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for Africa



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**Operational Guideline
on Improving Coverage and Completeness of
Civil Registration Systems in Africa**

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Improving Civil Registration Systems in Africa
 - 2.1. Prerequisites and preparations for improvement
 - 2.2. Creating demand for vital event records
 - 2.3. Facilitating use of vital records
 - 2.4. Improving registration operation and management
3. Need for keeping Interface between Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems
 - 3.1. Statistics: A tool for keeping civil registration dynamism
 - 3.2. Civil registration authorities need to appreciate and seek support from statistics
 - 3.3. National statistics offices need to develop knowledge and competence in flow statistics
4. Role of Development Partners in Improving Civil Registration Systems in Africa
 - 4.1. Identifying capacity gaps: Which ones are beyond the national capacity?
 - 4.2. Which development partner to which capacity gap?
 - 4.3. Need for responsibility and intervention limits
 - 4.4. Ensuring sustainability and contribution to permanence
5. Conclusion

Preface

This operational guideline on improving the coverage and completeness of civil registration systems in Africa is the first of its kind initiated as per the recommendations of the Dar-es-Salaam regional workshop that was convened in June 2009¹. It is well acknowledged that the United Nations has been producing a series of technical and operational handbooks and manuals on civil registration and vital statistics systems in the past years. These materials primarily focus on presenting international principles, recommendations and practices with the primary objective of improving the quality and comparability of international statistics. The preparation of this operational guideline was necessitated with the objective of addressing specific technical, managerial and operational problems and challenges Africa facing in the past half a century in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems. Furthermore, the guideline was designed to reflect African peculiar characteristics and the countries specific situations.

This operational guideline on civil registration is accompanied with another guideline developed in parallel on vital statistics, which is presented in a separate publication. The guidelines are expected to serve as springboards for the regional initiative on reforming and improving civil registration and vital statistics systems as presented in the regional medium-term plan². The two guidelines will be presented at the forthcoming preparatory meeting of experts for the First Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration that will be convened from 13 to 14 August 2010, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The two draft operational guidelines will be updated based on the inputs obtained from the preparatory expert meeting to be conducted from 10-12 August 2010. The preparation of the two operational guidelines was funded by the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank. This guideline was prepared by Gene Bizuneh, a consultant for the African Development Bank based in the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), under the supervision of Dr. Dimitri Sanga, Officer in Charge of African Centre for Statistics (ACS) of the ECA.

¹ Regional Workshop on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa: Report and Documentation, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 29 June – 3 July 2009.

² Reforming and Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa: Proposed Regional Medium-Term Plan 2010-2012, March 2010, ECA, Addis Ababa.

1. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations (UN) has been preparing and disseminating various civil registration and vital statistics handbooks and guidelines since the early 1950s. Among the earliest publications include the *Principles for a Vital Statistics System* and the *Handbook of Vital Statistics Methods*, published in 1953 and 1955 respectively. Following the publication of these founding vital statistics publications in the UN system, consecutive publications³ were released in the seventies, eighties and early nineties. The recent publications that are currently available as updated versions on civil registration and vital statistics systems comprised five series of handbooks⁴ referring to the different component activities of the systems and one revised version on principles and recommendations of vital statistics system. There are also parallel developments in the preparation of updated versions of causes of death data collection and classifications of diseases and injuries by the World Health Organization (WHO).

2. The primary purpose of the handbooks and guidelines of the UN is to set international standards and to present uniform concepts, definitions and procedures that enhances international comparability and improve utilization of statistical data. In addition, the more recent publications are more focused in serving the developing world in guiding the operation and management of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the countries. Various efforts were made in introducing and disseminating the UN materials in the developing world, through the organization of regional workshops, disseminating via electronic media and sending hard copies upon request and using other mechanisms. Africa as a region has been benefiting from these global initiatives though there were problems in accessing the documents in most countries due to limited infrastructural and communication developments. Furthermore, there were capacity limitations in civil registration authorities and national statistical offices (NSO) in properly understanding and using the documents to change the situation in their countries. Until very recently, the majority of civil registration authorities do not have the awareness about the

³ - *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 1, 1973.*

- *Handbook of Vital Statistics Systems and Methods, Vol. II, Review of National Practices, 1985*

- *Handbook of Vital Statistics Systems and Methods, Vol. I, Legal, Organizational and Technical Aspects, 1991*

⁴ - *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance, 1998*

- *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Preparation of a Legal Framework, 1998*

- *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Developing Information, Education and Communication, 1998*

- *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Computerization, 1999*

- *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Policies and Protocols for the Release and Archiving of Individual Records, 1999*

- *Handbook on Training in Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, 2002*

- *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 2, 2001.*

availability of these varied UN handbooks. Likewise, only few NSOs were accessing these documents. The focus to census and sample survey methods for collecting and compiling vital statistics could be the major contributing factor for such low level awareness and application of the materials by the NSOs.

3. The regional workshop on “*Strengthening Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems*” in Africa that was convened in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in June 2009 that brought representatives of NSOs and civil registration authorities from 40 African countries revealed the very low level of awareness and application of the UN materials in Africa. As immediate and first step measure the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) in collaboration with the other organizers of the workshop has made arrangements for providing copies of the materials to both English and French speaking countries. The workshop also revealed the need for organization of formal training programs on the handbooks that would enhance the technical capacity of national institutions and ensure the applicability of the handbooks in the countries. The workshop also recommended the preparation of regional operational manuals and guidelines that reflect the African context based on the global standards and recommendations as presented in the different UN handbooks and other publications.

4. Accordingly, the rationale for preparing this regional operation guideline is guided by the recommendations of the regional workshop as indicated above. Therefore, the objective of the preparation of this guideline was to supplement the global standards focusing on the regional context by making the necessary reference to the international standards.

5. The basic reference documents used in the preparation of this guideline were the various civil registration and vital statistics UN handbooks and manuals. The guideline is expected to serve as supplementary reference material as it intends reflecting the African context based on the UN standards. The guideline is prepared with the understanding that the principles, operations and management concepts and procedures are covered by the UN handbooks and hence did not indulge into repeating these aspects of the systems. Therefore, users of this guideline are expected to make reference to the UN handbooks for the comprehensive understanding of the basic concepts and principles about the technical, management and operational aspects of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

2. IMPROVING CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

6. Every nation in Africa seeks its civil registration to be complete and the vital statistics data to be high quality. However, the past four to five decades efforts and improvement initiatives have not resulted the required level of completeness in terms of geographic coverage, content and quality of information of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in the majority of the countries. Various UN agencies, donor communities and governments have extended resources to many African countries in support of projects and pilot or model programs designed to improve civil registration systems. In parallel, various intervention programmes and alternatives or interim methods and techniques have been developed, tested and applied in different parts of Africa aimed at generating qualified vital statistics data. These long-years of engagements without tangible development results have created frustrations among the major development partners, experts and focal national institutions that resulted in ignorance and stagnation at the national level in most parts of Africa.

7. Some of the initiatives managed in evaluating the outcomes of their programmes or interventions found major limitations and problems in the design as well as implementation of the different initiatives and programmes⁵. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases the problem originates from misconception of the principles and procedures of civil registration that required a depth of knowledge and wider outlook about the uses, functions, implications and multi-sectoral nature of civil registration component outputs. Besides, the institutional and operational inter-linkages and the role civil registration plays in the national and local development endeavors were largely ignored. Furthermore, most of the initiatives and interventions were not designed to bring fundamental structural changes that would have resulted in clearing past misconceptions and mistreatments of the services and values of civil registration products. Civil registration operations and management implications were understood in a narrow sense that did not get serious attention by key regional organizations, national policy makers and higher level government organs. Hence, much of the efforts and resources invested in civil registration and vital statistics systems could not result basic improvements in the coverage and completeness of civil registration in the majority of African countries.

8. This section of the guideline starts by presenting the basic preparatory activities that need to be considered and undertaken as prerequisites in planning for reform and improvement

⁵ *Review and Evaluation of UNFPA Supported Projects on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, Consultancy Report, March 1993 New York*

programmes of civil registration and vital statistics systems in a country. The sub-sections further discuss on the need and facilitating factors for creating demand and use of vital event records among individuals, population groups and organizations.

2.1 Prerequisites and Preparations for Improvement

9. National civil registration and vital statistics reform and improvement programmes require a well designed, properly studied and documented national strategy and implementation plan (the plan can have different names). The national civil registration and vital statistics improvement plan need to be prepared and endorsed considering individual, institutional and government requirements and resources.

2.1.1 Preparedness and commitment for improvement

10. Civil registration and vital statistics are two component functions working in parallel but in an integrated implementation modality towards a common goal. Civil registration is the basis and the source for vital statistics. In turn, vital statistics is the technical arm for civil registration that keeps the dynamism as well as the integrity of its various functions. Hence, reform or improvement initiatives and plans need to be designed or prepared considering these inherent characteristics of both component functions of the systems, that is, civil registration and vital statistics functions. Accordingly, the reform programme and improvement plan need to be prepared integrally and owned commonly by the two component functions.

a. Why need for reform and improvement?

