



A Tale of the Statistical Number

“Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics”

PCBS

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Introduction:

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) began its operations following a decision made by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) on 13/9/1993. The bureau is one of the first Palestinian institutions to begin working inside Palestine and in Jerusalem specifically before the year 1993, as during the preceding years Palestinians attached statistical work with taxation and considered providing information as something not in their interest. Statistical work was even attached in their minds to the occupation's concept of statistics and the interests of its security forces, which had no consideration for the human reality and livelihoods of the Palestinian people. Therefore, PCBS was built upon certain principles that contributed to developing concepts which are in the interests of the Palestinian citizen living on his land and to translating statistical numbers into active state institutions with plans contributing to overall development. These principles also justly served the goals of the Palestinian society. In addition, statistical science is an area that focuses on building and developing from a scientific perspective and cooperates and networks with all state institutions to achieve its goals of a prosperous and promising future. For this end, it makes use of advanced modern technology operated by its administrative, technical and professional staffs. This led PCBS to producing a massive amount of data much needed at the time to fill the large gaps in areas such as the environment, housing, social structure, culture and economics.

Whereas statistical work may appear as involving a plainly scientific field, the matter of creating Palestinian statistics was also an urgent practical need for the Palestinian society and its institutions. Palestinian statistics were, therefore, founded on a strong desire to build them successfully due to their strong moral connection to ensuring the symbolism of strong state institutions, and the resistance of the people against the occupation's repeated attempts to expel and cancel them and delete their existence. The Palestinian people lived for long years under systemic oppression and brutal occupational power, therefore, affecting the mechanisms of national work and social development.

The story of PCBS is built upon the human and cultural aspirations, and national and social values of the Palestinian people which include uplifting the nation and realizing public interests to meet the current and future needs of the society.

The creation and development of PCBS is strongly linked to the senior and junior employees and staffs which worked for it since the first moments of its establishment until now. With their efforts, PCBS has become a strong institution with tasks and operations required by all. This was achieved through continuous sacrifices, initiatives and determination to access data and precise numbers taking the form of a researcher arriving to the field, or an employee to work, or a data producer reaching accurate numbers despite all the difficulties that faced and still face the Palestinian people and their just cause.

*This novel is based on interviews with a number of Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics staff members.

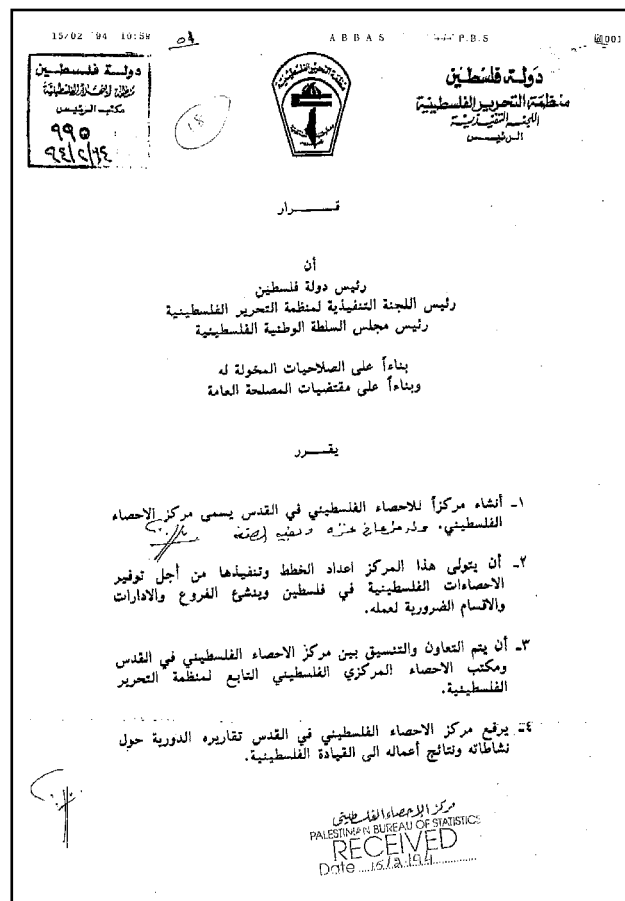
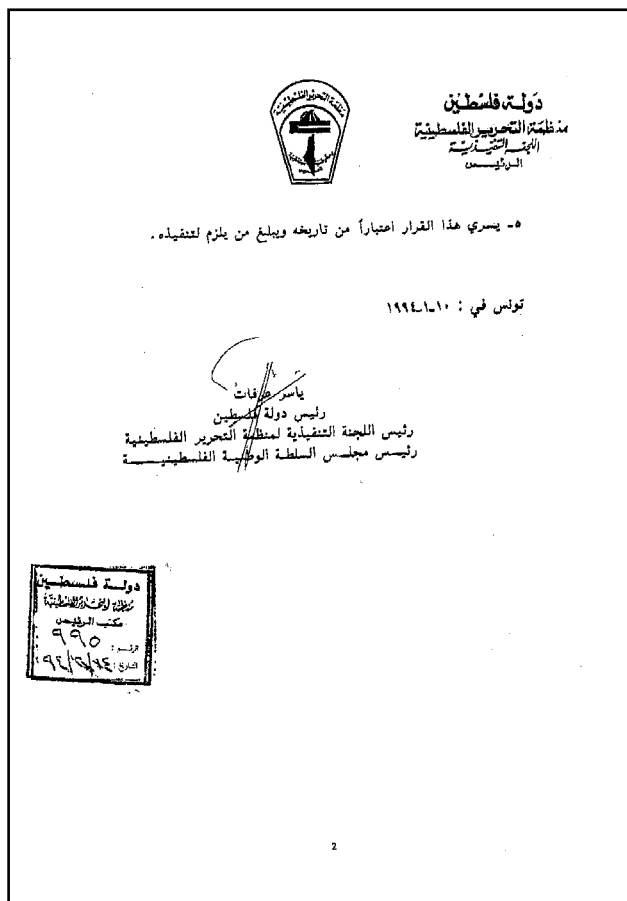
The narration of this story aims to provide inspiration through a model of determination and success resulting from a full belief in the right to work freely and professionally without being limited by partisanship or exclusion.

This novel on statistics has incurred its ideas from the PCBS founders and its current and former employees. They were kind enough to provide their personal stories and the direct connection of those stories to the establishment of PCBS. Their stories are largely similar and interconnected to the stories of all the employees, managers, researchers, officials and ministers who currently work or have previously worked with PCBS. Therefore, any name that is mentioned or unmentioned depends on the limited space of this novel and does not in any way imply negligence.

The experiences of all of the workers were pioneering, creative and devoted ones and they all added to the value of the work and contributed to achieving it accurately. However, in this short book, we have selected only a few of the experiences which we will shed light on without ignoring many other experiences which enriched the institution's work and led to its success. The time will come when we address all those experiences and sacrifices in detail as a token of gratitude to those who gave their time, effort, perseverance and creativity to this bureau.

The Story of Foundation and Development:

When PCBS began its work within the PLO on 13 September 1993, the goal was to develop an official, comprehensive and united Palestinian statistical system which would become a tool that provides data to ministries, public and private institutions, civil society organizations and citizens. The establishment resolution stated that the PCBS headquarters would be in Jerusalem, the capital of the Palestinian State despite the high level of risk due to the occupation's measures towards the city and also due to the high sensitivity and symbolism attached to it.



The statistics office located in Sheikh Jarrah area in Jerusalem formed the launching point of Palestinian statistical work and included a small number of no more than ten employees. The office's work in Jerusalem began under the name of a research center and was not publicly known as being part of the PLO due to the risks that may pose by the occupation's administration. Nonetheless, the occupation placed the office under surveillance and began conducting intensive military patrols opposite the building. It then began carrying out regular raids inside the building to find out the nature of the center's work and its political affiliation. It interrogated the office director and searched the place blatantly and provocatively on a daily basis in search of any papers that would connect the center's work to the PLO. They even searched trash bins for this purpose. The occupation's concern about this statistical office's work continued until it was finally closed with red wax and its work was then transferred to the field office in Ramallah.



Everyone remembers that the year 1994 witnessed the birth of the official Palestinian institutions following the signing of the Oslo Accords. This marked a new era for all the Palestinian people and there was a general feeling of joy as Palestinians were about to build their own state. As everyone had the responsibility of participating in the building of the new country, several questions were raised such as: What would be the nature of this state we are talking about? What would its population be? Where would its residential areas be located? What about its agriculture, its economic establishments, and who would be employed or unemployed? Most importantly though was the question of its geographical shape on the map and whether there was a clearly defined map, as well as the map of minor residential areas. There were tens of questions lurking in the minds of the people working at the PCBS offices which were confined to two apartments in Al Irsal Street in Ramallah. The planning processes to be carried out by all of the newborn Palestinian institutions would depend on the numbers issued by those two apartments. Therefore, everyone agreed on the importance of carrying out the first population survey and the first establishments census, which are both considered the main foundations for successful planning.

Work was extremely difficult and complicated due to the absence of a clear picture or work perspective. Everyone was doing this work for the first time. The team's primary task was to prepare detailed maps not only of the main cities but of all populations. However, obtaining such maps proved to be a challenging and difficult task. Nonetheless, no statistical operations could be implemented professionally on the ground without clear maps for all those populations.

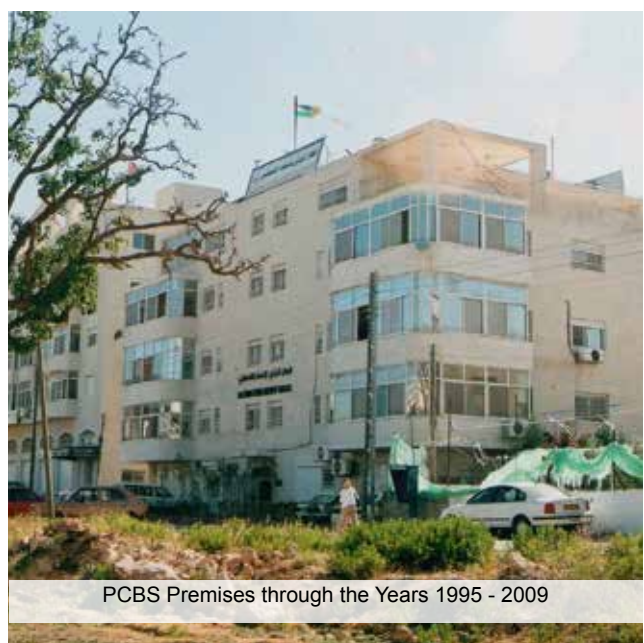
The institution was able to overcome all those difficulties by using certain innovative methods. Those methods made a large difference to the operations carried out as the southern region was the first region to successfully benefit from the experiences of a large number of professional surveyors who began working with PCBS and who enriched its statistical work.

The main PCBS mission was based on the idea of the Palestinians being involved in their state-building phase, which implied the necessity of having statistics to enable state institutions to carry out their work based on scientific and administrative principles. This would lead to the success of these newly born Palestinian National Authority institutions.

The PCBS leadership was based on two administrative principles: acquired professional experience and connecting work to national action through motivation. These principles implied that workers should invest their full effort and time to their work. This led to the expansion of work from being confined to two rented apartments in central Ramallah into the Palestinian Central Statistics Department within two years. Six years later, this department was transformed into the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), which was based in a fully rented building in Al Balou, and then in two nine-storey buildings owned by PCBS in 2009.



PCBS Main Premises since 2009



PCBS Premises through the Years 1995 - 2009

Regulations, Instructions and Management:

Since its establishment, PCBS lacked any regulations, instructions or models for its administrative work, as was the case with many ministries and institutions born after the arrival of the Palestinian National Authority. At that time, the bureau relied on some random regulations and instructions, some of which were placed by the technical and advisory teams involved in the negotiations, others which were obtained from Birzeit University and others which were created according to work requirements.

The center's senior management's idea was that each administrative employee was responsible for all aspects of administrative work without any specialization, implying that each administrative employee had to follow up all issues related to procurement, services, human resources, mail, etc. in the absence of an administrative structure for the center. In other words, all employees reported directly to the center's director.

In respect to the statistical work management at that time, there was a divergence of views, since the work of the young statistical institution in those days was described as being managed by plane or parachute due to the strict management policy which was based on full commitment, firmness and transparency. This policy created fully dedicated and engaged employees as a result of the administrative process which adopted a consistent work approach in the following years and facilitated the performance monitoring and improved follow-up, supervision and productivity. The institution and its staff had a remarkable presence at all levels and areas and participated in national, regional and international forums due to this effective professional management policy.

As a result of the workload pressures imposed on the President of PCBS and his extended working hours, the first organizational chart for division of powers and allocation of responsibilities was provided in 1995. The chart was developed in a phased manner until it became a user-friendly model that realizes the requirements and objectives of the work and follows up, organizes and performs the tasks. Hiring local experts contributed to obtaining a set of instructions and models, which were developed and used by the PCBS to organize the administrative work.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, was able, in a short space of time, to draft the General Statistics Law No. 4 of 2000. In addition, it secured a resolution from the President of Palestine to adopt the statistical number in accordance with the Law No. 4 of 2000, as an official and binding number to all ministries and public institutions.

