How to Move Statistics from Negligence to Transparency: A Palestinian Experience

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Abstract

Setting up a statistical system for Palestine requires special efforts to change perceptions and beliefs among general public about the function and role of the statistical systems. Due to long history of foreign occupations, Palestinians have linked statistical activities to occupier's well for control and abuse of indigenous resources. Image reversal and dismantlement of stereotyping are recognized as preconditions for turning alienated attitudes around, and for strengthen user's own perceptions of their rights as potential stakeholders in the statistical system. Moving users to become stakeholders and statistics to become "a public good" requires strategic intervention to change the prevailing culture of alienation or indifference. A reaching out strategy had to be based on a sweeping process of changing the stereotyping among users, eliminating statistical negligence, turning official statistics into "a public good", and introducing statistical transparency. The challenge facing Palestine is one of introducing official statistics to policy makers, key users, and the public at large as a tool for good governance and informed citizenry. This challenge is met through an open and constructive relationship with users through an extensive User-Producer Dialogue program and dissemination policies for promoting statistics as "a public good". Through active dialogue with users and intensive dissemination, the Palestinian Statistical System has become a leading force of change towards empowerment of the people in their quest for survival and prosperity.

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Introduction

The notion of statistics as "a public good" is a fairly recent in Palestine. Political history of the country, which is characterized by repeated foreign occupations, has created a deep-rooted culture of negative perceptions of data collection and information activities. Several of the documented experiences of data gathering during the last five hundred years link them to drafting young Palestinians to serve occupying armies, or to organization of tax collection for the benefit of the occupiers, or to supporting occupiers network of information gathering in support of running the country. The Ottomans, for example, have repeatedly collected the "needed" data on various types of holdings in support of their tax systems. They conducted population censuses to establish and maintain registers of potential draftees. The Egyptian forces have collected data in the 1830's on agricultural holdings, and then used the information to generate revenues in support of their operations in Palestine. The British military relied heavily on their data collection activities during the mandate period (1917-1948) in Palestine. In fact, they have assembled a full statistical function to maintain their control on the country and, to some extent, facilitate the fulfillment of the "Belfore declaration" of 1917, which paved they way for the creation of Israel. The Jordanians have conducted two population censuses and several data collection activities in the West Bank. Jordanian government and planners used the data and statistics to integrate West Bank within the Jordanian regime.

Upon its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in June 1967, Israel used data collection activities very heavily to maintain its tight control on the population and economy. The statistical activities were facilitated by the military government, and managed technically by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. During the 27 years of occupation, statistical activities were directly linked to the cause of maintaining Israeli control on the country. For example, in September 1967, the Israeli military conducted a population census in Wes Bank and Gaza Strip. Census records were then used by the military authorities to maintain a database on the individual Palestinians, and as a single mean of establishing residency in the country. Effectively, the Palestinians counted during the census were identified by the occupiers as the only legal residents of the country. This act has striped more than 350,000 Palestinians who fled the country during the 1967 war from their rights of residency in the country. Other data collection activities were very selective in terms of scope, coverage, and periodicity, and were "at least from the Palestinian perceptive" linked to actions taken on ground by the occupying forces to maintain occupation.

During all these years, Palestinian experience with data collection and statistical activities was one of alienation, suspicion, and fear. On the other hand, Palestinians did not have any real chance to experience good uses of statistics for socio-economic development during the same period. Concepts such as empowerment, right to know, planning, informed citizenry, and evidence based policy formulation were absent for lack of sovereignty, control, or socio-economic authority on the people and the land. The whole community was polarized during the period and squeezed

into a purely political path, which does not view statistics as a tool for improving good governance, leadership, development, and prosperity, but rather as a tool of the suppressor to maintain control. The country was, in a nutshell, hostile to data collection and statistical activities.