11. Any activity should rationally be questioned why it should be done. It should not be done for the sake of doing it. The need for improving the two systems and the need to invest resources for such undertakings need to be rationally argued and addressed in the strategy and implementation plan. The forefront responsible national organs, that is, the civil registration and vital statistics organizations should be able to question and ensure their preparedness and commitment in bringing change and tangible results differing from business as usual exercise.

b. Need for appropriate knowledge and understanding about civil registration

12. Civil registration is not included in university curriculums and not thought at other higher learning colleges either in legal, statistics or public health fields. The UN handbooks and manuals are the primary source of basic knowledge and practice of civil registration and vital statistics for the developing world. The UN, since the 1950s have been preparing and

disseminating international standards, principles and recommendations on the operation, management and maintenance of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the various guidelines and handbooks published by the organization. In late 1990s and early 2000, the UN has produced and disseminated five series volumes of handbooks on civil registration and vital statistics systems and a revised publication on the principles and recommendations of vital statistics system. The five UN handbooks have dealt with the major component parts of civil registration: management, operation and maintenance; legal framework; information, communication and education; policies and protocols for the release and archiving; and computerization.

13. A country prepared to launch a comprehensive reform and improvement programme on its national civil registration and vital statistics systems need to have enough cadres of experts in these UN guidelines capacitated in adapting them to their country realities. It is well acknowledged that the number of available experts in civil registration and vital statistics at regional as well as international levels have been depleted in the past years due to the focus and shift to enumeration and survey methods. A good example on the problem of staffing is the UN Statistics Division (UNSD), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the UNFPA that used to have international and regional experts in civil registration and vital statistics are currently understaffed. As was observed in the field assessment missions conducted in five African countries⁶, specifically National Statistical Offices (NSOs) are under serious expert limitations where in most cases there are no staffs trained in civil registration and vital statistics and also no practices of using the UN handbooks and other resource materials. Hence, national authorities or offices responsible for civil registration and vital statistics have to consider seriously the need to equip their staffs with appropriate knowledge that would enable them to lead and manage the improvement undertakings and sustain the capacity to monitor the progress and achievements.

c. Planning for improvement and setting targets

14. Civil registration is a continuous undertaking that need to be implemented and maintained in a permanently established institution supported with well established functional and management systems. Civil registration is a nationwide undertaking that concerns and touches every citizen of a country throughout his/her lifetime starting at birth and ending at death. Civil registration records need to be kept for generations so that reference would be made for various purposes

⁶ Reforming and Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa: Regional medium-term plan (2010-2012), Draft

even if the individual was dead long years ago. Civil registration system also lends its products to varied national and local government and non-governmental organizations on a routine basis that need institutional mapping for rendering efficient service and management. Vital statistics principles and operational procedures need to be built and reflected in the civil registration system. Improvement programme of such nationwide and people oriented undertaking requires a comprehensive plan with detailed activities, timeframe, expected outputs, targets and monitoring tools. Hence, advance preparation of medium or long-term improvement plan or programme document for the civil registration and vital statistics systems is a prerequisite in the whole reform and improvement programmes.

d. Building “can be and should be done” attitude

15. The problems and challenges facing the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the majority of the developing world in general, and Africa in particular had left pessimistic attitudes and ignorance in the minds of professionals, primarily those in the fields of statistics, demography, health management and law. It is widely documented that there is no disagreement or question on the importance and values of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the various fields: public administration, provision of social services, protection of human rights and provision of various demographic and health statistics. In general, it is well acknowledged that the individual and aggregate data and information generated by the civil registration and vital statistics systems are the basis for a country’s socio-economic planning and measurement of development results, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and facilitating the democratization process of a country. Hence, a country aspiring and targeting towards an efficient and accountable modern public administration system and moving towards building an information system for managing results should prioritize civil registration and vital statistics systems as a national development agenda. For this to be a reality, the government needs to break the past years silence and ignorance and need to ensure ownership and leadership of the reform and improvement initiatives. In such undertakings it is important to change attitudes of professionals first to: ‘*can be and should be done*’ mind-set.

e. Role of experts and management responsibility

16. As indicated above, appropriate knowledge and understanding of the basic principles, operations and management of civil registration and vital statistics is a huge asset for a country embarking comprehensive improvement programmes in the African setting. Primarily the management of the institution responsible for civil registration needs to make in-house assessment of its technical capacity and readiness in undertaking the improvement programme. However, for the management to react as per the expectation, the technical inputs and directives

has to come from the experts undertaking the supervision and leadership role at the frontline. Department heads or unit leaders are expected to have the knowledge about the defects of the system from practical and closer follow-up of day-to-day activities though may not have the means and full technical knowhow in fixing them. Such practical knowledge and experience have to be systematically assessed and synthesized and further reviewed by the management in the light of the international principles and recommendations.

17. In the national reform or improvement programme, the management has the responsibility in ensuring and facilitating the full participation of national experts. Management leadership and country ownership of the reform or improvement programme starts maybe at this point. Any external support or intervention need also to make sure that such arrangements are considered by the national institutions in handing over knowledge and expertise to the nation. Regional and international organizations need also to setup monitoring mechanisms in ensuring national ownership and proper transfer of knowledge and expertise to national experts.

2.1.2 Identifying priority and high impact areas of intervention

18. One of the purposes of having a national civil registration and vital statistics improvement plan is to help devise approaches and mechanisms that would result in immediate and sustainable improvement in the coverage and completeness of civil registration systems. The national technical taskforce or committee with the support of regional or international expertise should be tasked in identifying priority and high impact areas of intervention. In such an exercise though general knowledge and regional or international principles and recommendations may help in guiding the process, however identification of issues and decisions on priority and high impact areas are highly dependent on national circumstances and realities on the ground.

19. For instance, in a country, organizational or structural problems may require priority attention while in another the legislative aspect may be the priority area to be addressed. Addressing one major problem may result simultaneous correction to problems in other areas. There may also be a need to do rigorous analysis using appropriate methods in identifying priority intervention areas and cost and resource requirements in addressing the problems and challenges towards improved and cost-effective functions and procedures. Depending on the country situations, in some instances such problem identification and proposing options of intervention may require initiating full-fledged diagnostic studies and data collection and analysis (if not available) undertakings as part of the planning process.

2.1.3. Identifying key partners

20. Civil registration has varied number and type of partners and stakeholders. Almost all the partners, whether external or internal are beneficiaries either directly or indirectly from the registration system. The national civil registration authority should value, capitalize and build-up on the services and benefits the registration system renders to its partners and strategize itself to take advantage out of it. The civil registration authority may also need to do analytical exercise on the type of interest and benefits of the different partners and the capacity and willingness in supporting the reform and improvement programme on both internal and external partners. It is not only enough to know the benefit and interest side of the partners on the civil registration system, it is also necessary to assess the conditions required from the registration authority in facilitating their partnership that lead to mutual benefits.

21. The civil registration authority should also be alert in entertaining the various agency or institution specific interests that may sometimes intervene and influence the leadership role of national institutions. The authority should also be smart enough in bargaining in such situations and pull the string towards the common platform as each partner has some values in moving the improvement agenda forward. Hence, some sort of positive managerial categorical view of each of the partners may be necessary following a transparent process to help and upgrade efficiency of management of resources and in avoiding confusion and duplication and hence wastage of resources.

2.2 Creating Demand for Vital Event Records

22. Recording of vital events should follow basic principles and procedures of registration in order to meet the required level of accuracy for the evidence and data to serve its purpose for the individual, the household and the state. The timeliness and quality of registration data could not be maintained by keeping the organizational and administrative efficiency of the registration office alone, rather the system highly depends on the availability of well-informed informants and responsive public support. The civil registration authority or office should maintain a high level of expertise and management capacity in educating and disseminating the values and functions of vital event records to potential beneficiaries and the general public. It is not enough to have well designed civil registration legislation unless properly communicated and owned by the beneficiaries. Compulsoriness of the law is one of the principles and requirements of civil registration systems, however, practice has showed in the past years in various parts of the world

that ownership of the law by the informants and the general public should take a central place to make the law implementable at all times.

23. One of the critical interventions in ensuring ownership of civil registration systems by the beneficiaries is by creating demand for the vital event records. The civil registration office need to be able to convince and persuade each and every household, for instance parents to look for a birth certificate for their new born child immediately after delivery irrespective of the place of birth. However, the primary challenge here for most civil registration offices and the experts engaged in civil registration operation is to identify the potential purposes and values that particular household or community would benefit by registering the child as prescribed in the law. In addition, the mechanisms devised in communicating the household or parents or the community and institutions as per the realities and contexts of the particular situation has huge implication in persuading households or beneficiaries to the required level of response: timeliness and correctness of the information. The same holds true for other informants and beneficiaries of birth registration: the health worker or programmer or medical personnel, human rights activist, the education manager or policy maker, social security manager, the local public administrator or whoever deemed beneficiary of the birth registration record.

24. The civil registration authority together with the agency(ies) compiling vital statistics need to analyze the decisive and contributing factors in creating demand for each vital event and categories of beneficiaries. The registration authority should also devise appropriate forums in involving potential beneficiaries to comment on the strategies developed for demand creation and implementation of the civil registration and vital statistics improvement programme.

2.2.1 What were the shortcomings of past interventions?

25. In the past years, in the majority of cases the specialized UN agencies and other international organizations intervening in support of countries have been taking the lead in designing, advocating and managing civil registration improvement initiatives. Such practices had been the norm primarily due to capacity gaps in the countries and also lack of commitment from managing and supervising ministries or departments. Creating demand for civil registration records should not be guided and determined by the globally and commonly acknowledged uses and benefits of the records, rather realities and situations at the communal and local levels should be the primary determinants in identifying the factors in creating the demand as well as in strategizing the beneficiaries to respond as per the required level of accuracy and timeliness.