Human Resources:

PCBS suffered a shortage of qualified staff operating in the field of statistics because the institution was still at a nascent stage. It was considered a new experience in Palestine as there were no previous practical experiences in this field. Additionally, the academic discipline related to the nature of PCBS's programs and work was absent in Palestinian universities.

PCBS recruited a number of employees who transferred from other institutions with limited statistical expertise. It also appointed a number of experienced long-serving statistical staff who worked for the Central Statistical Bureau (Kuwait). Those employees, along with their senior colleagues working in the center, had higher workloads which involved supervising more than one statistical survey conducted at the same time. The donor countries also provided many foreign experts in this field to supervise the statistical work in the programs funded by them.

On the other hand, PCBS lacked any database for saving the personnel's data or the applications of persons applying to work in the center. In this regard, the Director of Human Resources at that time commented that a database was obtained from Birzeit University, but it did not include search tools to search for the personnel's data as requested by the officials, so they had to transfer the data to a text file to make searches of the employee data, and then transfer the file to a third party to be printed. This process used to be labor-intensive and time-consuming until a human resources management program was purchased. This program included the specifications required for conducting the

statistical work. A database for the job applications was established separately from the personnel database and finally one database was established for both branches.

On the other hand, many employees had left the PCBS finding new jobs in the emerging ministries due to the long working time, severe pressure, strict management and the competition between the ministries of the emerging Palestinian National Authority relating to the selection of new employees at that time. The center, thus, faced difficulties in finding new employees and in conducting training on the center's work programs.

The statistical institution has been characterized by its strict administrative system. There were some humorous situations that occurred, for example, one of the new employees was ten minutes late on his third working day, and his delay was due to an objective circumstance. When the employee entered the workplace, the President of PCBS saw him and said: You are the director of human resources and you are late. If you are late again, you will be fired. The President of PCBS kept a close watch on any employee being late, even if it were for a minute after a half-hour break that was given to employees in the middle of the workday.

In spite of all kinds of challenges, the PCBS has experienced developments in terms of recruiting qualified human resources, providing a number of missions and conducting training courses through organizations such as UNESCO, ESCWA, MEDSTAT, and other international institutions. The statistical institution is competing with the most important world statistical institutions that have existed for hundreds of years.

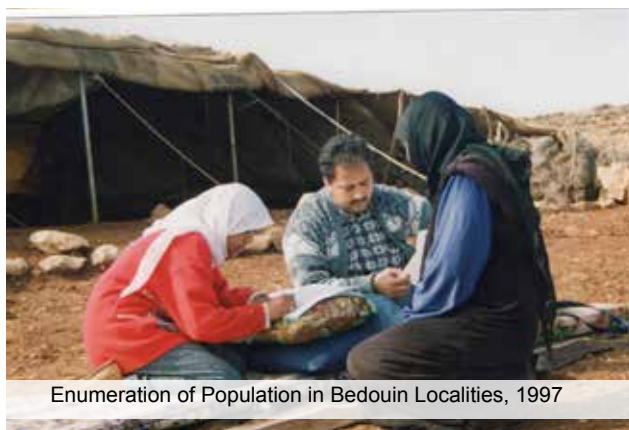
Our Censuses Story:

The first population census in 1997:

After completing the surveys of establishments and identifying the lists, the employees of the PCBS, which was then called the Palestinian Central Statistics Department, after changing its name from the Palestinian Statistics Center in 1995, by a decision made by the late President Yasser Arafat, were able to carry out specialized surveys on specific topics. The household expenditure survey provided the first data on the food consumption basket, which helped extract the indicators of high prices and the poverty line. In parallel, work was in full swing to conduct the Demographic and Health Survey that was considered the first specialized survey on family, maternity, children and family health.

At the same time, all eyes were focused on the preparations for the first elections to be held in the era of Palestinian National Authority. The voter registry was computerized in coordination with the Central Elections Commission in preparation for the 1996 parliamentary elections. All these preliminary surveys were the basis for carrying out the first Palestinian census in 1997. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics team worked tirelessly 24 hours a day during nine full months to complete the results of the first census in record time. Although the results of any census conducted in any part of the world take long periods of time to appear, the results of the Palestinian census appeared only nine months later, and joy filled the air due to this unprecedented achievement.

The first census faced overwhelming challenges on several levels: the challenge of the Israeli propaganda which was deliberately targeted to show the Palestinians as a small population of only two million and two hundred thousand people. In addition, the emerging Palestinian institutions and ministries at that time were in urgent need for the Palestinian number to develop scientifically based plans. The seriousness of geography and overcoming political obstacles on the ground were of particular significance. The real challenge in



Enumeration of Population in Bedouin Localities, 1997

the first census was to produce a comprehensive number for all Palestinians, including our people living in Jerusalem, which was fought by Israel in every possible way. It was the first real Palestinian census to be carried out by Palestinians, especially if we mention the census conducted by Britain during its mandate over Palestine before the Nakba and those political censuses implemented by the Israeli occupation after 1967.

Census Phases:

The census had many phases, starting from the preparatory phase, which included issuing resolutions concerning the implementation of the census as well as consulting relevant authorities and ministries and data users to identify priorities for data collection, configure organizational structures, establish census committees, then update maps, prepare forms, develop coding plans, develop supporting plans, estimate the number of workers required for the implementation and conduct the project's pretest. The census is a major national project; therefore, everyone should take part by providing material or in-kind or moral assistance to achieve success.

The intellectual and political mobilization of all workers in the first census played an important role in raising the spirits of crew members, field teams, researchers, and concerned parties, and it seemed like they were going to war to liberate statistical work. In other words, it was seen as (the information liberation of Palestine). Exerting utmost efforts was the sole requisite and the greatest and most fundamental challenge at that time was: To be ... or not to be.

Attracting attention, the census was like a Palestinian wedding or a mass demonstration where the president of PCBS and all governors led the masses. A massive media campaign was launched including audio-visual and print media, as half a million copies of specialized educational leaflets were distributed, as well as radio and television talk shows. The media activities aimed at encouraging the citizens to participate, as the census would provide them with longer-term value and benefits. The census was the next largest event to elections and had the same sovereign attributes; Palestinians felt victorious and were in fine spirits.

The active participation of citizens reflected their high degree of confidence in the PCBS and their excitement, satisfaction, union and solidarity, especially since the occupying state mounted a determined campaign against the field researchers trying to prevent them from achieving their goals. When the occupation's administration discovered that the census was being carried out in Jerusalem, it was outraged and enacted a law to immediately prevent it. The law was passed within 24 hours only, without passing the three-reading procedure as laws usually enacted in the occupying state do. The Palestinians demonstrated resolve and did not give way to these measures and they continued to work secretly in full swing in Jerusalem through various possible means.

The Fastest Law in the History of the Occupying State:

The Prevention of the Census in Jerusalem:

The Director of the census in Jerusalem who had not slept for more than two hours was frightened and in a hurry when he woke up at six in the morning. He said that no-one can sleep on this day as it was more like a compulsory military service, which required operating with discipline and alertness and confronting any fears or any emergencies even under the worst conditions. He never thought that he would feel what he felt at this moment when he decided to join the PCBS for the first time because it was a pure coincidence and he saw hopeful things while starting to plan his personal and family future. His family refused this decision preferring that he worked in a foreign institution with a higher pay and better privileges.

That day was the first day of the census being carried out in all Palestinian cities. It was the most crucial day in his life and the city itself. It was symbolically to begin in Jerusalem, the capital of the Palestinian State. The director of the census was appointed as the director of the Jerusalem Statistics

Department and this was a great opportunity for him to leverage all the experiences and preparations he had gained over the past few years. The PCBS was fully prepared for this moment; everyone was aware of the challenges they were facing, taking into account that it was the first census of its kind in Palestine. The challenges included the challenge of the Israeli propaganda that was deliberately targeted to show the Palestinians as a small number of only two million and two hundred thousand people. In addition, the emerging Palestinian institutions and ministries at that time were in urgent need for the Palestinian number to develop scientifically based plans. The seriousness of geography and overcoming political obstacles on the ground were of particular significance. The real challenge in the first census was to produce a comprehensive number for all Palestinians, including our people living in Jerusalem and all of the occupied territories.

The director of the census in Jerusalem carried out the first and most important experiment in his life in January challenging the cold weather conditions and looking very elegant. Starting working as a data collector, he was responsible for the census in the most important and dangerous area in Palestine and perhaps in the entire Arab world, namely Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine, recognizing it as a city of reverence and religious sanctity for Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims all around the world. The director of the census was in a great emotional state believing that he would achieve the first real act of sovereignty. The census had not yet been implemented in many Arab countries, but it was carried out in the State of Palestine that was still in its first steps of building the state and lived under occupation (this indicated the greatness of these people, who had been suffering all kinds of hardships at the hands of an oppressive occupier for decades). The director of the census was glad when he arrived at the assembly point, finding everyone in their places like an overwhelming surge from all geographical areas. He drove his car at 7:15 in the morning from the center's headquarters towards Jerusalem along with the director of the governorate and the census executive director accompanied by the governorate car that was used as a repository for data collection papers.

The car stopped for a while at the end of Al-Bireh city and the beginning of Kafr Aqab as planned in the agenda to visit the neighborhood census coordinator and to follow-up crews working in the field. It was not yet eight o'clock when the census executive director came out to observe the field crews, while the director of the census stayed in the car with the driver to review the papers and the plan. The car windows turned black as it was getting dark. He lifted his head and looked around him. A number of Israeli Special Forces, who were disguised in civilian clothes surrounded the car from each side. Shouting and saying un-understood Hebrew words, the soldiers took him and his companions to the "Neve Yaakov" station in Jerusalem, and the director was held in the detention room without anyone talking to him, then more young men and women working in the field were detained. They were asked many questions: "Where do you work?", "Who is your director?" Then they were taken one by one to other rooms, while he was only listening to what was going on around him without being asked any questions.

Twelve hours painfully passed and he had previously prepared himself for a long working day, but he was now shackled in the detention room sitting still for a long period of time. In the room, there was an old television with a small screen that broadcasted the emergency Israeli Knesset sessions on the Israeli Channel Two as the law to prevent the census in Jerusalem was passed within 24 hours only without being passed according to the three-reading procedure. He was surprised that such a thing could have happened as the Israelis had never passed a law so quickly and without the three readings, indicating that they were planning to prevent the census in Jerusalem in any way possible. Of course, they could have done so with the use of undeterred force and under the penalty of law.

Finally, the officer came half an hour after the law was passed and told him: "Now, you can go and work and you will be entitled to a trial in accordance with the new law." The director of the census knew what this meant, but he was also aware of the threats and complications related to this field that was not just a census issue, but incorporated the issue of sovereignty over the capital city. No-one had yet forgotten how they closed the census office in Jerusalem in 1993, which was PCBS's first headquarter and PCBS then started working in the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah with no more than ten employees.

The Jerusalem office changed its name to a "research center" to avoid the occupation measures, to the extent that its affiliation to the PLO was not announced as this was considered a crime at

that time. The Israeli forces placed the office under surveillance and soldiers patrolled intensively in front of the building. They then conducted periodic raids to find out the nature of the office's work and its political affiliation. The director of the office at that time was investigated and the office was searched, then it was closed and sealed with red wax by the occupation forces. As a result, they moved to the field office in Ramallah.

The director of the census was not surprised from his detention, but the law's speedy approval was very shocking. Along the way, he was thinking how to reenergize the team to complete the work. There was an opportunity now to motivate them to work in a spirit of patriotism. The prevention of the census asserted that Jerusalem was the capital and that the census had to start there at any cost. The work had now become a national challenge and everyone became a soldier in the field. An urgent meeting was held at one o'clock after midnight and was attended by representatives of all ministries, Palestinian security services and notables. The teams worked underground in Jerusalem. However, the Israeli occupation forces were harassing and pursuing the researchers.

The PCBS decided to establish a specialized statistical department under the name of the Jerusalem Statistics Department. The issuance of a specialized statistical book on the city of Jerusalem was one of its significant accomplishments, representing statistical information related to health, education, poverty, and youth. This book was issued annually under the title "Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook". The first issue was not launched easily as access to information meant clashes, arrests and prosecution. When the first version was issued, it was prepared to be announced in the courtyard of the Orient House, which was headed by Faisal al-Husseini. All community institutions, and religious and academic leaders were mobilized and the PCBS and the organizers were surprised to see the Israeli occupation army surrounding the headquarters and then closing the Orient House.

