from these data.

In addition to the role of the proposed database in facilitating the acquisition and use of knowledge data, it is proposed that it play the supplementary roles of creating opportunities for dialogue between producers and consumers of knowledge data, and equally among producers of this data, so as to serve the development of knowledge data regarding the Arab countries and its linkage with other data. From another perspective, it is proposed that the suggested database participate in creating an awareness of the significance of this data and of the role it can play in drawing up and implementing policies for knowledge development and in strengthening capacity for their production and use. Nevertheless, the present proposal goes beyond the traditional construct of a statistical database to encompass various other tasks and activities for the development of knowledge data in the Arab region, the outcome of which will be an advanced database providing a highly effective service to producers and consumers of these data.

The most important beneficiaries of the proposed database project are producers and users of knowledge data on the Arab

regional and international levels and on the level of the government, private, and foreign sectors. In particular, it is proposed that the database be oriented towards researchers in the fields of knowledge, academics, policy makers, decision makers, those working in the media, and statisticians working to gather, develop, and publish knowledge data.

The most important goals of the proposed database project can be summarised as follows:

- The assembly, standardisation, and presentation of the knowledge data about the Arab countries provided by various national, regional, and international sources. This is to be done in an up-to-date and user-friendly fashion that conforms to the needs of users and producers of this data.
- Participation in the provision of new data on knowledge in the Arab countries by carrying out statistical surveys or polls on the key issues connected to knowledge.
- Participation in the publication of knowledge data on the Arab countries via a website, compact discs, pamphlets, posters, and briefs to the media and others.
- Participation in the development of knowledge data on the Arab countries via the development of concepts, methods of data collection, statistical classifications, formulae to prepare indicators and indices, and other issues compatible with the reality and needs of the Arab countries.
- Participation in the cementation of cooperation between producers of knowledge data on the Arab countries, and between them and users of this data, to increase availability and foster the capacity to benefit from what is available.

To achieve the above goals, the proposed project is committed to the following tasks and principles:

- The contents of the database and its manner of operation will be defined in light of the needs of users and preparers of knowledge data for the Arab countries, and by making use of the expertise and wide knowledge related to the reality of these data and the prospects of their development.
- In addition to data on the level of the Arab countries, the database will undertake the preparation and presentation of aggregated data on the Arab regional level, or on the level of groups of Arab countries. The database will also include detailed data to show the disparity among geographical regions, among economic activities and sectors, and among the social, economic, and other segments of the population. The database will also emphasize the preparation of time series data thus making possible the comparison and analysis of changes through time.
- The database will devote particular attention to the specificities of the Arab region and, in particular, matters connected to the use of the Arabic language for knowledge purposes and cultural and artistic aspects peculiar to the Arab region.
- In addition to data, the database will contain illustrative figures and maps, forecasts, and methodological indices based on statistical references and sources.
- The database project aims to identify the gaps in knowledge data and statistics pertaining to the Arab countries in terms of availability, up-to-dateness, detail, methodology, effectiveness in expressing the knowledge reality, and other factors. This is with the aim of defining the steps required to raise the level of these data and statistics. To achieve this, the project may make use of researchers or research teams, hold meetings, or take other steps to serve this goal.
- The database will be put online and will take an interactive and user-friendly form that will provide users with the possibility of downloading data and creating explanatory diagrams. It will

include search engines, hyperlinks to relevant websites, and other advanced website features.

- Initially, Arabic and English will be used, with other languages to be added subsequently.
- The database will be periodically updated, and its contents developed and expanded in ongoing fashion.
- Access to and utilisation of the database and participation in its interactive features will be open to all with the exception of some specific portals where access will be restricted to specific groups who will be issued passwords.
- Within the database website, a special area will be created for the Arab Knowledge Reports that will contain the published reports, their background papers, feedback from the discussions and opinions of database users, and news related to the reports. This area will also contain a special section with access restricted to those preparing the Arab Knowledge Reports and those directly concerned with them. Work in progress, guidelines, the minutes of meetings, announcements, and other material of use for those mentioned above during the preparatory stages of the Arab Knowledge Reports will be placed in this area.
- A portal for dialogue, cooperation, coordination, and learning concerning knowledge in the Arab world will be provided within the database's website.
- The database project will hold training workshops and meetings of experts and form working teams for producers and users of knowledge data to serve the goals of the project.
- Statistical professional best practice, neutrality, and impartiality will be followed in collecting, classifying, and presenting data as in all aspects of the database, with the aim of ensuring that it is characterised by objectivity, accuracy, and efficiency.
- The project will seek to cooperate with parties interested in data and indicators

related to knowledge in the Arab region. The most important of these bodies are, on the national level, the national statistical agencies, on the regional level, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and, on the international level, UN agencies and the World Bank.

The founding and sustainability of the proposed database require the provision of the services of specialists in statistics and ICT. This is on the basis of fulltime employment, part-time work, or on a project basis. This also requires the provision of computer hardware and software, connection to the internet, a base for those working on the database and its equipment, and facilities for holding meetings and workshops. Advantage should also be taken of the experience of related databases such as those of the World Bank's Knowledge Assessment Methodology, the UNDP's Higher Education Project, the UNDP's Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR), as well as others at regional institutions such as the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation on account of its particular interest in knowledge as embodied in the Arab Knowledge Reports, which it will publish, and in its activities related to writing, translation, publishing, study opportunities, and others.