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MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL COOPERATION (MERC)

OBJECTIVES

Support applied, actionable research that generates results relevant to regional development.

Foster the implementation of research results and innovations to improve quality of life and achieve development impact in the MENA region.

Build science and technology capacity in developing countries in the MENA region.

Promote direct cooperation between Israel and the MENA region and establish strong working relationships that last beyond the life of the project.

WHERE WE WORK

Partners to Date

Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and the West Bank and Gaza.

Additional Eligible Countries

Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates.

CONTACT

Website

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Following the Camp David accords, an initiative of the U.S. Congress brought about the Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program. MERC promotes technology-led development, capacity building, and scientific cooperation between Israel and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Priority is given to research relevant to regional development and that benefits developing countries and resource-limited populations in the MENA region.

WORK WE SUPPORT

Drought and disease know no political boundaries. Meeting complex, regional challenges requires cooperation across borders. Scientists across the Middle East and North Africa are using science and technology to tackle development challenges and overcome resource constraints. Multi-national teams of researchers are engaging with the vibrant scientific community and innovation ecosystem in Israel; generating new knowledge; and leading developments in agriculture, environment, water resources, and health.

MERC aims to achieve development impacts including: economic growth that increases incomes of the disadvantaged, improved environmental management, increased food production, water conservation and resource management, and improved delivery of health services through better treatments or health management strategies.

MERC funds applied research grants and travel and workshop grants in support of Arab-Israeli scientific cooperation.

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PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW (FY 2022)

In FY 2022, MERC supported 35 joint Arab-Israeli grants in the water, agriculture, environment, and health sectors, totaling approximately \$19 million in active funding. Grants directly support the work of scientists, engineers, students, and technicians at universities, NGOs, and government ministries throughout the MENA region. Each project included scientists from Israel working with counterparts from one or several MENA-region countries on a single shared grant. In FY 2022, Jordan participated in the most grants of any Arab country, followed in order by the West Bank and Gaza, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia.

SELECT ACHIEVEMENTS (FY 2022)

Coral reef conservation in the Gulf of Aqaba

Coral reef tourism is a major economic driver in the Gulf of Aqaba for both Jordanians and Israelis, but human disturbances stand to severely compromise the reef and seagrass ecosystems. With support from MERC, Jordanian and Israeli scientists are working to establish early warning coral monitoring stations to monitor for disturbances, e.g., pollution and nutrients. Two systems have been launched off the coasts of Eilat and Aqaba – effectively launching the world's first real-time, open-science, continuous coral monitoring station.



Public and environmental health impacts of e-waste

Unregulated electronics waste recycling and disposal in the West Bank involves burning electronics and cables imported from Israel and poses serious threats to public and environmental health. Under a MERC grant, Palestinian and Israeli scientists are generating evidence of the presence, transport, and effects of lead on soils, plants, water, animals, and individuals near burn sites. Findings have been presented to policymakers and regulators, and shared via peer-reviewed publications, scientific presentations, media interviews, and public awareness campaigns.



Developing capacity for sustainable aquaculture production

Gray mullet is a popular fish across the Mediterranean, but protocols for rearing larvae have not been well developed and fry continue to be wild-caught – putting pressure on wild populations and hindering aquaculture production. A MERC grant brought together a research consortium of scientists from Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and the United States to develop protocols and best practices for increasing the production of mullet fry and stocking lakes, and to promote the use of hatchery-sourced fry in aquaculture and mariculture around the Mediterranean. Researchers and extension professionals were trained on mullet reproduction and fish tagging and restocking.



SPECIAL CALL FOR PROPOSALS ON NEGEV FORUM PRIORITIES

MERC aims to promote partnerships between Negev Forum countries or other key partners in regional integration. Applicants who wish to respond to this special call may apply for an applied research grant, continuation grant, or travel and workshop grant, and should address priorities under the following Negev Forum working groups: water and food security, clean energy, tourism, health, and education and co-existence. This special call for proposals should not discourage applicants from submitting proposals with other eligible partners and/or on any other topic within the natural, physical, and social sciences and engineering.