Media Campaign of the First Census:

The media campaign for the first census focused on gaining the Jerusalemites' confidence, mobilizing their energies and explaining the importance of this work which was carried out for the first time under the continued presence of the Israeli occupation, which considered information collection as intelligence and investigative work aiming at controlling the lives of people through it. People did not trust the census at first and so it had to be completed gradually. The campaign began by putting up posters in the streets, mosques, radio stations, and everywhere else including car air fresheners. The pressures on the PCBS were enormous, so each phase of the census was carried out separately. Palestinian leaders provided great support to the census. The Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, visited the center headquarters and received the census slogan. The actual census started with Yasser Arafat's family.



The Visit of the Late Palestinian President Abu Ammar in 1997

The coordinator of the media campaign was a young man when he began the first census' work. The census was taking place at a very critical time for him, as he was preparing for his wedding. He said to the director, "I have been engaged for two years and I need a leave to help my father in the preparations for the wedding. I have to buy the party meal requirements.", but the director told him, "Never, we have a lot of work. It is a census." The coordinator was granted a two-day leave and on the third day it was the holiday marking the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, yet he went to work

on that day leaving his bride at home. He attended a meeting in Ramallah while the “henna” party was held in Bethlehem. Several days after the wedding, the coordinator was running to find a taxi to go to work. His neighbor, Hajjah Um Ahmed, saw him and yelled at him: “Where are you leaving your bride?” He replied, “To my work, Hajjah.” When she realized that, she asked him to forgive her.

The coordinator was proud of the census and considered it a success story. He knew that the director was kind to him, but he was also firm and this was the only possible way to implement such work in a country like Palestine. No census had been carried out in Lebanon till then and the last census in Iraq was carried out five years before the US occupation because the census is an act of sovereignty in any country.

The media campaign for the census had to be well-planned to gain the people’s confidence and to explain the importance of the work, which was carried out for the first time under severe circumstances and in the presence of the Israeli occupation.

The media coordinator went to the director and told him confidently that the announcement of the census had reached everyone, but the director replied, “As long as Um Al-Abed, my mother’s neighbor in Arraba, does not know about it, your media campaign has failed.” The coordinator took a lot of time to think how to reach Um Al-Abed and he finally went to the area, gathered the women there and explained to them about the census. Significant participation was observed in the census, which pleased the media coordinator and he felt that the results compensated for his wedding.

Morale levels became high, since the grounds for assessing any nation is to know where it stands at this moment in time regarding all aspects of life. The Palestinian statistics (number) was missing, but it was of great significance due to its great particularities. The occupation’s administration aimed from the beginning to justify its occupation of Palestine through exemplifying the notion that “Palestine is a land without a people.” This will not pass as long as the resilient Palestinian people remain hopeful despite all odds. The census had a specific purpose which was to show the exact numbers without an emotional context or politicization or outpourings. The census demonstrated who the people living in this land were and that those people were deeply rooted in this land for thousands of years. It also revealed the characteristics of those people.

Therefore, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics is the first building block for the foundation of a state based on accurate numbers as the Palestinians are threatened by the deconstruction of their identity from various parties. The statistical number is the key to a just state for all its citizens, a state that is based on accurate plans.

The census was successfully conducted and the results were prepared only nine months after announcing them in a press conference held before everyone. However, the results of the census were generally unsatisfactory to the Palestinians themselves, as the numbers were important for grants, donors and other political matters, which were a major challenge for the PCBS. It was a time that confirmed the Palestinian number’s credibility and independency and was free from any political pressures. Accordingly, the results were announced before everyone at the same moment in spite of all the pressures. When the census had ended, the media campaign coordinator was given time off as compensation for working on holidays.

Recalling when the occupation tightened the procedures on the field researchers in Jerusalem, the census officials accompanied them in order to persuade the people in Al-Ram and Hizma to participate in the census. The border guards chased the researchers in an attempt to arrest them, but they were courageous and strong, especially the female researchers, who had hidden census forms in their chests to protect the workers.

Second Census 2007-2008:

The year 2007 was considered a sad year in the life of the Palestinian people. It is the year of the division that separated the Gaza Strip from the West Bank and all state institutions were negatively affected by it. The division divided the country into two parts and each ministry into two ministries. This coincided with the implementation of the second census of population, housing, and establishments in 2007, ten years after the first census. It was one of the most important and most difficult tests faced by the PCBS as work in the Gaza Strip was not separated from work in the West Bank. All statistical projects were carried out in both places at the same time using the same mechanism and methodology. However, the exceptional situation of the Gaza Strip had always existed. The National Authority was established in Gaza and people were enthusiastic and engaged with the authority demonstrating more respect for it and a great cooperation with its institutions in the initial period. This was clear in the 1997 census when the PCBS gained large support from the public, as all governmental bodies and institutions and civil society institutions voluntarily participated with the census' national team, and Islamic and Christian institutions were conducting awareness campaigns together as if the census was a new liberation process. The PCBS's teams received a hero's welcome.

The 2007 division greatly affected the work of the PCBS in the Gaza strip, as it work involves communicating directly with the public, entering the homes of all citizens regardless of their political affiliations, and collecting private information that may be considered a source of threat to some people. On the other hand, the people continued to show respect to the center in the Gaza Strip and even long-standing opponents of the authority including academic and political figures have supported the PCBS's work because of its credibility and competence. The importance of forming a safety net to protect the team and facilitate its work was recognized. This required organizing urgent visits to universities, academic institutions, and civil society institutions, which in turn have shown signs of support to the PCBS. Therefore, the National Committee for the Census was established including most of the academic and private institutions.

Academic staff had a significant influence on the census. The team in Gaza focused on completing the census at the same time as the West Bank, but the conflict was exacerbating day after day until a decision was issued to appoint a higher committee for the follow up of statistics, which included the Ministry of Local Government and the Prime Minister's office in the Gaza Strip. The census had actually started, but a new problem was arising which was the transfer of records from all regions to the center and then to the administration in Ramallah. The team agreed to transfer the records under the umbrella of the central security apparatus from the governorates' headquarters to the PCBS via the United Nations crews and vehicles. The PCBS's office in Gaza was closed during the period between 2008 and 2010.

The statistical team showed great patriotism in establishing credibility, neutrality and transparency and it maintained the professional standards of statistical work. The team in Gaza has never failed to participate and provide assistance related to collecting data and statistics, as the Gaza strip was in dire need of this census due to the incursions and aggressions committed by the occupation army as well as the ongoing blockade. The team participated in an international committee for the preparation of an inventory of the gross damage caused by the 2008, 2012 and 2014 wars. Many institutions contributed to the provision of statistical data, and the data update which was to be issued by the PCBS. This placed more pressure to reopen the center and recruit its staff to work unconditionally, taking into account the methodologies, mechanisms and general standards of the statistical work. The situation was going smoothly in the West Bank and employees were exerting great efforts and were working long hours, as the last days of the census had coincided with the days of Eid al-Adha.

The mosques recited Eid Takbeers, "Allah is Great, Allah is Great". Tomorrow is the first day of Eid al-Adha, so the markets of Nablus are adorned with lights and decorations are placed and songs are played.

Families are walking in the streets to buy new clothes and the date and pistachio filled Maamouls, as well as vegetables and meat. The director of the census in Nablus said that his son was waiting for him at the window of their home in the northern mountain, as he promised to take him and his

little sister to buy the new Eid clothes. The father had not yet received his salary and was so busy all the time, leaving early in the morning before his children woke up and returning late after they fell asleep. His son woke up this morning, as he set the alarm at 5:30 am, and before his father left, he ate breakfast with him, and gave him a list of Eid requirements: Khaki pants with big pockets, a white t-shirt and a Barcelona football shirt.

His father kissed him promising that he would return early this day and would take him, his mother and his sister to the market to buy Eid gifts. It was eleven in the evening, but his father has not yet returned. He called him many times, and the father promised him again that he would come as soon as he finished his work.

The director of the census in Nablus was stuck on the road between Ramallah and Nablus, thinking of his son who was waiting for him at the window. When he started his work in 1999, he did not imagine that he would feel pain and such failure as a father. His work affected his family since he started as a young employee after his graduation from An-Najah University until he was appointed as the director of the census in the northern governorates. He never would have imagined that his extreme obsession with work would let his 8-year child down. He cannot do anything because the records carried in the car must reach Ramallah before the end of the day and should not remain in Nablus in compliance with the procedures of the census phases.

Many big questions passed through his mind on the way. Was there anything more significant than the joy of his little child? Was he wrong when he focused on his work and neglected his family? He started as a statistical assistant, which was just a job, but after only a few months, he believed that he would continue his work in the PCBS until the age of retirement. He was looking for a career, not just a job. He realized that he was a statistician, and a good statistician should keep pace with statistical developments in the world. He should develop his knowledge in culture, economics, and politics and should attend training courses.

A statistician should stay informed about what's going on in the world through newspapers, read the latest human and social studies, and attend seminars and workshops, to understand and analyze the number based on recent data and to reach out to society at a time of sweeping change at all levels. He relaxed when he remembered his achievements, the objectives of his work and his transformation from an ordinary statistician to the youngest census director.

It was two o'clock at night and after a long wait at the Huwara checkpoint, the director of the census in Nablus had finally went home.

His son was lying on the sofa in the living room dressed in his outdoor clothes. He awoke his son, and the family went out to the bustling market, which was crowded with children and buyers. Although he was exhausted, he felt pleased when he saw his son carrying the balloons and running happily on the sidewalk, which made him forget his long tiring day. He bought everything they needed in preparation for the long day of Eid, hoping to sleep until nine in the morning.

General Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon 2017:

As one of the most important tasks of the PCBS is collecting data about Palestinians all over the world, carrying out a Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon 2017 was given the highest priority. Working in the Lebanon census resulted from the efforts exerted since the year 2011. In 2011, the PCBS carried out a multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS) in Lebanon in cooperation with UNICEF. This was a specialized survey on "maternal and child health". Another survey was implemented on the labor market in the same year in cooperation with the International Labor Organization.

The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon lead very difficult lives amid harsh circumstances. Besides, they are affected by political, sectarian and economic changes. Since professional institutional records and information are not based on on press materials, the PCBS had to work professionally to gain a closer look at the demographic reality there.

Therefore, it held meetings and consulted and coordinated with the concerned parties in the Palestinian embassy, the Lebanese Statistics, and the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee, which has led efforts in Lebanon to convince the Lebanese government of the importance of implementing the census of Palestinian refugees in camps and population centers.

The Lebanese government also wanted to carry out this census, desiring to know the actual situation of the Palestinians in the Lebanese camps, and to understand the social, economic, and environmental conditions of the Palestinians, as there is a need to look at the Palestinian reality from a perspective other than merely the security one. As a result, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Palestinian government, represented by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, and the Lebanese government represented by the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee, to implement the census. In Palestine, the PCBS had efficiently prepared for all of the census phases, including providing forms, work guides, manuals, field plans, field training, as well as field implementation.

Meanwhile, work in Lebanon faced many political, social, and technical challenges. The census is the largest process implemented by a country where all state bodies participate to ensure its success. The PCBS's staff that carried out the census was limited in number as most of the PCBS's technical and administrative staff usually participating in the implementation of the censuses include field researchers and data-entry personnel who are temporarily employed during the implementation of the census inside the country.

Phases of population and housing census in Palestinian camps and gatherings in Lebanon 2017:

Like the previous censuses, the first phase of the Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon 2017 began by preparing an experimental form and implementing an experimental census to calculate time and cost and examine tools including forms, maps, work plans, a schedule, identifying human and material needs, and providing the team with practical experience to undertake the supervision of the main phases of implementation. The first phase (decisiveness phase) starts by identifying the geographical areas and large areas are divided into specific census areas including the number of buildings for work facilitation, field control, follow-up and monitoring. In this regard, the demarcation of the external borders of the enumeration areas is implemented, and then the researchers are trained on the use of maps theoretically and practically in the field, to be able to work in the enumeration areas specified for each field researcher. The second phase includes enumerating and numbering buildings and houses, where the census areas are distributed, the enumerator of each area is determined, and the crews are trained on how to enter and exit the area, bring information, and determine the estimated number of residents, buildings and units. Then the actual enumeration phase starts where detailed data are collected on the demographic, social, economic, and environmental characteristics of the community members, and this requires a large group of field workers.

Most of the field workers in the various census phases came from the Palestinian camps in Lebanon because they were fully aware of the camps and the geographical environment. Media campaigns were launched and meetings were held with the committees in the camps and the popular committees in full coordination with the Palestinian embassy in Beirut.

The director of the Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon 2017 was clearly in distress after he read an article about the latest UNRWA report which enumerates the numbers of Palestinians in Lebanon. Many challenging questions were going on in his head when he and his colleagues began planning to implement the first official census of Palestinians in the refugee camps there. The article demonstrated the relationship between the deal of the century and the numbers mentioned in the UNRWA report which was prepared using recent statistics on the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and compared the results of the report with the census carried out by the PCBS upon the request of the Lebanese government.

