

Economic Commission for Europe

Expert Meeting and Workshop on Statistics for SDGs,

Webinar “Leave no one behind”

22 April 2020, 15.00-17.00, EST time

Background paper

Every Policy Is Connected (EPIC): A generic tool for policy-data integration

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I. Background

Vicious cycle

Lack of data is often 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. Bidarbakhtnia (2018) identifies the silo mentality in policy formulation and monitoring processes as the main bottlenecks in breaking this policy-data vicious cycle and proposes a structured, principle-based and participatory user-producer engagement to integrate production processes of policy and data. Three major issues that can be addressed by such integration are (i) identifying (and creating) clear demand for (disaggregated or appropriately aggregated) statistics for policy monitoring and evaluation, (ii) establishing interlinkages between the four key development pillars (Economic, Environmental, Institutional, and Social) at the planning as well as data production and dissemination levels, and (iii) enhancing development plans to be inclusive of all relevant issues and target groups.

Addressing the above three issues requires regular and active engagement between producers and users of official statistics. However, it is not common that data producers actively participate in policy discussions to understand where the evidence for policymaking is missing, and policymakers often fail to specify what data and at what level of disaggregation is needed for monitoring sectoral and national policies. Advocating for user-producer dialogue and evidence-based decision is not a new topic (Heine K & Oltmanns E, 2016; Vardon M et al, 2016), however, the efforts are often focused on making use of available data. There has been very little effort in identifying issues or target groups neglected by the policy that, in principle, must be

addressed/targeted (Heine K & Mause K, 2004), and data currently being produced is often neither demanded nor useful for some policy formulation and monitoring (Jules M, 2017).

Two characteristics are necessary for any effective framework for facilitation of user-producer dialogues: a set of principles on which all parties can agree up on, and identification of key issues requiring action to be addressed by all target groups which are affected by (benefit from) policies. The EPIC is developed based on these two building blocks to facilitate principle-based and participatory engagement of policy makers and data producers for effective “monitoring” of “inclusive” policies.

EPIC, bridge builder

While the need for coordination and engagement between data producers and users is not a new discussion and has been registered time and again by the international statistical and policy communities, what has been lacking, or at least partially lacking, is specific guidance on how to promote and operationalize such engagement and collaboration in a practical sense. EPIC, is a tool that can deliver practical guidance on systematic and purpose-driven engagement between users and producers of data. The participatory process that it promotes not only helps in identifying and streamlining data needs (particularly at the disaggregated level), identifying data gaps and even data waste, but also in reviewing and reformulating national and sectoral plans by engaging all relevant stakeholders at the national level.

The tool guides identification of priority issues and sub-groups as stated in existing national development plans and policies; uses this information to identify data needs, including required level of disaggregation; and thereby works towards the development and/or strengthening of monitoring/indicator frameworks for the specific national development policy or plan.

II. Features of the EPIC tool

EPIC consists of three major components: a) Issues for Action (IAs) and Target Groups (TGs); b) Core Concepts (CCs); and c) linking core concepts with Issues for Action and Target Groups to develop a national sustainable development indicator set. The IAs, TGs and CCs serve as inputs in the process, while the proposed indicator set is in effect one of the key outputs that emerges from the process of policy-data integration and systematic user-producer engagement.

Issues for Action and Target Groups

While IAs signify specific national or local concerns on which the policy or plan intends to act or make an intervention, the IAs would make more sense when the policy connects it with a TGs pointing out specifically for whom/what the action is being taken or who/what is likely to benefit from the action. It should be noted that TGs are not just population groups e.g. women, children, unemployed, poor, families, households, etc. (covering the social dimension), but may also address enterprises, establishments, sectors etc. (economic dimension); oceans, mountains, freshwater, cities, forests, species, etc. (environmental dimension), as well as service providers, agencies, organizations, etc. (institutional dimension).

Core Concepts

The second component, CCs, are derived from existing international conventions and declarations ratified or adopted by UN member States such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (underlying principles for CCs covering the social and institutional dimensions);¹ principles for inclusive economic growth (underlying principles for CCs covering the economic CCs);² and Rio 92 Declaration on Environment and Development (underlying principles for the environmental CCs).³ The proposed tool has currently identified 29 CCs and countries applying the tool are free to identify additional CCs if considered relevant. The initial draft of CCs was inspired by the list of CCs in a tool called Equiframe which was developed to assess public health policies against core concepts of human rights and identify vulnerable groups that, in principle, must be targeted by public health policies (Amin M et al, 2011).

The CCs are a unique feature of the tool as they allow each IA and corresponding TGs to be assessed for its potential to address the social, economic, environmental and institutional pillars of development, as appropriate and relevant. In effect, each IA and TG could link to more than one CC. Thus, the CCs could serve as an aid to bring about better integration of each IA and TGs across the various pillars of development, to address the principle of “leave-no-one-behind” in the policy-making and data collection processes.

¹ www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=893&menu=1561>

³ www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm

National sustainable development indicator set

Assessing each IA and TG from the angle of the various pillars for development allows for the development of a more comprehensive supporting indicator framework, as the indicators required to measure these various dimensions are likely to differ. If the EPIC tool is applied consistently across all sectors in a country, this can help put together a “one-stop-shop” of sustainable development indicators that are directly responsive to national policy demands, which identify data gaps and prevent data waste.

III. Implementation steps

The EPIC tool can be applied to any type of policy/planning document which tackles a thematic area (sector), or range of thematic areas within a country.

Before applying the tool and extracting the required information (Issues for Action and Target Groups) from the document being assessed, it is important to understand the nature of the document, identifying and focusing on the key sections which contain the pertinent information.

The full implementation of EPIC can be summarized in four steps as follows:

Step	Details of step	Information collected to assess the efficiency of the document
1	Scrutinize the relevant narrative and logical framework (logframe) to identify all key IAs in the document	If the document contains a logframe, collect details on how well the document narrative and logframe align
2	Map each IA against the list of CCs, assigning one or more to each.	
3	For each CC mapped on an IA (IA/CC combo), specify the reference population being addressed by each IA, and detail any target groups (TGs) specifically mentioned (or implied) in the document.	Collect details on whether additional target groups need to be addressed, with the EPIC user being given the opportunity to make recommendations
4	For each IA/CC combo, identify relevant indicators to track progress of that IA/CC, within the “national context”, and from relevant regional/global frameworks.	When indicators have been identified in both the document itself, and another relevant national or regional/ international indicator framework, which can track progress against the same IA/CC combo, collect details on how well aligned these indicators are.

The details provided in the far-right column of the matrix above illustrate what sort of outputs can be produced after applying the EPIC tool to a Policy/Planning document, to assess its effectiveness.

IV. References

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