

Social Science Research in India
A Mapping Report

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CDS	Centre for Developing Studies
CSIR	Council of Scientific and Industrial Research
CSSS	Centre for Studies in Social Sciences
CWDS	Centre for Women's Development Studies
DFID	Department for International Development
DST	Department of Science and Technology
GOI	Government of India
ICAR	Indian Council of Agricultural Research
ICHR	Indian Council for Historical Research
ICMR	Indian Council of Medical Research
ICRW	International Council for Research on Women
ICSSR	Indian Council for Social Science Research
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IEG	Institute of Economic Growth
IGIDR	Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research
IIAS	Indian Institute of Advanced Study
IIDS	Indian Institute of Dalit Studies
IIM	Indian Institute of Management
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
ISEC	Institute for Social and Economic Change
ISI	Indian Statistical Institute
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
MIDS	Madras Institute of Developing Studies
NIAS	National Institute for Advanced Studies
NISTADS	National Institute of Science, Technology and Developing Studies
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
PHFI	Public Health Foundation of India
PIN	Professional Institutes Network
RCUK	Research Councils UK
SARH	South Asia Research Hub
SSCI	Social Science Citation Index
TISS	Tata Institute of Social Work
UGC	University Grants Commission

Executive Summary

The institutional framework

Social science research in India has had a chequered history. There are more than 400 universities in India with more than 500 departments of social sciences. While universities are the locus of academic research, there are more than 200 government research institutes and autonomous research organisations which undertake social science research as well. Some NGOs and policy research initiatives such as think tanks have also produced specific development focussed research products but generally do not have longer term interest in research and the quality of their research is not yet established.

Research output

While the country has the highest volume of research in the region, and is significantly ahead of other countries in south Asia, there is wide disparity in research activity and output across the country, both in terms of quantity and quality. Some premium universities located in the major cities foster academic research cultures which include interdisciplinary work, knowledge production with emphasis on peer review, and engagement with internal and external intellectual networks and learned societies. Members of faculty in many of these institutions are scholars of national and international repute. However, the quality of research in a large majority of institutions neither conforms to international academic standards nor have they been able to make a significant contribution to social science research, either theoretical or applied and policy-oriented, in the country. There is a tendency to publish books rather than papers in refereed journals and a large number of publications appear in low-impact journals. Part of the reason for this could be the mandated emphasis on monographs for academic positions in Indian universities, as is the case in the Anglophone world in certain social science disciplines like history, anthropology, sociology and political science.

Structural constraints

One of the main reasons for the variable research quality is the lack of proper institutional support. The university system emphasises teaching over research. Although a number of Indian social scientists have achieved eminence in the international social science community, a majority of the institutions are yet to make a mark in the international academic community. Research organisations recruit university graduates, but do not invest in further research capacity building and training. Applied research organisations and consulting firms are increasingly becoming attractive career options but there is a preference in these organisations to produce policy papers or briefs with no incentives to publish academic articles in refereed journals. While the bulk of social science research is undertaken in universities and public-funded research organizations, the university administration is not research friendly

and there are no incentive structures – either financial or professional – to encourage teachers to undertake research.

Funding arrangements

Social science research in India is largely funded by the Government of India and its agencies such as the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the University Grants Commission (UGC). While India has had a relatively stronger academic tradition in the humanities and social sciences, India's budget expansion in higher education focuses on science and technology. Of the total expenditure on research by the UGC, less than 12% was allocated to research in social and basic sciences in 2009-10. During 2006-2010, the total grant to ICSSR was 2.3% of the total grant to the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and approximately 11% of the total grant to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). It is difficult to arrive at an accurate picture of what proportion of the national budget is allocated for social science research in India. A trawl of government records suggests that around Rs 600 crore (£81 million) a year is assigned to different social science research institutions through its different Ministries. However, of the total funds allocated to ICSSR, it has been found that only 20% is used for research and the rest for administrative purposes. Similarly, the UGC is allocated funds for higher education which is then used for administrative purposes, salaries and its various research programmes. No disaggregated and reliable data is available on how much of the allocation is *actually* spent on research activities per se.

Since the mid-1990s, there has been a significant increase in the number of non-state funders of social research in India. While this share is still considered to be very small compared to that of the government, it is a rapidly growing field. There is no comprehensive or accurate data, however, on how much these agencies contribute in numeric terms to social science research in India. The multiplicity and wide range of players in this category, and the significant duplication of work across these agencies make it virtually impossible to estimate the amount of money that is spent on research by these agencies.

Challenges in assessing research quality

A bibliometric analysis as would be done in the North is not an adequate measure of quality of research as most of the journals in India are not registered in the international citation databases. There is a need, therefore, to work with other secondary sources for building a more reliable and objective picture on the status of social science research in India. The most appropriate strategy would perhaps be to use peer review as the standard norm of validation of quality of research (including papers published by Indian researchers in important national and international peer reviewed social science journals) and books published by leading social science publishers.