He lived in Lebanon during the implementation of the census, knowing fully well that the refugee camps in Lebanon are quite different from camps in other regions. It was not only about the financial and political situation but involved other issues affecting foreigners, refugees, and also the Lebanese people such

as water and electricity, geographical space, determinants of employment, construction, travel, official papers, health, education and newborns. He was wondering before the census was carried out: How do Palestinians actually live in the camps? Do we know more than what is shown in the media and private TV channels? What is behind the slogans and pretentious sentences? During the preparation of its plan to carry out a census of the Palestinians who live in the Palestinian camps there, the Planning Department discussed each and every question that the Palestinians living outside and inside Lebanon may ask.

It was evident from the beginning that the refugees' lives were heavily influenced by the Lebanese culture and that their main problem was purely political. Therefore, it was necessary to come up with real numbers about the situation there in order to influence the political decision. The Lebanese government agreed to conduct this census to identify the real situation of the Palestinians in the Lebanese camps, regardless of the security exaggerations.

A census had never been carried out in Lebanon; the PCBS in Palestine prepared the forms, handbooks, field plans, and training and it had already implemented the various phases of the census. The PCBS's team traveled to Lebanon to implement the first phase. It was not an easy task with the political, social and technical difficulties as a census is the largest process carried out by governments and requires declaring a state of emergency. A few staff members were sent to Lebanon, while the PCBS's overall staff, field researchers and data-entry personnel carried out the census inside Palestine. The Lebanese had no practical experience inside the Palestinian environment, while the PCBS's team had significant experience, particularly from the first census in 1997 and the second census in 2007.

The team was formed mostly from individuals from the Palestinian camps in Lebanon due to their familiarity with the situation. The Palestinians in the camps were very happy when they knew that a Palestinian census center was carrying out the census. They responded very rapidly as field research teams were formed from the Palestinian students in the camps, who were trained to implement the various census phases.

Introducing the Palestinian number in the Lebanese refugee camps is particularly sensitive, as it has many implications and many Palestinian refugees changed their place of residence because they married Lebanese women, or moved to the camp's neighboring areas, or travelled and obtained foreign passports. Social and humanitarian challenges have still remained, not to mention the political pressures. Everyone is waiting for the results of the census. Who is a Palestinian? Who is a refugee? This question passed through his mind again, when he read the article clarifying the mistakes made by UNRWA, in the words of the author.

The census was carried out in Beirut, Tyre, Sidon, Tripoli, Beqaa, and Chouf, where the Palestinians were remunerated in twelve camps, as well as the communities adjacent to the camps. The census included statistics on the demographic issue, the population's geographic distribution, age structure, gender and fertility, population characteristics in terms of education and majors, work and unemployment, mortality, disability, housing characteristics, housing density and its connection to public water, sanitation and electricity networks.

Under the auspices of Prime Minister, Saad El-Hariri, and in the presence of the Palestinian Ambassador to Lebanon, Ashraf Dabbour, the census results were officially announced on December 21, 2017 from the Grand Serail, where a celebration was held. The results revealed that the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon reached about 174,422 people (78,897 in the camps, 37,652 in adjacent communities, and 5787 in other gatherings), distributed over 55,473 families. The average family size was 4 members, of which 3707 were mixed families (the husband is a Palestinian refugee, and the wife is Lebanese), while 1219 of these families were formed of (a Lebanese husband, and a Palestinian refugee wife). From a cursory reading of the UNRWA report, it is evident that that the figure is much greater as the UNRWA census includes all enrolments, even though they live in neighboring countries, and the majority of them visit Lebanon and do not reside in it. This is crucial to UNRWA as an executive body, that implements projects for refugees in the camps, and therefore its statistics and results are not based on professional methodologies or an actual implementation of census.

The Director of the Lebanon Census was proud to be part of this professional institution, while facing all political and social pressures by adopting scientific methodologies. Although the growing number of refugees in Lebanon necessarily means the increased support provided to UNRWA, the long-term

professionalism of the PCBS has motivated others to deal with it with great credibility and take its views seriously.

After the census round was concluded, a press conference was held, where the number and distribution of the population was announced, and the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee, in coordination with all partners (the Lebanese Dialogue Committee, the Palestinian Authority, the Central Administration of Statistics in Lebanon, and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics) contracted with a neutral technical advisor to prepare the final and analytical report on the final results of the Lebanon census. Introducing the Palestinian number in the camps is particularly sensitive, as it has many implications and many Palestinian refugees changed their place of residence because they had married Lebanese women, or moved to neighboring areas, or travelled abroad to Arab or foreign countries.



Census Results Announcement of the Palestinian Refugees in the Palestinian Refugee Camps and Localities in Lebanon, 2017

The Lebanon census had a symbolic value, as the Palestinian refugees have been suffering from political, social, geographic and humanitarian pressures in the camps.

Third Census 2017

The global statistical system was experiencing rapidly changing developments in the field of information systems development during the second census in 2007 and the third census in 2017, which was well reflected in the last census that can be titled “the technology census.”

Preparations for the census began in 2016 as forms, work guides, and training were prepared for all census phases, and technical and administrative committees were established and tablet devices were provided. 7,500 tablet devices were borrowed from the Jordanian Department of Statistics to be used in the census and electronic applications were developed to implement the census using modern technologies and GIS. Many office and field trainings were conducted using tablets to examine whether the applications of census forms met GPS building identification. As a result, the researchers were directly linked to the PCBS’s database at the headquarters, facilitating follow-up through GIS and entering data into the system directly via “tablet devices”.

It is worth noting that the census was carried out in the same way in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, despite facing many obstacles, particularly entering the tablets and getting them out and the danger of using GIS in the Gaza Strip. However, the team was determined to overcome the present difficulties through all available means using the safety net that was developed in various phases of work. The PCBS did not focus only on information systems and technology in the census but used a statistical monitoring system and metadata application and developed a dynamic website to allow users to access information easily. It also used social media tools and children’s websites to reach the largest possible number of beneficiaries and to raise awareness towards the statistics.



Census 2017 Activities in Gaza Strip

GPS: Global Positioning System.
GIS: Geospatial Information System.

In addition, the PCBS has always faced a large challenge with regard to maintaining and ensuring the confidentiality of statistical data considering that the Israeli army and security forces carried out frequent large-scale military incursions into Palestinian areas, stormed many institutions including the PCBS's buildings, and confiscated their computers. This required the development of several methods to maintain statistical data.

It is eight o'clock in the morning on 1 December 2017: the day on which the actual work on the third census carried out in Palestine will start. As with the first and second censuses, the third census is of great importance to the PCBS and a starting point for its following plans and achievements. After two years of planning, updating the maps, placing delineation marks on the enumeration areas, calculating and numbering, the actual work on the ground will begin using modern technical equipment, which will allow researchers to enter data directly into the census system through tablet devices. It is a historical moment in the short lifetime of PCBS, when compared to the statistical bodies in neighboring Arab countries.

Clean, and well-organized, this is how you will find the PCBS's building when you enter them in the morning and every employee is at work before the beginning of the official working hour. You ask yourself, what makes it worth it? Is it the place? But places are changing. Is it the people who establish the place and grow older with it? But people change, too. Is it the name that gives things value? Perhaps all these things together essentially inspire the institution to rise, continue and to add value. They either move the workplace forward, or bring it down.

A Researcher's Story

The third census was in its second day when the field researcher arrived in Hebron. He was looking for a family that he could not find at home whenever he went to count them. A girl decided to lead him to the family's place. The seven-year girl walked with him on foot, showed him the location and then returned home. Shortly afterwards, a man asked the researcher about the girl who had not yet come home. The researcher asked him, "Which girl?" The man shouted, "The girl who led you to the family." He had no idea about the matter. He saw the girl for a short time and she then disappeared and went home. All male and female researchers in the region were called to search for the girl, and after many hours of searching, they found the girl sleeping at her friend's house. It was a difficult day for all of us and I think that this girl will not forget what happened to her that day, nor will she forget the census throughout her life.

Twenty years have separated the first census from the third census. In addition, the techniques and tools used in the implementation of the two censuses are extremely different. Now, tablet devices are used and are linked to a central program that converts the input information within seconds into input in the statistical program. The work and plan's progress are also easily monitored.

On the other hand, there are aspects that do not change, no matter how many years pass and no matter how different the technology used, for the census is a matter of sovereignty. This led the occupation's security forces to pursue and arrest workers. The Director of the Jerusalem Census confirmed that he found dozens of Israeli soldiers standing over his head in his bedroom at 2 am on 11/21/2017, after breaking the apartment door and confiscating his mobile phone. He was thinking of his three sons, who woke up in horror when they put a black mask on his head taking him to the settlement of BezgatZe'ev.

At that time, it was very cold. They made him sit on the ground for 45 minutes, until an officer came and took off the mask from his head and took a photo of his face, then sent it to an unknown destination. After a quarter of an hour, an intelligence officer arrived and took him in a car, while his hands and feet were cuffed and his face was covered. The officer said that they would take him to Al Maskobiyya Prison and he then asked him mockingly about (Abu Mazen and Arafat).

He did not understand what was going on with him. He was an ordinary employee and had no political activity. When he heard the voice of Hatem Abdel Qader, the person in charge of the "Jerusalem file" in the Fatah movement, he thought that the census might be the reason. While he was sitting in

the detention room, the census workers came one by one. The investigator accused the director of infringing on the sovereignty of the state, for his work in Jerusalem, which is an Israeli area where the Palestinian Authority is forbidden to perform any work. He reminded him of the census prevention that was approved in 1997. Then he asked him about 40 young men and women working with him and he heard recordings of work-related phone calls between them. After a long week of continuous interrogation and placing him with criminal defendants, they made serious accusations against him carrying a penalty of a life sentence.

One of the female researchers, who began as a field researcher in 2016, said that she was arrested from her home in Shuafat at 3 am without knowing the reason. When she arrived at the investigation office, she found 13 field researchers who she supervises at work. She met her director in the detention room. They put her in the same prison with him and then they separated them, and told her that her director had admitted that they were working in the Jerusalem census, and that she had to confess too. However, she said that she does not like him and cannot work with him. It seems that he told them the same thing, but she did not know whether they believed it or not.

They searched her phone, Facebook and WhatsApp, while she was too busy thinking about her fellow researchers and her responsibility towards them. So, she said that they know nothing and that she had asked them to work with her on a private research. The researcher was released on a 20,000 NIS bail, and she was sentenced to house arrest for five days and the other researchers too. The director spent a whole week in detention. Without the the intervention of major human rights organizations, this matter would have developed into a more complex case. All the recordings, phones and tablets were confiscated that night, but the work had to be completed even through the use of traditional methods.

Challenges of the Security Situation and the Intifada

An Employee's Story

The PCBS began its work at the end of the first intifada (Intifada of Stones). Once the PCBS developed the fundamentals and methodologies of its work, the second intifada (Al-Aqsa Intifada) broke out, during which the occupation army dissected Palestinian villages and cities in the West Bank, deployed military checkpoints on main roads, prevented movement, and carried out close vehicle and citizen inspections, which made access to the workplace difficult, especially with the frequent military incursions and the imposition of curfews. Since the PCBS's administration and its employees believed that access to the workplace was a national duty, they faced various risks to reach their workplace.

With the outbreak of the Second Intifada, checkpoints were closed in 2003, including Qalandia Checkpoint, which is the most vital land corridor for Ramallah, where the government institutions exist and many citizens and students cross it to reach their various destinations. In those days, instructions were issued by the Israeli occupation not to allow anyone to pass through the checkpoint, except for students, nurses and doctors. A female employee, who works in the Living Standards Department at PCBS and lives in Jaba area, and who had to pass through Qalandia checkpoint daily to reach her workplace in the Al Balou' area, said, "Despite the intifada, the blockade and the checkpoints spread everywhere dissecting the West Bank's cities and villages and preventing access to the nearest locations, the PCBS's employees cannot wait for the improvement of the situation to return to work."

She searched for her school uniform and old school bag and decided to pass through the checkpoint on this day to reach work and complete the preparations for a research study on poverty and the proportion of expenditure. She was 25 years old, but she pretended to be 15 years old. She did not have an ID card proving her young age. She put the tenth grade books that she borrowed from her sister in her bag to avoid any surprises. The female soldier stopped her and then allowed her to pass. It was a little bit hard to find a car to take her from Qalandia to the headquarters. Then she ran, taking off her uniform before the director arrived.

She carried out her usual work on that day in the Living Standards Statistics Department, where she had worked since 1999 after her graduation from the Faculty of Economics. She contacted the male and female field surveyors who she supervised their work and analyzed the data of poverty, expenditure and living standards to extract the figures for a report on the economic conditions in this critical period. Then she returned home after school, dressed as she came.

The employee continued disguising herself until a female soldier stopped her one day claiming that she was older than fifteen, but fortunately she was always ready for surprises as she had the birth certificate of her fifteen-year-old cousin. It was very difficult to prove otherwise. When the summer vacation started she had to find another way to pass, perhaps by applying for a sick permit. But could she be sick every day? If she was not sick, could she change her profession to a nurse? but how? She decided to issue a nurse's card.

