

Opening Article by Dr. Amjed Ghanem – Chief Cabinet Secretary of the Palestinian Government

The Vision of the Technology and Public Administration Cluster

PITAtimes NEWSLETTER
21 Volume ,2021 March

Dear PITA's Members and Friends,
The current Palestinian government, led by H.E. Prime Minister Dr. Mohammed Shtayyah, continuously seek planning models to achieve higher developmental impact in a range of economic fields including agricultural, trade, industrial, technology, etc. The concept of 'planning by clusters' is used as a grouping tool to capitalize on the relative merits and competitive advantages that every Palestinian geographical area can offer. For instance, the agricultural Cluster is seen in locations with availability of fertile land, water, and farmers'skills, as in Qalqilya, Tulkarem, Jenin and Tubas. Similarly, the industrial cluster can be seen in Hebron and Nablus where the major manufacturing base exists. The tourism cluster is determined in historic and religious Palestinian cities in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Jericho, the diversified cluster in Gaza, and the cluster of Palestine's capital: Jerusalem.



The idea of clusters is also genuinely based on the fact that an effective development process depends on the collective actions of all related government departments and goes beyond a single responsibility of a specific ministry or department. This is true, as development is a compounded activity in which each participating institution plays a key role within the cluster and in accordance with interrelated responsibilities, and a clear set of indicators that allow monitoring and evaluation.

As for the central area of the West Bank, Ramallah and Al-Bireh, the government has recently created the "Technology and Public Administration Cluster" (Technology/PA Cluster) that is compatible with the Palestinian youth capabilities and business entrepreneurs, and geared towards the digital transformation of the Palestinian Government. The core of this cluster is built on the IT sector, banks, government agencies, and other services specialized in providing management, financial, engineering and technical solutions. In Palestine, we have approximately 700 companies working in the IT and telecommunications and employ about 8000 people, and representing approximately %6 of the GDP (%3 of which comes from telecommunication).



What is the Technology/PA Cluster? Who are the key stakeholders? How can we achieve the desired outputs? What are the results we seek to achieve?

The Technology/PA Cluster is a government effort aiming at improving government performance, and targeting our innovative human resource and capabilities for producing and marketing services (technology, engineering, administration and finance) that can be designed, produced, and delivered to international markets. This assists in overcoming the continuing Israeli obstacles impeding the entry of raw materials and export of finished products into and from Palestine. The end products of the IT/service industries, whether it be technical solutions, documentary, advisory, plans or virtual programs and IT applications can all be delivered via the internet.

The government has established this cluster through a steering committee that consists of the Ministry of IT/Telecommunications, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Entrepreneurship, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, General Personnel Council, the Palestinian Monetary Authority, and led by the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. This committee is mandated to discuss and construct strategies for building and directing a Palestinian eco-system to assist in developing the sector in all its technical, legal, human and financial aspects.

The Technology/PA Cluster is a multidimensional governmental effort geared for developing the IT and government service sectors with a vision of achieving global competitiveness and building international presence and reputation in these work domains. The general goal of the cluster is to enhance and empower our Palestinian economy by maximizing service production and export, providing sustainable jobs, and strengthening government agencies and local business capabilities to penetrate international markets. One indicator is to increase and diversify exports and increase IT/Service share of the GDP to %12 within 3 years.

In order for Palestine to become a distinctive export base and a destination for international clients, we must work towards developing 20,000 programmers, designers, developers and directors, as well as IT/Service companies that are strong both administratively and financially. Note that the current number does not exceed 3000 persons in these domains. Therefore, achieving our objectives requires strong collaboration among all our partners including the Palestinian Information Association of Companies – PITA, companies working in the ICT sector, Universities, Palestinian Banks, and relevant Donors.

One of the most important interventions assigned to the committee is preparing and ensuring implementation of a strategy to develop the Palestinian technology and government sectors, combined with providing specialized training in various technologies to increase opportunities to export services in IT programming, fashion design, environmental solutions, renewable energy services, etc. Work will be done with governmental entities and higher education institutions to modernize and create the infrastructure, knowledge and systems, including high speed internet, modern university programs, effective partnerships, all to remain updated on the latest global developments in a rapidly advancing world.