Who are the major players?

The wide spectrum of organizations engaged in academic and policy research in the social sciences in the country with different organizational forms, different research mandates, links to policy objectives, and different sources

of funding, make it difficult to compare all the organizations engaged in social science research.

For the purpose of this mapping a two-pronged approach was used to determine the key institutions undertaking social science research: (a) an institutional assessment that included a quantitative analysis of their research output and a qualitative review of the strength of their research programmes and the multi-pronged activities they have initiated in order to advance their chosen areas of research; and (b) interviews with selected key resource persons engaged in social science research in India. Based on an assessment of publication records, research programmes, contribution to a specific area of study, recognition by the government, composition of faculty, and emphasis on dissemination of research including conferences and seminars, the institutions have been grouped into two broad categories – ‘established centres for research’ and ‘emerging centres for research’.

The Established Centres for Social Science Research include the Delhi School of Economics (Delhi University), the School of Social Sciences (Jawaharlal Nehru University), Madras Institute of Development Studies, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Centre for Development Studies, Institute of Economic Growth, Centre for Women’s Development Studies, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, School for Women’s Studies (Jadavpur University), National Institute of Advanced Studies, Department of History, University of Delhi, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Centre for Law and Governance (Jawaharlal Nehru University), the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, and the Centre for Policy Research. The Emerging Centres for Social Science Research include the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Department of Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Social Sciences of the Indian Statistical Institute, National Institute of Science, Technology and Developing Studies, International Centre for Research on Women, Public Health Foundation of India, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, and the Department of Economics and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore

The present report is a general and preliminary overview and is not in any way an evaluation of the work of individual institutions.

I. Introduction

Purpose of study, scope, and methodology

DFID envisions an active role for research in its efforts to reduce poverty at the country level. Research-generated information is seen to be essential in determining needs, proposing new cost-effective interventions, monitoring their implementation and evaluating their effectiveness. The South Asia Research Hub (SARH) helps to deliver DFID's commitment to high-quality research by improving the supply and use of research, evidence, and evaluation knowledge in DFID country programmes in South Asia; and improve the responsiveness of DFID funded research to current and future challenges that country programmes in the region are working on.

In order to understand the research environment better, SARH has carried out a preliminary mapping of social science research in India. This report presents the results of the mapping with a special focus on the following areas:

- The institutional landscape including key institutions or groups undertaking research in the social sciences in India
- The current research agendas of these research groups or institutions
- The main sources and distribution of funds for research focussed in the social sciences
- Challenges of social science research in India and specific areas in which there might be particular strengths

The report is based on different forms of evidence. These include:

- a desk review of existing reports and commentaries on social science research in India
- review of publication records and websites of key organizations engaged in social science research
- key informant interviews conducted by the SARH with select social science researchers and government officials to gather information on research resources and funding

For each key research group identified, the following information is provided in Annex 1: location and group name; a short paragraph of background information on the groups' overarching research interests; a web link; and contact details.

The present report is a general and preliminary overview and is not in any way an evaluation of the work of individual institutions.

II. Social Science Research in India: An overview

A. Disciplinary domains

Higher education in India is typically divided into two broad streams – sciences and arts. There is no degree in the social sciences as such and the social sciences and humanities are grouped together in the universities under the arts stream.

A wide range of disciplines are included in the social sciences. Teaching and research carried out by the universities in the social sciences are delivered within traditional disciplinary domains such as sociology, economics, history, anthropology, geography, psychology, public administration and political science. There is some variation, however, in disciplines such as economics, geography and anthropology which are taught in some universities under the arts stream while in others they fall under the rubric of the science faculty. Similarly, history is sometimes considered as a social science and at other times grouped as a humanities discipline along with philosophy and the languages.

Apart from these traditional disciplines, there are certain disciplines which are not very widely taught but fall under social science research and teaching as they draw upon the parent social science disciplines of sociology, history, psychology, etc. Examples of these are social work offered by institutions such as the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Visva Bharati, the Delhi School of Social Work, and the Madras School of Social Work; women's studies in Jadavpur University and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU); law and governance (JNU); community medicine (JNU); educational studies (JNU); and finally studies in science policy (JNU). Apart from this, JNU has small but significant Programmes of Study like 'gender studies' mentioned above, but also ones on the 'study of discrimination and exclusion' and another one on 'North-East studies', all of which are in the School of Social Sciences. The newly opened Azim Premji University and the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) specialise in providing courses in Education - another non-traditional discipline in India. TISS has also recently started a degree in development studies.

Research in the social sciences in India has been dominated by particular disciplines. Economics has traditionally attracted greater funding than others. While sociology seems to have greater attraction among postgraduate and research students, apparently because of the rapid growth of the NGO sector, the demand for higher education in disciplines like history and political science seems to be declining, due to their limited career opportunities, although they, and especially history, is perhaps the oldest and most taught discipline throughout India and often, as in JNU, attract among the best students.

