

Epidemiology

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INTEGRATED PLANNING TO ENHANCE EFFICIENCY AND ACHIEVE LONG-TERM GOALS OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NDP 2030): THE CASE OF NORTHERN CAPE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



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ABSTRACT:

Background

The National Development Plan (NDP 2030) of South Africa which is broadly aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2030) has been adopted as overarching guiding plan for the country's long-term socioeconomic development. Well-integrated strategic plan, annual performance plans, budget and operational plans as well as effective monitoring of progress including at district level are vitally important for successful translation of the long-term plans into reality. This document produces evidence from the Northern Cape department of health.

Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used for gathering information from research respondents who are working at senior and middle management services levels in Northern Cape department of health. Structured questionnaires conducted online via department's GroupWise email network. Descriptive statistics used for analysis of the data in the study.

Results

In 2016/17 financial year, a total of 118 predetermined objective targets were monitored. Of which 54 percent of the targets were achieved; while 16 percent partially achieved, and 30 percent were not achieved. Limited efforts have been observed to undertake integrated planning, resources alignment, progress monitoring and implementing improvement plans.

Conclusion

The SDGs agenda and the NDP have placed the health sector to play a vital role in supporting efforts to improve country's socioeconomic conditions through producing healthy and productive citizens. This is an opportunity and a challenge to the health sector to adequately respond to the long-term socioeconomic development Vision. Absence of comprehensive and integrated health planning in line with NDP and SDGs supported by resources may compromise the achievement of long-term plan.

BACKGROUND

Health status matters. Good health status at individual and population levels considered as an economic investment to enhance socioeconomic development through greater productivity, more competitiveness, and creation of wealth [1,2]. It is unimaginable for an economy to perform optimally without good health of individuals, families and societies [1,3]. Assuring this, however, requires a well-functioning health systems that provide equitable and good quality health services to all, which in turn largely dependent on the performance of the economy [4]. Indeed, in recent years, the bi-directional causal relationships between population health and country's economic growth has taken center stage in many countries sustainable socioeconomic development agenda, and the health issues and health sector performances are looked at beyond the sector itself^[5].

In 2012/2013, the South African Governing party, the African National Congress and South African Government adopted the National Development Plan (NDP 2030) as overarching long-term plan for all-inclusive socioeconomic development strategy for the country. The NDP is more aligned with the broad United Nations Sustainable Goals (SDGs 2030) which is a universal call to action to end poverty, inequality in all its forms, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity [5,6]. Both the SDGs and the NDP not only set out a Framework for desirable future outcomes, but also centrally placed the health sector to play critical role in ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, at an optimal quality of care and at a low per capita cost. Thus measuring performance of health system is an essential requirement to evaluate progress on predetermined objectives, challenges and propose improvement strategies for all-inclusive growth and better South Africa^[7].

Reasonably good population health is not only a desirable, but also an essential priority. However, the opportunities to be healthy or to promote healthy lifestyle is not equally available everywhere or for everyone [8]. Previous studies indicated that health inequalities among population groups and geographical regions arise from adverse conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and encompasses the broader social, economic, political, cultural and environmental determinants of health [8]. While recognizing that all health care interventions are important and should continue to receive support; they also mentioned that interventions must be prioritized due to the constraints on available resources and capabilities. Hence redressing health inequities requires improving the existing public policies to provide equitable access to good quality health services that are efficient, equity-focused, accessible and sustainable. This in turn requires tackling the social determinants of health which make people sick in the first place [8,9,10,11]. South Africa's health system face complex challenges, in part derived from pervasive social determinants of health; disease burden, such as HIV/AIDS, TB as well as growing prevalence of chronic illnesses, and intensive use of expensive yet vital health technologies and health care costs which are unaffordable to the majority poor.

The NDP may present a significant opportunity and challenges in health sector. The plan not only require structure, inputs, process, outputs and outcomes for a comprehensive health status improvement, but also it encompass assessment of efficiency and equity in healthcare delivery system. An effective plan demands a well-coordinated and integrated action oriented successive plans [12]. Accordingly, the Northern Cape department of health develops strategic and annual performance plans where indicators are monitored quarterly and annually to assess performance progress on predetermined targets and their achievements. On the other hand, studies elsewhere indicate that planning often fails when they are not integrated into the day-to-day operations of the department [13] and recommends effective monitoring and evaluation of activities on plans and implementation of strategies in order to achieve targets [14].