Work was constantly a commitment and not a luxury. Even after the closure of Qalandia checkpoint, she used to cross very long roads passing through Sarda and Rafat, with mud covering her clothes during the rainy days, and she was burnt by the sunlight in the summer. Cars could not cross those roads, so she went on foot.

One day, she arrived at work very late, which violates the center's principles. She was wearing a school uniform and carrying the bag, and when she saw the director of the PCBS from a distance, she was so afraid. He did not recognize her at the beginning but at the same moment, one of her colleagues was arriving on the back of a donkey, which was the only effective means of transport to arrive from his village to Ramallah. She and the PCBS director laughed at the colleague whose clothes were covered in mud while riding the donkey. The PCBS director decided to reward them for their dedication and for developing creative solutions to reach the workplace. The donkey was also rewarded with two bags of barley!



One of PCBS Employees Wearing School Uniform to Access her Workplace, 2003

“Stop right there!”.. “Where are you going?”.. “Get down!”

An employee and his colleague heard these words before they found guns pointed at their heads over the hot desert sands. They were performing their normal tasks while driving their car to collect information about a gathering in the southeast of Hebron. No information was available about the number of communities or the number of Palestinians living in this extended desert area. The two colleagues did not have maps showing distances and they wanted to reach Arab al-Najza, Umm al-Khair and Umm al-Daraj, which are Bedouin areas close to the Beersheba region, to develop an initial plan that could help in the census. They walked a long distance in the middle of the hot desert and there was no evidence of human presence at all. They tried to trace the Bedouins living in this area. Ten minutes later, a sound of cars coming from the middle of the desert was heard and less than three minutes later, military jeeps had stopped them immediately.

They realized that they had entered an army camp and that soldiers were surrounding them from all sides. They were interrogated for more than 12 hours, in which they tried to prove that they were civilian staff who got lost in the desert. After a day of calls to verify their statements, they were released.

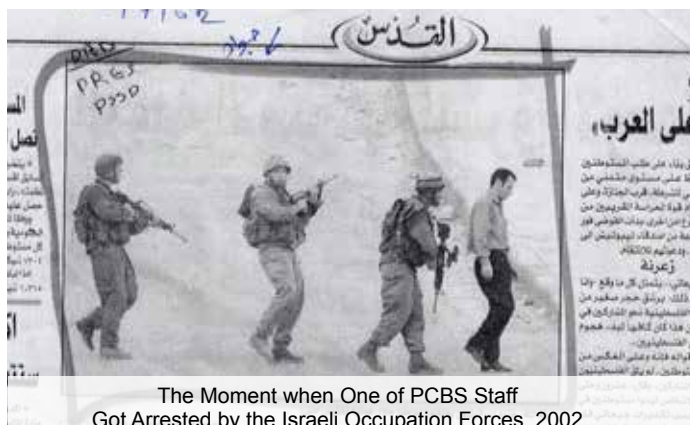
Then they followed their route towards the MasaferYatta area, an empty space with wide hills which settlers try to control by imposing restrictions on the few Palestinian communities living there. Abu Mari, one of the residents, owned a house which was very close to the house of a settler. The settler

had sued Ali (Abu Mari) because the smell of taboon bread coming from his home bothered him and the trial extended for years until the court decided that the smell of taboon would not affect the life of the settler. The employees heard the story from (Abu Mari) while they were eating fresh taboon bread. They gathered some information and then continued on their way until they reached one of the nomadic Bedouin communities, which they had not been able to reach before. They were very glad because this community was considered a floating population that changed its location according to the seasons. They camped there in the summer because of the existence of a well and in the winter they moved to another area for protection.

The gathering consisted of two families living in a disputed area. The settlers wanted to occupy the land, finding no resistance except the presence of these two families who were preventing the settlers from annexing the land. The inclusion of this area in the census would help preserve the land and support the steadfastness of families, so the employee felt that he had made a great achievement despite all difficulties encountered.

After that, the car arrived to a gathering of families living in caves and which were prohibited from building independent houses. They lived in caves called "Al-dakeeka". We monitored their needs, their numbers and the number of times the solar cells, which were the only source of electricity provided by some foreign institutions for generating electricity inside the caves, had been broken. This data was not only in the form of numbers, but could contribute to completely changing the life of at least one person. This was enough for those employees.

The PCBS has spared no effort in providing housing for its employees who come from other governorates to work at the headquarters in Ramallah in order to ensure their safety and to allow access to their workplace easily. The occupation's incursions into the areas of the Palestinian Authority have caused other difficulties and problems despite that the housing problem was solved. One of the employees from the sampling department, who was at the age of twenty-eight, stated that he continued to be plagued by the Second Intifada due to access difficulties as he could not commute from his home in Asira ash Shamaliyah to his workplace in Ramallah.



The only road to pass through was Jericho. The road looked like some kind of horror movie. He preferred to sleep for two weeks in Ramallah and then return to visit his family on vacations. The storming of Ramallah made things more complicated. During this time, he lived with a group of colleagues at a building in Al-Balou` near his workplace, but the building was close to the confrontation area, so the smell of tear gas filled the place during night and day. Everyone had tears falling from their eyes for a long time as a result of the tear gas and they would get down on the ground waiting for the bullets that entered from the windows to stop. They decided to move to a new place, which was the Maryland Hotel. It was the only place in the city which was large enough for ten employees and the joint operations room for the National Security Forces existed there.

A strict military curfew was imposed on the city for two weeks. Water, food and cigarettes ran out. 10 people were crammed into one small room, where shelling and death were expected at any moment. Two weeks later, it was announced over a loudspeaker that the curfew had been lifted for one hour. The men rushed along in search of anything to be eaten, and the aforementioned employee arrived on foot to the vegetable market area in downtown Ramallah, which was usually crawling with vegetables and fruits sellers, but the shops and the market stalls, which most of their owners come from neighboring villages, were closed. After a period of searching, he found only one half-opened store with almost empty shelves, from which he bought whatever chocolate and juice he could buy, but the basic foodstuffs were missing.

At that moment, the shelling began, so he had to return immediately to the hotel. The intensity of gunfire increased, sniper bullets and warplanes were everywhere but he finally arrived at the hotel and the men started arriving one by one empty-handed.

At five in the afternoon, the men were in a state of anxiety, alertness and waiting. Suddenly they heard knocks on the room door along with the tank shell sounds. It was really horrible and terrifying. Rabah finally opened the door. A man in his forties carrying two plastic bags was standing in front of him and offering help. The man was one of the hotel's neighbors who brought some vegetables and homemade bread for them. At night, members of the National Security Forces knocked on the door and told them that the hotel would be bombed and stormed and that they should leave immediately.

The men went down to the hotel lobby to make a phone call to find a means of transport that could take them to Nablus. At that moment, a huge explosion shook the place from the corridors and the door of their room was bombed. They fled and the occupation army stormed the hotel on the same night.

The employee decided to return back home in Asira ash-Shamaliya to overcome the difficult conditions. He decided to try his luck during the next lifting of the curfew for one hour. He got into a car whose driver was one of the few hotheads who dared to drive between cities at that critical period. When the passengers, including children and women, arrived at Hamra area, they had to walk between the orchards to cross the checkpoint and reach the adjacent area where they could take a car to the neighboring area. After walking for more than an hour on foot, an army patrol stopped them asking for their IDs, then it prevented them all from crossing. They returned disappointed on the same road they came from. The sound of the helicopter broke the silence, but no one cared. The driver thought it was a reconnaissance aircraft, but the plane started approaching and chasing that car in particular. Then a loudspeaker began to be heard from afar, ordering the passengers to get out of the car. The car stopped and was surrounded by Israeli army jeeps. Then, soldiers began beating the passengers.

The employee in the samples department, who spent half of his work in the office and the other in the field, felt that it was his last business trip. He was lucky that the car had not been completely bombed. He thanked God because the matter ended with beatings and arrest that lasted for three days. He decided that he would not leave Ramallah during this period, as he and four of his colleagues found a room in Ramallah al-Tahta area. Neighbors began to flock to help them and provide whatever food they needed.

On the third night of their residence in their new room, the employee heard the Palestinian zaffa and traditional wedding songs. The sound was very close to them. Is there a wedding in the neighborhood? The young men went out in search of the source of the sound. Although their bodies were exhausted, those songs brought back many happy memories. It had been a long time since they had heard the sounds of hope and joy, as instead they had been hearing the sounds of funerals, loudspeakers, newscasts and break-ins. It was a wedding that took place in the yard of the house in which they lived. There was a real bride in a white gown and her groom and a group of women and men sharing their happiness. It was a wedding for a Christian family, which was now their neighbor in Ramallah al-Tahta. Watching the wedding ceremony was an experience of pure joy. Abu George, the groom's father, noticed their presence on the house's rooftop and insisted on their participation in the wedding. They were shy and reluctant, but finally the five men joined the wedding as if they were members of the family. They ate, drank and enjoyed the food that they had not tasted since their last visit to their homes. Then, they joined the dancing groups, while the bombing was still outside assuring that yet there is still a hope in life.

A Very Bold Employee

Hebron city's unique circumstances make it difficult for census staff to carry out their duties naturally. The Old City and the Ibrahimi Mosque are continuously threatened by the Israeli settlements and are heavily affected by Judaization measures. In addition to the specificity of the desert areas and Palestinian communities adjacent to the Israeli settlement compounds, the city has a tribal nature that has distinctive customs and traditions.

Up until this moment, the occupation administration is preventing census officials from reaching the Palestinian families living in the Old City during various census rounds. Many obstacles have been put in place by Israel to block researchers' access to these families; however, registering these Palestinian populations in the census extends Palestinian sovereignty over the Old City and limits the opportunities of Judaization and dispossession. Therefore, since the first census, reaching these families was a major concern for the census staff, particularly for one of PCBS's female employees who decided to be the heroin of the census. Since 2002, she has been working in PCBS, where she developed a combination of methods and field tactics that helped her reach dangerous places, despite all the geographical, climatic, social and occupational conditions.

That employee encountered snakes and dogs on her way between the bushes, while she was running barefooted from the Israeli army which closed down many areas declaring them as "closed military zones" during the Intifada. She also faced conflicts between blood-feuding families in the tribal areas and also faced settlers whom she entered their houses by accident while she was working in the same zones and whom commonly followed her from house to house while she was holding her famous bag that contained additional clothes and sneakers to avoid surprises.

On the ground, she has built social relations with the public, which helped her enter houses and collect accurate information. Her personal relationships improved her access to hard-to-reach families, especially in the Old City where a security cordon was imposed by the army to prevent out-of-towners from entering.

Moreover, she reached some families by meeting them in other families' houses outside the Cave of the Patriarchs, and she communicated with many families over the phone, as it was impossible to meet them face to face. She was not able to reach everyone and in one of the families, for example, the mother was hearing impaired, so it was difficult to talk to her by phone. She was desperately trying to communicate with her for a long time, but one day by random chance she solved the problem when she met the woman in the market accompanied by her ten-year-old son, who translated what she wanted to say to his mother by using sign language.

Residents of the houses facing Al-Shuhada Street could not even open the window to answer the questions of the PCBS employee who was in the next house. Opening their windows would make them subjected to direct gun shots. She secured her access to residents of these houses by jumping from the neighbor's roof. Jumping from one rooftop to another was one of her tactics to reach everyone. The residents of those areas were very cooperative, which encouraged her to take risks in order to realize her objective.

The following are some recommendations made from her own experience in field work:

Do not look into the eyes of a soldier who wants to block your road. Move ahead along the way ignoring him completely and if you are stopped by him, act as if it is not your concern.

If you have encountered a snake while trying to get to a house to fill out a form, do not panic. Just hit it with your leg and go on.

Don't get involved in internal armed disputes between quarreling families (armed feuding between clans). Return back at another time or write that you were not able to access that region.

Do not let anyone convince you that you cannot reach, even if it is the occupation, the walls of the Old City, the entry ban, or the bad weather conditions. You can find a way to reach anyway.

Working in the field requires all social, economic, offensive and defensive skills, and it is not determined by certificates and papers.

Statistical Work Development and GIS

PCBS was established in 1993, where its organizational structure included only ten individuals and did not have a plan or a work program. However, the structure began to develop focusing on generating as many data and information as possible and managing information systems. Accordingly, the structure's development began directly with the global statistical system development, whereby new departments were created and added, including the Women and Child Development Department, as well as the departments of standards, methodologies and quality. PCBS then started focusing on the dissemination of statistics, the establishment of the Records Department, Good Governance Department, Data Security and Protection Development Department considering the high extent of reliance on IT. Finally, PCBS worked on developing geographic information systems.

PCBS seeks to promote the sustainable development of its structure and to meet the requirements related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators 2030, as PCBS's statistical system is in line with international statistical standards, taking into account the Palestinian specificity in some issues due to the occupation and wars.