B. Key areas of focus

The Fourth Review Committee of the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR 2007) reports that social science research is driven by two factors: an interest in the functioning of society in its diverse social, cultural, political and economic aspects and in understanding the variables that influence them, and the practical needs of the policy-makers and managers in government, civil society and the private sector for reliable data and professional analysis.

In the past two decades, social science research has grown beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries into areas that are pertinent to the current socio-economic and political context in the country. Globalization and development have emerged as major areas of focus. Education and health are being researched across various institutes. A number of research organizations like the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG), Centre for Developing Societies (CDS), Madras Institute of Developing Societies (MIDS) and the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) have carried out various research projects in areas related to equitable and sustainable development. Poverty studies and urbanization have also emerged as key areas for research. New directions in feminist studies and women's and gender studies are found across research carried out by universities, research institutes, and NGOs. Research on environment has largely been focussed on indigenous knowledge systems. Although industrial development and its related concerns constitute an important area of research, agriculture and rural development remain focus areas for both researchers and policy-makers. A discourse on 'inclusive development' has emerged as an important theme.

Unlike the other social sciences within the context of a 'developing' nation, economics as a discipline has often been ascribed a more utilitarian function and seen to contribute directly to the growth of the State. The past decades has seen more focus on applied empirical research, often commissioned by various stakeholders including the Government, rather than theoretical economics that straddles the other social sciences and addresses a wide range of themes from the philosophical basis of the discipline to the question of culture, gender or the politics of globalisation.

Caste has always been a central category in social science discourse in India and there is a significant and growing body of work on its economic, political and social implications. The issue of reservation for disadvantaged caste groups in higher educational institutions and government jobs at the central and state levels has led to major upheavals and unrest between the pro and anti-reservation movements over the last decade. With the emergence of cultural studies, a specifically Indian school, known as subaltern studies, has developed. Represented by post-colonial and social historians, subaltern studies have contested the strong elitist bias that characterized the writing of modern Indian history, and has provided an alternative framework.

III. The Institutional Landscape

A. Where is social science research carried out in India?

There are currently more than 400 universities in India with more than 500 departments of social sciences (ICSSR 2007). There is no official system of rating of universities in India in terms of their research outputs but they are governed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) which is the apex regulatory body of universities. The latest UGC report (2011) on higher education in India records that during 2008-09, 45.17% of the total of 13 million students in India enrolled in institutions of higher learning study arts and humanities and social sciences. The total faculty strength is approximately 500,000 working at the 433 universities and their 20,600 affiliated colleges. Approximately half this number teaches humanities and social sciences. A somewhat similar trend is visible in the proportion of doctorates in the social science and arts and humanities, who accounted for approximately 36% of the total 13,237 new doctorates in 2007-08 (ibid.).

Broadly, there are three main types of institutions that conduct social science research in India:

(i) The university sector

Social science departments and post-graduate colleges

Universities are the locus of academic research in the social sciences in India. They are the sites of particular kinds of expert knowledge and knowledge production, disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, and often set the standards on how research is done, how peer review is exercised, and involve other internal and external intellectual networks and learned societies. The universities are responsible for granting degrees, setting the syllabus and conducting examinations. Higher degree programmes such as the Masters, MPhil and PhD are usually run by faculty at the university, though many of the ICSSR institutions also offer MPhil/PhD programmes by affiliating their students to the respective state universities in which they are located.

Universities in India can be divided into several groups:ⁱ

- Central universities: universities directly administered by the Central Government (42)
- 'Deemed universities': which started as private institutions but considered as deemed universities by the UGC because of their good performance in teaching and research (92)
- State-level universities: universities which are administratively managed by state governments. Largest category of 265 universities. These universities typically have several colleges under them which are involved in undergraduate teaching.ⁱⁱ

In addition to these, there are 17 agricultural universities, 62 management institutes and 32 institutes of engineering and technology, many of whom carry out research in the social sciences.

(ii) Government research institutes

Different Ministries of the Government of India (GOI) have established a number of research institutes at both the Central and State levels, including the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Institutes for Rural and Urban Development. The 2007 ICSSR review reports 67 such institutes which undertake sector-specific research. Their primary objective is to generate data for policy-makers and are not engaged in pure social science research. Many of their research programmes, however, have embedded sub-studies and methodologies that draw heavily from the social sciences.

(iii) Autonomous research institutes

The ICSSR is an autonomous agency set up with the mandate to new research in all social sciences disciplines. It is funded by the Government but managed by social scientists. Through its 25 research institutes, ICSSR has sanctioned close to 3000 research projects over the last 38 years. This translates to an average 75 projects a year. An overview of research output of the ICSSR supported institutions is provided in Annex 2.