While Palestinian public viewed Israeli statistical activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, OPT, negatively and with great suspicion, the PLO has invested some of its resources in supporting statistics and data collection in the country. The PLO established a statistics division in 1979 within its department of economic affairs. Palestinian researchers, NGO's, and universities, took several data collection initiatives in the country on behalf of the PLO and other international agencies. These initiatives, however, were marginal in terms of impact on establishing databases, building statistical capacity, providing independent sources of information, or changing the public perception of the field.

Palestinian participation in the peace process, which was launched in Madrid in 1991, has encouraged the PLO to take some steps toward establishing the infrastructure of a potential state. In March 1993, the PLO leadership decided to set up a Central Bureau of Statistics for Palestine. This was the first national Palestinian agency to be set up on Palestinian soil as the peace process was unfolding, actually the first small beginning of an administrative apparatus for a future independent Palestinian state. At the time, there was nothing; no staff, no Palestinian produced statistics, no organization, no statistical infrastructure.

In establishing PCBS, we have realized that the emergence of a Palestinian statistical system must involve a major process of reorientation of perceptions and taking apart the stereotyping of statistical operations. We knew that the Bureau needs a measure of recognition and respect from society at large to motivate respondents in households, and enterprises to cooperate in an objective manner, and in the public arena for its results to be taken seriously as official statistics. This is a task that is political in essence; to establish, maintain, and continuously develop a set of values and beliefs that provide motivation and meaning to the activities, not only among those directly involved but also in the culture and life of the society at large.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, PCBS, has endeavored since its establishment in 1993 to achieving several strategic goals. First, to turn around the public perceptions of statistical activities, and move them from the state of alienation to participation. Second, to achieve recognition and acceptance of the Palestinian Statistical System, PSS, as a powerful tool for planning, monitoring, evaluation, empowerment, and public debate. Third, to fill the existing statistical gap in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (West Bank and the Gaza Strip) by compiling data in the social, economic, geographical and environmental areas in accordance with a specified priority schedule.

Achieving the first two goals required a major mobilization of public support for the national programs, major campaigns to raise public awareness and acceptance of the statistical system, and extensive dialogue with various potential stakeholders, which served us in introducing the system to the stakeholders, and to help them realize their own needs. In the efforts for achieving the first two goals, PCBS allocated much of its efforts to move forward both in terms of data dissemination and access to micro data. Both are necessary steps in order to help the general public make informed decisions. In this regard, data dissemination as well as public access to information on policy issues and initiatives of collective interest are viewed by PCBS as substantial steps in institution building and system's sustainability.

For achieving the third goal, and in view of the fact that statistical priorities are numerous and urgent, and in an attempt to lay the basis for a scientific and practical Palestinian Statistical System which enjoys national and international credibility, a Master Plan for developing Palestine official statistics was articulated to fulfill the requirements and conditions of building a national statistical system capable of earning national recognition, and which is qualified to join the international statistical system without any obstacles.

In the rest of this paper, we present the Palestinian experience in achieving the first two goals. We discuss what we believe to be the issues that stood out as milestones, challenges, or problems in moving the Palestinian official statistical system from the state of negligence and

alienation, to a potentially transparent and participatory system.

2. Reaching Out for Users and Stakeholders

Situation analysis of the Palestinian attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about the field of statistics during the occupation period revealed a great need for remedies which take into consideration an image bank of uses of statistics. Our efforts for turning much of the standing perceptions and beliefs among Palestinians about statistics, had to be based on a sweeping process of changing the stereotyping among users, eliminating statistical negligence, turning official statistics into "a public good", and introducing statistical transparency.