PCBS was a small center that turned into a department and then into an institution. In 1994, PCBS had only five statistical programs, but then six technical statistical departments were created. Each department includes five to six sections, where each section works on a program that includes 1-7 staff members. The statistical departments are established as follows:

1. General Administration of Censuses: It includes the Technical Operations Department and the Department of Maps.
2. The General Administration of Geographical Statistics: It includes the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Hotels and Tourism, the Department of Housing and Housing Conditions, the Department of Natural Resources, and Environmental Statistics Department.
3. The General Administration of Economic Statistics: It includes the Finance and Insurance Department, the Prices and Indices Department, the Analysis and Forecasting Department, the Service Sector Department, the Industry, Construction and Satellite Accounts Department, and the Digital and Commerce Department.
4. The Population and Social Statistics Department: it includes the Department of Housing, the Department of Health, the Department of Labor and Living Standards, and the Department of Education and Culture.
5. The Department of Statistics, Administrative Records and Statistical Monitoring: It includes the Department of Administrative Records and Gender, the Department of Security, Justice and Governance, the Child Statistics Program, and the Central Records Department.
6. Standards, Methodologies and Quality Management Department: It includes the Department of Quality, Samples and Inspection Frameworks, and the Department of Standards and Methodologies.

First Comprehensive Plan:

PCBS's work was based on the "Comprehensive Plan for the First Official Statistics" in the first five years (1995-2000). The plan majorly aimed at setting out the general framework of a detailed statistical system that would be developed over the first five years. It also took into account a range of internal and external considerations and closed an important gap in the information vacuum that prevailed in Palestine, especially after the implementation of Palestine Population, Housing, and Establishment Census, 1997. This plan was prepared in consultation with the key users, representing government institutions, universities, organizations and research centers. Completion of this plan required consultation with international experts and the review of international guidelines and practices in several institutions. It was a guide and a benchmark for development and accomplishments for the next five years.

Data Promotion and Access Challenges (2000-2006)

The early years of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics were the major building-blocks for the Palestinian statistical number. Since there were no previous censuses to build upon, work began from scratch to carry out and develop them. But apparently now after seven years of implementing five major projects including the general establishments census in 1994, the computerization of the voter register in 1995, the demographic survey in 1996, the Population, Housing and Establishment General Census in 1997, and the health survey in 1999, PCBS built on the abovementioned surveys, focused on market needs, and determined the needs of the researchers, students, and producers for data marketing.

PCBS's relationship with the various institutions, the statistical programs that must be covered and the rights and duties of users was regulated through the General Statistics Law No. (4), which was approved in 2000. PCBS's mission is to develop and enhance the Palestinian official statistical system based on legal grounds. It collects, provides, and preserves statistical data on Palestine to achieve a comprehensive vision.

It is a comprehensive and unified statistical system that serves as a guide for ministries and institutions to help in diagnosing problems and evaluating progress achieved. PCBS should attract users and provide needed information through meeting and consulting with them before the implementation of a survey, during implementation and at the time of results announcement.

PCBS focused on providing training to specialized users (qualified data researchers), which is not used for the public only. Now, PCBS does not only produce data, but has also started to provide special numbers used by researchers and users in producing their own data, enabling them to reach the maximum possible levels of productivity.

PCBS promoted the role of the statistical library and the scientific research center so that the researcher could visit the library and take information needed on a CD. PCBS announced the publication dates of its statistical reports related to various occasions within the statistical calendar, circulated them through its website and conducted a survey to measure the satisfaction of users of PCBS's products, services and statistical data.

Those years witnessed the outbreak of the second intifada on September 28, 2000 in which the West Bank and Gaza Strip were separated from each other and Palestinians were isolated in geographical cantons due to the barriers, incursions and tanks. The political, social, and economic conditions deteriorated in the Palestinian territories, increasing the vulnerability of community groups such as (women, children and youth). Such deterioration prompted PCBS to undertake creative initiatives, the most important of which was the development of a statistical monitoring system that helped create an effective safety net for these groups.

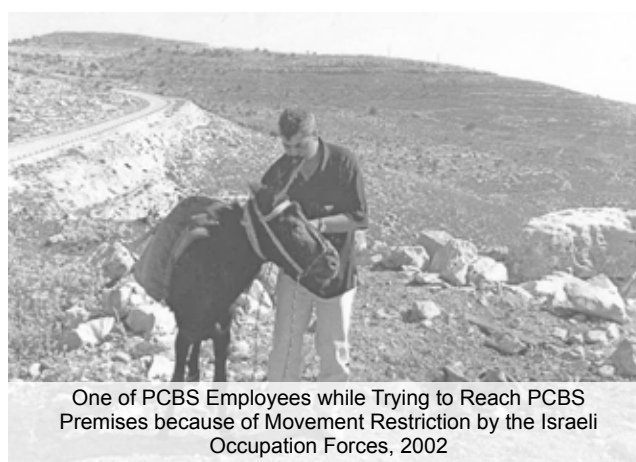
PCBS maintained a high status due to its credibility, professionalism and avoidance of politicization, outpourings and propaganda, but it has not forgotten the exceptional specificity of the Palestinian people living under the repression of occupation and blockade. Despite its adherence to international professional standards, it issued specialized statements on Palestinian affairs including the statements on detainees, statements on war victims, statements on settlements, and a statement on the impact of the apartheid wall and the impact of the intifada on the conditions of Palestinian citizens. Reaching people was not easy and one can hear from every employee who went through the events in that period a heartbreaking or humorous story along with his/her special story of working with the PCBS.

A picture of the director of fieldwork when he was riding on the back of a donkey is placed at the center of his office in Ramallah eighteen years after the outbreak of the Second Intifada. During that period, the occupation cut off the cities of the West Bank and movement became hazardous due to separation barriers which left individuals vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and detention. The director of fieldwork who was living in a village near Ramallah used to attend work regularly and to arrive at work on time like all the employees of the PCBS during that period. He crossed the dirt bypass roads on the back of a donkey, with mud covering his entire back and clothes during the winter and he was burnt by the sunlight in the summer. He is very proud of that photo documenting the moment

he reached the PCBS on the back of a donkey during one day of the second intifada. He said: "My donkey was rewarded that day with two barley bags." It was a gift from the director of the PCBS for its dedication to the work. He keeps a note of gratitude until now in his office.

In the second intifada, the Israeli occupation forces raided the main and the subsidiary offices of PCBS. The PCBS building received heavy fire and was hit by explosive shells leaving massive damages, not to mention the seizure of equipment including servers, computers, paper files, photos, and some electrical devices. When the PCBS was nightly stormed, PCBS's assistant director for technical affairs said, "We formed a follow-up team, issued press releases in four languages and we gained great international solidarity because we were known for our professionalism and credibility."

"Of course we were ready for the Israeli attacks and incursions and we had an additional archive of all PCBS's important information and documents, which were stored in a safe place. It was stored in secret places in case of any emergency," stated the director general of administrative and financial affairs at that time.



One of PCBS Employees while Trying to Reach PCBS Premises because of Movement Restriction by the Israeli Occupation Forces, 2002



Photo courtesy of ARIJ

Israeli Occupation Forces Raiding into PCBS Premises, 2003

National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (2009-2010)

PCBS approved a strategic planning policy to develop and update the statistical system in Palestine. This system was represented by all data producers and users in the public and private sectors. Accordingly, the General Administration for Planning and Development was created to follow up the strategic planning since 2008. In partnership with the pillars of the statistical system, this administration prepared three five-year strategic plans for the statistical system for the years of 2009-2013, and the years of 2014-2018; and the last one was the strategic plan for developing official statistics 2018-2022. It also produced annual statistical reports, the Palestine Statistical Yearbook, Palestine in Figures, and the Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook. This included performing work in the department of Planning and Statistical Coordination and preparing regional and international forms, as well as the internal forms at the national level.

Strategic thinking and five-year plans are based on certain aspects of statistical work on which annual plans depend. They strengthen the focus on statistical knowledge that aims to educate the public about the essence of statistics, its uses and importance. Furthermore, it pays attention to the public's satisfaction and feedback by conducting user satisfaction surveys on the quality of data and other services provided. User satisfaction surveys were initially implemented in 2005 and were then developed in 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2016. Currently, PCBS is preparing for the implementation of a user satisfaction survey after it has become an essential part of PCBS's work. It largely regulates the relationship between PCBS and the user. Many memorandums of understanding focusing on the users' needs were concluded as a result of this survey.

The National Team for the Preparation of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics, which includes all partners in the statistical system, assesses the reality and identifies strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The partners' needs, gaps and challenges are also identified

to be analyzed using the problem tree model. Strategic and sub-goals are determined to overcome problems based on the analysis. Consequently, operational plans and activities are formulated to ensure the achievement of the strategic and sub-goals. Then, the reports of various phases are submitted to the Board of the PCBS for approval, and the PCBS submits the draft strategy to the Advisory board for guidance, amendment, development and approval. The Advisory Board includes representatives of all parties concerned with the statistical system such as ministries, government institutions, representatives of the private sector, universities, scientific research centers, civil society organizations and trade unions. Prior to the issuance of the first drafts of the plan, specialized workshops are held for the national team to diagnose the internal and external work environment for the pillars of the statistical system, to make work references and adopt general directions for the State of Palestine and the National Policy Agenda 2017-2022 entitled "Citizen First". This agenda covers the social, economic and environmental policies, which strengthen the resilience of the citizen, preserve national constants, support work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators 2030 and support the technical trends at the level of PCBS and the pillars of the statistical system. Then, the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics is finally approved by the Council of Ministers to bring it in conformity with the National Policy Agenda and the SDGs that enhance the use of official statistics in the decision-making process.

For this purpose, the strategy focuses on achieving the quality of statistical data, using the best methodologies for the collection, analysis and dissemination of data. It also focuses on using the electronic publishing and the latest technology in statistical work, exchanging information, networking, and transferring data in a safe manner, in an integrated manner to develop the official statistics system. This, in turn, will enhance using statistics in planning and policy-making process.

SDGs :The Sustainable Development Goals

The Story of the Women and Men Program

PCBS has been working on establishing a women and men statistics program since 1994, but it was successfully established in mid-1996, after building up a cadre of human resources and providing the basic financial resources by UNDP. In early 2005, following the approval of the PCBS's structure, the Women and Men Statistics Program turned into the Women and Men Statistics Department that was part of the Directorate of Social Statistics. In 2015, the Women's Statistics Department became one of PCBS's directorates under the name of Gender Statistics and included two departments: the Women and Men Department and the Child Department. The Directorate of Gender Statistics carried out many activities and events that left an obvious impact on women's issues in the Palestinian society and children's statistics. Furthermore, it opened the door for researchers and planners to develop the desired strategy and close the existing gaps that limit women's productivity and participation in daily life. The Women and Men Program highlighted the existing gaps in some issues including education, health, work and public life by focusing on some indicators that measure the status of both women and men in the Palestinian society and child statistics.

The main objective of the Department of Gender Statistics is to provide data on gender and child statistics and to strengthen PCBS's capacities related to the publication and dissemination of women and men statistical data. Therefore, all official statistics should be published by gender and the collection, analysis and dissemination of data should reflect the issues of women, men and children. Additionally, it aims at enhancing awareness among policy-makers, planners, non-governmental organizations and research centers on the importance of using the statistics of women, men and children in policy-making processes and the development of plans and programs. The department should promote and monitor changes in this regard, and should follow up international recommendations on issues of gender equality. This should be reflected in the statistical activities and related programs in the PCBS's annual plan, as well as in communication and coordination with national and international institutions to develop gender and child statistics.

The most significant achievements of this directorate are the implementation of The Time Use Survey, the issuance of the Women and Men Annual Report, the implementation of a survey on

Violence for three sessions, in addition to the implementation of many awareness-raising, outreach and promotional campaigns on the issue of gender in the Palestinian society.

Partnerships and Deployment Phase 2010-2015:

In the light of the remarkable development and achievements of PCBS, Palestine has participated in all international statistical forums, including the recognition of the World Statistics Day on 20 October 2010 that was celebrated pursuant to a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. 2010 witnessed the Institutionalization of Total Quality Management. PCBS built an integrated quality system that promotes Palestinian and international principles, best practices, recommendations and standards related to the production of statistical data and this was culminated in receiving an ISO 9001 certificate.



Celebrating World Statistics Day, 2010

These years were marked by successful partnerships and networking with local, regional and international institutions. PCBS strengthened its relationship with users and partners, whether by conducting user satisfaction surveys, workshops and training courses within the user dialogue program or by signing memorandums of understanding with ministries, institutions and local and international universities for cooperation in the fields of statistical work. The first agricultural census was carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture. The criteria of data dissemination were set in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance and the Monetary Authority. Memorandums of understanding were concluded between PCBS and the Ministry of Justice, the NGO Affairs Authority, the Ministry of Health and other international institutions to strengthen the capacities of workers in the national statistical system, technical missions, and advisory committees.

