**Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third Session**

**Women's empowerment and the link to
sustainable development**

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Women's empowerment and the link to
sustainable development – the data challenge
and opportunity**

**Gender policy-data integration: Experiences of Samoa in Piloting *Every Policy Is
Connected Tool (EPIC)* - opportunities and challenges**

by

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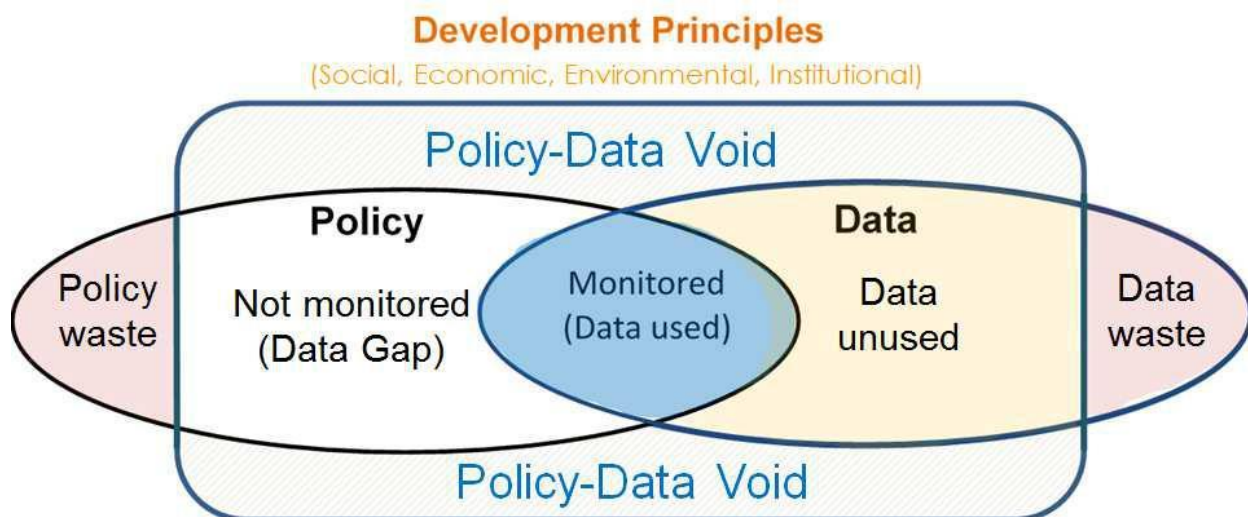Monday, 18 March 2019
10:00 am – 1:00 pm

Introduction

Policymakers and Data producers all aspired to make residents of their country to access and enjoy the same services and life opportunities available in the country. However, despite their good intentions, each side continued to blame each other for any gaps, inaccurate or irrelevant information and policies. The lack of data is blamed for the absence of appropriate policies due to insufficient evidence, whilst the lack of demand is seen as the main challenge for producing relevant data. The root cause analysis begins with "lack of demand" or "lack of supply" for data, depending on who the analyst is - the data producer or the policymaker. Moreover, data producers don't actively engage in policy discussions to see where the evidence for policymaking is missing, and policymakers often fail to specify what data is needed for monitoring. This has created a vicious cycle, where the give-and-take of policymakers and producers of official statistics recurs with little success.This is also the dilemma that we continue to live-within our everyday life at work even today, we continue the blame-game without resolving it. In order to stop this blame game between the two actors a tool should be put in place to do so.

The Every Policy Is Connected (EPIC) Tool

The Every Policy Is Connected (EPIC) tool is the ESCAP's initiative on Policy-Data integration aiming to address the blame game challenge by providing a framework for a structured, participatory and principle-based dialogue between policy and data stakeholders. The framework defines a policy-data landscape and identifies gaps (lack of demand, supply and use of data), voids (absence of policy and therefore data); and waste in the production of data and formulation of policy and this is demonstrated by the diagram below.

The framework maps out the social, economic, environmental, and institutional dimensions of every issue that requires policy action regardless of sector. It also identifies target groups that will benefit from policy implementation, and develops indicators for the key issues identified. EPIC helps governments to implement the integration framework through the development of a national comprehensive indicator set for specific policy documents.

EPIC facilitates conversation between policymakers and data producers based on agreed development principles to articulate the demands of policies for disaggregated data in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The tool also helps to identify beneficiary target groups and highlight where data disaggregation is necessary. The exercise enhances understanding among stakeholders, and creates ownership of indicators and statistics among policymakers to enhance political and financial support to national statistical systems.