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2.1 Stereotyping official statistics, a product from the enemy

Upon occupation of West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the Israeli military and civil authorities have established statistical functions in the country, and initiated data collection and statistical tabulations in several fields. For almost twenty-seven years, these authorities were actively involved in the statistical activities about fields which, Palestinians believe, served the purposes of occupation. The absence of an official Palestinian Statistical System in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, OPT, between 1967 and 1993 resulted in the inability of the Palestinian planners and policy crafters to use the information and to make it available for serving the goals of objective developmental planning. The prolonged Israeli control over the statistical environment of the country has lead to emergence of attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes among the Palestinians against use of statistics in a rational objective manner. We list here some of the issues which made up the culture of alienation among Palestinian users;

* Being a direct *product from the enemy*, the statistics are, therefore, bound to be wrong, misleading, and based on dubious methodologies of data collection.
* The statistics is *Selective in scope and modalities*; areas of concentration are directly related to ways and means of strengthening Israeli control over the population and land.
* Being *used to serve occupation forces*, these statistics must be part of the intelligence gathering operations of these forces.
* In many fields the production was *not systematic*, the variable modes of production and release of various statistics made it difficult to maintain time series, or carry trend analysis, which in turn casts some doubt on the value of the whole exercise as a professional and impartial one, and suggests negative perceptions on the real motives behind the work.
* Data collection has often used *outdated sampling frames*, leading to suspicions about the statistical value of the exercise among Palestinians. For many Palestinians, the data collected had marginal statistical value in comparison to its intelligence value.
* The statistics compiled was often tabulated and published for Israeli users only. The management of this exercise had *no dissemination plans*, which focuses on the needs and interests of the general Palestinian public, and never intended to make the statistics available for the local users, being the main stakeholders. Moreover, the statistics compiled was often published in the occupier's language.
* Statistical activities were bound to violate the codes of privacy due to *lack of independence, legal framework, and track record* for controlling the authority of data collection agency. The integrity of data collection was always in question due to the fact that the statistical activities were based on the authority of military orders, and not statistical act, in accordance with international recommendations.

The unique conditions surrounding the process of establishing and maintaining the statistical systems for Palestine required special approaches in reaching out for our main users and

stakeholders. The system has to define stakeholders and help them understand their needs, and then encourage them to generate their own demand from the system, it has to establish a track record of good practice, timely production of reliable data with very high quality, and positive impact on the socioeconomic conditions. It has to introduce new language in the media, which is not used to reporting of stories using statistics. Within the context of the process of reaching out, users and stakeholders have to be encouraged to have their own expectations from the statistical system, and to formulate their positions on the basis of what the system should offer or can offer in response to their perceived needs.

In our effort to achieve acceptance of the statistical system and maximum use of its outputs, a sweeping strategy was adopted for establishing the demand for statistics among users, empowerment of stakeholders, and timely delivery of statistical output to the doorsteps of various users.

2.2 Parameters of statistical negligence

Attributes of statistical negligence in the country are determined by looking at system's own perception of its mandate and functions, the nature of relationship between the system and general users, and the horizontal relationship between the NSI and the government. Systems with marginal function in a country tend to suffer from low status on the government's structure and annual budget, they are often bypassed by key users such as government planners, NGO's and international community, and they lack motivation for acquiring knowledge and expertise needed for putting their statistics to use, increasing awareness about their potential, or building trust in their products. Often, the state of negligence and marginalization, which face a statistical system of the country are attributed to ambiguity in the legal mandate and role, lack of resources and motivation, absence of leadership, failing to maintain timely delivery of products, absence of national agenda for statistics within the policy making circles, irrelevance of the system to users and stakeholders, and lack of trust in system's products.

A statistical system cannot perform its functions within the determinants of a state of negligence. System's survival and sustainability is dependent on how far it can achieve in defining clarity and transparency of mandate, role, and relation to stakeholders. External forces, we believe, can do little in promoting escape from this state. In fact, it is the responsibility of the statistical system not to take a passive role in mobilizing the interest of users in their products, and avoid ending up with a production cycle with no dissemination strategy or with one, which is static, rigid, fragmented, or outdated.

The above description does not, however, fit the Palestinian context. Attributes of statistical negligence are mainly external to both producers and users, and influenced by the political process. The challenge we have to face is one of moving an already alienated public to the other extreme, and to mobilize interest within the government in what we do, including extensive training on how to use our products. We have been probably very lucky in maximizing the use of international goodwill in establishing a system, which aggressively pursued the users for maximum interaction, benefiting from a wealth of experiences and examples of good practice in setting up and operating a modern statistical system.