These partnerships eased the burdens and increased effectiveness and social responsibility. As a result, statistical capacities were developed whether in the ministries, national institutions or at national, regional and international levels. Such capacity development contributed to the development of the national statistical system in general and the development of PCBS in particular, for that, a training plan was developed for the partners within the Palestinian Statistical Training Center in order to introduce them to the fundamentals of statistics.

In 2012, Palestine formally joined the SDDS, which was launched by the International Monetary Fund in 1996. It is aimed at improving the coverage and availability of country data, which facilitates the decision-making process in the public and private sectors and provides investors and policy makers with sufficient information. SDDS also provides benchmark indicators with the required transparency and publishes these indicators on the International Monetary Fund website. In the same year, PCBS carried out the general census of economic establishments for the fifth time, inaugurated a scientific research center that provided a place for users of statistical data to access it effectively and privately and developed the statistical monitoring system and data quality.

SDDS: Special Data Dissemination Standard

Palestine: The Head of the United Nations for Monitoring Sustainable Development Plan (HLG):

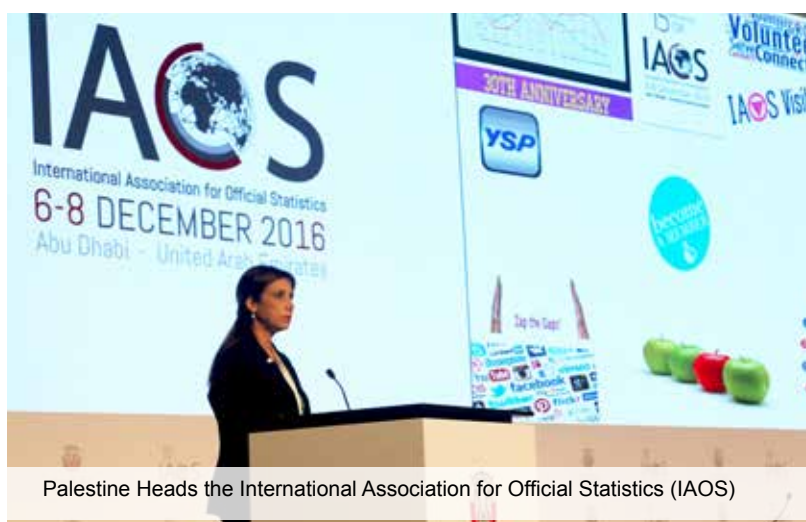
Since 2015, PCBS has been selected as a representative for the Arab region in the United Nations High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB). The team includes more than 20 countries from all regions of the world and is supervised by the United Nations Statistics Division. It should be noted that the State of Palestine was selected as the co-chair of the team for the year 2020.



The UN High Level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB)

Palestine: The President of World Statistics:

At this stage, PCBS began benefiting from the progress achieved not only at the local level, but also at the global level. Investing in people and building their capacities made PCBS a place for exporting and sharing expertise locally and internationally and helped it move to the international level for the first time since its establishment. Palestine, represented by the President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, was elected as the president of the International Association for Official Statistics for the period (2013-2015), which was an important and unprecedented Arab and Palestinian achievement at the international level.



Palestine Heads the International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS)

During a meeting held in Hong Kong, she also was the president-elect of the International Association for Official Statistics during the period (2013-2017). It is the first time that an Arab figure has been elected to this position since the establishment of the association.

The current President of the PCBS was promoted to this position after she filled the position of the Director of International Relations for 10 year. She also held the position of President of the International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS) for the period (2015-2017). She took over the rotating presidency of the ESCWA Statistical Committee, in addition to being a member of the Middle East Initiative for Young Leaders, a member of the Board of Directors of the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries, a member of the Board of Directors of the Union of Arab Statisticians, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, and a member of the International Advisory Committee of the Abu Dhabi Statistics Center.

IAOS: International Association for Official Statistics

The President of PCBS believes that Palestine is “exceedingly good “as long as each person does his utmost. “We are all numbers that influence indicators positively and negatively, therefore, every person matters and each depends on the other. When it comes to statistics as solid numbers, we think that it is separated from daily life, but in fact it is related to the full details of human life. The details are what made the name of the (PCBS) institution, where each member works to support the other as a large team”.

The president of PCBS continues by saying: “Of course, every team needs a leader. From the very beginning, leadership has played a major role in determining the institutional and professional nature of the work environment, but proper leadership can create an institutional environment that enhances employees’ creativity and development. Leadership is not only limited to the director of the institution, but also includes leaders at the levels of departments and divisions. A good institutional environment is not affected by staff turnover».

The president of PCBS was a second-year student at Birzeit University when she successfully began working at the Pharmacists Without Borders Association. She took a part-time job as a logistics officer where she was responsible for packing up and loading the medicine boxes for distribution to medical clinics. That job provided her with new skills, increased her experience, enhanced her competence and helped her move to a new position as a program coordinator. At that time, the culture of working while you are still a university student was not common, especially in the homeland. After graduation, she received her MA degree from Boston University. Her practical experience helped her develop her communication skills, learn how to write project proposals and improved her French and English languages.

I have never wanted to work in the government sector. I always saw myself in a senior position in an international institution. In the interview, I said “I will not stay in my job for more than three years, because at that time I will have given my all to my job and I will have nothing to add to the institution.” Although I applied to the position of Director General of the Department of Administrative and Financial Affairs, I got the position of Director of the Department of International Relations because I was qualified for this position. I spent three years at my job but I never felt that I had as there was a new task that could be carried out every day and a new experience that could be gained. I did not deal with my work as a daily routine but as a task that needed more effort and research. She continued by saying: “PCBS was recently established at this moment. You have to expect that you will work on multiple tasks, gain all kinds of experiences and face many challenges. You have to be always ready to work at any time and you may be invited to official meetings at the highest levels on a day of field work. Sometimes loving what you do makes you driven by passion rather than logic and makes you feel the importance of the impact you leave everywhere you go. The effort you put into your work in the PCBS is much greater than the salary you are paid. You will not be able to make a fair comparison of this kind.”

«Becoming the President of PCBS means that you hold the responsibility of adding something new and doing what others cannot do, otherwise you are not in your right place. This is why I always feel that there is a necessity for developing performance and maintaining the quality, the positive institutional environment and the quality of the product provided to the public” she added.

Although the President of PCBS came from a different administrative school, she insisted on becoming a leader who preserves the legacy of the center in addition to her administrative and leadership beliefs and who comes up with new and quality ideas. Therefore, she had built her capacities and kept learning from her previous experiences. “In the end, I was a woman who grew up in the PCBS” she said. This helped her to be selected by the staff of the PCBS. Being the President of PCBS can be described as a stage of innovation as she may be the youngest among the managers around her, in addition to her existence in a patriarchal society where it is difficult for a woman to be a woman and a leader at the same time. This imposes great social costs on her at the level of social relations and the extended family and limits her relationship with her nuclear family, as well as her social relations within the PCBS.

If the early phase of the PCBS was foundational, then the current phase is developmental and international. PCBS passed key tests, moved to a new stage at the technical level, joined the special standard for data dissemination (SDDS) and implemented exceptional projects worldwide.

PCBS is now in the phase of digitalization at the technical and administrative levels, as there is a complete electronic archiving of data and documents. PCBS is managed through a decentralized administration. It has a remarkable and effective international presence; the small experience of the PCBS compared to the experiences of others forces the international community to seriously look at what has been done by the Palestinians who are suffering under occupation. Palestinians bring something new on the practical and scientific level and contribute to the development of institutions in the Arab region.

Palestine occupies the position of the President of the International Association for Official Statistics. It may seem absurd but it is not, as statistics is a science that is not directly related to politics. Development is at the technical level that can be measured and not at the political level that can be questioned.

The President of PCBS did not run for the position of the President of the International Association for Official Statistics, but was rather elected by other statistical institutions. Electing Palestine to be the President of the Association after the United States, France and Italy was a great privilege and was not the result of political pressure or a supporting lobby. PCBS has worked since its inception to prove itself at the international level. It strictly prepares for training courses, workshops and conferences, and its strong presence helped it occupy the most important position at the level of world statistics.

International Visits to Palestine:

International visits to Palestine were of great interest to many experts who were afraid to come to Palestine at the beginning, but PCBS's mission encouraged them and stressed the necessity to visit Palestine to see what is happening on the ground.

A major feature of statistics is that it indirectly transforms politics into numbers and science and it is not ruled by feelings or sentiment, but rather it is based on logic and reason. It affects people's emotions in ways devoid of slogans. When PCBS invited 19 countries to visit Palestine for the first time, they accepted the invitation and were shocked to witness the situation on the humanitarian level. They thought that Palestinians' lives were quite normal and easy, but when they saw what was taking place at the checkpoints, at closure zones and areas of direct and daily contact with the occupation, they realized the impact of the occupation on people's daily lives. Although PCBS has never focused on politics but rather on technical matters related to the life of Palestinians, the production of the Annual Settlements Report, which reveals the settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, the special reports on the impacts of the 2014 Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, in particular on the social and economic conditions, and many other reports that reflect the exceptional conditions, have clearly highlighted the Palestinian political needs in a professional and effective manner.



The Visit of the Director of UNSD to PCBS Premises

Information Technology Phase (2016-2019)

Many major information system developments have taken place in the last ten years between the second census in 2007 and the third census in 2017, not only at the level of PCBS, but also at the global level. These developments were positively reflected in the last census (Technology Census).

Preparations for the Technology Census began in 2016, where forms, work guides and training for all stages of the census were developed and the technical and administrative committees were established. The census was implemented in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip at the same time using the same mechanism. Although the entry and exit of tablet devices were greatly challenging and the use of Geospatial Information System (GIS) in the Gaza Strip was hazardous. The team has overcome all obstacles by using the safety net that was developed in previous work phases.

Field Challenges

Since its establishment, the PCBS's census processes in Palestine have been predominantly national with a political conception, whereas the process of field data collection aims to determine who the citizen is. After the arrival of the Palestinian National Authority, there also was a conceptual confusion among the respondents about the benefit that can be achieved from field research and its positive and negative impacts on them, or the taxes that will be imposed on them accordingly, due to the lack of sufficient awareness of the importance of statistical field research as a matter of sovereignty benefiting the homeland and the citizen. Therefore, the respondents' answers needed to be reviewed until disseminating the culture of statistical work and clarifying its relationship to personal and individual information to publish figures at the national level.

On the other hand, the lack of sufficient experience at the beginning of the work required extensive training on how to reach the target respondents, including the use of maps and the defining of region codes. In addition, there was a continuous need to create confidence in the researchers, so they were provided with identification cards and an official letter from the PCBS as proof that they were on an official work mission, noting that some individuals have been reported to have used the name of PCBS for non-statistical purposes.

The Director of the Northern West Bank Department stated that some people impersonated PCBS field researchers. Therefore, PCBS provided identification cards for its researchers to be recognized by families and business owners and to communicate with PCBS for inquiries. In Qalqilya, a merchant sent a group of people to settle a personal dispute with one of the families. They claimed that they were researchers from PCBS and soon after the family and the competent authorities contacted PCBS's office in the governorate to confirm their identities.

Field researchers have faced challenging working conditions including harsh winter conditions, hot and dry summers, difficult geographical terrains, Israeli checkpoints and barriers, the annexation and expansion wall and respondents' lack of cooperation with them. The non-cooperation of respondents required interference at different levels to encourage and persuade them to cooperate with the field researchers. For instance, owners of large businesses and companies cooperated with the field researchers only after the field manager directly interfered. They considered that communicating with them was a sign of respect and a kind of appreciation for their cooperation with the requirements of PCBS. Over time, they built friendly relations with PCBS, which made the field work easier and more flexible.

Sometimes, some local bodies refuse to cooperate with PCBS's field researchers unless the director of the department paid a visit to their offices to start cooperation. These bodies then became the largest providers of logistical support for PCBS during the stages of preparation for censuses. They provided work places for field teams working in the same area or community. Moreover, the Israeli checkpoints posed a serious challenge, particularly for female researchers who faced delays in returning home.

Field researchers go through inhuman suffering just to return back to their homes, as they face considerable delays for many hours at the checkpoints. During one of the working days, PCBS was informed that female researchers had been waiting at an Israeli checkpoint for long hours. So, the PCBS's office called their families to inform them to stay overnight in a hotel, but they insisted on returning home. Finally, they reached their homes after eight hours of humiliating waiting and through the great efforts of the PCBS. It was a painful experience for them and their families, but later they were honored by the president of the PCBS as an appreciation of their efforts.

Public Relations and Social Responsibility:

Since its inception, PCBS's relationship with the local community was marked by credibility, as PCBS has been and remains to be in contact with all groups of society including the government, public institutions, civil society, universities and even individuals, in order to meet their statistical needs and to update the statistical projects according to the renewed needs of the community.

Advisory Board:

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics has an advisory board chaired by the Prime Minister. It comprises thirty-three members representing public ministries, relevant institutions and civil society. They meet twice a year and the board determines the general statistical trends of the country.