Table 1: Categories of social science institutes in India

Universities with social science departments	Government research institutions	Autonomous research institutions	Total
190	67	152 (25*+127**)	409

* ICSSR institutes funded by GOI; ** Other institutes

The most recent review of the ICSSR (GOI 2011) identifies three main shortcomings of the ICSSR: (a) inability to identify new and potentially significant research areas; (b) slow evaluation of grant applications for research projects; and (c) the very small corpus of funds earmarked for research projects. Further, there is significant variation in the quality of research across the ICSSR institutions - while some institutes have performed well, others have lagged behind in terms of research output and quality.

Other specialised institutions and networks

Centres for action and advocacy research: NGOs concerned with development action are increasingly realizing the need to conduct research and disseminate in the form of publications. Organizations such as SEWA, Jagori, Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes and the Public Health Foundation of India have set up designated research wings. Most of them tend to specialise in specific development agendas and their research outputs are aimed at supporting initiatives for social change. It is, however, difficult to estimate the quality of their research products for lack of conclusive evidence.

Policy research networks: Policy research networks as a way of drawing in expertise from many different institutional locations are present in different

forms. While their value as *research* initiatives is not yet established and they seem to be more oriented towards policy dialogue, this paragraph mentions some of the initiatives which have been set up with a mandate to carry out research to policy work. The Working Groups set up by the Planning Commission, GOI as part of the process of formulation of each Five Year Plan bring together academics, practitioners, and officials to provide high quality advice, expertise and knowledge across different themes and sectors for programme formulation.ⁱⁱⁱ The Ministry of Rural Development has set up a Professional Institutes Network (PIN) to bring together research and documentation of best practices on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). The PIN includes the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), Indian Institutes of Management (IIM), the National Institute of Rural Development, law institutes, other government institutes, professional institutes, and universities, including agricultural universities. While areas for collaboration include monitoring and appraisal, training, evaluation and impact assessment, action research, case studies and curricula development, there is no evidence to support that these initiatives have culminated in significant pieces of social science research.

The IDRC initiated Think Tank Initiative is a major multi-donor programme which operates with funds from the Hewlett Foundation, IDRC, DFID, Gates Foundation and Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation and aims to support independent policy research organizations – or ‘think tanks’ – in developing countries. The programme aims to strengthen a select group of independent policy research organizations such that these organizations provide objective, high-quality research that both informs and influences policy. To achieve this, the program provides focused support to these organizations in the areas of research quality, policy linkages and organizational performance. This programme was initiated in 2008 and while organizational development of policy research organizations is likely to be enhanced, it remains to be seen how successful this model will be in improving quality of social science research conducted by these organizations.

Private research firms: Private research firms have emerged for many reasons and this umbrella term carries considerable diversity. They are associated with short cycle, empirical/ survey based research commissioned by multilateral donors, private corporate bodies and at times by the Government. Such firms usually work on short term contracts and do not have longer term interest in research. The theoretical frameworks, methodological principles, sources and quality of data and methods of inference used by these firms are often not subjected to public scrutiny and debate and seldom presented in professional academic forums.

B: Who are the major players?

For the purpose of this mapping, a two-pronged approach was used: (a) an institutional assessment that included a quantitative analysis of their research output and a qualitative review of the strength of their research programmes and the multi-pronged activities they have initiated in order to advance their

chosen areas of research; and (b) interviews with selected key resource persons engaged in social science research in India.

Based on an assessment of publication records, research programmes, contribution to a specific area of study, recognition by the Government, composition of faculty, and emphasis on dissemination of research including conferences and seminars, the institutions have instead been grouped into two broad categories – ‘established centres for research’ and ‘emerging centres for research’. Lack of substantive and comparable data on each of these institutions does not permit a ranking of these institutions.

Established Centres for Social Science Research	
1	Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi: Delhi a. Department of Economics b. Department of Sociology c. Department of Geography
2	School of Social Sciences, JNU: New Delhi a. Centre for the Study of Social Systems b. Centre for Historical Studies c. Centre for Political Studies d. Centre for the Study of Regional Development e. Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health f. Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies g. Centre for Economic Studies and Planning
3	Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS): Chennai
4	Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC): Bangalore
5	Centre for Development Studies (CDS): Trivandrum
6	Institute of Economic Growth (IEG): New Delhi
7	Centre for Women’s Development Studies (CWDS): New Delhi
8	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS): New Delhi
9	School for Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University: Kolkata
10	National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS): Bangalore
11	Department of History, University of Delhi: Delhi
12	Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS): Shimla
13	Centre for Law and Governance, JNU: New Delhi
14	Centre for Studies in Social Sciences (CSSS): Kolkata
15	Centre for Policy Research (CPR): New Delhi

Emerging Centres for Social Science Research	
1	Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR): Mumbai
2	Department of Social Sciences, IIT: New Delhi
3	Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) : Mumbai
4	Department of Social Sciences, Indian Statistical Institute (ISI): Kolkata/ Delhi
5	National Institute of Science, Technology & Developing Studies (NISTADS): Delhi
6	International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW): New Delhi
7	Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI): New Delhi
8	Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS): New Delhi
9	Department of Economics and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Management (IIM): Bangalore

Descriptions of these institutes, including their overarching research interests; web link; and contact details, have been provided in Annex 1.