For effective planning, identification and performance monitoring,

there are two popular approaches described in literature: top-down and bottom-up approaches [15,16,17]. Top-down approach, is a planning strategy tries to achieve objectives mostly through using a previously generated set of data and lead by experts that modifies this data according to the local situation. As such, this approach is simple and not data-intensive [15]. Top-down approach relies mainly on historical data. This approach is opposite to bottom-up approach [16]. A bottom-up approach is a strategy that depends on local community's active engagement based on their need and situation, and thus is data-intensive [17]. This study argues that formulating sustainable pro-poor focused policy requires an integrated approach or balance between bottom-up and top-down planning approaches to address the multiple socio-economic challenges at district levels.

Commendable efforts have been made over the last few decades to develop an integrated planning and utilize performance assessment. These include districts based planning taking peculiarities of their specific health systems challenges into consideration, guided by generic frameworks developed by National and provincial department of health planning sections. In this regard, it is important to answer such questions, i.e., to what extent is the NDP aligned with the district and provincial health performance plans? How are performance targets developed? How to address inequity in health care? What are key factors that contribute to sub-optimal performance? This study argues that department's capacity to align plans, allocate adequate resources to each target, effective monitoring and accountability measures in place are vitally important to support and achieve targets as planned.

The study presents an assessment of the health sector planning and actual performance on basis of predetermined indicators to help identify gaps and recommend corrective measures. It also helps to strengthen and understand the relationships between successive annual planning, adequate resources and strategic plans towards achieving the national overarching goal – a long and health life for all South African in the Northern Cape Province.

METHODS

The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods for gathering information from purposive randomly selected 73 research respondents of the department who were working at senior and middle management services. Structured questionnaires conducted via department's GroupWise email network as these groups are largely responsible for developing strategic plan, annual plan, budgeting, implementing, monitoring and reporting programme activities as well as to design improvement plans in cases targets were not achieved. A pre-tested structured questionnaire was used for gathering information that will answer the study objectives to understand how the department plan its goals, implement goal oriented activities, monitor performances, and develop improvement strategy where there is a need.

The questionnaire was designed based on information obtained from literature and key informants in the subject area, and conducted via department's GroupWise email network between 10-12 May 2017. Three days were used as a time framework to respond to study questionnaires on purposive randomly selected respondents. Staff from research directorate and policy and planning unit collected the response from research participants. In addition, written materials and other official documents on planning, monitoring and evaluation as well as strategic planning records, official publications and performance reports were reviewed. Accordingly, the Annual Performance Plan for 2016/17 financial year, quarterly and annual performance reports were appraised. These documents capture programmes plan, strategic objectives, performance reports, reasons why programmes couldn't achieve targets and recommendations to overcome the challenge.

A broad range of one hundred and eighteen (118) performance indicators covering all eight budgeted programmes of the department as per the annual performance plan for the year were analysed by an expert. The analysis was classified into three sub-categories such as targets achieved, partially achieved, and not achieved by means of evaluating their predetermined target plans and the actual performance. Furthermore, performance indicator setting process, stakeholder's involvement, resources allocations to targets were reviewed. Data was entered in data entry tools developed in Microsoft Excel and descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe the respondents' response for each question that was asked.

RESULTS

The study results suggest that there is an urgent need to enhance integrated bottom-up and top-down planning approaches at national, provincial and district levels. This will help to establish better link between the NDP, strategic, annual and operational plans to support the department efforts in the right direction. Currently, the local health needs identification, setting of realistic goals, and allocation of adequate resources guided by evidence are sub-optimal. Most strategic goals require well-integrated planning lead by adequate resources in order not to leave behind anyone in terms of their health needs.

The departmental policies and guidelines promote annual performance plans to be aligned with its strategic plan, and monitoring of actual performances measured against predetermined objectives and targets on quarterly and annual basis. Accordingly, the annual performance plan of the eight budget programmes of the department derived their targets for the 2016/17 financial year from the Medium Term Strategic Plan (2015/16-2019/20) which in turn linked to the NDP Goals 2030. Analysis of the Department's annual performance report against these predetermined targets, objectives and goals set in the APP for 2016/17 financial year shows that only 54 percent targets were achieved, while 16 percent partially achieved, and 30 percent not achieved. Not achieving predetermined objectives and targets is a concern and hinders the realization of the long-term health goals including the NDPs.

