

# **Role of Official Statistics System in Measuring and Monitoring Economic and Social Human Rights During Political and Economic Crisis: Palestinian Experience**

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## **Introduction**

The declaration of human rights is ideal but the reality is different and requires mechanism of monitoring that takes into consideration the level of social and economic development. It is important to achieve national consensus on a set of indicators to be used as a tool for measuring and monitoring social and economic human rights. This mechanism requires regular flow of accurate, comprehensive, and consistent statistical data. The data flow should be considered as input within an integrated system.

## **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.

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 continues.

During political and economic instability, the indicators and the statistical data should satisfy the needs at two levels of intervention, emergency and humanitarian aid, particularly, for venerable groups (e.g. women, children, and poor households), which might be characterized as the short-term intervention, and development purposes for promoting the status of economic and social rights, which is characterized as medium and long term intervention. The challenge is that during such crisis, statistics do not lie within the priority list of governments and other stakeholders. Therefore,

providing the minimum needed information with very limited resources is a real challenge of the statistical systems.

In developing countries, it is important that all stakeholders 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 an intensive dialogue to create common base of definitions and standards that guarantees the accurate measurement of the agreed list of indicators. The national statistics office (NSO) should be in the driving seat at the stage of data collection since it is the most well equipped organ to undertake this task in terms of consistency of definitions, standard and measurement with international standards.

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 for vulnerable groups 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.

The tightness and intensity of political and security measures might change from time to time. However, damage to various sectors of the economy, household earnings and savings, and private sector potential is much more fundamental than what could be saved by cosmetic or quick remedies. Hence, structural damage and long-term impact, which will be felt for long time, should be taken into account as well. Therefore, establishing a dynamic monitoring system, capable of using inputs and producing outputs at the short term (monthly), medium term (quarterly or semi annually), and long term (annually, with potential for projections) horizons. Accumulation of statistical data will enable very effective planning and interventions and optimal utilization of resources. At each level of monitoring, it is expected to establish a process which is looking both backward and forward.

As far as the management of statistical activities within the crisis are concerned, multi purpose surveys such as living conditions, as well as running surveys such as continuous labour force household survey might be used as an efficient tool to provide statistics on the main indicators of the monitoring system. Much of the data needed for the operation of the system should be available from the routine work of NSO. The advantage from setting up a monitoring system is that it brings users and producers of statistics together, and in setting up a warning system for immediate intervention of local, regional and international community.

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