The EPIC Tool in Samoa

In Samoa we have our Mother Policy named the Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS) with a lifespan of five years and the latest policy was started from 2016-2020. It is a living document that our government committed to "improve quality of life for all". In order to achieve this, the government has given priority to the mainstreaming of gender, children, youth and disability in all policy development. At the sector level, the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD), the lead agency for the development of the Community Sector Plan, has the vision of "Communities to lead inclusive development to ensure quality of life for all", which clearly cannot be achieved without the full engagement of women. The Samoa Gender Policy 2016-2020 is one of the policies under the Community Sector plan, and it was formulated around the fundamental principles of human rights. During the EPIC tool workshop, the gender policy makers realised that they should consider all the four development principles namely social, economic, environmental and institutional dimensions in order to improve this policy and making sure that no one is left behind.

The EPIC was trialed in Samoa for the first time in June and September 2018. The strength of the EPIC brings together all the 14sectors of the economy. Samoa has been instrumental in the testing and improving of this tool from the outset, and as such, is the first country in the Asia-Pacific region to fully apply the EPIC tool across all 14 sectors of the economy.

From the Government of Samoa's perspective, one of the primary motives behind testing the EPIC tool in Samoa was to use the tool as a window of opportunity to strengthen and push the integration and linkages of statistical work with the national planning and policy-making bodies, to ensure that we all work towards the same national and global goals, despite differences in our line of work via durable and effective partnerships. The other important motive was to use the tool to identify data availability, data waste, data gaps and also data classifications and methodologies at the national and sector plans and policies, in order for the Samoa Bureau of Statistics to strategically plan its on-going investments in data collection and data compilation efforts, towards achieving national and global data needs including the SDG indicators.

The tool is inclusive of 29 Core Concepts that can help both a policymaker and a data producer to assess the issues that they are trying to address in the policies and data and then identify target groups who will be affected both negatively and positively by the policy. To name a few, some of the 29 Core Concepts included Access, Engagement, and, Equal Opportunities.For instance, in the Gender Policy, if the policy is that all women and girls must access health facilities , then from the 29 Core Concepts you can pause and ask these questions:

1. Access – Is the health facility accessible to all women living in the urban or rural and isolated places and especially vulnerable women? If not, how will you improve that policy and data monitoring?

2. Engagement – Have women's partners been engaged in the health programs and are they aware of the availability of the health facility? If not, then how will you improve that policy and data monitoring?

3. Equal Opportunities – Will women with physical disabilities, communication disabilities, hearing disabilities and other life barriers be able to receive good health? If not, then how will you improve that policy and data monitoring?

As mentioned, there are 29 Core Concepts in the EPIC tool and as you go through the full list in assessing the issues in the policies, you will certainly find out heaps of essential issues that were not properly addressed in the policies and likewise also missing in the data for monitoring of progress. This is the main cause of the "blame-game" that I mentioned in the beginning. There is a great mismatch amongst the policies, reality, and, data. This is why, there is still many people left behind, and, remain missing in our policies and data.

The EPIC tool opened our eyes beyond what we normally do in policymaking and data collection. We learned that "Equality" overshadows the real issues of inequalities that existed in our communities and real life barriers, therefore ignoring the differences amongst the beneficiary population. We tended to assume that "one-size fits all the fortunate and the less fortunate population". I am from the Oceania region, my issues should not be treated as the same with the European, African or Asian region. Our differences should be acknowledged and respected in our policies and data compilation and especially in sharing of our global resources.

Most importantly, we learned that all policymakers and data producers must stop working in isolation, but work collaboratively as a "team". The days of the blame-game are over!!!

In summary, we Samoans saw the brighter light in the EPIC tool, it brought together our policymakers and statisticians to a more strategic bonding and we managed to identify where the gaps and waste are for both our policy and data compilation. We had shared the integration exercises and we have acknowledged that we cannot work in silos anymore.

To date, our Policy-Data integration is not fully completed from all the 14 Sector Plans, but we are committed to bring this tool to its full fledge very soon. We expected this approach to be more expensive in terms of resources, but we feel that the outcomes will be more strategic and closer to reality than our existing policies and data. We understand

that ESCAP is developing and IT solutions that makes application even easier and once applied, you will feel that justice is been made, to leaving no one behind. Only then, can we achieve inclusive policy and data inclusive.