2.3 Turning official statistics into "a public good"

Maximum return from investment in statistical activities can be achieved only when we reach the stage in which stakeholders and public at large perceive the statistics we produce as "a public good". It becomes then a very effective tool for energizing public debate about government policies in various fields, leading to transparency and accountability within the government and civil society.

The challenge of turning official statistics in Palestine to "a public good" involves a series of actions, which we had to take among users and producers in the course of establishing the system.

Users had to be influenced to become demanding stakeholders with expectations from the statistical system that is transparent and useful. Producers had to be informed of the basic principles of good practice in producing and disseminating official statistics, and of the function and role of official statistics in promoting good governance. They had to be educated on the various aspects of the User-Producer relationship, and on the need to be demand driven and oriented toward maximum use by users. Both users and producers had to be couched for building a network of relationships, which could only lead to better use of the statistics, better production, and relevant production process.

Our current practices in communicating with users and disseminating output take into consideration this challenge and address it in a systematic way. We inform various stakeholders about the value, potential, and expected use of the statistics resulting from a census or survey well ahead of time before the actual data collection and statistical tabulation. Users are invited for feedback and consultations on the selection of indicators, tabulation plans, and dissemination for each census or survey. Once statistical results become available, we usually invite users and stakeholders for a briefing on the outcomes, we share with them our assessment of data quality and the expected time schedule for disseminating the output.

Keeping stakeholders informed about the planning and execution of statistical activities at all time is key to empowering them and raising their expectations from the statistical system. The empowerment of users is possible only when we share with them information about various stages of planning and execution of the statistical activities, seek their views about tabulation plans, and share with them results of assessment of data quality and investigations on reliability of statistical results.

Our perspective for the long-term results we opt to reach involves convincing our users and the public at large that we are truly an independent, neutral, accountable, and modern system. We are taking several measures to emphasize these aspects of the system such as; adopting new statistics law (passed in July 2000), establishing fixed release dates of our output, establishing transparent procedures for management and statistical activities, intensifying dialogue with users before, during, and after each census or survey, diversifying dissemination means to fit different needs as expressed by potential users, and communicating with the media in more systematic manner.

2.4. Parameters of statistical transparency in Palestine

On the basis of experience so far, one could argue that the Palestinian statistical system has emerged as a clear winner in the battle of introducing statistical transparency. In the six years which have passed since the release of the first ever statistical publication, PCBS has managed to establish a strong record on several fronts;

• The statistics we produce is *extensively used* by various users as a tool for public debate on government policies and programs. While we do not have statistics about the extent of use of the statistics we produce, we are sighted on regular basis in the media, parliament, and dialogue between NGO's. Many research papers and investigative reports were published on the basis of what we produce.
• Our statistics is *accessible by all*. Printed publications are distributed to approximately five hundred locations, including all government ministries and agencies, members of parliament, public libraries, university libraries, media agencies, major NGO's, and several others. Regular press releases are issued whenever a survey or a census is conducted, and an internet website is maintained and updated on daily basis. Moreover, a special section within PCBS handles all requests for statistics. Micro-data is released for use within research community on limited basis. and soon will be made available for general public against nominal fees.

- We believe we have achieved *Independence* of the system. Fixed release dates have been introduced recently, and all of our statistics is accessible on equal rights basis. The government does not have any privilege over any other category of users.
- The concept of *Timely* release of the statistics is practiced on an ad hoc basis. The relative age of the country and the nature of the socioeconomic developments, which are taking place, do not require very strict adherence to the concept. However, we have not delayed the release of any results so far. Our policy in this regard calls for the immediate release of results once they become available.
- It is widely believed that the statistics we produce is of good quality and highly *Reliable*. We have taken very tight control procedures to provide for maximum quality of what we produce. Users of our statistics and general public have confidence in what we produce. Moreover, the statistics we produce is widely used by the international community without any question relating to data quality.
- The Palestinian system produces statistics that are *Relevant and Useful*. The statistical program was derived on the basis of a conceptual framework, which was drafted for the country as a whole (the master plan), and in consultation with key users and stakeholders. Annual review of *Relevance and Usefulness* keep the system on high demand.
- The framework of our relationship with users is based on complete *Professionalism* and strict adherence to codes of conduct. We maintain a transparent mode of communication and collaboration with stakeholders. Dialogue with users takes several forms and covers a wide range of areas of concern for the system and them.
- The transparency we maintain in what we do has lead to an environment where users consider the statistics we produce *Beyond controversy*. The general believe is that the system tries to perform its functions in a standard scientific way, which is subject only to the professional ethics and codes maintained by the field. Results of our statistical work are considered *Neutral*