Table one shows respondents answer for the survey questions. A total of 48 out of 73 middle and senior managers of the department responded to the survey questionnaire within three-days. The response rate was 66 percent. Table one shows the summary of the respondents answer for the survey questions with the ratio scale from 1 (not desired) to 5 (highly desired).

Table one: respondents answer for the survey questions

No	Issue	Rating scale					n
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	Do you set Annual Performance Plan (APP) targets for your programme collectively with all responsible staff as a team and consider the baseline?	6 (12.5%)	9 (18.7%)	8 (16.6%)	11 (22.9%)	14 (29.2%)	48
2	Are your APP targets aligned to the available resources and programme budget?	14 (29.2%)	4 (8.3%)	19 (39.5%)	5 (10.4%)	6 (12.5%)	48

3	Do you make quarterly performance assessment information regularly available to staff, discuss on it and do monthly monitoring?	8 (16.6%)	12 (25%)	8 (16.6%)	13 (27%)	7 (14.5%)	48
4	Do you have a performance improvement plan for non-achieved performance indicator targets on quarterly basis?	9 (18.7%)	17 (35.4%)	12 (25%)	6 (12.5%)	4 (8.3%)	48
5	Do you have a process to manage accountability regarding the non-achieved performance target indicator, and a reward system for over achievements ?	17 (35.4%)	16 (33.3%)	5 (10.4%)	6 (12.5%)	4 (8.3%)	48
Where, 1= Nothing in place; 2= Just getting started to move in the right direction; 3=moving in the right direction; 4 = adequate – have made good progress over the last year; 5= very good quarterly performance management system							

29 percent of the respondents indicated that there is a very good system in place with regard to setting annual performance plan targets. According to them, plans are set collectively with all responsible staff and considering the baseline information. While 18.7 percent the respondents indicated that they just getting to start to setting targets jointly and are moving in the right direction. However, for 12.5 percent of the respondents, targets were not set jointly with all responsible staff as a team and considering the baseline information.

Only 22.9% respondents indicated that when setting annual performance plan targets, they do align plan with the available resources. While 29 percent of the respondents do not set their targets in line with the available resources and programmes budget. Furthermore, they indicated that often inadequate resources have been negatively affecting performances as set out in annual plans as well as the strategic goals. In order for the department to be able to achieve its targets, adequate and sufficient resources including budget must be available. Policy mandates not supported by adequate resources are often a challenge. Not aligning plan with resources will make it difficult for attaining the long-term goals. In the current practice, it seems some decision-making tends to be short sighted and aligned with budget rather than long-term goals.

Quarterly monitoring performance, and sharing of assessment information regularly to staff is important in order to discuss and plan improvement strategies. Each employee at programme level has a critical role to play so that planned targets and predetermined objectives were achieved. However, the response suggests that only 14.5 percent indicated that there is very good system in place, while 27 percent of respondents indicated that they have made good

progress over the past year. 16 percent and 25 percent respondents indicated that there is nothing in place and just getting to move in the right direction respectively.

More than half (54 percent) of the respondents indicated that they don't have improvement plan for non-achieved performance indicators. Only 8 percent of the respondents indicated that there is a very good improvement plan in place for non-achieved indicators, while 12.5 percent have made good progress over the last year. This shows that the majority of programmes do not have performance improvement plans for non-achieved targets.

More than one-third (35.4 percent) of respondents indicated that a process to manage accountability regarding the non-achieved performance targets, and a reward system for overachievement of targets were inadequate. Close to one-third (33 percent) respondents indicated that they are just getting to move in the right direction. Only 8.3 percent of respondents indicated that there is very good performance management system; while 12.5 percent respondents suggest they have made good progress over the last year. This suggests that there is a need to put accountability in terms of targets.

Although health systems which are central to the healthy development of individuals, families and societies but a number of other factors, commonly called the social determinants of health (SDH) negatively influence the healthy lives of many people, especially who are socioeconomically poor. However, there is limited indicators to monitor actions on the SDH in the annual performance plan document. The pledges to monitor the SDH indicators was made in the Rio Political Declaration on the Social Determinants of Health, which was subsequently endorsed by the World Health Assembly (WHA) in the WHA resolution 65.8.