26. National institutions orientation in implementing civil registration operation and improving the registration performance was highly biased and dependent on enforcing the registration law. Making the law compulsory is one aspect that helps in insuring the completeness, timeliness and continuity of the registration operation. However, regulatory measures need to be strongly supported with the provision of information and knowledge about the values, benefits and importance of the records to the different population groups through appropriate communication channels. For instance, ensuring the completeness and timely reporting of death event highly depends on the level of acceptance primarily by the community and households or individuals as per the culture or the existing value systems. Putting a provision in the civil registration law as a requirement for households or individuals or institutions to have a burial or cremation permit may not be difficult, however convincing the public on the value and benefit of death records for various purposes require extra efforts of the civil registration office.

2.2.2 Creating demand in central and local government administrations

27. Government administrations are the primary beneficiaries from the three major category benefits of civil registration, that is, legal, administration and statistics. Judicial services, including police and prison administrations and civil and criminal court rulings and proceedings require evidences of vital event records: birth, death, marriage and divorce certificates at the local administrations as well as at the center in day-to-day public transactions and administration of legal cases. The public administration at all levels (local, district, region/state or at the center) uses vital event records in providing various administrative services, including issuing residence identification cards that provides facts about the name, date and place of birth and other related personal information that requires accurate birth and death certificates. It is a requirement for local administrations to maintain databases of individual citizens residing in their jurisdiction in support of various public services.

28. Local government administrations are meant to be the major vital statistics data users for preparing, implementing and monitoring of local development plans and programmes for the sectors under their jurisdiction. In the majority of African countries more than ever, due to the progressive movement towards decentralized government administration, local governments are empowered in administering their own socio-economic and political affairs that urge them to prepare, implement and review their development plans and programmes. The primary statistical data the local administrations look for are population size and vital statistics information that are required to update and estimate future population growth and trends at the community and district levels.

29. The brief presentation above testifies the huge and diversified potentials for the civil registration system in creating demand for the individual records and the compiled statistics across all levels of the public administration system. However, in the majority of the countries such strategic approaches of demand creation has not been systematically designed and implemented. Hence, securing public administration support and communication approaches followed by national civil registration authorities in the past years need to be re-oriented to innovative demand creation approaches and methodologies.

2.2.3 Creating demand in service rendering key government ministries and departments

30. Major sector government institutions require evidences of vital event individual records in the provision of day-to-day services to the public. Among these institutions, law enforcing bodies, health and education institutions take the frontline. Facts about the occurrence of vital events and related evidences of the person's involved are the basic information required in court cases and rulings of filiations, paternity, existence or dissolution of marriages, confirmation of absence of persons, etc. Unlike commonly exercised administrative procedures, court proceedings require accurate and stringent evidences in rulings of civil and criminal matters. Similar situations exist in other law enforcing bodies, such as, the police, prison administrations and the intelligence branch that require accurate identity particulars of individuals, which are the starting point in investigating and administering various criminal and related cases.

31. Electoral commissions and offices usually establish national electoral databases that need to be updated on a continuous and permanent basis. The primary data requirements for updating and maintaining such databases originate in the birth and death individual registration records. The electoral commission database needs to be linked to the civil status database for keeping the dynamism of the database that would result in trustworthy electoral processes. Agencies and authorities administering national social security schemes, grants and other benefits require individual birth, death, marriage, divorce and other complementary vital event records in maintaining the service provision efficient and responsive. Evidence and information requirements of immigration authorities and passport administering institutions are highly dependent on the availability of comprehensive and accurate individual vital registration records. For instance, the starting point for compiling individual data items required for preparing and issuing passports is the birth register and the birth certificate.

32. In most developing countries administering adoption is one of the basic functions of government administrations. Agencies responsible for administering adoption cases require dependable individual birth records that testify filiations and other relevant background evidences of the child and the adoptee. Institutions administering driving licenses require accurate and dependable identity document established on birth and death registration records in issuing and administering various levels of licenses.

33. Public health ministry's or departments have dual role in the administration and management of civil registration operations. On the one hand, they are the primary responsible institutions in recording those births and deaths that occur in health facilities and on the other hand they are the primary users and beneficiaries of the registers as individual records as well as in aggregate form. Specifically, in situations where significant number of births and deaths occur at home, which is the case in the majority of African countries, birth, foetal death and death records are the primary information sources in guiding community health workers in providing efficient and life-saving health services. A package of health services, including identification of disabled or low birth weight infants, women and men eligible for family planning services, tracing and follow-up of children and women for immunization and nutritional services in post-natal services, ... etc at individual, household and community levels highly depend on the availability of accurate and comprehensive civil registration records.

34. Ministry of Education and local education departments and private schools engaged in education services need accurate and dependable birth certificates as evidences in testifying the age and other particulars of the child for admitting and enrolling in primary and nursery schools. Furthermore, birth and death records serve the education sector in monitoring and verifying the level of performance in meeting access to education rights and privileges and achieving universal coverage of primary education at all levels of the government administration.

2.2.4 What are the driving forces or incentives for individuals and households to seek for vital records?

35. The benefits of civil registration records for individuals and households are comprehensively documented in the various UN handbooks. Principles of civil registration operation and management prioritize individuals and households as the primary information providers and beneficiaries of civil registration system. Nevertheless, proper implementation of these operational principles that ensures individuals and households as beneficiaries of the system depends on the availability, accessibility and use of the registration services to the beneficiaries.

In other words, it means that registration offices should be established at the lowest administrative units that would enable the registrars to be available geographically within reasonable distance to the community and households they meant to serve. In addition the registration service needs to be free from various registration barriers and the service should be efficient enough to attract individuals and households for reporting and registration of vital events on time and as per the registration law and requirements.

36. The other major incentive factor for individuals and households in reporting vital events on a timely basis is the availability, accessibility and use of service rendering institutions. For instance, a household would be encouraged to report a birth and takes reporting and registration of the birth as an obligation if it sees the future positive or negative implications of the birth certificate on the child's life. The campaign by a registrar office about the benefits of birth certificate during enrollment of children in schools would only be relevant if and on if the school facility is available and accessible in the nearby area and legal or social obligations are set on the community and households in enrolling their children when they reach school age. Furthermore, the birth certificate would only be appreciated by the household if and only if the school requires a birth certificate during enrolling a child.

37. Likewise, the use of birth and infant death registers by the health service in the provision of immunization, counseling and post-natal nutritional and other services are the decisive factors in promoting the registration operation and showing the values of the records for the households and the communities. A campaign or educational programmes about the values and benefits of the birth and death records without the availability and accessibility of the services would result in a futile exercise in motivating individuals and households to seek for the records.

38. Unlike birth, it may not be easy to identify or investigate the factors that would contribute for individuals and households seek for death registration records or certificates. The difficulty lies not because of limitations of the use and benefits of death certificates to individuals and households but rather it is the absence or limited availability of the services due to various national circumstances that counteracts the demand side of the evidences. For instance, in the majority of instances though civil or criminal codes require courts to use registration records as prima facie evidences, however actual practices do not follow the provisions of the law. In such situations, inheritance, family allowance, adoption, and similar other court cases would not urge for conventional civil registration records and certificates. Absence or inadequate management of social security or grant schemes in the developing countries is also the other major barrier in creating demand for civil registration records.

2.2.5 Need for thinking beyond individualistic values – for the betterment of us

39. Civil registration necessitates the goodwill of each and every citizen of a country. The evidences, the statistics and other information produced by the civil registration system though emanate from individuals and households they are public goods that need to be owned and protected by the public. The national civil registration authority or office should be able to inculcate such custodianship, belongingness and responsibilities in each and every citizen of the nation. Parents and households should be educated and communicated that reporting and registering their child's birth and securing his/her birth certificate as part of their responsibilities in preparing the future wellbeing of their child as well as the future generation of the nation. For instance, establishing direct relevance or justifying about the values and benefits of registering an infant's death to an illiterate household would be difficult unless it is linked to the social wellbeing through which the household and the community benefits by keeping the health and prosperity of future mothers and children.

40. Therefore, civil registration should not be seen as government obligation put on citizens to respond as per the law in the book. Civil registration should be seen as a moral, social and legal obligation and responsibility of each individual citizen irrespective of her/his education or employment or economic level or status, gender, age, residence type or area or any other identity. People should respond to civil registration operational requirements considering its contribution for the betterment of the coming generations beyond individualistic interest – for the betterment of us.

2.2.6 Why development partners support civil registration?

41. The varied and integrated purposes of civil registration has created different users and partners at national, regional and international levels that supports the improvement of its operation and management. The civil registration authority or office should be able to know and document the interest, relevance and type of data and information required by each of its partners, whether national, regional or international. The registration authority in partnership with the national statistics office need to develop a strategic document that defines the areas of engagement of each development partner in the civil registration and vital statistics operation and management specifying to each vital event. The question why development partners support civil registration or vital statistics need to be taken as a strategic management starting point in identifying areas of interest, harmonization of intervention approaches, designing commonly

agreed resources management mechanisms, improving partnership towards accomplishing a common objective and monitoring development results and setting accountability on each of the parties.

