

**Palestine National Authority**  
**Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics**

**The Role of Official Statistics in Measuring and  
Implementing the Economic and Social Human Rights**

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## 1. Introduction

On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Following this historic act, the Assembly called upon all member countries to publicize the text of the declaration and to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and exposed in schools and other educational institutions, without distinctions made on the basis of the political status of countries or territories. Since that time, many regional and country reports on the status of human rights were disseminated. It was realized that statistical information is an important input for implementation process. The committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women, recommended in its eighth session in 1989, that statistical information is absolutely necessary in order to understand the real situation of women in each of the State parties to the convention.

The declaration is universal and ideal in terms of justice and equity, but reality is different. Hence, the gap between the substance of the declaration and reality varies according to the level of development, democracy and social and political equity in the country. DFID indicated that two lessons were learned from the experience of human rights for poor people (DFID 2000 [1]). Lesson one is related to the fact that there is a large gap between the aspirations contained in the principles of the universal declaration of human rights and the reality of the lives of many people in poorer countries. Lesson two includes the progressive realization that human rights require resources and strategic planning and long-term action. Many stakeholders addressed the need for implementation mechanisms and modalities of the declaration. The meeting report of “models for monitoring the protection of children’s rights” organized by the international child development center in Florence in 1990 included separate items for the necessity of having the access to valid statistics and data analysis on the conditions of children. The report indicated that speaking with facts in hands depends upon the availability of sound statistics and data analysis on the conditions of children – information, which is often missing. The working groups were particularly concerned about the issue of systematic data collection processes to generate all the social and other indicators, which are essential to sound policy and planning (ICDC 1990 [3]).

Therefore, providing a comprehensive, comparative and accurate information on the situation of human rights is considered a backbone of the reporting system on human rights. Statistics can determine the responsibility of the violations against economic, social, and

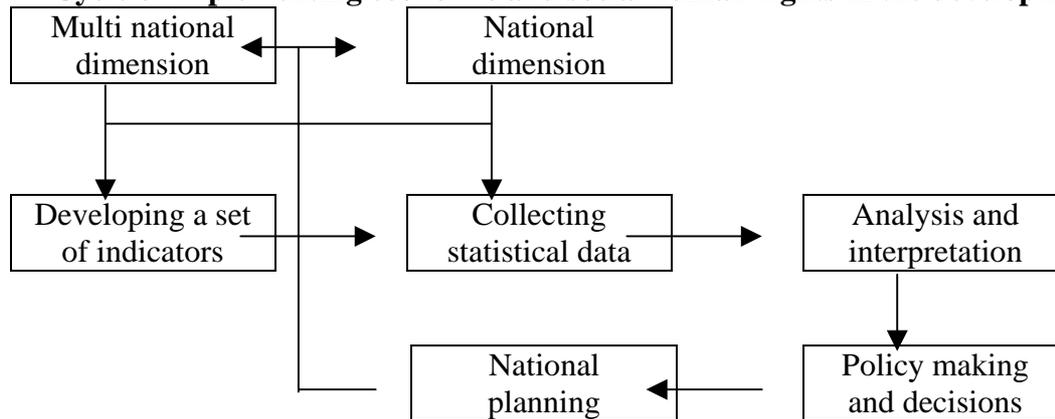
cultural human rights, and if they are directed to certain group. It can show also if these violations are part of strategies employed or encouraged by governments or other forces. The development of the standard classifications is a necessary prerequisite to produce comparable statistics on human rights. Statistics based on well-documented cases can be used in several ways to give better understanding of the situation.

## **2. Measurement and implementation cycle**

Developing a set of indicators to be measured in different points of time is the standing point to indicate the current situation and to measure the progress over time. Clearly defined indicators provide a scale, which is used to measure the level of progress in the implementation of social and economic human rights. Analysis of the collected data using statistical methods provides better understanding of the trends, and the main characteristics of certain subgroups of the society. Therefore, reporting on the situation of human rights stands basically on the flow of statistical data on each of the indicators identified. Interpretation and assessment of the situation form a basis for the formulation of action plans in light of the findings derived from the statistical information collected.