The Prime Minister, Dr. Salam Fayyad while chairing a meeting of the Advisory Council for Official Statistics, 2011



The Prime Minister, Dr. Rami Hamdallah, while chairing a meeting of the Advisory Council for Official Statistics, 2017



The Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh, while chairing a meeting of the Advisory Council for Official Statistics, 2019

PCBS continuously holds workshops with ministries and public institutions and signs cooperation agreements with parties concerned with the statistical number. In addition to the published statistical projects, PCBS has a special department of public services that receives requests for statistical data according to the researchers' needs. It provides the required data for the researcher within a maximum period of three days.

Statistical Family

The statistical family is characterized by its wide knowledge, culture, professionalism, its links with the community and accumulated experiences. When you ask an employee who has spent most of his working life in the PCBS in return for a low salary despite his long experience and local and regional job opportunities available to him in this field, "Why did you choose statistics?" He would reply: "Statistics is as a very interesting science and scientific research is an important tool to understand reality. When numbers are converted into words and texts that people can understand, it would give you great pleasure. You can convert the rigid signs into a cultural benefit. Statistics puts things in place in a scientific way, away from emotional excitement. Statistics helps you perform crucial and enjoyable work, away from the pressures of routine tasks. In this work, there is no free time as you are continuously searching. You are in a dynamic world where information and data are constantly changing. Therefore, you have to move to update the data.»

«You should be aware of what is published in newspapers and the latest human and social studies, and attend seminars and workshops to understand the number in front of you and analyze it based on recent data, which permanently connects you with the community that attracts your attention through its dynamicity and mobility.

«Work is terribly exhausting, but it is interesting . In the beginning, it affected my family life. Sometimes you may have to sleep in the headquarters, or you have to think only about work even while you are at home. Our job is not a one that ends with the end of working hours, especially in Palestine, as you want to put Palestine on the world statistical map. Even after long years of work, our work cannot be turned into a routine as every day you expect new tasks and you enter in committees that you have not heard about before.

«Your statistical family means that there is no separation between work and home, no separation between work and rest hours, no separation between employees and their families, nor between the service provider and the public.»



PCBS family, 2010

“Many of the PCBS’s staff got married and established families during the period of their work at PCBS. Since PCBS was established, an entertainment day was organized for all employees and their families. It contributed to transforming individualistic sentiments into collective emotion. It does not matter what you do here, whether you are a general manager, a consultant, a driver or a receptionist. You have a responsibility to represent your country. You represent PCBS everywhere you are.”

The statistical family faced political pressures when its director rejected pressures related to politicization, the change of the statistical numbers or the delay of their announcements. This family bravely faced the threats and went on strike. It assumed its responsibilities and duties that cannot be delayed. It always tried to reach the statistical number despite the financial and moral burdens. It took the needs of its employees into account by organizing working days in open places such as public parks or cultural centers that made the employees feel comfortable, free from work pressure, creating human understanding between the various administrative levels and the activate committees such as social work, solidarity, and the effective participation of employees in various events.

Story of Quality

PCBS invests extensively in the qualification of its employees, which is obviously reflected in their career development at the human and social levels. PCBS’s employees are required to undergo job rotations, initial training, periodic research, report writing, and presentations before representing the PCBS abroad.

It is rare to find an employee or an official whose position remains unchanged. Everyone has undergone an initial training period that extends to three months. During this period, the employee shall do nothing except read and communicate with the public. Every employee, who receives external training must submit a detailed report and then transfer the experience he gained to the whole staff.

Capacity building is an intensive program that transfers experiences from one generation to the next. This is clearly evident in the development of many PCBS’s employees who turned into international experts in neighboring countries.

The training modules vary at the different job levels. Each employee shall have the right to develop his\her capacities at all levels. This may start with expressing his\her opinions and even giving suggestions and recommendations that may change the workflow and the employee’s position. Having the capacity to take initiatives in the field of your work or even other fields greatly contributes to job rotation, places the right person in the right job and creates creative people who do not stop dreaming and thinking for the sake of comprehensive development.

PCBS is developing a training plan that enhances analytical capacities in order to carry out in-depth research and studies, which increase the creativity of the employees. The PCBS undergoes a structural review every two years and establishes new departments or makes changes to them. For instance, a new department for quality and administrative central records was established. Therefore, the employee in PCBS feels that he will not remain in his position forever, but rather there are opportunities of getting a promotion.

The internal capacity building program has greatly developed with the expansion of international needs. Currently, it is developed more in light of the new technology and the unconventional methods of data dissemination. This development greatly contributed to the change of working methods, for example, information collection and data entry were done completely manually, but now the digital transformation linked with GIS is used is for producing and disseminating statistics.

Social media is considered a new means for information dissemination and it constantly produces unconventional methods of publishing. PCBS is currently developing a special application for data dissemination using 3-D images, so that numbers are transformed into data visualizations that facilitate understanding the information and results by all concerned parties.

PCBS is trying to bring the human dimension to statistics, by highlighting some real experiences and using narrative interviewing in order to shed light on the importance of statistics in people’s lives. This matter changes many misconceptions and increases awareness among the public, so that statistical

ignorance and burdens can be reduced. The internal capacity building program also targets children and adolescents by creating a special website for free online games to give answers to questions and information that may concern them. PCBS cooperated with the Ministry of Education to introduce the statistical section into the curriculum in an easy way.

PCBS adheres to the highest levels of quality whether in statistical data or in administrative systems out of the belief that excellence and creativity are necessary for work. PCBS has established a specialized department for quality to have control over the quality of data, and administrative systems and procedures. In 2010, PCBS obtained the ISO 9001 certificate that sets out the criteria for a quality management system. In 2017, PCBS was awarded the C2E “Committed to Excellence” certificate by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM).

PCBS will work on developing the information system infrastructure, interacting with users, taking advantage of developments in the field of technology, enhancing the role of users and strengthening the relationship with them.

PCBS, like all state institutions, faces constant threats. The first is the direct financial threat and the second is the long-term moral threat. Although the foundation is a governmental institution, the most important part of its budget covering the technical side (which is usually very large) is provided by donor institutions. This is why the budget is subject to political tensions and infighting that make the future dependent on the political situation. Now, the funding basket is restricted to only one funder, after it used to contain a number of financing agencies. This makes the officials in PCBS question the PCBS’s strategic plans and its aspirations for the future.

PCBS also works extensively on developing the administrative records in the ministries of the Palestinian National Authority, to become the main source of information collection and to be used later in data production.

Funding Crisis

After seventeen years of working in PCBS, the Director of programs and activities are mostly dependent on donors, badly affecting their sustainability. PCBS’s main funding group started with six donors where all of them used to pool funds in one funding basket and the issue was later managed inside PCBS. Unfortunately, with time, the donors withdrew due to the political situation in 2006, leaving only the Netherlands, Norway and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Netherlands stopped financing in 2009 and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation stopped it in 2017. Currently, Norway is the main funding group for PCBS. It is important to mention that technical programs cost between 7-8 million US dollars, and PCBS has a budget deficit of one million and 800 thousand US dollars. This increases the pressure on PCBS and makes it subject to a permanent threat.



The most important strategy that can be adopted by PCBS to reduce the financial burdens is to put pressure on the government to increase the value of its contribution to the budget, especially since the government has signed an agreement to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. PCBS takes over the leadership of the national team for the coordination and implementation of the plan (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), which makes the general national policy of the government and ministries relying more broadly on statistics in order to fulfill obligations.

PCBS’s great achievement is being the only competent and authorized body responsible for data provision as a result of the efforts exerted and international relations. In the past, data was provided by external international sources such as: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other sources. In addition to this, PCBS works on the administrative records, where data are available in

the state's institutions in general. After processing those records and checking their accuracy, PCBS can benefit from these records in providing statistics. 48% of the statistical indicators now depend on the administrative records found in institutions and ministries and this percentage is expected to increase in the coming years.

The PCBS also fully relies on some ministries for information collection, such as: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Culture, due to the comprehensiveness and quality of the records available in those ministries. However, the records available in some ministries are insufficient and lack quality, so PCBS holds special training courses and workshops to raise the efficiency of these records. Availability of efficient administrative records in these institutions and ministries means that PCBS can use each record according to its competence, without the need to collect data from the field, which greatly reduces the financial burden. PCBS also addresses new financiers according to their statistical interests.

Statistics and Corona-Virus (COVID-19)

In 2020, the world witnessed the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic that has cast a bad shadow over humanity. The Coronavirus Pandemic has negatively affected all sectors and human life in general. People take all preventive and protective measures to live with the pandemic and avoid its negative effects as much as possible. Protective measures against the coronavirus were taken including domestic isolation, quarantine, social distancing and remote communication. This pandemic has imposed new binding behaviors and practices on the members of society in order to mitigate its negative effects on human life and social, political, economic, cultural and educational aspects.

Therefore, PCBS has adapted to these conditions by changing and amending methods, procedures and work plans in order to complete the tasks required. It collected the required data using electronic methods to extract the results and provide them to decision makers in a timely manner. Changes made by the PCBS include canceling surveys that require face-to-face meeting with the respondents, postponing some surveys, adopting work-from-home practices and communicating remotely. This change was accompanied by development of means, such as developing information technology infrastructure and relying on social media as much as possible.

PCBS issued a press release announcing the continuation of work and production of statistical materials (reports and press releases) on time, according to the statistical calendar. Therefore, a proactive leadership approach was adopted by PCBS to face the crisis internally, as an administrative core was established to manage and direct the work of PCBS and an integrated plan was quickly and effectively developed on methods of communication between employees to facilitate work during emergencies. The plan included the following:

- Immediately preparing economic forecasting on the losses in the Palestinian economy and in the main sectors.
- Strengthening partnerships with international institutions, participating in all virtual activities and sharing experience.
- Providing all data users with relevant data, such as: the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in light of the closure.
- Providing the Palestinian government with data related to the reality of the crisis including: population groups, poverty, places of gathering and economic forecasts.
- Communicating effectively with the public by establishing a hotline to respond to any calls and meet their need for data.
- Developing a plan for human resources in terms of the divisions of work and adopting the principle of Putting Employee Safety First.
- Collecting data on the phone for specific topics such as prices.
- The PCBS's work plan and the contingency plan were sent to all PCBS's partners, including the United Nations Statistics Division.

- The United Nations Statistics Division was provided with all materials prepared on data related to the pandemic and they were placed on a website dedicated to the interaction of statistical agencies with the crisis.

After the end of the closure period and the gradual return to office work, all measures were taken to adhere to the health protocol announced by the Ministry of Health. PCBS's projects would continue to naturally publish statistical reports, as the first report on sustainable development goals was recently issued and the interactive development atlas based on Government Cluster Development Plan was launched.

Some of the awards won by the Bureau:



President of PCBS while Receiving the Palestinian International Award for Excellence and Creativity, 2007



President of PCBS while Receiving the Gold Order of Merit and Excellence, 2018



The Union of Arab Statisticians Awards PCBS the Medal of Arab Statistical Excellence, 2018



PCBS Receives the Award of the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), 2018



PCBS Team Receives the Integrity Award, 2019

Conclusion

This book sheds light on the statistical process from the beginning of 1993 until the end of 2020, giving a true historical overview of the reality of this pioneering institution taking into account the difficulties, achievements, failures and successes, which placed it at the top of leading institutions in our homeland. PCBS occupies a preeminent place at local, regional and international levels. The book also highlights the main role played by PCBS in building the Palestinian state, so that it can stand on a solid ground facing challenges and difficulties.

PCBS's distinguished presence at all levels and the high position it holds at the world level would not have been achieved without the efforts of all its employees. They insisted on self-denial for the sake of the public interest and made sacrifices for the sake of having a distinct statistical family, where mutual respect, full dedication, perseverance, and unrivaled diligence prevailed for the sake of the institution's advancement.

PCBS contributed directly and indirectly to building the state by providing decision-makers with the data and information they need for proper planning and development, building a successful and sophisticated society and creating a supportive environment for development and progress. PCBS was able to preside over many international and local bodies and institutions or participate in their membership. This is indeed recognition of these institutions and bodies of the creative capacities of PCBS and its management.

In this context, we should commend the important role played by PCBS and its effective contribution to the tasks entrusted to all Palestinian national institutions.

Statistics is not just a number - it tells a human story. It tackles people's health and well-being, problems and prospects and socio-economic conditions. Effective and proper collection and analysis of statistics promotes sustainable development and contributes to the determination of the community groups at risk of being left behind.

We should truly believe that statistics are telling the truth. Steps must be taken to ensure the data is accurate, consistent and complete to give us a clear full picture. At the same time, we should have confidence in how the statistics are used and in the statistical process that respects privacy and prevents discrimination.

Today is the time to call on statisticians, governments and those leading technological innovation to make sure that the produced data is accurate and reflects the human stories behind every number. Obtaining better data will ensure a better understanding of the challenges faced by individuals and the progress we make with a view to improve their lives and protect their rights.

A Statement by UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem on the World Statistics Day, 20 October 2020