42. The depth and method of analysis may vary from country to country, however it would be advisable to incorporate brief profile about each partner and consider the following variables for further rational justification of the interventions as deemed necessary.

- Type of development partner: whether national, regional or international
- Major areas of engagement – brief statements about the mission, accomplishments and future plans
- Interest in civil registration – relevance to its mandate and mission, brief historical perspective, interest to which vital event, basis for the interest and to achieve what ...
- Interest in vital statistics – relevance to its mandate and mission, brief historical perspective, interest to which vital event, basis for the interest, purpose, function and to achieve what ...
- Type and level of intervention – type of intervention (past, present and future plans) for each vital event, mode of intervention, procedures in accessing resources (technical, financial or logistics), criteria or requirements to access resources, geographic coverage, ...
- Type or size of beneficiaries – type and size of beneficiaries by population groups, geographical coverage, ...

2.3 Facilitating Use of Vital Records

43. Creating demand for birth, death, foetal death, marriage and divorce records is one aspect of promoting the values and functions of civil registration records. However, demand should be followed and accompanied with the actual use of the records for the intended purpose. As indicated in previous sections, users of vital records vary and range from individuals to national governments and international organizations depending on the type and purpose of vital events. The mode of application and use of the records also vary depending on the type of services intended to be used: for legal or administrative or statistical purposes. The civil registration authority or office should take as one priority responsibility the facilitation of the use of vital event records and the certificates by the various beneficiaries beyond managing the registration and certification operations.

44. The facilitation and monitoring of the availability of the services and hence use of the civil registration records as individual evidences or aggregate information may seem difficult tasks and beyond the mandate of the civil registration authorities or offices. However, considering the low level of development in general and the public administration in particular and other differing national contexts prevailing in the majority of African countries, national civil registration authorities in collaboration with NSOs and key development partners need to consider and strategize such responsibilities in their civil registration and vital statistics reform programmes and improvement plans.

2.3.1 Responsibilities of government institutions

45. The primary responsibility for the use of birth, death, marriage, divorce and the other vital event evidentiary documents and the aggregate statistics rests on the various government institutions engaged in public administration and service rendering activities.

a. Courts and other judicial bodies

46. For instance, courts should use marriage or divorce records and certificates as prima facie evidentiary documents in testifying the existence of marital union or dissolution of marriage. Identity and filiations of defendants and accused persons and also eyewitnesses in law proceedings should be based on identifications established through birth or death registration records. Courts should use birth certificates as primary evidences in testifying persons' names, age and filiations in proceedings and in cases of filings of dispute or disagreements. Judges, the court administration and other judicial bodies should use birth certificates in establishing age of accused persons, specifically child offenders. Likewise, evidences produced for other vital events should also be facilitated to be used as primary evidences in courts and other judicial bodies.

b. Health institutions and health workers

47. Health facilities and health workers should use birth registers as the starting point in identifying infants and children eligible for immunization services, campaigns and programmes. In the African context, list of children by date and place of birth, birth weight, sex and residence of the mother should serve as the guiding information source in planning and allocating necessary human and logistic resources and provision of post-natal and various maternal and child health services. Local civil registration offices need to prepare the list from the birth register and send or forward it to the local health service unit or department to use it during home visits by community health workers. Infant death records are essential tools for health institutions and managers in identifying causes of infant deaths and to plan and follow-up health

interventions to the mother and the community. Hence, government and non-government health institutions and community health workers should integrate the use of birth and death registers and certificates in health service provisions in facilities as well as during home visits.

c. Schools and the education system

48. Schools and education facilities need to ask and use birth registers and certificates in enrolling children at the right school age. Birth register is the primary information source for education planners at the local level that would show number of eligible school children for the coming years that will be used in preparing annual education service plans and programmes and in determining the need for additional or new schools or classrooms, teachers and all other necessary logistics and teaching materials. Education systems without such detailed pupil based information system would fall into continuous mismanagement and misrepresentation and inefficient administration of the school systems.

d. Residence identification issuers and identity system managers

49. The conventional source of individual data required for preparing residence identification, such as, name, age or date of birth and place of birth is the birth register. The correct information for each of the variables and the validity of the information will depend on the availability of adequate civil registration system in the country. Public agencies and local administrations engaged in issuing residence identification and those institutions managing identity systems need to use the civil registration records.

e. Agencies engaged in assigning unique identity numbers for citizens

50. One of the commonly practiced administrative responsibilities in the public administration system is the assignment of unique identification number to each and every citizen of the country. The composition and combination of national identification numbers and the system of administration vary from one country to the other. The national unique identification number is the key in the provision of various social and economic services for national and sub-national public administration agencies. Conventionally, national governments assign unique numbers to individuals at birth while registering the birth or following a different procedure at some particular age. The identification number also include date or place of birth, sex and combination of other uniquely identifying variables. Therefore, authorities or agencies responsible for assigning and managing unique identification numbers are expected to use the civil registration records while assigning the numbers as well as discarding or removing it from the database.

f. Passport and immigration offices

51. The usual identity particulars used in national passports include names and surnames, date and place of birth and nationality of the bearer. The conventional information source for all these variables is the birth record or certificate. The government agency responsible for issuing passports should look for birth records to transfer the required individual identity information to the passport and also marriage and divorce records in case of changes in citizenship by marriage or other legal procedures. The death record also serves in protecting the national passport from misuse, forgery and corrupt situations. Passport issuance requires a very stringent legal and administrative procedure as it relates to national security and has human rights component as it is the basis in safeguarding the right to movement of people. Hence, passport and immigration officers should look for accurate and quality personal information from civil registration offices in issuing passports and managing immigration issues.

g. Social service and welfare administration bodies

52. Individual birth and death records compiled in the local civil registration office are the basis in guiding the health services and interventions provided by community health workers and health posts. Community health workers and health posts require list of children under the age of 5 by single age category for providing vaccination services in a particular community or in their catchment areas on continuous basis. They also require list of current home deliveries, health status of the mother and the child by residence address so that required services will be arranged for both the mother and the child. The birth register is expected to record the name and residence identity of the mother, delivery date, whether the child is alive or dead, weight of the child and other demographic and health related information that helps the health worker to provide timely services to the members of the community. Hence, community health workers and health posts should look for such records in order to plan and implement the services and the interventions in a particular community.

53. Death records also register and collect individual identity information about the diseased including the name, age, place of residence, causes of death and other specific additional information in case of infant and maternal deaths. The local civil registration office will compile the list of diseased persons by age category and place of residence that would be forwarded or made available for the local health facility to use it for services at the locality and door to door interventions. Such individual records play an important role, specifically in monitoring and managing infectious and communicable diseases. Therefore, community health workers and health posts need to look for the death records from the local civil registration office that

provides guidance on the type of health intervention that need to be provided for a particular locality or community.

h. Pension administration offices

54. Accurate date of birth or age is basic requirement in properly administering pension allowances and determination of whether the person has reached pension age or not. Due to the absence of accurate age data, in most African countries pension administration uses unreliable age and other judgmental personal identity particulars. Absence of accurate age data also affects the identification of dependents of deceased employees that are eligible for pension allowance. Similarly, testifying presence or dissolution of marriage has huge impact in processing and administering pension allowances of deceased spouses. Therefore, pension administration offices should look for conventionally prepared birth, death, marriage and divorce records that would adequately address personal and legal evidences in determining the right beneficiaries of pension allowances and provision of efficient services.

i. Land administration offices

55. Correct age or date of birth, name and filiations of children eligible for ownership of farmland in rural parts of a country in the African context is a requirement for proper management of land redistribution and administering rural land claims. Administration of land inheritance rights by individuals and family members require legal evidences that testify the presence of either marriage or divorce or childhood or parent-ship as the case maybe. Such cases could only be properly administered through the availability of conventionally recorded and prepared vital event registration system. Therefore, land administration offices operating at the local level should look for birth, death, marriage and divorce records and certificates from the local civil registration offices.

j. Election commissions and offices

56. National election commissions and offices require primarily birth records in identifying eligible individual electorates during voter's registration. Accurate date of birth or age, name, place of birth and citizenship are the basic individual data requirements in properly administering voter's registration. In addition, personal information about those individuals who have died after the last election would help in updating electoral databases for the coming election. Therefore, electoral commissions and offices should look for birth and death records and certificates or identity documents that are prepared from properly and conventionally produced vital event records.

k. Emergency and preparedness offices

57. Natural and manmade disasters have adverse effect in retrieving identity of individuals beyond the challenges in managing relief interventions and re-building infrastructures destroyed by the disaster. Birth records supported with current population register are important instruments in tracing the population affected by the disaster and in the provision of relief supports for the different population groups. Children and women are the primary victims in such natural and manmade disasters that makes it necessary for the relief, emergency and preparedness offices or agencies to be able to access to birth, death and marriage registration records from the local civil registration offices.

l. National Statistics Offices

58. NSOs are the primary users of civil registration records and also co- implementers of civil registration management and operation activities. Birth and death registration records are the conventional data sources for the generation of demographic and health statistics on a continuous and permanent basis. In addition, marriage and divorce records are the sources for the production of various marriage and divorce indices and statistical tabulations. Hence, NSOs are the primary users of the individual registration records that need to closely liaise with local as well as higher level civil registration offices for timely release and ensuring the quality of registered data.

m. Universities and research institutions

59. Universities and research institutions are the major users of the records and the compiled statistics for various study and research undertakings. These regional and national institutions should re-orient their research agenda towards using national data and play an active role in building the capacity of civil registration offices and NSOs at national and sub-national levels.

