

PCBS Experience in Implementing European Code of Practice (COP)

Ali Hussein
Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)

Abstract

The paper will talk about three main sections about the implemented of the European Code of Practice in PCBS

The first one is the historical overview for the implantation of the COP in PCBS, and a light peer review mission and its report. The mission report concluded that PCBS is on the right track, and suggested a wide range of proposals for further development. Afterwards, PCBS has transferred a list of improvement measures to specific mandates, and sets of mechanism for following-ups and implementation during the period 2013-2016.

Secondly, the paper will focus on the advantages and challenges of code of practice implementation in PCBS such as:

- Increase the coordination role of the national statistical institute within the statistical system
- Highlight good practice suitable to foster compliance with the code of practice
- Recommend improvement action needed in view of fully complying with the code of practice
- Enhance the quality of the statistical outputs, and implemented the EFQM
- Development of a strategy to achieve the long-term financial independence of the PCBS.
- Develop a master plan for the increase of the contribution of administrative bodies to the production of official statistics of the NSS.
- Develop a master plan for the increase of the use of data from administrative sources
- Develop and document a strategy for improving the statistical methodology used by other producers of official statistics within the NSS.

Finally we will look to apply the Code of Practice for the European Neighbourhood of South Countries inside the institute (PCBS) and within the National Statistical System, to enhance the user confidence in statistics at the national and international levels.

Introduction

The European Statistics Code of Practice sets the standard for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. It builds upon a common ESS definition of quality in statistics and targets all relevant areas of the institutional environment, the statistical production processes to output: European official statistics.

The European Statistics Code of Practice sets out 15 key principles for the production and dissemination of European official statistics and the institutional environment under which

national and Community statistical authorities operate. A set of indicators of good practice for each of the 15 principles provides a reference for reviewing the implementation of the Code.

The European Statistics Code of Practice was adopted by the Statistical Programme Committee on 24 February 2005 and was revised by the European Statistical System Committee in September 2011.

Together with the new version of the Code of Practice, the European Statistical System Committee adopted the Quality Assurance Framework. The Quality Assurance Framework serves as guidance on how to implement the European Statistics Code of Practice.

Eurostat has adopted the Protocol on Impartial Access to Eurostat data for users to support the implementation of the Code. It addresses Eurostat users, staff and partners in the production of European Statistics.

Each year Eurostat monitors the compliance with the Code of Practice across the European Statistical System (ESS). Summary information is provided to the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) for its Annual Report to the European Parliament and the Council.

The ESGAB reports on the implementation of the Code of Practice insofar as it relates to Eurostat and includes an assessment of the implementation of the Code of Practice in the ESS as a whole. The ESGAB Annual Reports, starting with 2009, are accessible through its website.

PCBS Quality Position

PCBS started the preparation on establishing a quality management system since 2008. The objective was to develop a system that will facilitate the ISO certification. PCBS reviewed relevant literature on quality management systems, examined the experiences of similar institutions in the field and conducted gap analysis to identify requirements necessary to achieve the objectives. During 2009, PCBS elaborate necessary documents, trained employees on quality related subjects and prepared the needed procedures.

In 2010, PCBS applied the system of quality management in practice and conducted awareness campaign targeting all of its employees to promote quality values and objectives. Standard procedures were tested and tailored to meet the needs of PCBS as the main entity of Palestine's official statistics. Internal and external quality auditing was implemented to ensure compliance with written requirements. In the fourth quarter of 2010, PCBS received the ISO-9001:2008 certificate.

PCBS uses different methods to control data quality in statistical projects and surveys, such as database of quality control procedures, development of self assessment programme (DESAP), specialized studies, data verification, quality reports, and The Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM).

Database of quality control procedures is a general system that has been applied since 2009, and contains a set of conditions with specifications the project manager should apply during the project cycle in all phases (preparation, data collection, data processing, dissemination and documentation). A special report on the results of DESAP; another system that has been applied in PCBS since 2007, to improve and enhance the Quality in all statistical surveys. COP Form has been applied at PCBS during 2008 and 2010.

The Quality Department at PCBS has been working on Data Verification by checking Public used data file and the data quality chapter of statistical reports. As a matter of fact, quality reports are endorsed into PCBS work since 2010, aiming at creating a general perspective regarding the extent of applying the dimensions of quality namely: relevance, accuracy, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, comparability, coherence and completeness, in addition to related indicators in statistical surveys. Some Specialized studies were prepared; last one was about accuracy on Labour Force data.