3. Challenges Facing Palestine in Promoting Use of Official Statistics

Promoting use of official statistics in planning and decision making for Palestine required understanding of the nature of challenges facing the system. While the agenda for well-established and transparent statistical systems is a function of well-articulated user needs, usually expressed innovatively by sophisticated users, the agenda for the Palestinian statistical system is driven by a genuine resolve for overcoming cultural barrier in the understanding of the function and value of statistical information, establishment of baseline databases on the socioeconomic conditions, updating and maintenance of already existing databases, meeting "potential needs" for "potential users", and international recognition.

The challenge facing Palestine is one of introducing official statistics to policy makers, key users, and the public at large as a tool for good governance and informed citizenry. Dialogue with various potential stakeholders was crucial in setting up the conceptual framework of our program in relation to their potential needs and the needs of the international community. In order to achieve recognition of the Palestinian statistical system (PSS) by various stakeholders in a relatively short period, we had to adopt a special outreach strategy for moving both horizontally in terms of reaching all potential users of the statistics, and vertically through building stakeholders trust in the quality and reliability of the statistics we produce.

The outreach strategy is based on a series of interventions that included *capacity building among users* for better understanding and use of official statistics, *generation of user needs* through extensive dialogue and advocacy, extensive use of the *media* in all forms for publicity and marketing of statistical products, designing and implanting a *dissemination strategy* focusing on increasing access to statistics, and special means and forms of *communication with policy makers* to win their recognition. support. and extensive use of the PSS.

4. Role of User-Producer Dialogue in Achieving Transparency

Open and constructive relationship with users is key to the success and sustainability of a demand driven statistical system. User-Producer Dialogue, UPD, serves stakeholders in their quest for information, and producers in their efforts for reaching the stage of being demand driven and relevant. The process of UPD in Palestine includes a mix of approaches; which vary from the more classical and well-tested methods, to the country specific methods tailored to meet the challenges resulting from existing sociopolitical conditions.

4.1 Turning users into stakeholders

Stereotype reversal of the image, function, and role of official statistics among public and potential users was a key step to be taken before a normal course of UPD could be carried out. We had to redefine the role of official statistics from that of a control mechanism to an enlightenment tool. The experience of tight control over the information by an alien power had to be dismantled in favor for an image of openness, increased access, and sometimes divergence from the government as a ruling power. We had to move away from the practice of granting access to statistics on the basis of privilege and pre selection to transparent access with equal opportunity to our statistics. And we had to promote accessibility to all the information by public at large.

Absorption capacity of users in terms of system's outputs was very limited in the first three years of the life of PSS. In fact, we had to couch users during that period, and help them generate their own needs from the system. We had to move users from the state of "ignorance" on potential uses of official statistics to the state of empowerment as stakeholders through publishing literature on use of statistics in various areas, and linking with research community. As a result, the absorption capacity of users as stakeholders has increased dramatically since then. In our efforts to maintain relevance of the system from users perspective, we try to understand changes in user demands, and continuously monitor user needs and use of our statistics.

The scope of UPD in Palestine takes into account the need for empowering users in terms of their rights as stakeholders, increasing their awareness of uses of the system, informing them of the input-output dynamics of the system, generating demand among them, and continued monitoring and assessment of their needs. During the last five years of the UPD, hundreds of seminars, discussion groups, and inquiries were launched. These consultations have lead to an increased understanding of the dynamics of the official statistics production process among users and producers, development of indicators that satisfy users expectations in almost all sectors, and adaptations of concepts and definitions to local conditions.