2.3.2 Attitudinal change towards using appropriate evidences and procedures in public service provisions

60. In the majority of African countries, public service institutions have developed alternative or provisional procedures in public service undertakings to compensate for the absence of adequate civil registration records. For instance, schools are looking for baptism certificates or visual judgment mechanisms in estimating age of children in admitting in nursery or primary school levels. In the majority of cases, such practices are being taken as traditional norms in administering and managing the services. Improving civil registration systems in Africa requires a thorough understanding of the norms and practices of evidence or information requirements and use in public and private sector service rendering institutions vis-à-vis the conventional

procedures that need to be followed. Civil registration authorities should collaborate with NSOs in creating awareness and educating these institutions about the difference between alternative practices and conventional procedures and their implication and effects on the efficiency and quality of the services. They should also be able to persuade these institutions in supporting the improvement of civil registration system that would benefit them by providing legal and appropriate registration records.

2.4 Improving Registration Operation and Management

61. Registration of vital events is a continuous and permanent undertaking, which requires clear procedures and accountability mechanisms at various levels of government administrations. Civil registration is a national task that needs to be governed through comprehensive national standards guided by principles set for the whole national administration. Day to day operations of registration of vital events is the duty of local administrations with supports from higher level administrative hierarchies on macro issues.

62. Civil registration is about service provision to the whole population and territory of a country. Civil registration is about dealing with interests of individuals, households, communities, specific population groups and the general public. It is also about dealing with the interest of institutions, firms and all sorts of organizations engaged in public services and administration of public affairs. Civil registration goes beyond national boundaries, where it is about dealing with emigrants and citizens residing abroad or refugees.

63. Furthermore, civil registration is about collaboration and caring for mutual interest and benefit of human beings and institutions. For instance, the civil registration organ should care about the quality of information not only for its own purpose but to the agency producing the statistics. The civil registration organ should realize that registration of births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages and divorces is about dealing with people's life that goes to the extent saving lives. For instance, through the notification of births immediately after delivery, the registrar office is expected to facilitate the accessibility of health services to the child and the mother in case of home deliveries, which is the predominant case in the African context. Registering the birth of a girl-child is about ensuring that that child's future life would not be detracted by early marriage.

64. Therefore, the guiding principle for the design and implementation of the management and operational functions of civil registration system should in principle base on the above minimum

requirements that need to be accommodated in the planning process. The above requirements are not only issues to be addressed while planning for improvement, but rather they should also be considered as long-term strategies in managing problems and challenges facing countries. A country with no or limited preparation in addressing these core operational and management requirements would enter into serious troubles that would not allow the civil registration system to improve and progress.

2.4.1 Need for comprehensive assessment on the status of civil registration

65. Any system improvement or reform initiative requires knowledge about past circumstances as well as the current status or situation the system is operating. Likewise, countries planning to engage in the improvement of their civil registration system need first to go through a comprehensive assessment exercise that helps to investigate how the system was working in the past and the current operational and management situation. Such assessment exercises if framed following scientific methods and procedures will bring pertinent background and current information on varied components of civil registration management and operational issues. Some of the core areas that need to be included in the civil registration assessment exercise include:-

- Assessment of civil registration laws – assessment questions may include about the implications of the colonial heritages on the implementation of the laws, procedures followed in updating the laws, exhaustiveness in addressing the varied beneficiaries and partners, comprehensiveness of the objectives and outcomes, the existence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and procedures, ... etc.
- Management, operation and maintenance of the registration system – this is a broad area that need to be exhaustively assessed incorporating the whole infrastructure of the registration system. The issues may include about the organizational arrangement and the operational and management procedures followed at different layers of the civil registration organ, the capacity of the system in accommodating core values and standards, collaboration, multi-purpose and multi-disciplinary requirements and harmonization needs, ... etc.
- Responsiveness of beneficiaries – one of the core assessment variables used in measuring the success of civil registration in a particular country is the level of coverage and completeness of registration of vital events on current basis. Quantified assessment variables need to be incorporated to know the status of un-registered events, late and delayed registrations and the size of the backlog. Aggregate statistics on the above

variables need to be compiled at all administrative levels, including the local administrations.

- Use of vital records – producing vital event certificates are not the end products of civil registration undertakings, rather the use of the records by the various beneficiaries should be used as key assessment variables in measuring the performance and success of a civil registration system. Detailed assessment variables and questions on the use of the records by individuals, households, communities and institutions need to be incorporated in the assessment tool.
- Interface between civil registration and vital statistics systems – one of the critical challenges most countries facing in improving civil registration lies on the lack or limited interface between the agencies undertaking the registration operation and that of the agency compiling the statistics. Conducting genuine self assessment for the civil registration authorities may seem difficult however there should be a consensus and real commitment starting at the management level to address bottle-necks or gaps in this respect. The assessment should also be comprehensive enough in addressing areas of common responsibilities as well as areas of collaboration in all aspects of the civil registration and vital statistics systems.
- Collaboration and partnership building among stakeholders – the role played by civil registration authorities in building collaboration and partnership forums and successes and challenges recorded among the different actors as well as stakeholders need to be well reflected in the assessment exercise. The assessment should not only collect such investigative information internally from the civil registration office but rather involve the stakeholders at all levels to reflect their views and critics on all aspects of the civil registration operation.

2.4.2 Organizational arrangement for civil registration at the local level

66. In principle, operations of registration of vital events are expected to be performed by the lowest administrative organ or an agency/department/ministry structurally operating at the lowest administration level of a country, whether the registration system follows centralized or decentralized administration arrangement. It is well understood that public administration arrangements and infrastructural development levels vary from one country to the other. Furthermore, organizational and structural arrangement of civil registration offices also vary, for

instance, in some African countries civil registration offices are structured under Ministry of Interior or Home Affairs, while in others under Ministry of Justice or local administration. Even in some instances, birth and death registration offices may be structured under one ministry and marriage and divorce registrations in another ministry or department. Hence, administrative and geographic arrangements of civil registration offices will vary depending on the structural arrangement of these ministries or departments or public administration offices. Such variations in administrative arrangements of civil registration offices are the results or reflections of the unique characteristics of each specific country public administrative structure that need to be accommodated as inherent characteristics of civil registration management and operation. However, in all these organizational and administrative variations there is one commonly shared and principally agreed requirement that need to be respected in all civil registration organizational arrangements. That requirement refers to the need for the actual registration operations to be administered by the lowest administrative unit or the branch of the respective ministry or department instituted at the lowest administrative hierarchy.

67. The reference or starting point for devising civil registration organizational structure in any country need to base on the structural arrangement of the local administration of that particular country. The organizational arrangement of civil registration system should also be guided by the operational and service requirements that need to be provided to individuals, households and communities. The local civil registration offices/units or focal persons as the case maybe, should be instituted within the premises of the lowest local administrations or branch of government department/ministry. Though, such organizational arrangements are being taken as the norms and the guiding principles in devising institutional arrangements for civil registration, however, in the majority of African countries existing public administration infrastructures have not been instituted to allow the civil registration structure to base itself in such communal level arrangements.

i) Where and who should do the recording operation?

68. As indicated above, a country looking for improved and strengthened civil registration system needs to work towards devolving the operations and services of civil registration organs to the community they are intending to serve. Devolving civil registration services and hence the organs to the community does not necessarily imply creation of new public administrative infrastructures for the sake of civil registration operations alone. Organizational and structural devolution of civil registration should be taken as integral part of the holistic decentralization and public service reform engagements of governments. Devolution of civil registration organs and services to the community could not be treated in isolation or without concomitant public

administration reform programs, specifically from the service delivery point of view. Therefore, vital event registration activities and services has to be done in those public administration organs that are instituted at the grassroots levels accessible for any member of the community, within reasonable walking distance and time needed to reach the service point. It may also be needed to put extra efforts to further minimize the time needed and distance required to reach to the service points by availing efficient services and provision of extra registration services, such as mobile registration units and other information technology supported services.

69. Delineation of the boundaries and sizes of the catchment areas of each local civil registration office or unit need to be decided considering various criteria's such as the population size, settlement pattern, availability of infrastructure and other local conditions. Furthermore, delineation of registration catchment areas at the local level needs to follow the pattern and boundaries of public administration structures. In the African context, in some or most countries, it may sometimes be difficult to find a well defined public administration unit with well delineated boundaries and necessary staff and structure below for instance district levels. In such situations, lack of such lower level administrative infrastructure would counteract the proper delineation of registration catchment areas as per the necessities of civil registration operation.

70. Registration of vital events is the responsibility of the state. Civil registration should be considered as one branch of public service activity and duty of the state machinery. It should be treated as any of the other public service branches that pass through the routine public fiscal resource allocation processes, accommodating the necessary manpower, logistics and financial resources. Hence, the state is required to establish the necessary institutional infrastructure and also need to assign the required manpower that would handle the duties and services of civil registration. Assigning registration manpower to a specific registration office or unit depends primarily on the registration workload expected in that particular catchment area. The primary input used in measuring registration workloads in a particular civil registration catchment area is the number of expected vital events occurring per specific time period. Therefore, average expected number of births, deaths, marriages or divorces estimated for a specific time period, usually a year could be used as major input in estimating the number of person-months or years required for the nation as well as for each of the registration localities. In most instances, there may not be up to date population census estimates on the size and distribution of the population for each geographic areas that may need to make efforts to estimate for the first years from available sources and then update using the registered data as the registration progress.