Our work will also include working with government entities to streamline legislations such as the intellectual property law, telecommunications, funding, companies, trade, taxes, etc. This will also be combined with preparing and operating work policies, guidelines and manuals, electronic systems, centralized databases, citizen-centric service applications. Success stories and case studies will be published as part of this cluster. All this will need extensive orientation and training of the government cadres to help transform work environment into new performance-based culture.

The cluster has come to pave the way for creating a Palestinian digital economy, and to guide Palestine towards a knowledge-based society, with economy that uses e-commerce channels and provides governmental and non-governmental services in modern ways. The cluster also requires a focus on investing in human capital to produce and market information technology products and services by government and private sectors, and launch them locally and internationally with relative ease. These services need effective data communications and e-government systems to incorporate more than 1400 services provided to citizens. The Technology/PA cluster will enable young Palestinians unlock their potentials, creativity, and innovations, and be motivated to start their own innovative projects and market and sell products and services in the fields of programming, technology, education, health, entrepreneurship, etc. To do so, this requires close work with private sector companies, relevant stakeholders, and innovation funds, as well as ensuring that entrepreneurs in technology are mentored to start their own businesses/start-ups. It also requires an active role of related ministries to focus on strengthening information and communication infrastructure, such as high-speed internet and smart government services, to work with educational and higher education institutions to upgrade education programs in response to global developments and future jobs.

The strategic objectives of the “Technology and Public Administration Cluster” focus on several milestones:

- Strengthening the ICT infrastructure to facilitate data communication the production, dissemination, adaption, and exchange of information based on market needs of local and international solutions.
- Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of services through updating the legal and policy structure to achieve greater transparency and productivity of government services to citizens.
- Establishing and strengthening international and regional partnerships in the areas of innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-ups that are based on research and development and linking higher education institutions to market needs for continuous development.
- Cooperating and forming partnerships between government institutions and private sector companies with their regional and international counterparts, through conferences, exhibitions, joint research, and trade agreements.
- Building Palestinian human capacity in the fields of modern programming, data science, and artificial intelligence, and its applications in all sectors including economic, industrial, agricultural, and touristic sectors as well as in financial services, ICT, and others.

It is worth mentioning that the Technology and Public Administration Cluster did not come as a mere public policy document, rather it contained a detailed road map with interventions for each strategic objective, KPIs identified and aligned with global measures, estimated budgets, identified responsibilities of relevant parties, and expected timeframes for activity implementation. The implementation of this strategy is being monitored through a technical committee from relevant entities.

Some of the initiatives that the government has begun to implementing include:

- The launch of the project of e-government services and electronic portal “My Government”, including the development and activation of electronic payment, and the
- completion of the automation of at least 20 services in government departments, which will come to light in a span of two months.
- Graduating and recruiting the first batch of qualified cadres (70 programmers) from the youth training initiative in the field of modern programming, as part of a plan to train 6,000 graduates in software technologies and software industry management.
- Removing 120 traditional specializations in Palestinian universities and replacing them with 60 complementary specializations and programs to support higher education programs and keep up with modern technology.
- The launch of the “Innovate» platform for entrepreneurship in the non-banking financial sector, as the first regulatory platform in Palestine in the field of financial technology development.
- To start implementing the information security policy and implementing information security governance in government departments in accordance with ISO 27001 and cybersecurity strategy.
- The establishment of a « Development and Investment Government Bank - Al Istiqlal Bank” to promote government development work based on the goal of enabling Palestinian youth to start start-ups and market them globally.
- Legal Achievements: The company laws and the telecommunications law have been finalized, and the Law of the Palestinian Monetary Authority has been amended to ensure the use of electronic payment tools, and work has been initiated to prepare the law of startups. This is in addition to starting the development of many systems of services, licenses, and others.
- The establishment of a National Optical Fiber Company to enhance internet services and facilitate its access to citizens.

These joint efforts, led by the government as directed by H.E President Mahmoud Abbas for boosting and promoting Palestinian products and economy, need most possible cooperation among all stakeholders in the sector during all phases of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This team effort is seen as a golden opportunity for establishing, recognizing and maintaining a Palestinian IT identity in the world, enabling it to eventually act as a driving engine for the Palestinian economy at large in the medium to long term.