UPD has assumed several forms in the course of the last five years. Seminars, workshops, study days represent the main modality of conducting UPD in Palestine. More than seventy-five consultations are designed annually in various fields. Each of these consultations lasts for 2-3 hours and is carried out four times in four different parts of the country. The repetition of these consultations is designed to ease of communication with users in various parts of the country, and to overcome political obstacles caused by the Israeli military actions, which limit the public's ability for free movement within the country. Various stakeholders are usually invited to attend these consultations and to express their views in terms of contents, findings, plans, and measurement methodologies. User satisfaction surveys are also used to monitor and understand user needs. Users are also encouraged to present us with feedback through the Department of user Services, which is the main department responsible for satisfying users needs in statistics.

The forward looking and openness in relation to users has earned the PSS a very respected standing in the country. Currently, the system enjoys very high support from users, although they have their own differences with some of what we produce, and criticism of our release schedules and tight control on micro data releases.

4.2 Dialogue with policy makers

Dialogue with Policy makers on value and use of official statistics is recognized as a top priority for the survival and sustainability of the BSS. The dialogue is based on realization of the need for the system to converge towards policy makers through recognizing their agenda, which is based on their need for relevant, usable, and timely information. Our strategy in addressing them is based on adapting to their needs for information as a matter of priority, with emphasis on informing them of various uses of official statistics and convincing them that our services provide good value for money when competing for scarce government resources.

4.3 Education and learning among users and producers

Educating users on the power of proper use of statistical information, as well as continuously learning about the developments of users needs and expectations will lead to a better UPD and more constructive partnership between users and producers. Users and producers have to learn more about good/bad examples of practices in producing and using of official statistics. Producers are often carried away in searching for missing links with users, and in analyzing the causes of rifts, which may exist from time to time between them and the users. They tend not to recognize the change in user needs or focus, and do not allocate resources for going out and meeting users in the field. they do not appreciate very much the fact that knowing more about user needs requires going out to the field and learning more about them.

4.4 Meeting users expectations in statistical reporting

Meeting users expectations and answering to their demands and needs from the statistical system is crucial to the survival of the system. Achieving user satisfaction from a producer's perspective requires major investments and actions in terms of system's integrity and communicability of the statistics. On the integrity side, users are satisfied only when the system is able to produce statistics that are timely, accurate, comparable, comprehensive, consistent, objective, relevant, reliable, and clear. On the communicability side, users will be satisfied only when the statistics are user friendly and simple to understand.

5. Dissemination Policies in Service of Transparency

Development of attitudes based on the notion of "right to know" among stakeholders and general public is absolutely essential in promoting statistics as "a public good" within the country. Dissemination policies tailored to serving this concept will bring users more into demanding and supporting actions leading to development of the concept. The framework for these policies should be designed to establish appreciation for production of statistics, promote and increases the use of statistical output, demonstrate cost effectiveness, and promote importance of statistics in the collective life of the society.

A successful dissemination strategy which fits into the framework suggested above, should serve as a proper vehicles for bring users into the process as stakeholders, and for arriving at a situation where users interact with statistics and use it in the fulfillment of a "right to know" perspective.

Users would have to realize that the statistics we produce functions as their eyes in looking at performance of the social and economics policies within the country. The strategy should address stakeholders and emphasize the widening of the knowledge base of the state of affairs in the socioeconomic realities of the country. It should be impartial in the sense that it guarantees equal access rights to information among various users, and allows for maximum access to the information by them. It should promote the ability of users to perform trend analysis and impact

analysis, and must give them maximum chance to be able to formulate informed judgments on the basis of what is being disseminated.