71. Vital event recording operations need to be conducted by a trained public service employee of the local public administration or agency/ministry/department responsible for civil registration at the local level. Assignment of local civil registrars needs to be guided by local conditions following established procedures of civil service personnel recruitment and administration system. The duties and responsibilities of the local registrar should be defined based on nationally agreed principles and standards of civil registration and vital statistics operation and management arrangements. The duties and responsibilities should also reflect and accommodate local conditions and specific working and living circumstances of communities in the local registration area. The local registrar is the single most important individual that shoulders the bulk of the responsibility in operating and managing the civil registration activity at the local level.

72. In the majority of African remote rural settings, there would be a problem of finding literate persons to recruit from the local community to handle the operations of civil registration activities. In such situations, the state has the responsibility to make the necessary arrangements in assigning the required manpower to do the registration activity. Assigning a registrar to do civil registration activities alone in a specific local area may need a thorough analysis and critical review of its cost-effectiveness considering all accessibility criteria's of the registration operation. In some cases there may be a need to integrate civil registration operations with other public administration services, such as, issuance of identifications, health services or other public services conducted at the community level.

ii) Accountability to higher level hierarchies: who cares and demands for vital event records

73. As presented in previous sections, civil registration is a state duty and the operations of registration of the events should be conducted by local governments at the lowest level of administrations or branches of government departments or ministries operating down to the lowest administrative units. On the other hand, individuals and households also take the major part of the registration duty in reporting the events on a timely basis. Mobilizing these varied actors towards common targets in a proper and integrated manner will determine the success or failure of the whole national civil registration management and operation. The primary driving force for these varied actors to work in harmony to a common goal is the interest and benefit vested in the civil registration records. Local governments irrespective of the government administrative arrangement, that is, centralized or decentralized, are expected to benefit from the civil registration system as the system provides critical individual and aggregate information for the day-to-day management and operation in all sectors of the local government administration.

Likewise, as discussed in the beginning of this guideline, individuals and households are the primary beneficiaries as the official certificates are the incentives that urge them to report and register the events. Therefore, from the highlights presented above, it is so obvious that the major actors for the success of the national civil registration system lie on these bodies interacting at the lowest administrative units. A country initiating civil registration reform and improvement programme needs to base its investigative research on the problems and challenges of the systems at the lowest administrative levels targeting the operations of the key actors indicated above.

74. Civil registration records and the compiled statistical information is a major public good to administrations operating at higher levels of the government administrative hierarchy. The individual records operate and provide services in all the justice system administration and also lend itself to various social sector government departments. Due to the multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary nature and services of civil registration, varied organizational and accountability practices are in existence in the various African countries. In most parts of Africa, Ministry of Interior, Justice or Home Affairs take the custodianship of management and operation of civil registration. Giving the national civil registration management and operation mandates to any of the above ministries or departments may not be the source of the major challenges in improving the systems in the majority of the countries. In most instances, the source of the problem lies on the level of harmony existing between the local and the national civil registration organ.

75. The basic question that should be asked and be addressed in deciding the question of accountability to the various layers of administrations or government departments/ministries should be: who cares and demands for vital event records? It is not enough for any ministry or department to list down the relevance and importance of the records to its established mandates or functions, rather the most important aspect to be considered should be how much these institutions care and hence demand for the records in their day-to-day management and operational undertakings. From the multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary nature of civil registration these all government ministries/departments and others may equally claim the relevance of the records to their mandates. Therefore, such questions should be brought to the experts that deal with the improvement and reform programmes to further investigate the merits and demerits considering international principles and national contexts, specifically basing on local conditions and linkages of the records to the various government bodies.

2.4.3 How to determine the appropriate registration method and procedure

76. Conventionally, informants are expected to report vital events within the prescribed time period to the local registration office. In such passive registration arrangements, governments are simply expected to avail the civil registration service by opening registration offices in the most accessible way and aware and educate the public to register the event on time. Implementing fully passive registration method requires the government or the registration agency to continuously educate the public about the importance and availability of the service until reporting of vital events become a culture in the society. In addition, public institutions that provide services using civil registration records, such as, the courts, police and other justice administration bodies, health and education administrations and local public administrations should also be fully engaged in using the records in their day-to-day transactions with the public. Hence, for the civil registration to be passive, at least these above conditions should be placed fully at all levels of the public administration hierarchy.

77. The passive registration method is the conventional and cost-effective registration approach that needs to be targeted for a country moving towards current and complete civil registration system. However, in the majority of African countries, the requirements indicated above for the registration to be passive are not available hence these countries cannot move directly to passive registration approach. These countries may need to devise a transitional program, where they prepare the groundwork that will enable them to maintain sustainable reporting and registration mechanism. As indicated above, the primary measures that need to be taken in improving the responsiveness of the public and the institutions linked to service delivery activities using civil registration records are to upgrade their knowledge to the level where they act spontaneously without much intervention from the registration offices. These minimum requirements should be met for a country to transit to passive registration approach. Though, the practices we see in various countries have not been designed based on the above premises, there are efforts going on in taking remedial actions in filling the gaps on the knowledge and responsiveness of the public in reporting and registering vital events by installing active registration approach, which refers to registering events through canvassing method. Active registration approach should be seen as interim, transitory or supplementary measure that help the civil registration operation to promote to a higher and convention registration approach, that is, passive registration approach. When civil registration operation remains in active mode for an extended period of time, then that will lead the system to a costly exercise and further causes stagnation in its progress towards complete levels of registration.

78. In some literatures, passive and active registration approaches are treated as two optional roads or techniques of reporting and registering vital events. Such treatment of optional or alternative approaches will lead to misleading understanding of the concept and method of registration. Therefore, here active registration is treated as an interim and transitional intervention in moving the system to passive registration approach.

i) Level of demand for vital event records: determinant to the type of registration method to follow

79. The decisive factor for a country to move directly to passive registration or to pass through an active registration approach is the level of demand created in using the records in the public domain as well as responsiveness of service rendering institutions in using the records in their daily transactions. A country should be able to conduct a thorough review of these situations on national scale as well as at different sub-divisions to decide on how to move to fully passive registration approach. It is so obvious that in the majority of African countries, public awareness about the values and importance of registration records has not reached a level that would transit the registration system to a passive registration mode. Likewise, public service institutions expected to use the records for various purposes have not transformed their service delivery system to the level where it demands the records as an evidentiary sources in their daily transactions. Therefore, most African countries are expected to pass through the active registration approach to transit to a passive registration mode.

ii) Evidentiary power of records: determinant in deciding time allowed for registration

80. One of the key features and requirements in reporting and registering vital events is keeping its timeliness. It is customary for civil registration laws to indicate the time needed or allowed to report and register a vital event by the informant. One of the major implications of the need for keeping timeliness of reporting and registering vital events is for ensuring the evidences generated meet the stringent legal requirements of producing *prima facie* documents. The civil registration system should give high priority and place strong monitoring tool in keeping its products relevant to its users by installing procedures that ensure the quality and timeliness of the evidences produced. Therefore, the evidentiary power of vital records is the major determinant factor in deciding the time needed to report and register vital events, which in turn needs further understanding on how the various factors contribute to these conditions.

iii) *How to treat late and delayed registration*

81. According to the UN guidelines, late registration refers to the registration of a vital event after the legally specified time period but within the grace period. The grace period is usually considered to be one year following the occurrence of the event. On the other hand, delayed registration is the registration of a vital event after the grace period has expired. In the majority of African countries, the legally stipulated time period for registering a vital event is usually less than 30 days. However, due to various contributing factors the size of vital events recorded on a timely basis as per the provisions of the laws is very low and that is why in most instances civil registration remained inadequate. Hence, the volume of late and delayed registration existing in the system is the primary indicator in measuring and assessing the level of performances of the systems and a measure whether the system is in track towards complete civil registration system. It is unavoidable to get late or delayed registered events in any civil registration system, however, one should expect in a properly functioning system a consistent and sustainable decline in the number and size of late and delayed registrations, which otherwise implies that the system is still in a problem. Therefore, the size and distribution of late and delayed registrations should be taken as key measures in measuring the performance and monitoring of the success of improvement or reform programmes.

iv) *Who should be the local registrar?*

82. Considering the varied civil registration organizational arrangements we see in Africa it may be difficult to propose who the local registrar should be; as such decisions could only be made based on country specific situations. However, one can draw general guidance on the possible alternatives in identifying local registrars that fit to the requirements, principles and standards of civil registration management and operations in Africa. Accordingly, here we will deal with the minimum national requirements that a local registrar should qualify in managing the operations and services of civil registration in a specific country. It may also be important to treat differently urban and rural settings as they have huge disparity in the African context. As was indicated in the previous sections, local registrars are expected to be public servants with defined terms of employment contract with a government agency/department in charge of civil registration. There are instances where non-civil servants are being assigned as local registrars in situations where there is no proper public administration infrastructure in the locality. There is also confusion in the differences between informants and registrars, where in some instances informants assume the responsibility of registrars. Civil registrars are civil servants or persons legally assigned to serve as registrars as per the provisions of civil registration laws, whereas informants are individuals or institutions required to report to local civil registration offices

about the occurrence of a vital event in their jurisdiction. The civil registration law is expected to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of these two key actors of civil registration systems.

