



7th Africa Symposium on Statistical Development

Lagoon Beach Hotel
Cape Town, South Africa
18 – 20 January 2012

**Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and
Vital Statistics Systems (APAI-CRVS)**

*“Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Institutional and Human
Infrastructure”*

Draft (revised)

Concept Note

(Sponsors’ Logos)

1. Background and Justification

The 6th Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD) that was held in Cairo, Egypt from 31 October to 2 November 2010 adopted a resolution that shifted its focus area from Population and Housing Census (PHC) to Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)¹ systems for the next five symposia beginning 2012. Accordingly, the 7th ASSD will be the first in the series to be convened focusing on CRVS. The 7th ASSD will be held in Cape Town, South Africa from 23 to 25 January 2012 back to back with the 3rd meeting of the Statistics Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa III) conference.

The first Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration that was held from 13-14 August 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia culminated in a set of declarations reflecting the need to address critical political and policy issues on reforming and improving CRVS systems in Africa. The conference gathered over 40 Ministers responsible for Civil Registration from the region and representatives of civil registration offices, national statistics offices and regional and international organizations. The 6th ASSD in its resolution took note of the ministers' statement that emanated from the first conference and called upon the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and Health Metrics Network (HMN) to work with countries for deployment of existing standards associated with the collection and processing of PHC and CRVS-related data.

Civil registration is the conventional source for the generation of continuous and complete vital statistics that provides key health and demographic statistics, including many of the Millennium Development Goal (MGD) indicators. Furthermore, civil registration produces various legal and administrative information/documents that are the basis for acknowledging and safeguarding basic human rights, including children's and women's rights. Civil registration also provides critical information required for the implementation of decentralization and democratization processes currently in progress in most African countries. Despite the importance accorded to the system, almost all African countries lack adequate CRVS systems.

¹ Vital events considered in the registration system include live birth, death, foetal death, marriage, divorce, annulment of marriage, judicial separation of marriage, adoption, legitimization and recognition. Birth, death, marriage and divorce events comprise the priority vital events required by countries to be registered and the statistics to be produced in a continuous and permanent basis.

1.1 Past efforts and challenges in improving CRVS systems in Africa

UNSD has been engaged in preparing international standards, principles and recommendations in support of national efforts in improving CRVS systems since the early 1950s. The earliest versions gave more emphasis to vital statistics with limited attention to civil registration and the situation in the developing countries. However, the revised versions of CRVS handbooks that were prepared starting early 1990s broadened their content and purpose by addressing CRVS system in a comprehensive and integrated manner. In all these developments the different UN organizations at the headquarters level were taking the lead in promoting the systems and managing interventions at regional and country levels as part of the global programme for accelerated improvement of CRVS systems. Regional organizations, including ECA were passively involved as facilitators for the interventions coming from international programmes without region specific initiatives and programmes.

Although the UNSD had made tremendous efforts in improving international standards and principles, much of the knowledge and resource materials produced by the division has not percolated to the country level to serve the purpose. Most countries in Africa were either unaware of the existence of these international guidelines or have not seriously taken them as reference materials in implementation of their CRVS system. In addition, UNFPA and UNICEF interventions in promoting CRVS systems in countries through either their HQs or country offices were not necessarily designed in line with the international standards and principles. The CRVS practices and operations in most countries are still based on colonial laws and processes which are largely in variance to the international standards and principles.

1.2 The new regional CRVS initiative

In 2009, the ECA and AfDB co-organized the first regional workshop titled “Strengthening CRVS Systems in Africa” that brought the two main national actors of the component functions of CRVS: Civil Registration Authorities (CRAs) and National Statistics Offices (NSOs). The recommendation from the regional workshop set the technical, operational and policy directives for the regional initiative and modalities for implementing the various regional and national level activities. Among the core policy directives proposed to be followed in the regional initiative “ensuring country ownership and leadership” took prominent position. The workshop urged member countries to obtain firm political commitment and requested the three premier

regional organizations to organize a conference of ministers responsible for civil registration within a year.

