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Agenda Item 3b Population and Social Statistics:

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In its last session, the Committee on Statistics established and tasked a **Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics** to develop a work plan for implementation of the **Regional strategy to improve population and social statistics in Asia and the Pacific.** Under agenda item 3.b, as a member of the steering group, I am pleased to inform the committee about progress made in implementation of this regional initiative.

The Steering group has prioritized three goal areas to strengthen population and social statistics in the region: **Goa1) Enabling policy environment and maintaining demand and support; Goal2) Improving availability and quality of disaggregated statistics; and Goal 3) Improving data accessibility, analysis and use.**

Recognizing the critical role of understanding needs and creating effective demand for increasing data availability and use, the group prioritized implementation of Goal1. The group, with support of the Secretariat, developed a **policy-data integration framework and developed a tool called EPIC to facilitate integration through a participatory process.** The EPIC tool was developed in consultation with a sub-group of the steering group and successfully piloted in two champion countries: **in Samoa across 14 sectors and in the Philippines** for women economic empowerment policies.

Successful implementation of Goal 1 in identifying and establishing effective demand, by application of EPIC, will provide a good basis for taking next steps by the Regional steering group in pursuing implementation of goals 2 and 3 on availability, analysis and use of quality disaggregated statistics from both conventional and new sources of data.

The Committee is invited to express its views on progress to date and to advise on further implementation of the Regional Strategy. Specifically, the Committee is invited to endorse the generic tool for policy- data integration in document ESCAP/CST/2018/CRP.1.

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Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: progress in implementing existing regional initiatives of the Committee on Statistics (ESCAP/CST/2018/2)

Samoa acknowledges the Secretariat for supporting Samoa and Philippines as champion countries to pilot the EPIC tool.

Getting a traditional policymaker or user to produce statistics is impossible, and likewise getting a typical statistician to produce policies is unheard of, because the two professions don't usually work together in the same environment. As a result, we statisticians or data producers pay the price of investing heavily in resources and time in order to communicate statistics in the most friendly or professional manner for users and policymakers to make evidence-based and informed decisions. This is what we have been doing for ages and we don't want to change that cycle! However, communicating statistics is becoming more and more expensive in our annual budgets and most times we make tough choices by prioritizing production of statistics over communication of those statistics to the right audience. As a result, data becomes unused, it becomes data waste, and people's stories in those data are never heard of, hence they are left behind!.

However the EPIC tool was an eye-opening experience. The tool offers quite a different perspective on user-producer dialogue. It does not focus on communication of statistics to users but rather focus on **building a more engaged user-producer effective relationship** while still maintaining professionalism, hence enabling the policy environment to maintain demand for statistics. By building trust on this engaged user-producer relationship, both sides can work collaboratively by using an existing policy or planning document to identify where the policy gaps or data gaps or wastes are, and then make changes both policies and data to improve it.

The theme of leaving no one behind means that policies and data must be inclusive of all vulnerable people in different sectors of development. It can be an unemployed mother of five children needing financial support for education or disabled person needing assisting devices or troubled youth needing counselling. This is what the EPIC tool does. It helps to guide both the policymaker and the data producer to assess and evaluate the existing policies and plan documents in identification of all key issues and vulnerable situations, by applying 29 Core Concepts which are based on Social, Economic, Environment and Institutional principles. Those key issues will help us to identify all vulnerable people or target groups for actions. As policies will then target the right groups for action data will automatically follow-suit. From here, a national sustainable dataset will be developed that both the user and producer can identify with, which will ensure inclusive policy and data for all.

The EPIC tool entails a more strategic approach that will bring together the users, policymakers and data producers to a common playing field and hence reduces the burden on communicating statistics from a distance!.

The EPIC tool simply uses Excel, it is generic and it can be applied to all different sector policies and plans of development.

Samoa gives 100% support for this tool and highly recommends this tool to be used in all other regional initiatives to enhance: user-producer dialogues, sustainable user-producer partnerships, and, efficient budget allocations for integration of inclusive policies and data.