Considering the situation in the developing countries, three levels of intervention might be considered in the process of measuring and implementing economic and social rights. Multi national agencies played a significant role in developing the available set of indicators. Some of the indicators were developed on the basis of the interest of these agencies, such as UNICEF, ILO, WHO, UNDP, SIDA, and others. At the national level, the core problem in this regard is related to the existence of national agreement and adoption of the concerned indicators and the role of these indicators in the national planning and evaluation process. i.e. the legitimacy of the adopted indicators as a basic component of the economic and development system in the country and the institutional framework in the execution process.

### Cycle of implementing economic and social human rights in the developing countries



This second level includes also the existence of statistical and information system which is able to feed in and provide statistical information on regular basis on these indicators. The third level is developing the mechanism of follow up on the findings in order to feed in the national planning and policy development. This level includes also the regular monitoring of the indicators, which requires statistical data, and interpreting the results to feed in again in the policy development. This process is dynamic and continuous.

### 3. Limitations and Obstacles

Good quantitative data are often useful in disproving what is regarded as common knowledge. Sometimes statistical information can document in startling way phenomena, including those related to human rights questions that are extremely important to know for public policy. Analysis of statistical data collected on questions related to human rights is crucial. But it should be warned against general tendency to perform sophisticated statistical analysis on grossly unreliable data. Making precise statistical calculation of imprecise data is misuse of statistics (Goldstein 1998 [23]). In this regard, compilation of statistical information on the economic, social and cultural human rights faces many difficulties and obstacles, of which some are political, while others are technical.

#### 3.1 Concepts and standards

Despite the fact that the area of social and economic rights lends itself to easier definition and operationalization than political, civil, and personal security rights area, yet many concepts in this field still pose great difficulties. For example U.S Census Bureau

reported in 1979 that less than one percent of the Americans over age of fourteen were illiterate, while U.S. Department of education reported in 1986 that 13 percent of adult Americans are illiterate. The difference between these two estimates was related to the fact that each institution used different definition to measure illiteracy (Goldstein 1998 [23]). This argument of using different definitions applies to all levels of intervention of human rights implementation cycle. At the international level, the Human Development Report (1990) introduced a measure of human development called human development index (HDI). People and their governments were encouraged to use this measure to evaluate progress over time. Successive reports promoted the UNDP's product. The HDR (1991) reported that HDI was a reliable measure of socio-economic progress. This report concluded that HDI is simple, as it is, stand up as a robust device, even when different weights are tried, the country HDI values do not change significantly. In reviewing the HDR report, Ian Castles concluded that the HDI might not be a satisfactory reliable measure of socio-economic progress. Allen Kelley argued that the HDI offers only limited insights beyond those obtained by small modifications to simple measure of economic output. Oartha Dasgupta judged the index to be not much good, and it has too many unappealing properties, and is also excessively partial. (Ian Castles 1998).

At the regional level, it is also difficult to get comparative statistics among countries. The report submitted by Tunisia in 1994 to the committee of child rights indicated that the judicial system applied to children in Tunisia does not include specific definition of child. The definition of child is variable and dynamic according to the specific objectives of the law. The minimum age for labor is 15 years as a general rule. Children less than 15 year are able to work in family business if all business employees are family members. The minimum age for children working in agriculture was reduced to 13 years if the work is not hazardous. The child becomes adult by marriage if the age is more than 17 years. The statistics included in the report indicated different age limits of each subject under study. No statistics were presented on article 32 regarding the protection from economic exploitation (CRC/C/11/add.2 1994 [10]). On the other hand, the report of non-governmental and Lebanese societies indicated that the children are all persons less than 15 years. By law it is forbidden to employ children in specific economic activities and it is forbidden to employ children less than 13 years of age in any economic activity<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A report submitted from the Lebanese societies regarding the implementation of CRC in Lebanon, 1995.