DISCUSSIONS

There is much greater emphasis today on improving health systems performances as the sector is central to the development of healthy and productive citizens for country's socioeconomic development. Performances of the health systems, which in turn are directly influenced by the country's economic performance [18]. For instance, ample evidence suggests that in general, wealthier countries have healthier populations compared to most developing countries [19, 8, 10]. Poor socioeconomic conditions coupled with poorly functioning health system adversely affects life expectancy through high morbidity and mortality. Indeed, most countries with weak health systems find it harder to achieve sustained socioeconomic growth [18,19,20]. While all health care interventions are important and should continue to receive support; in many cases interventions must be prioritized due to the constraints on available resources and capabilities. The plan, therefore should focus on health services delivery mechanism that take into consideration the resources constraint and health problems to develop priority systems and services to receive the necessary support. Health system improvement through adequate resources and investment is critical, however, their performance can be negatively affected by the social determinants on health [20]. This suggests, if the country's wants to reduce the raising health spending, they may need to invest in programmes that aim to address social determinants of health.

Both the NDP and the SDG have vision to eradicate hunger, poverty, inequality in all its forms and substantial reduction in diseases burden by 2030 [5,6]. Given the complexity of promoting equity in health, and ascertain the far reaching country's long-term socioeconomic development while strengthening the health system, monitoring performance is equally important. The National Treasury defines integrated planning, effective implementation of plans and monitoring is paramount for the success of all government initiatives [12]. For instance, Goal three of the SDG is specific to health and states to "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" There are twelve targets detailed to this

Goal [5]. Equally, the NDP has a vision- A Long and Healthy Life for all South Africans [6]. These plans have goals, objectives, and targets to provide directions and required activities for the lower echelons i.e., strategic plans and annual performance plans.

This calls for alignment of strategic plan, annual performance plans and resources. Yet there is a gap in achieving the desired level of integration and outcomes [21,22]. This study argues that successful achievement of targets hinges on the institutional capacities to develop integrated top-down and bottom-up planning approaches, collaborative planning and monitoring of progress for the attainment of targets. Moreover, advancing in health equity requires collaborative actions on the avoidable health inequalities. Figure one presents the links of annual performance targets against the long-term goals of the NDP and SDGs of 2030.

Figure 1: links toward achieving a long and healthy life for all South Africans



Proper alignment of APP with strategic plan and the available resources is paramount to achieve performance targets as well as to track progress in the implementation of targets thereof. Concurrently, developing the implementation plan (operational plan) which provides the detailed actions that are identified to achieve the intended targets in the annual plan is vital to guide what is to be done? when it should be done? who will do it? how it will be done? and the expected amount of resources for each action and expected output/outcomes. Ideally, an operational plan is an integral part of annual performance plan. This is important step in order to monitor and evaluate how well targets were supported with resources. Resources required may include finance, human resources for health, equipment, laboratory, time, and network to ensure a realistic output/outcome.

In this study a total of 118 predetermined objective indicators were monitored in the 2016/17 financial year. The study results show that close to half (54 percent) of the targets were achieved, while 16 percent partially achieved, and 30 percent were not achieved. There are gaps related to integrated planning, resources allocations to targets as well as setting targets through consultations with staff and key stakeholders. For instance, only 29 percent of respondents indicate that they set targets collectively with all responsible staff as a team and considering the baseline information. While 12 percent indicated there is nothing in place, and 19 percent of respondents stated that just getting started to move in the right direction. This suggests that there is a need to improve performance setting process in order to successfully achieve desired long-term socioeconomic development goals.

Each employee within the programme has a role to play in order for his/her programme to achieve planned targets. 18 percent of the respondents indicate that they don't have improvement plans for non-achieved performance indicator. While only 8 percent of the respondents indicated that there is a very good plan i.e., developing improvement plan in place for non-achieved indicators, and the majority 25 percent have indicated that they have made good progress over the last year. This shows that the majority of programmes do not have performance improvement plan for non-achieved targets.

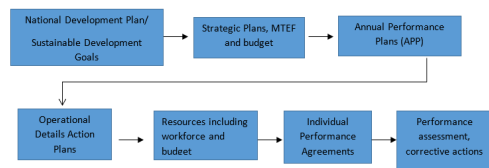
If targets are not supported by adequate and necessary resources, it cannot be assumed to be achieved. This is huge risk towards

attaining the annual targets and strategic objectives. Moreover, it creates undesired internal and external audit queries and qualifications. In this study, only 22.9 percent respondents indicate that when setting APP targets, they do align plan with the available resources. While 37 percent of the respondents indicated that they do not set their targets in line with the available resources. The majority 39 percent of the respondents indicated that they are moving in the right direction. This suggest that the issue of alignment of plans with available or adequate resources cannot be neglected during the planning process. Realistic and feasible targets can be set through an evidence-based approach. This can be best achieved through integrated top-down and bottom-up planning approach so that these three elements talk to each other, and spend the limited health resources on the key health priorities and needs of the local communities.

