

Covid-19 in GCC, determine priorities, set targets, and establish standards to promote accountability

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Abstract and Paper

Governments and decision-makers around the world are working hard to limit the economic and health impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. They will succeed if and only if they are armed with the appropriate technical and behavioural capabilities, and have access to a trusted data to make more strategic and timely decisions. Strengthening the underlying data to address the challenges is one of the major pillars of the governments' pandemic strategy.

In addition to relevant medical staff, the general audience of Covid-19 statistical information include knowledge workers, media, economist & business people, and educators and researchers. Covid-19 has become a priority for society at large as it is linked to multiple aspects of everyday socio-economic life of everyone. With hundreds of available platform to provide daily pandemic information, the challenge of official statisticians and media working together is both to provide relevant information and to attract users thus understanding the audience is a key in leading to right statistical products and services with the right tools.

Keyword:

- GCC: Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf, includes: United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Oman, State of Kuwait, and State of Qatar.
- GCC-Stat: The Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf.
- Severity Index: The sub-indices of GCC-STAT Covid-19 Severity Index is simple average of normalized values of each of the Index input indicators (i.e. New reported cases, New reported deaths and Total reported active cases).

Reaching potential audiences

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GCC-Statistical Centre, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

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Introduction

GCC-Stat was established to provide a common official pool of statistics and data for the member states of the GCC countries. A key role of GCC-Stat is to provide statistics about the GCC to a wide range of users, from the GCC Secretariat to the general public. Covid-19 as all we know is the most current popular topic around the world in general and in GCC region in particular, thus the responses to the Covid-19 pandemic reflected the wide range of users. Together, both the media staff and statisticians at GCC-Stat play an important role in during normal circumstances, but during the pandemic the importance of this role is doubled and included:

1. Establishing a dual language (Arabic and English) GIS based, integrated data platform for COVID-19 statistics, which enabled real-time national level statistics for GCC countries to be compared with the global situation.

Reaching potential audiences



2. Providing statistical and visual infographic reports in regard to Covid-19 in GCC countries.
3. Providing specialist statistical summaries and analysis (e.g. impact on GCC financial markets, food security using foreign trade data, and statistical summary on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on tourism, etc.).
4. Creating targeted reports on the macro-economic impacts in the GCC (e.g. assessing expected performance of commodity markets, levels of government spending, monetary policies, and global economic growth).
5. Informing member countries on how global statistical community and other NSOs were responding to the crisis.
6. Innovating a Covid-19 Severity Index meant for decision-makers to get a quick, one-measure reading, against which to gauge the efficacy of policy measures.

Underpinning these products, was the need to establish new statistical production concepts to support the team responsible for production of daily COVID statistics and preparing many specialist reports.

The dissemination and communication functions worked together to ensure that appropriate techniques were used to disseminate and communicate the different products.

As well as the general public as a targeted audience, regional and national decision-makers were among the top priorities of the Statistical Center in supporting them with focused and specific quick indicators by tailoring a special product for them, called the “Severity Index” which is the first severity indicator of its kind in the world.

The Severity Index is a daily summary measure of the epidemiological severity the Covid-19 pandemic inflicts on the Gulf Cooperation Council member states and on the region as a whole, which help to provide a simple, understandable measure of the direction and relative magnitude of “severity”, i.e. how serious is the situation today, meant for decision-makers to get a quick, one-measure reading, against which to gauge the efficacy of policy measures.

Responsive

The Center’s media plan recognized the need for speed, accuracy and innovation in the dissemination, enabling users to access the data and information easily and reach different groups of society through targeted, appropriate means.

The overall objectives of the plan were to strengthen the Centre's role as a reliable source in disseminating accurate data and information on the spread and outbreak of Covid-19 in the GCC countries, to highlight the tireless efforts of the GCC countries to combat the outbreak through data and indicators, and to shed light on the joint action and procedures taken by GCC countries.

Extensive use was made of the center’s official social media platforms: (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp), as well as extensively using infographics for the dissemination of the key statistics.

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Community responsibility was also a part of the media plan, as the center participated in a community campaign that encouraged people to stay at home and contribute to governments efforts in limiting the spread of virus. Another key part of community responsibility was supporting the efforts of the health sector and its workers by sending and posting messages of thanks and appreciation.

Specific Communication activities with the GCC General Secretariat and GCC organization included:

- Periodic reports and special statistics on the pandemic provided to the Secretary-General.
- Statistical study of the impact of the pandemic on the GCC economy (
- Initiated a joint working team with: Gulf Health Council to produce all related reports on the crisis.

Within the framework of existing GCC Statistical work program, GCC-Stat has also worked with member countries to study the actions to be considered in the short, medium and long term and determined the statistical priorities during and after the pandemic at the GCC level. Responses so far have included regional and national workshops and webinars, as well as remote technical support.

Results

The preparation and provision of these products to suit the users had a positive and tangible impact lead to

- Increase in the number of followers in the GCCSTAT social media accounts,
- Receive official letters of appreciation from official authorities and institutions.
- Strengthening relations among the GCC organizations such as the Gulf Health Council, by providing them a daily basis report on Covid-19 to be presented to the Ministers of Health in the national institutions of the member states.

Lessoned learned:

- 1 More investment to capitalize on new data sources, especially those relevant to crisis statistics. This investment should ensure the sustainability of future data flow, some MOUs should be in place, and some agreements with these sources need to be formalized in order to reach or represent non-traditional audiences.
- 2 Better coordination with main data users; (especially strategic ones as government sector and relevant entities to crisis) to determine exact information requirements to ensure continuity and efficiency in responding to the crisis.
- 3 Developing the more informative statistical products; direct to the points of uses and tailored as per their needs.
- 4 Utilizing the social media channels; as people during the crisis are available most of their time on social media, statistics should be in the right place too.

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