The above argument is still valid at the national level. In Palestine, for example, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), which produces the official statistics defines children as all persons less than 18 years of age. The minimum age for the purpose of collecting data on labor market is 10 years. But the ministry of labor (MOL), which is responsible for monitoring and implementing labor standards, adopts that all children less than 15 years are forbidden from paid employment, but those 16-18 may work under certain conditions.

PCBS adopts the ILO definition of paid employment, while the ministry of labor does not adopt specific definition. PCBS adopts the ISIC3 for classifying economic activity and ISCO-88 for classifying occupations. Ministry of labor adopts local classification of economic activity and local guide of job titles for describing occupations.

When it comes to measuring the knowledge of children and young people with their respective rights, neither PCBS nor MOL adopt any internationally adopted concept or definition. For the issue of work conditions, including safety measures, PCBS adopted international definitions in addition to local definitions of work conditions. The inspectors of MOL do not adopt these definitions.

It is worth mentioning that for simplicity purposes some multi national organizations concentrated on the measurement of well defined, clear and easily measurable indicators. The above argument of inconsistency in the definitions appears in the more difficult and less clear indicators in a more striking way. For example, life expectancy, infant mortality, child mortality are measuring the “survival” of human beings, but do not indicate the quality of life children are enjoying, which is more complicated to measure and the gap in definitions is much wider than in the case of the survival indicators<sup>2</sup>.

Lack of harmony among legislation related to child is common observation in many countries. For example, let us consider the relationship between minimum age of child labor and compulsory education age limits. According to the ILO, the first principle in identifying the minimum age is that it should not be less than the age of completing compulsory schooling and in no event less than 15 years. The minimum age should be progressively

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<sup>2</sup> The implementation handbook for the convention on the rights of the child presented a list of statistical information requested by the committee on the rights of the child in its guidelines for periodic reports. The committee requests, for example, statistical data on children who are non-nationals and children working in the streets (article 2), measures taken to protect against the adverse effect of economic policies including the reduction of budgetary allocations to the social sector (article 5). The committee request also statistical data on children situation of detention, imprisonment, exile, and death causing separation of child parents (article 9). Children suffering from violence, abuse, neglect and maltreatment (article 19). Statistics on adequate standard of living by family situation, and recovery of maintenance from parents having financial responsibility (article 27). The committee requests also statistics on exploitation of prejudicial to children welfare.

raised to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons. For the countries whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed, the minimum age can set initially at 14 years (ILO 1998 [4]).

**Table 1: Compulsory education ages and minimum age for admission to employment - selected countries**

Country	Age limits for compulsory education	Minimum age for work		
		Basic minimum age	Light work	Hazardous work
Angola	7-15	14	-	18
Congo	6-16	16	12	16 to 18
Morocco	7-13	12	-	16
Costa Rica	6-15	12-15	12	18
Pakistan	-	14 to 15	-	15 to 21
Syria	6-11	12 to 13	-	15
Palestine	6-16	15	-	16 to 18
Israel	5-16	15	-	16 to 18
Netherlands	5-16	15	13 to 15	18
Sweden	7-15	16	13	18
Switzerland	7-15	15	13	16 to 18

*Source: ILO 86th Session 1998. Child Labor: Targeting the intolerable. Report VI (1).*

The above information indicates the lack of harmony in all levels of country development among different fields of concern (labor and education in the above example) even when the country is adopting the international concepts and definitions in each field individually.

**3.2. Collection of reliable data**

Contemporary quantitative data are available and reliable in the areas of social and economic human rights. Thus, data on clearly definable and relatively easily countable subjects such as mortality, infant mortality, and life expectancy are available for almost all countries. Other data, such as measures of poverty, literacy and unemployment present major problems of conceptualization, interpretation, and measurement. In some cases, data may be unavailable for cross-national comparative purpose, due to the definitional differences or lack of compilation, but may be adequate for the purpose of tracking trends within individual countries.