5.1 Characteristics of a transparency based dissemination policy

To achieve maximum utilization of the statistics produced, we aim at arriving to a situation where our dissemination policies are transparent and maintain the following characteristics;
- Aims at maximizing stakeholders access to the statistics and micro data, maximum use of what is produced, minimum cost of what is produced to users and producers, and minimum bureaucracies and administrative procedures for accessing and using the statistics and data.
- Based on continued monitoring and assessment of user needs for the sake of adjustment and redesign of the production agenda to fit changing needs. Monitoring and assessment can be developed, carried out, and determined through case studies, respondent surveys, face-to-face meetings, UPD seminars, ...etc.
- Recognizes all stakeholders in an impartial way, allocating proper weights for them according to the extent of utilization potential the possess for the system, and meeting their needs and demands within an open prioritization system.
- Diversified to meet various needs and experiences of various stakeholders (tailored to fit)
- Publicly available for review and evaluation by stakeholders, and based on simple approaches for meeting user needs.
- Take into account available means of access to statistics and data within user circles, and do not represent a financial burden on users to benefit from.

Dissemination policies should be user oriented and avoid complications. They should be kept very simple and based on basic principles of dissemination, which try to address the basic needs and reach out for users. Successful dissemination policies come usually with communication policies, media policies, and extensive user surveys for feed back purposes.

5.2 Development of a dissemination strategy

Development of a dissemination strategy should take user needs as the ultimate target for fulfillment. Organization of such a strategy should take into consideration various categories of users and user needs. It should use the media as one of its most effective means of reaching out and address the special needs of various media venues and modalities. A successful dissemination strategy would also approach the exercise from a marketing point of view, with statistical products as commodities which require articulated and efficient strategies to sell to clients.

Components of the dissemination strategy could be based on strategies for soliciting the media as a vehicle for reaching out, strategies for involving policy makers and becoming useful to them, strategies for invoking interest and participation of the research community, and of course strategies for promoting extensive use of the products by the government and private sector.

5.3 Means of dissemination in Palestine

Dissemination takes several forms using various mediums in Palestine. Statistics available vary from the more classical and old fashion printed tabulations and summary reports, to the more user friendly descriptive and analytical printed reports. Other means of dissemination include display of basic downloadable tabulations through Internet, supply on demand special tabulations through the Department of Users Services (DUS), press releases, quick summaries which are usually released as preliminary results 2-5 weeks after completing field work, specialized seminars and workshops, and policy notes which try to link statistics to policy through a monthly joint address of PCBS and policy makers on specific topics.

6. Conclusions

After six years of launching statistical operations, basic building blocks of a transparent statistical system are well established in Palestine. Independence of the system, as well as the legal foundations for its integrity are preserved through a modern statistics act which has been ratified by the legislative and executive authorities of the country. Main stakeholders are increasingly demanding and vigilant. The demand for timely and reliable statistics is mounting among various users. The PCBS is slowly moving away from being project oriented towards becoming a producer of regular statistics, and the production cycle is about to stabilize. Our ability to reach transparency and achieve independence of the system could be attributed to the approaches we had to take in establishing the system. These approaches included;

• Extensive use of advocacy in promoting legitimacy of the PCBS, the statistical system, and the statistical production cycle.

• A sweeping approach in launching the various elements of the system and starting the production in several fields

• The extensive use of the press as an effective vehicle for promoting the need for reliable statistics and for communicating the statistics we produce to the end users

• The extensive use of international visibility and interaction to transfer know-how and achieve recognition,

• The adoption of a Masterplan for developing the Palestinian official statistics as a prerequisite for all steps, which followed. The Masterplan has acted as a road map for various stakeholders and users of the system.

• The extensive use of UPD as a vehicle for empowering users and promoting partnership in designing and executing censuses and surveys

• The allocation of resources for dissemination and adopting dissemination policies and strategies as integral parts of the planning and execution of various activities.

Looking back at the perceptions, convections, attitudes, and practices among Palestinian users before the establishment of the Palestinian Statistical System, we believe the PSS has managed to move from being an alien marginalized one to become a leading force of change towards empowerment of the people in their quest for survival and prosperity.

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