The adoption of the NDP 2030 presents a significant opportunity and challenges in health sector. Ensuring the overriding Goal of “A Long and Health Life for all South Africans” requires no one be left behind in his/her health needs [7,8,14]. Attaining this goal is critical for producing healthy citizen in line with eradicating poverty and reducing inequality in all its forms. It is well known fact that if countries are to take part in the delivery of more equitable and accessible health services for all, tackling the social determinants of health vitally important [8,10,11,18]. Yet there are gaps in the current planning of targets and monitoring on how to address the social determinants-the reason why people get sick in the first place. In working towards realizing the vision of both the NDP and the SDGs, South Africa needs to make measurable targets on SDH to guide collective planning, financing, implementation and monitoring strategies on SDH [13,14]. This might call for promoting actions towards health in all polices.

Achieving more equitable and sustainable development among subgroups a population and geographical areas is the essence of the SDGs and NDP. This needs the alignment and integration of plans, budgets and other resources to eliminate poverty, and inequality in all its forms.

Figure 2: Annual Performance Plan and Performance assessment



It is important for annual performance plans to be linked to strategic plans to ensure that key objectives and priorities of the National Development Plan are budgeted for and achieved. In addition to this, annual performance plan and resources should be interrelated to improve operational effectiveness [12,22,23]. Figure two shows the links how the department can improve performances in sequential and structured approach in the course of fulfilling its mandates and implementing government long-term health priorities and policies. This link is vital in enhancing transparency, accountability and oversight performance and accountability. Furthermore, it makes it easy to use of programme performance information for assessing the value-for-money of government activities as well as to inform management decisions to plan improvement and corrective actions where targets are not achieved or in case of policy changes happened.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of approaches exist for integrating population health issues into planning. In South Africa, for instance, the National Development Plan used for promoting the long-term socioeconomic development vision of the country which in turn aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In the plan, the health sector is centrally placed, particularly relating to

the importance of developing healthy and productive citizens for sustainable development. However, this requires the alignment of NDP with successive lower level plans supported by adequate resources. There is a need for integrated planning and effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms to be put in place in order to track progress toward the NDPs.

Achieving the NDPs may not be an exclusive task of national government, and hence provincial and local governments need to have sufficiently aligned plans to meet their own developmental goals. The study result highlighted that integrated planning and performance monitoring processes already exist, however performance is suboptimal and there is a room for improvement. This suggests the importance of using top-down and bottom-up planning approach to guide rigorous and evidence-based planning, and which is accompanied with capacity support. In the context where health inequality is increasing and while many people are living with poor health status, as a result of the social determinants of health, doing so will provide enormous opportunities to identify the health needs of the local communities and improved solutions.

Recommendations

1. Integrated planning for NDP implementation at provincial and district levels. It is generally acknowledged that health sector has to serve as catalyst for sustainable development goals. Producing healthy and productive citizens, and reducing avoidable health inequalities, are a few key examples. Integrating top-down and bottom-up plans can help understanding of complex issues and offer a means to better plan and achieve the desired goals. It is important to clearly understand the needs of local people and the role of local governments, where majority of the population live.

2. Fostering an enabling environment through capacity assessment. Resource requirements relating to the implementation of plans for all-inclusive and sustainable development is tremendous. While all health care interventions are important and should continue to receive support; it is also important that interventions must be prioritized due to the constraints on available resources and capabilities. Focusing on Primary Health Care as the main vehicle of service delivery may resolve resource constraints in addressing public health problems and ensuring that priority systems and services receive the necessary support.

3. Ministry of health should lead Health in All Policy (HiAP) agenda to achieve the National Vision 2030. There is a need for innovative means to engage multiple stakeholders, policy development such as Health in All Policy. Such approaches enable the health sector and key stakeholders to solve health problems in cost-effective and sustainable ways, where progress toward one area can enhance progress in others. Engaging other sectors, bringing issues around the table for consultations, priority setting, convincing partners on the HiAP actions and the types of resources that could be mobilized in the form of direct support, learning and research and engagement and advocacy.

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