The committee on the rights of the child has frequently noted that without sufficient data collection, including disaggregated data, it is impossible to assess the extent to which the convention of child rights has been implemented. In its guidelines for periodic reports, the committee asked for detailed statistical and other information under most articles. For

example, the committee stated in its comments to Colombia “the committee expresses its concern at the insufficient steps taken to gather relevant information on the implementation of the convention as well as to ensure an effective monitoring system at the national, regional and local levels”. The committee went to recommend that reliable quantitative and qualitative information be systematically collected and analyzed to evaluate progress in the realization of the rights of child” (IRCO, add.30 [10]). The committee stated in its concluding observations that establishment of a comprehensive network for the collection of data covering all the areas of the convention and taking into account all groups of children within Canadian jurisdiction is recommended” (IRCO, add.37 [10]).

The under coverage of all needed data might lead to reducing the ability to monitor human rights. For example, it is important to know the school enrollment rate in order to have an idea of the proportion of children who are not enrolled. But it is also important to know the characteristics of this category including the reason for not being enrolled, gender, economic situation, and family environment. The enrollment rates are provided by education statistics database produced by Ministry of Education, who is responsible for providing the statistical data on children outside schools. It is also important to monitor the infant mortality over time, considering that the most important is to monitor the social, economic and cultural factors affecting the infant mortality rate in order to feed in the policy development process.

***Table 2: Availability of statistical data for selected indicators used to monitor the rights of child - Palestine***

Indicator	Institution providing statistics	Periodicity	Method of providing	Deficiency of Statistics
Death causes of children	Ministry of Health (MOH)	Annually	Administrative Records	Under coverage, inaccurate recording, missing data, and lack of socio-economic characteristics of the family.
Vaccination	MOH	Annually	Administrative Records	Under coverage, lack of other socio-economic characteristics of the family.
Health insurance	MOH	Annually	Administrative Records	Under coverage, outdated statistics, no data on children not covered by health insurance.
Children with special needs	Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA)	Annually	Administrative Records	Under coverage, lack of socio economic characteristics of the family, and lack of accuracy
Not Enrolled children	PCBS	Irregularly	Censuses and surveys	No regular flow of data.

Poor children	PCBS, MOSA, Zakat Committee	Irregularly	Surveys and administrative records	Under coverage, inconsistency of definitions, lack of socioeconomic characteristics of the family, and irregular data flow.
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Hence, the available data does not provide an enabling environment to monitor social and economic human rights. This fact was confirmed by the current status report on health statistics in the Palestinian territories (PCBS 1995[5]), which concluded that available statistical data is scattered due to diversified health care responsibilities. There has been a lack of central strategy for performing data collection and publishing statistics. Hence, there is no general study on the prevalence of main diseases among population, and the outcome of the health care performance is unexplored. There are some findings on quality deficiencies in the existing statistics such as underestimation of infant mortality and severe deficiencies in population statistics.

### 3.3 Interpretation

During the stage of interpreting the statistical figures, adequate documentation is very important to give the reader the accurate reading of the scale. Lack of documentation and technical notes associated with statistical figures might lead to misunderstanding of the actual situation. Some international organizations and national statistical offices are striving to remove common misunderstanding about different scales caused as a result of a lack of proper documentation. Proper interpretation of statistical information on certain indicators is also crucial due to the fact that misinterpretation might lead to incorrect conclusion and policy implication of the subject under study. Different data sources should be checked, technical notes have to be taken into account as well as reliability and data quality. In Palestine, for example, the PCBS published poverty statistics update in March 2000 (PCBS 2000 [7]), reporting that these statistics are based on an official definition of poverty developed in 1997. The definition combined absolute and relative features and was based on a budget of basic needs for a family of 6 persons (2 adults and 4 children). The results indicate that the rate of the total diffusion of poverty among Palestinian Households in the Palestinian Territory was 20 percent in 1998. This is lower than the corresponding rates of nearly 23 percent and 24 percent in 1997 and 1996 respectively. Consequently, a journalist (Al-Quds newspaper 13/3/2000) published an essay in a local daily newspaper concluding that “according to PCBS statistics” most schoolteachers, who were conducting a strike at that time to promote their incomes, live under the poverty line. This conclusion was based on a comparison made by the journalist of the average net monthly salary of the schoolteacher with the poverty line for a family composed of 6 persons. This conclusion was a direct result of misinterpretation made by the journalist. His calculations ignored the household’s size of the schoolteacher, number of earners in the household; the consumption based on household products, earnings and assistance that the family gets, overtimes, multiple job teachers and other related factors.