83. Local registrars are expected to qualify some minimum educational qualifications that would enable them to have the appropriate capacity in filling the registration forms and in preparing the certificates. The decision on the minimum educational level required for a registrar highly depends on national circumstances and the complexity of the information that would be administered by the specific registrar. In the majority of cases, registration documents are expected to be prepared in simple formats that can be handled by a person with equivalent educational background to an administrative assistant in the public administration system. The civil registration office should also devise alternative options in cases where there is manpower shortage by devising on the job training programs that would equip the recruits to qualify for the job.

84. Local registrars are preferred to be residents of the community they are serving. Specifically, in countries with predominantly rural setting, it is highly advisable to give more chance for those eligible individuals resident in the particular registration catchment area, in cases where there is no established administrative structure and where there is a need to assign registration focal person. Local registrars deal with highly sensitive and delicate legal issues and handle personal information that urges personal integrity and discipline in keeping the confidentiality and safety of the information.

v) ***Local registrar: takes the primary responsibility in the civil registration system beyond filling forms***

85. The local registrar is one of the key persons taking the bulk of the responsibilities in administering the operations of civil registration system at the local level. The local registrar assumes the representation of the government in the particular community where the government vests in him/her the responsibility of ensuring that every event is registered and required legal, administrative and statistical information properly recorded and administered at that level. In the majority of cases, the local registrar takes the responsibility in ensuring that every member of the particular community has the proper knowledge and understanding about the importance and uses of the records and accordingly responds to the requirements of the registration system as per the guidance of the law as well as other relevant government directives. The local registrar might also take extra responsibilities of ensuring the responsiveness of various government and non-government bodies, including judicial bodies, public administration and sectoral institutions

engaged in service delivery activities in using the registration records in their service delivery duties.

vi) Who should be the informant?

86. The international standards provide recommendations about whom to assign as informant for the priority vital events. However, it is the local and national situation that governs the selection of appropriate informants to each specific vital event. It is customary for the civil registration law of a country to assign informants for each vital event. Most civil registration laws in Africa also incorporate provisions that refer to assigning informants. These provisions usually are taken following international norms without due consideration or proper assessment of the cultures, norms and circumstances of national and local situations. Informants, following registrars, are the primary duty bearers in the operation and management of civil registration activities and services. It is the duty of informants to report to the local civil registration office the occurrence as well as relevant information about the event and the persons involved as per the prescribed reporting time period in the law.

87. For instance, in some cultural circumstances it may not be appropriate or realistic to assign the mother as an informant where there are cultural or religious sanctions that confine the mother to stay at home during most of the current registration period. The civil registration operation should not be taken and considered as a tool to change such cultural norms of societies. In such situations other options should be investigated that would not indulge the civil registration operation into contradictions to the societal cultures and norms that may need or call other public interventions from the appropriate government and non-government organs. Similarly, assigning informants in reporting deaths also require taking conscious measures that would not counteract to the purposes and services of civil registration. However, such measures and considerations of cultural and local circumstances should not compromise, primarily, the timely reporting and registration of the events.

2.4.4 Record keeping, documentation and transfer

88. One of the very basic identifying characters of civil registration is the huge documents produced by the system. Civil registration refers to the whole population and territory of a country. The system records and documents all births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages, divorces and complementary events occurring in a country. The system works continuously and documents are produced on continuous and permanent basis. These whole documents have to be documented as originals and copies and are required to be transferred to the various levels of the

administrative hierarchy. These characteristics of the system were in existence in the past 200 years in the world where the contemporary developed countries have managed and maintained the system in those years. The contemporary developed countries have managed these huge tasks without the support of the information technology facilities that we are endowed in this information age. Record keeping, documentation and transfer of the records from the local registration offices to the center and to the various levels of the administrative structure were the major challenges to the contemporary developed countries in those past years. Africa and the rest of the developing world should strategize information technology solutions for managing and improving efficiencies of recording, documentation and transfer operational activities of civil registration systems.

i) The difference between keeping register records and filing papers

89. Civil registration records primarily are legal documents that will be maintained and kept for generations to come. The information maintained in the registers refers about people and the facts associated about their identity, existence, non-existence and their legal status. Lose and disappearance of such information will have huge implication in a person's life as it affects the rights and privileges of individuals and citizens. Therefore, keeping registration records should be seen differently from filing or shelving administrative or technical papers. This implies that keeping and documenting registration records requires well mapped and systematized standards and procedures that would ensure the maintenance, permanence and efficient retrieval of the information for various purposes.

ii) Record documentation: need for combination of efficiency and confidentiality

90. As indicated above, a huge number of registration records depending on the size of the population will be produced every day in a country. The civil registration office at each level of the administrative structure is expected to sort out, classify and archive each of these documents in a manner that would facilitate retrieval and use of the documents on a daily basis. The efficiency of the registration office highly depends on its management capacity and specialization in documenting the records created and those flowing continuously to its archive. Confidentiality is the other component of record documentation that needs to be integrated in the whole system of archiving. As per the provisions of the law, the civil registration office should make necessary preparations in creating categorical indexing of documents for keeping the confidentiality of records. For instance, information registered about the causes of death of an individual may need extra documentation arrangements as compared to other record variables. In such situations, the civil registration office should make reference to those variables and prepare

clear guidelines how and where they should be documented and conditions need to be fulfilled for retrieval and use of such documents.

iii) *Record transfer: to whom, why, which type and by when?*

91. Civil registration records are required to be transferred to the various levels of administrations and agencies/departments/ministries to serve different purposes. Major products of the civil registration system are the vital event certificates, the registration records and the vital statistics information. The source of all the certificates, the records and the statistics is the local civil registration office. The national and regional civil registration offices as the case maybe should devise a workflow that shows the different channels and processes records transfer and transmit to the various bodies within and outside the civil registration structure. The workflow for the record transfer should start from the local registration office and should reflect the process and the document flow all the way to the center. The workflow is expected to serve as a guiding tool for all transactions and needs to be updated and reviewed at all times.

iv) *Role of Information Technology (IT) in record capturing, keeping, documentation and transfer*

92. Countries in the developed world are taking advantages of information technology developments in improving and transforming their civil registration and vital statistics systems to the norms and standards of the modern world. Computers and the various technology solutions linked to it are changing the operational and management traditions of civil registration that prevailed for centuries in various parts of the world. Traditionally well accustomed and acknowledged manual based registration and service provision activities have transformed into electronic-based operational procedures and systems. Likewise, IT solutions have revolutionized record keeping, documentation and transfer activities into new area of online data and information channeling systems. Using computer and communication technology, huge volumes of registration records that used to be stored in large stores and warehouses are now handled in single desktop and mini-computers in a room. The information and communication technology has also brought huge transformation in the transfer of information and sharing of data. Various information transfer modalities and mechanisms are currently available that can be adapted to civil registration operations. These information technology options are being used widely in the developed world in facilitating the various component activities and operations of civil registration.

93. There are huge improvements in terms of cost, efficiency and availability of these technologies. The whole world is benefiting from these information technology solutions.

Applications of the technology in Africa in the field of civil registration has also started in some countries, however, most countries are still remain behind in properly and widely applying the technology solutions. It is believed that most of the challenges facing in the area of civil registration could be relieved with the support of the modern technology solutions. However, the technology alone would not produce results unless supported with skilled and qualified personnel.

3. NEED FOR KEEPING INTERFACE BETWEEN CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS

94. Civil registration operation involves simultaneous implementation of three major component functions at the local civil registration office: vital events recording, certificate issuing and reporting vital statistics information. The interface between civil registration and vital statistics systems should emanate from the local civil registration office right at the start of the civil registration operation. The local registrar should be assigned and trained to perform these functions of the civil registration operation: on the one hand to register the event and produce the legal evidences and simultaneously to prepare the vital statistics information to be transferred to the compiling agency. These functions are expected to be performed for each vital event registered in the particular civil registration office.

95. All vital event registration documents should be prepared integrating these primary functions of the registration system. Such operational arrangements require the integrity and cooperative engagement of the two component functions, which in turn urges the interface of the agencies/institutions dealing with these functions. The organizational arrangement in implementing the component functions and accordingly, keeping their interface and integration in a sustainable and institutionalized structure is the most challenging task most countries in Africa failed to do. Though interface and integration refers to a collaborative function by more than one institution, however in such arrangements there is also a need to assign and give responsibilities of each of the specific functions to the parties involved in the operations. Accordingly, the national civil registration office as one government institution is expected to take the bulk of the responsibilities at the sub-national level in operating and managing the very basic functions indicated above.

96. The civil registration office is also the custodian of all the registration instruments, including the vital statistics form, if separate from the registration form. However, the responsibilities for

preparing the different civil registration forms and data collection instruments should fall under the collaborative function aspect of civil registration operation, where the registration office and the agency(ies) dealing with the compilation of the vital statistics information should take as common responsibility ground. Once the civil registration documents are commonly prepared and agreed by the two major responsible organs, then the civil registration office own and operationalize them as per the agreed implementation modalities and procedures.