IV. Funding arrangements

A: Funding from GOI

Social science research in India is largely funded by the GOI and its agencies such as the ICSSR and the UGC. Of the 433 universities in India, 40 Central Universities are funded by the Central Government through the UGC which in turn receives its grants from the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the rest are funded by the state governments.

It is difficult to arrive at an accurate picture of what proportion of the national budget is allocated social science research in India. Of the total funds allocated to ICSSR, for instance, it has been found that only 20% is used for research and the rest for administrative purposes. Similarly, the UGC is allocated funds for higher education which is used for administrative purposes, salaries and its various research programmes.^{iv} No disaggregated and reliable data is available on how much of the allocation is *actually* spent on research activities alone.

In the budget for 2011-12, ICSSR has been granted Rs 68.49 crore (£9.2 million) and the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR) has received Rs 14.10 crore (~ £2 million). While UGC's allocation has gone up by 26% [as its budget rose from Rs 3,626 crore (£490 million) to Rs 4,556 crore (£615 million)], it is difficult to estimate how much of this is earmarked for social science research alone.

While India has had a relatively stronger academic tradition in the humanities and social sciences, India's big budget expansion in higher education focuses on science and technology. During 2006-2010, the total grant to ICSSR was 2.3% of the total grant to the CSIR and approximately 11% of the total grant to ICMR (GOI 2011). Of the total expenditure on research by the UGC, less than 12% was allocated to research in social sciences in 2009-10.^v Whereas science and technology institutions are funded by a number of state ministries and departments, most social science research is funded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development through the ICSSR. Other Ministries, however also fund research projects that have been found to have social science research components for instance through the ICMR and the Department of Science and Technology (DST).^{vi}

In 1996-97, of ICSSR's total grant of Rs 9.69 crore (£1.3 million) from GOI, Rs 4.64 crore (£0.6 million) – only £54,000 - just over 4% - was given as research grants to scholars, while a whopping Rs 2.25 crore (£0.3 million) - 23% - was spent under various heads on the ICSSR's own administration (Chatterjee 2002). Over the last two decades, between the Seventh (1984-89) and Tenth Plans (2002-2007), the share of ICSSR funds dedicated to running its institutes rose from 73% to 81%, while that to fund research and fellowships declined from 13% to 8%.^{vii}

The Fourth Review Committee of the ICSSR had recommended a tenfold increase in its budget (to Rs 4 billion). The most recent review of the ICSSR (GOI 2011), however, reports that during 2005 - 2010, while the total allocation to ICSSR was increased from Rs 41.8 crores (£5.3 million) to Rs 51 crores (£6.5 million), in real terms, the total grant in fact decreased by 7%. This meagre financial support from the Government limits the capacity to carry out high quality research, particularly empirical research. According to the recommendations of the Knowledge Commission, 1500 universities will be set up in the next decade.

B: Funding from donor agencies

Since the mid-1990s, there has been a significant increase in the number of non-state funders of social research in India. While this share is still considered to be very small compared to that of the GOI, it is a rapidly growing field. International multilateral agencies (the World Bank, ADB), bilateral agencies (DFID, CIDA, USAID, NORAD), the UN as well as domestic and foreign foundations have been funding studies on poverty, employment, education and health. Some of the prominent non-state funders of research are the Ratan Tata Trust, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation, ICICI Centre for Child Health and Nutrition - now closed and reformulated as the ICICI Foundation - MacArthur Foundation and IDRC (see Annex 3). Domestic and foreign foundations generally provide corpus funding while all provide funds for sponsored research.

Most private funding, however, is project based and seen as a source for revenue generation for the institution (usually 10-15% overhead charges go to the institution). Very often, this funding is project-based where the objective, scope and often even methodology specified by the sponsors are not scrutinised for quality or academic significance nor do they accumulate into a stock of knowledge in a social science discipline (Papola 2010; SSRC 2002).

While there has been a strong call for 'untied' research funding in the recent years, anxieties regarding donor influence on research systems and agendas have been a central concern of researchers (Chatterjee 2002; ICSSR Review 2007; Papola 2010) who suggest that commissioned research has negative implications for the academic quality as the results do not usually feed into a common stock of knowledge in a social science discipline. Sponsors, irrespective of whether they are public agencies, private foundations or international organisations fund research that matches their priorities rather than further academic research capacity. The IDRC roundtable on policy research organizations in 2008 highlighted these issues, in particular dependence on project funding; staffing and related questions of recruitment and retention; organizational performance measurement; and management and strategic leadership (Hay and Sudarshan 2010).