Many data users, including those working in the field of economic and social human rights deal with statistical figure ignoring the technical notes which explains the circumstances where this figure is valid, and the danger of misusing it. In the case of developing countries, published statistics in the form of aggregate statistical tables might not be sufficient for the purpose of human rights purposes. Deriving specific statistics related to the social human rights might be needed. In particular, access to primary data is useful to make rigorous analysis and to understand the real situation from different point of views. However, the access of primary data might not be available for different legislative administrative or technical reasons. This situation creates another difficulty in the process of monitoring human rights.

**Table 3: Access to statistical data related to economic, social and cultural human rights at the national statistical office by user and type-Palestine**

Mean	Research institutions	Researchers & universities	NGO's	Public sector	Private sector	Media
Statistical reports	1	1	2	1	2	1
Press releases	3	3	3	1	3	1
Other statistical tables	2	2	2	1	2	1
Primary data	4	5	5	5	5	5
Analytical reports	4	4	4	3	4	3
Web site	1	1	1	1	1	1

Where, (1): accessible regularly free of charge, (2): accessible regularly not free of charge, (3): accessible irregularly free of charge, (4): accessible irregularly not free of charge, (5): not accessible

#### **4. Development of Official Statistics System**

Official statistics is one of the main tools that provide periodic and regular statistical information in many areas including those related to human rights. The level of development of official statistics is hence positively correlated to the service provided in the field of human rights.

##### **4.1 Independence of official statistics**

In his presentation on the “Independence of Statistical Authority” during the seminar on statistics and policymaking, Carlo Malaguerra (PCBS 1999 [6]), indicated that the integrity of the scientific authority of statistics is not, and will never be a characteristic acquired once and for all, but one, which has to be conquered on constantly defended. Effective political respect of the impartial role of the statistical authority within society is a further step after legislation that guarantees the integrity of official statistics. Serving the process of monitoring human rights is included within the perquisites of statistical independence of official statistics, because their credibility relies on a real effective guarantee of the quality of official statistics at different levels. This includes professional ethics and the production of information in compliance with scientific criteria. At managerial level, it covers the internal and external control and transparent procedures including documentation, and at the information level, the pertinence, coherence, impartiality and comparability of statistical production.

In developing countries, independence of official statistics is much more important and complicated, since the issue of violation of human rights is more striking, and governments may face “pressure” from internal and external forces based on “reports” on human rights. Some people might claim that in some cases these reports might be “used” to put political pressure on governments based on human rights reports. Hence, the integrity of the statistical system and its independence is more important and uncertain.

##### **4.2 Fundamental principles of official statistics**

Practicing the fundamental principles of official statistics is an important step in the monitoring and implementation of human rights. Statistics, which are assumed to serve human rights, have to gain the trust of users (United Nations 1994 [19]). Trust of the public in official statistical information depends to a large extent, on the respect for the fundamental

values and principles. Cooperation of citizens, enterprises, and other respondents in providing appropriate and reliable data is essential for the quality of official statistics. Hence, creating and maintaining a “good” official statistics is a dynamic process which depends on inputs from the public (respondents) who represent the providers of the micro (individual) data and the user of the macro (aggregate) data. Therefore, a statistical system has no choice but to gain the trust of respondents irrespective of their political and social orientation. This trust might be gained when practicing “professional ethics” in the production and dissemination of official statistics. These statistics will serve as an instrument for human rights purposes if they are relevant, accurate, timely, coherent, accessible and comparable. Adopting and practicing the fundamental principles of official statistics adopted by the Statistical Commission in 1994 might serve as a general framework to ensure basic requirements needed to serve the monitoring and implementation of human rights.