3.1 Statistics: A Tool for Keeping Civil Registration Dynamism

97. The final output of the civil registration operation is information generation. The system primarily produces individual legal evidences, aggregate administrative information, and compiled statistics. Generating these data and information through the system requires installation of systematic data or information collection, compilation and dissemination methodologies and strategies that enables in ensuring primarily the quality, timeliness, and sustainability of the data and information generated. In this respect, statistics as a discipline and the NSO as a government body mandated in the area should play the lead role in setting national standards and taking the responsibilities in guiding and ensuring the proper implementation of the standards at all levels of the civil registration operations.

98. The NSO should devise national standards and procedures on the recording, compilation and reporting of civil registration data and information for the civil registration office. It should also prepare proper national guidelines and procedures and conduct capacity building trainings on the modalities of implementation to the civil registration staff at all levels in collaboration with the civil registration office.

3.2 Civil Registration Authorities Need to Appreciate and Seek Support from Statistics

99. Civil registration authorities should appreciate the values and expertise of NSOs in data and information collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination and seek for their support in the design and preparation of registration documents and devising procedures of information documentation, transfer, processing, dissemination and information management. There is no need for the civil registration office to invest extra resources in these aspects of the civil registration operation while the expertise is available in another government department. On the other hand, the NSO should take these activities as part of its usual duties at least for its own sake as it enables it to receive qualified vital statistics from the civil registration system. It is

therefore a matter of communication and mutual support, which at the end benefits both institutions from the civil registration system.

3.3 National Statistics Offices Need to Develop Knowledge and Competence in Flow Statistics

100. It is well understood that NSOs deal with all types of statistics data collection, compilation and dissemination activities. However, in most African countries there are limitations in expertise and staff in some statistics fields. Civil registration and vital statistics is among those fields with scarce qualified manpower. As indicated in previous sections, civil registration is a continuous and permanent information generating system that produces data and information on a broader scale for various users and stakeholders. Unlike, other statistics undertakings, such as, censuses and sample surveys that usually refer to data collection within a brief period, civil registration is an information generation business that works on a continuous and permanent basis covering the whole residents and territory of a country. Hence, the system generates statistics on a current, continuous and permanent manner. In addition, the multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary nature of the system's operation and management contributes to the complexity and challenges facing implementing agencies to comprehend and respond to the varied data users interest that need to be served at the same-time on a continuous basis.

101. The above briefly presented issues urge NSOs to put extra-efforts in building their capacities in the development of coherent and integrated data collection and management methodologies and techniques and in providing the necessary and all round support for the civil registration office and other stakeholders. In this respect, the primary measure the NSO should take will include preparing highly skilled and conversant national staff in UN guidelines and technical documents that needs to be used as guiding tool for all civil registration and vital statistics operations and management in the specific country.

4. ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS IN IMPROVING CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

102. Though the multi-sectoral nature of civil registration has implications on the complexity of the technical and operational aspects of the system implementation, however, on the other spectrum it has a huge advantage as its gives a wider room in mobilizing support from various partners. As it was discussed in the previous sections of this guideline, civil registration records deal with individual rights and privileges highly linked with a country's legal and judicial

system. It also deals with varied social and public administration and service provision issues and statistical data and information generation that include measurement, monitoring and evaluation of national as well as sectoral policies and programmes. The vital statistics produced from the civil registration system is also the basis in measuring and monitoring many of the health and demographic related MDG indicators and targets.

103. These above different dimensions of civil registration and vital statistics intervention areas have varied implications to the activities of the various national, regional and international organizations engaged in supporting a particular country. For instance, in the UN system, UNICEF has a big stake in relation to children and women rights and protection issues from individual as well as statistical data availability perspectives. Likewise, UNFPA has a big role in supporting the improvement of vital statistics data generation programmes and activities that would in turn require ensuring the proper functioning of civil registration system. WHO is the other UN agency that has a big role in supporting countries in the improvement of causes of death recording and generation of associated statistics. There are other regional and international organizations working within as well as outside the UN system that would contribute and support national initiatives in the various operational and management components of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

104. It should be noted here that the operation and management of civil registration should be owned and led by the country. Any support coming from outside the government machinery should be treated as supplementary addition to the resources allocated from the government treasury. The responsible government institution(s) managing the civil registration as well as the vital statistics systems should build-up their technical and organizational capacities in leading and managing the whole implementation process. Therefore, the national civil registration office and the NSO need to integrate their resources and shoulder the huge responsibilities in coordinating and managing the flow of technical, financial and logistics resources in support of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

4.1 Identifying Capacity Gaps: Which once are Beyond the National Capacity?

105. The civil registration authority/office is expected to have a comprehensive strategic and implementation plan or action plan, either medium or long-term on the operation and management of civil registration in a country. The plan is expected to include capacity issues and resource requirements detailing the gaps, constraints and also indications on the strategies on filling the resource gaps: human, finance and logistics. The plan need also to reveal which

component activities or resource gaps could be filled by whom and the modalities of implementation.

4.2 Which Development Partner to which Capacity Gap?

106. As indicated above, it may not be enough just to show the type and extent of the resource gap or the list of development partners in the strategic or implementation plan. The civil registration office may need to show and link the resource gap with development partners envisaged to support or fill the gaps. The development partners that would involve or intervene in filling the resource gaps varies from country to country depending on the type of organizations present in the country and the relevance of civil registration or vital statistics systems to their mandates. Therefore, the civil registration office and the institution(s) dealing with the compilation of vital statistics should come together to work on the partner-capacity gap matrix.

4.3 Need for Responsibility and Intervention Limits

107. As presented above civil registration and vital statistics is the state duty. Any external support outside the government system should be seen as supplementary input that would be used to fill the resource gap. However, in some instances there is dependency as well as externalizing the responsibility of civil registration management and operation to agencies and institutions outside the government structure. In some instances, the major resource required for the civil registration may be supported from external development partners however that need not lead to long-term dependence and also transferring the responsibility and leadership to these development partners. The national institution(s) mandated in civil registration and vital statistics should have a long-term strategy in building their capacities in leading and owning the process and in raising and managing core resource requirements from the government treasury.

4.4 Ensuring Sustainability and Contribution to Permanence

108. Permanence and sustainability are among the basic requirements of civil registration system. Any external intervention beyond its project or program life is expected to contribute to the sustainability and permanence of the registration system in a country. Civil registration authorities are the primary responsible organs that ensure alignment of external interventions to these basic characteristics of the system. Civil registration reform and improvement programmes are expected to mainstream these basic characteristics across all component activities of the registration system. Development partners should consult and work closely with civil registration

offices at each stage of the reform and improvement programme, among others, in developing the plans and programmes, preparing various manuals, forms and other registration instruments and also in devising monitoring and evaluation techniques and procedures.

5. CONCLUSION

109. The preparation of this operational guideline on improving the coverage and completeness of civil registration systems in Africa was initiated as per the recommendation of the Dar-es-Salaam regional workshop that was convened in June 2009. The guideline is the first attempt in identifying, presenting and addressing problems and challenges of improving the coverage and completeness of civil registration systems in the African context. The guideline emphasized the need for launching comprehensive civil registration reform programme and improvement plan in the majority of African countries. Considering past practices and current prevailing situations, the guideline questioned the capacity and orientation of most civil registration authorities in managing such holistic reform undertakings. Among others, advance preparations, readiness and commitment on the part of civil registration offices and the interface established with the respective NSOs were taken as prerequisites in advancing the reform and improvement programme. The success in creating demand for civil registration records among key users and beneficiaries of civil registration products was also taken as key strategic measure that need to be taken in ensuring the proper execution of the reform programme. The need for parallel developments in facilitating the use of the records, primarily by key government service delivery institutions at the community and higher level administrations was proposed to be taken as critical preparatory measure in improving civil registration system in a country.

110. The guideline proposed countries to conduct comprehensive assessment of the status and situation of civil registration and vital statistics systems before launching reform programmes. The assessment is suggested to be planned jointly with the NSO and be conducted with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. The assessment tool is expected to include major functions and activities of both civil registration and vital statistics systems. Availability of public administration structures near to the people and the communities and devolution of key public service sectors based on the principles and procedures of decentralization were taken as pre-conditions in improving the coverage and completeness of civil registration system in a country. Based on these premises, the guideline reflected some key organizational issues and factors that need to be considered and addressed in determining organizational arrangements and manpower requirements of local level civil registration operations. Level of demand for vital event records in a country was suggested to serve as a determining factor in deciding the type of registration approach to follow. Likewise, evidentiary power of registration records was

proposed to serve as determinant factor in deciding the time needed or allowed for registering vital events. The need for mapping the workflow and devising clear operational procedures for record keeping, documentation and transfer of the bulk documents produced by civil registration systems was proposed to be treated as key area in reforming the systems. In this respect, it was suggested to take advantage of using available IT solutions in improving efficiency and effectiveness of record capturing, documentation and transfer of data and information.

111. The guideline gave strong emphasis to capacity building that would result in producing sufficient civil registration staff conversant in the techniques, operations and management of civil registration systems following the UN guidelines. Accordingly, key staff of registration offices should be trained on the UN handbooks and serve as cadres of change in their countries. National civil registration authorities and NSOs are referred in shouldering the responsibility in building the national capacity that would enable the country in leading and owning the operation and management of civil registration system. The need for re-orienting the role of development partners in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems and ensuring their contribution towards permanence and sustainability emphasized. The guideline proposed the need for the development of systematic national monitoring and evaluation mechanism and devising appropriate measurement tools for tracking progress in the coverage and completeness of civil registration systems.