C: Overseas research funding

Although the current budget allocations for both ICSSR as well as UGC represent a higher share of the national budget compared to previous

budgets, it is far from what developed countries spend on social science research. As a result, although university departments still rely on government funding for the bulk of their research activities, some institutes have worked out innovative combinations of government and non-government funding with varying degrees of success, and developed appropriate and flexible institutional arrangements. For example, the Department of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University and the Centre for Law and Governance of JNU receive limited funds from donor agencies for specified objectives other than the Central or State Governments. TISS, Delhi University and JNU's School of Social Sciences are also receiving project specific grants from various international donor agencies. Students pursuing PhD degree can now apply for funding from a Dutch organization - Sefhis - which funds scholars pursuing their doctoral research in the developing countries. University faculty members can also avail of short-term grants for visiting universities in the UK and the US from institutions such as the ICSSR or ICHR or their respective Consulates (Charles Wallace Fellowships, Fulbright Fellowships, Commonwealth Fellowships, and Travel Grants from the Wellcome Trust and the British Academy).

A recent collaborative initiative in January 2011 by four European funding agencies from Germany, UK, France and the Netherlands (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Economic and Social Research Council, Agence Nationale de la Recherche, and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research) has resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding with ICSSR to create a new funding scheme to bring together leading research centres in India and Europe to address major social science challenges. This collaboration will build on existing research centres in Europe and India and will provide additional funding to current investments to develop international activities and knowledge exchange. The agreement is initially scheduled to run for three years and applications will be sought to include at least two institutions from both Europe and India. The agreement represents the first time an Indian research organization has collaborated with national social science research organizations from across Europe for research on economic growth and development, energy and climate change and health and well-being.

An attempt was made to collate information on the volume of funds that are spent by the UK on social science research in India. Data pertaining to UK's Economic and Social Research Council's projects and studentships relevant to India for the period 2005-2010 indicates that £13,200,614 has been awarded across various projects. This, however, relates to grants awarded for projects in general. No disaggregate information is available on how much of this amount is spent on research in India.

There is no comprehensive or accurate data on how much these various streams of funding contribute in numeric terms to social science research in India. The multiplicity and wide range of players in this category, and the significant duplication of work across agencies and funders make it virtually impossible to estimate the amount of money that is spent on research by them.

V. What are the main challenges?

Research output: variable

The wide spectrum of organizations engaged in academic and policy research in the social sciences with different organizational forms, different research mandates, links to policy objectives, and different sources of funding, make it difficult to compare these organizations. There have been recent attempts to assess research output in the country based on bibliometric studies. Gupta et al. (2009) report that India ranks 13th among the top 26 productive countries with 1% global publication share with an average annual publication growth rate of 10.9 % during 1996 to 2007. A review commissioned by IDRC in 2008 of policy research organizations in south Asian countries found that India is the only country in the region to have some significant presence in his review of journal papers indexed in Scopus (and SCImago). For the period 2000-2008, India accounted for a very large number of papers – 12 times its nearest rival Bangladesh.

A quantitative assessment of publication records of the major social science institutions across the country carried out as part of this mapping demonstrate that institutes in Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata and Mumbai have the highest number of publications in the country. This confirms an ICSSR (2007) review of social science research which was based on sample data published during 2004-05 in eight select journals and on publications data on books and monographs as published on social science themes.^{viii}

Table 2: Disciplines and institutional affiliations of authors of books

Discipline	ICSSR Institutes	Indian Universities	Other Institutes	NRIs and Foreigners	Independent Scholars	International Agencies	All
Economics	29	77	53	94	38	17	308
Sociology	19	96	41	101	43	4	304
Political Science	14	59	35	82	44	-	234
History	6	26	16	39	17	1	105
Geography	1	24	4	10	8	-	47

Source: ICSSR 2007.

Consultations with key resource persons (see Annex 4) suggest that there is more emphasis on publishing books, working papers, and chapters in books rather than journal articles. A majority of books are published by Indian publishing houses with a small percentage of academics from Delhi University, JNU, some of the ICSSR institutions and occasionally other universities and affiliated colleges, publishing with international publishers like Oxford University Press, Routledge, Sage, etc. There is a kind of pecking order among these and a number of European academics working on South Asia also publish their monographs with some of these Indian publishers.

Among the journals, most publications are in journals of sociology (including social work and anthropology), economics and psychology. The following journals comprise the maximum number of papers in the social sciences - *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *Sociological Bulletin*, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, *Indian Journal of Social Work*, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, and the *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*. A large majority of the total publication output, however, are not peer reviewed products. The *EPW* is not a refereed journal but is one of the most widely read journals in India. Most of the articles focus on empirical findings on the Indian economy and issues which have a bearing on economic policy.

A review of **institutional affiliations of authors** who published in selected leading social science journals during 2005-06 indicate that the highest number of publications are by universities and colleges followed by autonomous research institutes.^{ix}

Table 3: Institutional affiliations of authors of articles in social science journals

Institution	Number of authors
ICSSR supported institutes	58
Other autonomous research institutes	156
Foreign scholar/NRIs	131
International organizations	7
Universities/colleges	179
Government departments	9
Independent researchers	2
Total	542

Extracted from: ICSSR 2007.