**Table 4: Key output of practicing fundamental principles of official statistics in serving the process of measuring and implementing economic and social human rights**

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Substantial Content</b>	<b>Key Output of Practicing</b>
(1)	Official statistics is an indispensable element in the statistical system of a democratic society. They are compiled on an impartial basis.	Relevance Coherence
(2), (3), (4)	Professional considerations, accuracy and transparent scientific approach to avoid misuse and misinterpretation of official statistics.	Accuracy Interpretability Accessibility Coherence
(5)	Timeliness, quality, cost, and minimum burden to the respondent	Timeliness Relevance
(6), (7)	Confidentiality of individual data, and the rights of respondents.	Accuracy
(8), (9), (10)	Statistical cooperation and using international standards.	Comparability Accuracy

Where,

**Relevance<sup>3</sup>:** The degree to which the information respond to user needs, including the requirement to watch human rights, to point out the association between information releases and public policy.

**Accuracy:** The degree to which data correctly estimate or measure the parameters and indicators. Providing information on methodology used in the production of statistics, and the accuracy (quality) of data, including source of error, coverage, sampling, response and bias.

**Timeliness:** The length of time between the reference period and appearance of statistical data. In some cases it refers to the length of time between defining the need of the data and the appearance of it. Broadly speaking, timeliness could be classified as type of relevance, since outdated statistics might not be relevant.

<sup>3</sup> The definition of Relevance, Accuracy, Timeliness, Accessibility, Interpretability and Coherence were derived from United Nations, 1999. Monitoring the Performance of a National Statistical Institute. Submitted by Statistics Canada. Conference of European Statisticians.

- Accessibility:** Existence of suitable modes of disseminating information to different audiences, the availability of searching tools that allow users to know what is available and how to obtain it, and the provision of access that is affordable and convenient to different user groups.
- Interpretability:** Refers to the ease with which users can understand and properly use and analyze information. It covers the availability of metadata, particularly description of the underlying concepts and definitions used, methodology, and accuracy of the data.
- Coherence:** The degree to which data from different programs and sources are compatible and can be analyzed together.
- Comparability:** The ability to scale the situation in the country among other countries for the same measurement. Comparability covers also measurement of progress made during different points of time.

## 5. Conclusions

The declaration of human rights is ideal and requires procedures and mechanisms of implementation that takes into consideration the level of social and economic development. This mechanism should be based on the full national participation of measuring, monitoring, and implementing social and economic human rights. This mechanism requires a regular flow of accurate, comprehensive, and consistent statistical data. The data flow should be considered as input within an integrated system that ensures monitoring, implementation, feedback and improvement of a nationally agreed set of indicators.

In developing countries, it is important that all stakeholders should coordinate the work to ensure that the list of indicators used to monitor social and economic human rights is complete, comprehensive, measurable and consistent. This includes also coordination in the field of concepts and standards. All intervening agencies, including national and multi national, users and providers of statistical data should engage in a real dialogue to create a common base of definitions and standards that guarantees the accurate measurement of the agreed list of indicators.

It is noted that there is quite a long national and international experience in the measurement of well-defined and clear social indicators such as life expectancy and mortality. However, less attention and experience at both national and international levels has been paid, from both

technical and financial perspective to the more complicated indicators, which address the quality of life in the less developed countries. This situation might question the accuracy in describing the gap when comparing developed and developing countries in the field of social and economic human rights.

In developing countries, official statistics might not provide an enabling environment to monitor and implement economic and social human rights. It is important to encourage national statistical institutes to develop their master plans, and to make sure that they include this dimension, and to concentrate on the use of the permanent statistical infrastructure rather than irregular activities for the purpose of sustainability and cost effectiveness.

Strengthening and developing official statistics is important for providing needed statistical data for the sake of human rights. The commitment of official statistics to professional and scientific criteria and the internationally adopted principles of official statistics ensure providing enabling environment to monitor human rights. The adoption of these principles requires improving the legislative, technical and financial resources of statistical systems in the developing countries.

Finally, institutions and individuals engaged in watching social and economic human rights are advised to listen for statisticians and their concerns in order to obtain more precise analysis and interpretation of statistical data, and to avoid misunderstanding, misinterpretation and consequently the misuse of statistics.

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