Definitions are given on different quality concepts. These definitions are a precondition in the assessment of quality that explain how the process of quality, product quality and user needs are linked to each other.

The preparation of the new National Strategy for the Development of Official Statistics (NSDS) 2014-2018 was based on scientific methodology that reviewed and assessed the results of the previous NSDS of 2009-2013 to benefit from the accumulated experience and build on this experience in the drafting of the new NSDS. The diagnosis and analysis of the national statistical system identifies strengths and weaknesses and ascertains appropriate solutions. PCBS listed the problems and challenges facing the national statistical system, analyzed these problems and articulated objectives that will contribute into solving problems and prioritizing objectives.

A technical team was formed to prepare the NSDS 2014-2018 led by the Director General of Planning and Development directorate at PCBS and representatives of all PCBS directorates, under the supervision and guidance of PCBS President. The NSDS 2014-2018 was prepared in coordination with the Advisory Council for Official Statistics and data users in ministries, government institutions, universities, NGOs and research centers. lists the names of participants in the workshops conducted during the preparation of the NSDS.

A SWOT analysis has been carried out for the development of the the (NSDS) 2014-2018. identifying the strengths and the weaknesses in the National Statistical System (NSS). One of the weaknesses identified; is the limited commitment by some statistical bodies to apply the adopted standards in addition to weak physical and human resources in most of the statistical bodies. For specific categories of users there is a weak statistical knowledge.

PCBS worked during 2013 on the formation of a working group to apply a GSBPM model ,and work on linking the GSBPM model with NQAF.

The Historical Overview of the Implementation of the European Code of Practice in PCBS

PCBS adopted (COP) in 2008. During 2010, PCBS contributed to the development of COP as contents being revised, developed and updated as well as reviewing all documents relating to questionnaires. PCBS benefited from the European statistics sources and exchange of experiences in applying COP. After completion of questionnaires review, the content was modified in wording and sentencing to conform with the English versions of the questionnaires. Arabic questionnaires are to be approved by Top management and senior professionals at PCBS as well, COP report explained the results and the situation at PCBS statistical system, Moreover, the report includes the strengths and challenges for the statistical system and important recommendations to development. In February 2012, a TA mission from European Statistics (Eurostat) conducted a review of COP practices to fulfill the obligations and resolutions adopted by the Statistical Commission of the United Nations. The mission report concluded that PCBS is on a conventional position and suggested a wide range of proposals for further development. Afterwards, PCBS transferred a list of improvement measures and sets mechanisms to specialized authorities, for follow-ups and implementation.

Within PCBS efforts towards developing capacities, the Light Peer Review (LPR) mission has been received in February 2012 by three consultants from Eurostat being in charge of implementing it. It is worth mentioning that the implementation of the said mission was in response to achieving one of the requirements of the NSDS 2009-2013, and in abidance to the decision made by the UNSC 43rd Session that was held in February 2012 at New York, stressing the necessity of implementing such type of reviews, in addition to the fact that the implementation of such review mission is considered as one of the international good practices.

LPR Recommendations: The final report of the LPR covered all findings of the review mission by each principle of the European Statistics Codes of Practice. The report covers (31) recommendations distributed over the years 2012-2016.

Following up on the LPR Recommendations: Within the framework of following upon the LPR results and recommendations, PCBS submitted them to the Advisory Council for Official Statistics during the 13th meeting that was held 29/08/2012, and upon the approval of the Advisory Council, Mrs. Ola Awad, President of PCBS, issued necessary instructions for following upon the results and recommendations.

The benefits and Challenges of Code of Practice Implementation in PCBS

PCBS is a young and ambitious organization, aspiring to be one of the leading NSIs in the region being strongly committed to quality and becoming increasingly efficient in recent years – a move to new accommodation in 2010 seems to be beneficial for the internal coordination and to reinforce the impression of a modern, well equipped organization.

The Advantages and Challenges According to Code of Practice Principles (Principles 1-6 and 15)

Principle 1: Professional independence

The professional independence of PCBS is not explicitly stated in the General Statistical Law (GSL). However, a decree that has been issued by the Council of Ministers stressed the importance of the professional independence for PCBS to enhance the credibility of statistical figures and to strengthen the confidence of individuals and institutions in statistics. In addition, the Council of Ministers approved the adoption of the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. PCBS states on the website that it operates in accordance with the Palestinian Code of Practice for Official Statistics as well as with the Declaration on Professional Ethics that was adopted by the International Statistical Institute in 1985.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) is independent as it is not influenced by the political and external interferences, and that its statistics are produced and disseminated in accordance with the national legislations.