Research quality: difficult to assess

Assessment of quality of social science research in India is complicated. A bibliometric study conducted by Gupta, Dhawan and Singh (2009) led to the identification of 19 'high productivity institutions'. However, a quantitative analysis of research output is not an accurate predictor of the quality of research that is carried out by these institutes. Further, a bibliometric analysis is not an adequate measure as most of the journals for instance in India are not registered in the international citation databases. Although Scopus covers around 15,000 journals, its coverage of social science journals from India is limited to 15. Similarly, the coverage of the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) published by Thomson Reuters is not as comprehensive as that from North America and Western Europe. This is a particular problem as many Indian academics make a conscious decision to publish in Indian journals to reach an Indian audience, often driven by the subject matter of their research.

There are questions regarding the reliability of using citation impact alone to determine research quality in the social sciences in India. The IDRC supported review of citation trends in social science research in south Asia carried out by Arunachalam (2008) indicated that papers published in

psychiatry and medicine-related journals and energy journals were cited far more often than papers published in sociology, social work and anthropology. Also, Indian social science researchers generally do not make their research papers accessible through open access repositories such as inter-operable institutional open access repositories or global repositories such as *RePEc*.

Indian researchers during 2000-2008 have used 407 UK journals to publish 2176 papers (cited 5021 times) and 455 US journals to publish 1393 papers (cited 3613 times). In contrast the 1070 papers they have published in 27 Indian journals have been cited only 377 times (ibid.). While this could be attributed to the fact that most Indian journals do not have as wide a circulation as reputed international journals, what then of the 353 papers in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (with an SSCI ranking of 93/114 in Sociology in 2009) which were cited only 20 times during the period?

It is, therefore, difficult to apply the standardised quality yardsticks or criteria used in the North for assessing quality of research in the social sciences in India. If bibliometric analysis does not offer a sufficient evaluation and high productivity is not a necessary indicator of high quality research or excellence in research, there is a need to work with other secondary sources for building a more reliable and objective picture on the status of social science research in India. This was also reported by the recently concluded mapping of the arts and humanities research landscape in India which was commissioned by RCUK (IFA 2010). The most appropriate strategy would perhaps be to use peer review as the standard norm of validation of quality of research. The best strategy would perhaps be to look at papers published by Indian researchers in important national and international peer reviewed social science journals published from the country and books published by leading social science publishers.

Constraints: largely structural

One of the fundamental shortcomings of social science research in India is the **lack of proper institutional support and funding**. Driven largely by the huge volume of undergraduate enrolment in the social sciences, as mentioned earlier in the report, less than 20% of Indian universities combine teaching and research with most universities emphasising teaching over research. This limits the scope of research opportunities within universities. Consulting firms are often attractive career options but there is a preference to produce policy papers or briefs with no incentives to publish academic articles in refereed journals.

The 2007 ICSSR review reports that while the scale and range of social science research in the country have been expanding, the quality of research output of a majority of institutions, as well as their contribution to a better understanding of socioeconomic processes and shaping public policy are widely perceived to have fallen short of expectations and also not commensurate with the resources spent on them. **Multidisciplinary**

approaches are seldom used even within the various social science disciplines and the policy research field is largely dominated by economics.

The **problem of language** was highlighted by most of the resource persons consulted for this report. The medium of instruction upto the undergraduate level in most provincial colleges is a regional language while most postgraduate education and almost all advanced research (with the exception of language studies) uses English as the language of communication. With the critical vocabulary of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research conducted primarily in English, a large majority of students find it difficult to make the transition. Much of the primary research itself is conducted in local dialects and languages used in the field. Unlike the natural sciences, social science research, especially in those disciplines where description and the written essay are primary, this necessarily means that a lack of felicity with the English language acts as a fetter.

The overall picture of **how social research is utilized for policy-making** in India is sketchy (Mathur 2009). Gender-related policies could be cited as a good example of research placing an issue on the policy agenda. The Committee on the Status of Women (1974) built up a new range of research on gender discrimination, had excellent communication and dissemination strategies, and led to the formation of an independent department (now Ministry) for women and child development (Hay and Sudarshan 2010). In general, however, a great deal of policy relevant research simply does not enter the public domain, making it difficult to assess its quality, or for it to contribute to public debate.

VI. Discussion

Social science research in India has had a chequered history. While the country has the highest volume of research in the region, and is significantly ahead of other countries in south Asia, there is wide disparity in research activity and output across the country, both in terms of quantity and quality. While a handful of premium universities located in the major cities do foster academic research cultures which include disciplinary or interdisciplinary work, particular kinds of expert knowledge and knowledge production with a focus on peer review and engagement with internal and external intellectual networks and learned societies, the quality of research in a large majority of institutions neither conforms to international academic standards nor have they been able to make a significant contribution to social science research, either theoretical or applied and policy-oriented, in the country.