The new regional CRVS initiative is anchored on the following major strategic directives:

- Promoting country ownership and leadership
- Promoting integration among CRAs and NSOs: conceptual as well as operational
- Promoting systematic and coordinated approaches for developing regional plan followed by country plans
- Constituting strong regional policy and advocacy fora
- Building capacities of national CRVS focal institutions
- Promoting partnership at country and regional levels
- Strengthening the regional CRVS secretariat at the ECA

Following the above core strategic directives various preparatory activities were conducted in the past two years, the majors ones being listed below:

- Organized the first Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration and preparations for organizing the 2nd conference in progress
- Mainstreamed CRVS in regional statistics fora – the second session of the African Statistics Commission (StatCom-Africa II) recognized the regional initiative and recommended follow-up actions. ASSD committed to promote CRVS in its coming five symposia
- Established regional CRVS Core Group involving key regional and international organizations which is effectively functioning
- Prepared conceptual and technical resource materials and conducted expert group meetings
- Prepared and endorsed regional CRVS medium-term plan and implementation in progress
- Conducted region-wide comprehensive CRVS assessment study and report preparation in progress
- Development of web-based CRVS monitoring database system in progress

The activities accomplished from mid-2009 to 2011 were focused on awareness creation, mobilization of commitment and development of technical and methodological materials as per the directives of the new regional CRVS initiative.

Activities planned for 2012 and 2013 would also focus on strengthening past achievements and preparation for region-wide operations.

The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) emerged from the necessity of encompassing the various CRVS undertakings in a consolidated policy and advocacy framework. The regional Programme is developed based on the premises of the international standards, principles and recommendations of CRVS and following holistic and inclusive approach that anchor on the regional CRVS core strategic directives. The Programme recognizes the socio-economic and political diversities of African countries which urge for a more decentralized approach that promote and enhance indigenous knowledge and creativity in resolving problems and challenges of improving CRVS systems keeping in view the country context.

1.3 Role of institutions compiling national vital statistics: past practices and future directions

Civil registration by its nature is a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary undertaking that needs to be designed to address demands, requirements and interests of various stakeholders and customers. One of the key responsibilities of civil registration authorities is to collect data on vital statistics on a timely and continuous basis. This is an integral part of civil registration operations. National institutions compiling vital statistics are also expected to provide the required technical support to the civil registration system in establishing standard technical and institutional data collection procedures that would enable the statistics sector to produce reliable and timely vital statistics at the required level of disaggregation. This shows a great deal of interdependence between CRAs and NSOs. There lies a shared responsibility among these two institutions in responding to the various services required from the civil registration system. In order to discharge these responsibilities as per the required level of competence, the civil registration authority needs to work in close collaboration with the institution responsible for compiling vital statistics. Hence, national initiatives on improving CRVS should be designed as joint undertaking of the two institutions dealing with civil registration and vital statistics.

Past practice in most African countries show loose and in most instances absence of linkages and cooperation between civil registration authorities and institutions compiling vital statistics. Civil registration laws in most African countries were developed and enacted without technical consultations and involvement of the

statistics sector. For instance, definitions of live birth, foetal death/still birth and death are not framed in reference and in line with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations². Civil registration systems established based on such laws cannot result in the production of vital statistics that satisfy national, regional and international requirements.

A country's civil registration legislation is expected to incorporate minimum or core requirements that differentiate a live birth from a foetal death. However, civil registration legislations in most countries do not incorporate those basic requirements in a definite and comprehensive manner. NSOs are supposed to be the primary responsible organs in making sure that civil registration laws are in line with the international recommendations, specifically ensuring that the data collection aspect of vital statistics properly placed in all the civil registration operation, including the legal framework. However in past practices linkage of civil registration and vital statistics was seen as simple transaction of forms; where the statistics sector design a vital statistics reporting form for the CRA to fill and send back.