PCBS presidential position is equivalent to the position of a Deputy Minister that corresponds directly to the Council of Ministers as well as the Palestinian National Authority. Therefore, the President of PCBS is allowed to access policy authorities and administrative public bodies.

The Production and Dissemination of Official Statistics is not limited or tied to the Cabinet's approval, neither does the GSL state any related responsibilities.

PCBS key strengths under the professional independence principle are: Releasing official statistics based on the scientific and international standards and methodologies, providing genuine statistical results, Loyal working staff, Professional independence from the political bodies, making independent decisions on statistical methodologies, and disseminating the statistical outputs without any interference from the political body

PCBS key challenges under the professional independence principle are: PCBS is solely responsible of defending the quality of its statistics without any assistance from the political bodies, some users take a negative stand from PCBS work since PCBS works in accordance with the professional independence principle that disagrees with some users who disagree with the professional independence principle

Principle 2: Mandate for data collection

PCBS is mandated by law to collect data for specified branches as stated in the GSL.

The articles are:

- Article 3, point 5: conduct of population, housing, and establishment censuses;
- Article 5: collection of data in the fields of population size and structure, social affairs, national economy, and area and other statistics.

Furthermore, Article 5 of the GSL specifies that - apart from the specified list of statistics - “The Bureau may collect statistical data on any other area as decided by the Council of Ministers at the recommendation of the President” of PCBS.

Article 14, point 2 of the GSL states that “The Bureau has the right to obtain administrative records data from government departments to be used for statistical purposes.”

Although it seems that central registers are still at an early stage of development, the population register, which is updated and maintained by the Ministry of Interior, the establishments register and the housing and buildings register, that are updated and maintained by PCBS are active while the agricultural r and the disease registers are being currently set up.

PCBS key strengths under the mandate for data collection principle are: Confidentiality of individual data, conducting statistical surveys without any needed approval of any other party except for censuses which need to be approved by the state president.

PCBS key challenges under the mandate for data collection principle are: Target samples are not obliged to respond in surveys, and no applied penalties on target samples if they have been non-responsive.

Principle 3: Adequacy of resources

The financial, human and IT resources are currently adequate for the tasks to be carried out. However, the financial resources heavily depend on external funding potentially harming PCBS long-term sustainability as well as the NSS as a whole. Hence, PCBS is recommended to achieve long-term financial independence.

Options in this regard are to increase the contribution of administrative bodies to the production of official statistics of the NSS, to increase the utilization and dependency of administrative data sources in order to reduce the costs of data collection in PCBS. Cost reductions are possible by using modern technology

PCBS key strength points under the adequacy of resources principle are: Discussing the annual work plan and the medium-term programs with data users before adopting them, the agreement with the Core Funding Group (CFG) to secure the needed funds for the main activities of PCBS assures the availability of the needed financial resources.

PCBS key challenges points under the adequacy of resources principle are: Lack of enough capacity of the statisticians to develop the questionnaires and methodologies of certain surveys consistently, leading to a constant repetition over time, and inadequate dependency on the administrative records.

Principle 4: Quality commitment

According to the quality system at PCBS, more than 75% of total statistics are being followed upon regularly comparing to 50-60% during 2008.

Disseminating the quality reports on control and supervision internally. The reports also are provided to PCBS presidency to take the necessary developmental procedures.

Following up the quality of statistics production stages (data collection) and (data auditing and processing, data analysis and data dissemination) for all statistics.

The following methodology is utilized for the purpose of quality control during producing statistics:

- Internal control
- Self-assessment
- Quality report
- Quality indicators
- Reviewing the statistical outputs on many administrative levels prior to approving these outputs.

PCBS Key strengths points under the quality commitment principle are: Abiding by (ISO 9001:2008) and EFQM, abiding by the international standards and classifications, instructions and detailed manuals that connect the stages of working on quality, and preparing quality reports for all statistical surveys by using GSBPM (Generic Statistical Business Process Model)

PCBS Key challenges in the quality commitment principle are: Some of the administrative registers data are not provided in the appropriate timing in case they are available at the original source. In addition, they are not comprehensive concerning the covered subjects and geography and that negatively affects quality, and technical statistical capabilities of statisticians are not consistent which means that the statistical outputs consume more time and effort to be produced properly.