There is a tendency to publish books rather than papers in refereed journals and a large number of publications appear in low-impact journals. Part of the reason for this is the mandated emphasis on monographs for academic positions in Indian universities, as is the case in the Anglophone world in certain social science disciplines like history, anthropology, sociology and political science.

The problems are largely structural. One of the fundamental shortcomings is the lack of proper institutional support and funding. The university system emphasises teaching over research. Although a number of Indian social scientists have achieved eminence in the international social science community, specific institutions are yet to make a mark in the international academic community. Research organisations recruit university graduates, but do not invest in further research capacity building and training. Consulting firms are often attractive career options but there is a preference to produce policy papers or briefs but with no incentives to publish academic articles in refereed journals.

While the bulk of social science research is undertaken in universities and public-funded research organizations, the university administration is not research friendly and there are no incentive structures – either financial or professional - to encourage teachers to undertake research. A majority of doctoral theses in regional universities cannot be published due to their poor quality. Only about 15-20% of the 433 universities have achieved an international standard in teaching and research. There is wide variation across the country in institutional nature, ambition and resources as well as in individual research leaders' orientation and capability. While specific departments in universities focus on academic rigour with attention to both theoretical as well as empirical research, there are other departments in the same university, or in other institutions, where research products are produced but with inadequate attention to rigour and theory generation. Further, there is very little coordination between the various entities that carry

out social science research in India leading to considerable overlap and duplication of research.

Given the various streams of support, it is difficult to estimate the exact amount of funds that the GOI spends on social science research in India but funding in general is meagre. High quality research centres in the life sciences such as the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, and the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bangalore, provide a conducive ambience and world class laboratory facility for their researchers. Different agencies promoting the physical and biological sciences and engineering are flush with funds. Where are equivalent centres of excellence in the social sciences?

Discussions with leading social scientists in Delhi highlight the need to develop two inter-related components of institutional research capacity in the social sciences: developing a research culture (of a specific nature), and developing researchers' capacity to carry out high quality research. A concerted effort to forge active links between research institutes and university departments will not only enable teachers in the universities to participate in research programmes of specific institutes but will give opportunities to researchers in institutes to engage with higher quality academic research.

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ⁱ Of the 28 universities that were reviewed, only the University of Delhi, NUEPA and TISS publish annual reports with select publication details. In the absence of comprehensive data on publication, however, it is not possible to arrive at any scientific conclusion on the quality and quantity of the social science research being done by the universities.

ⁱⁱ The focus in these universities is mainly on teaching; research is more often that not led by individual interests among members of faculty.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, the Programme of Environmental Education supported by the Ministry of Education since the early 1980s finds its origin in the recommendations of a Working Group set up for the Eighth Plan, is based on education and development research in Uttarakhand. Similarly the Tenth and Eleventh Plan approach to adolescents, including education and going beyond it, has been strongly influenced by the experiences of an NGO programme in Rajasthan, and discussion with educationists and practitioners within the Working Groups.

^{iv} The Special Assistance Programme selects particular departments in the faculties of science, humanities, social sciences, and engineering and technology for support at three levels: the Departmental Research Support; Departments of Special Assistance and finally as Centres for Advanced Study. Another scheme is to identify and designate select university departments as Departments for Potential of Excellence, and provide them substantial financial support. Apart from such funds UGC also offers specific project based funding to scholars under the Major Research Projects and Minor Research Projects. It also provides Junior Research Fellowships to students for carrying out MPhil and doctoral studies if they achieve distinction in the National Eligibility Test conducted by the UGC. Apart from the UGC, state Governments also allocate a part of their budget for universities most of which is used to pay salaries of faculty members and staff. The single major source of funding for institutes in southern India has been state governments.

^v No significant change in budget allocation in the recent years is observed. Although Rs 74,440 million was allocated for research and development in science and technology in 2005-06, only 8% of that sum was allocated to the social sciences.

^{vi} Similarly, publications of academics from the Indian Statistical institutes – although largely in economics – have been found to have social science research components. Also, policy research projects, for instance the Bridging the Urban Rural Divide co-funded by RCUK and DST, also has social science research components.

^{vii} Core government grants given to Indian ICSSR institutions are 'equity driven' reflecting the initial intent that each state government would have access to research support. This funding over the years has ensured the building of capability for research in social sciences. However, some ICSSR institutes have been able to access project funding more than others and there has been a gradual reduction in full support to ICSSR institutes and this has forced a degree of effort to attract project grants and even consultancies from other sources. These organizations continue to have an assured staff budget.

^{viii} From a survey of around 1,000 books from a selection of eight major academic publishers (including Sage, Oxford University Press, and Orient Longman) it was reported that 31% of books were written by economists, 30% by sociologists, 23% by political scientists, 10% by historians and 5% by geographers. About 33% of all authors are non-resident Indians and foreign scholars, 28% work at an Indian university, and 20% at a research institute.

^{ix} Based on articles published in the following journals: *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *Demography India*, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *Indian Journal of Labour Economics* and *Sociological Bulletin*.