Principle 5: Statistical confidentiality

PCBS pursues constructive discussions with data users on the issue of the balance between optimal usability and highest possible protection. Penalties for breaches of confidentiality are specified in the GSL.

PCBS staff sign a pledge of keeping the confidentiality of data upon their appointment.

There are penalties by law for any deliberate breach of data confidentiality by the staff of PCBS as stipulated in the GSL.

There are penalties by law for any deliberate breach of data confidentiality by other persons as stipulated in the GSL.

The detailed data for external data users for the purposes of research can be provided through submitting an official request and signing a contract between the two parties to ensure the confidentiality of the data.

PCBS Key strength in under the statistical confidentiality principle is: Commitment to ensure confidentiality of the individual's data is the corner stone of the respondents' confidence in PCBS which leads to increasing response rates in surveys and censuses.

Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity

PCBS complies to a large extent with this principle. PCBS respects scientific independence in producing and disseminating official statistics, and carrying out tasks objectively. Neither the impartiality nor the objectivity of PCBS were questioned at any stage of the LPR but were rather confirmed by all groups of users interviewed. However, formalization of available procedures will serve as a means to improve the future perception of PCBS as an impartial and objective NSI. It is recommended that procedures how to deal with errors in published statistics, how to revise the release calendar, and how to control and document pre-release access should be developed and made public.

A statistical calendar, that shows the dates for disseminating statistical outputs in advance, is disseminated and there are certain procedures to refine, review and update it.

All data users can receive statistical publications at the same time.

No incidents of data leakage, before the official announcement, have been discovered.

In case of data leakage, certain legal and administrative procedures are taken according to Article 4 (Statistical data confidentiality and maintaining it) that was issued by the Cabinet in 2005. It is worth mentioning that there is no registered incident of data leakage at PCBS.

PCBS Key strengths under the Impartiality and objectivity principle are: There is commitment of objectivity and impartiality, data dissemination for all data users at the same time, absence of any political statements in any of the statistical products, and the existence of a policy for dealing with errors in disseminated press releases or statistical reports in PCBS and this policy published to all users.

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

PCBS presents its statistics clearly and they are accessible, although its statistical releases could be made more informative. All of its statistical releases are published on PCBS website of usually both in Arabic and English. A lot of information is also actively disseminated via e-mail to a wide range of targeted users in the form of press releases, some also published in connection with various national and international events (e.g., Statistics Day, or Women's Day). PCBS produces also a wide range of statistical publications.

Reports are accompanied by supporting metadata; for press releases, links to metadata and corresponding reports would be helpful. However, the website itself requires further development to enhance its functionality and the accessibility of the statistical products.

The annual and multi-annual programmes and the annual reports should be made public on the website. The website does, neither in content nor via links, provide access to statistics of other producers of official statistics.

Applying the Code of Practice for the European Neighbourhood of South Countries inside PCBS

The Code of Practice for the European Neighbourhood of South Countries is based on 16 Principles covering the institutional environment, the statistical production processes and the output of statistics. A set of indicators of good practice for each of the Principles provides a reference for reviewing the implementation of the Code. The National Statistical Institutes are responsible for the development, production and dissemination of Statistics, together with governments, and ministries, commit themselves to adhere to the Code. The Principles of the Code of Practice together with the general quality management principles represent a common quality framework in the Statistical System.

Working on preparing the Code of joint cooperation between European Statistics and the European Neighborhood of South Countries through the formation of a Quality working Group (QWG), that conducted many meetings, and with constant cooperation between its members to prepare this Code, the Code constitutes a fundamental pillar of the work of the statistical systems to establishing an effective national frameworks for quality assurance.

References

1. Light Peer Review of the Implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice in the occupied Palestinian territory Version 9, (17 May 2012), prepared by Peter Hackl, Jolanta Szczerbinska, and Volker Täube, <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/pcbs/LPR-PCBS-2012-En.pdf>
2. Code of Practice for the European Neighbourhood of South Countries 2015.
3. Code of Practice, self Assessment report, December 2010, Unpublished report.
4. PCBS experience in using data quality tools and systems, December 2011, Unpublished paper.
5. PCBS Experience in Implementing ISO 9001, European Conference on Quality in Official Statistics Athens, Greece 29 May-1 June 2012, Marwan Barakat and Ali Al-Husien