One of the basic strategic pillars of the new regional CRVS initiative is promoting the integration of CRAs and NSOs in the whole management and operations of the improvement of CRVS systems. The regional initiative presumes vital statistics as the primary knowledge resource center for the civil registration system in modernizing and moving civil registration management and operations towards the international standards, principles and recommendations. Accordingly, the role of institutions compiling vital statistics in the whole civil registration system involves, among others:

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- Ensuring vital statistics concepts and definitions are integrated in the civil registration legislations, including rules, regulations and administrative directives
- Ensuring variables required for vital statistics are harmonized with the content and formats of the different registers
- Take part in the preparation of civil registration operation manuals and ensure technical and operational procedures of collecting vital statistics data properly and comprehensively addressed

² WHO recommends live birth to be defined as: *“the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of conception, irrespective of the duration of pregnancy, which after such separation, breathes or shows any other evidence of life, such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord or definite movement of voluntary muscles, whether or not the umbilical cord has been cut or the placenta is attached; each product of such a birth is considered liveborn (all live-born infants should be registered and counted as such, irrespective of gestational age or whether alive or dead at the time of registration, and if they die at any time following birth they should also be registered and counted as deaths)”* Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System; Rev 2, UN 2001.

- Take part and advise in designing operational procedures and management of the different civil registration operational activities
- Take part in the preparation of advocacy and educational materials and engage jointly in promotional activities
- Take part in introducing new and improved operations and methods of civil registration
- Develop monitoring tools and take part in follow-up studies
- Take responsibility in designing evaluation studies and lead the operations of these studies

1.4 Improving CRVS institutional and human infrastructure in Africa

In most countries civil registration institutions are seen as simple administrative branches of the government structure. There is little understanding about the value of civil registration records beyond serving as sources for issuing birth, death, marriage or divorce certificates. As described in the different documents of the new regional CRVS initiative, civil registration is about good governance and is fundamental in building modern and accountable public administration system in a country. Monitoring the civil status of individuals and managing the human capital of a country depends on the availability of systematically organized national database from reliable civil registration system that provides those most basic legal and administrative individual evidentiary documents and information about each and every subject of a country on a continuous and permanent basis. The other major area that considers civil registration as development agenda for Africa is its value as source of population dynamics and basic demographic and social indicators, including the production of many of the MDG indicators.

With increased threat perception with regard to security, more and more countries in recent years are trying to tighten their external and internal security systems and are opting to implement national identity registration systems as one of the measures towards achieving this objective. The rapidly developing ICT is playing a catalytic role in the implementation of these systems. These computerized identity databases are opening up new opportunities in promoting e-governance including service delivery of various government programmes such as health, old age pension etc. Some countries are working towards reforming their laws to provide legal sanctity to digitally created and maintained records. However sophisticated these systems are made to be, the primacy of a complete and fool-proof CRS in ensuring that the national identity system is complete and fool-proof, is yet to be recognized and fully understood by many

of these countries. There is a need to clearly lay down the processes and protocols for a new entry into and exit of a record from the database and the only way this can be achieved is by making an organic link between the national identity database and civil registration system.

Civil Registration structures in most African countries were setup without considering those comprehensive objectives and services of CRVS systems indicated above. Despite the role civil registration plays in the various sectors and national and sub-national development programmes and projects, civil registration offices in most countries are positioned under the periphery and margin of the public administration system. The same holds true for vital statistics. Most NSOs treat compilation of vital statistics as byproduct of an administrative process without giving due emphasis to its inter-linkages to the operations and management of civil registration systems. The narrowly defined roles and responsibilities of vital statistics in the civil registration system and more emphasis and preference given to indirect methods resulted in vital statistics being marginalized in the NSO organizational structures and arrangements. As a result the institutional and human infrastructure currently prevailing in most countries is highly inadequate and incompatible to the output expected from the sector.

The Symposium in its first session on CRVS decided to give priority and dwell on the institutional and human infrastructure problems and challenges as it is the primary intervention area that needs to be addressed in most countries across the region.

2. Interface between ASSD and the Ministerial Conference on CRVS

The first Ministerial conference considered CRVS as a regional policy agenda that need to be treated as one of the development challenges for the region. As per the recommendation of the conference, the 6th ASSD resolved to focus on CRVS in the coming five symposia. In order to bring more impact and coordinate the different initiatives, it was envisaged to align and interface the two regional fora working on the same issue at least for the coming five years. Accordingly, the 7th ASSD and follow-up meetings were planned to be linked to the Ministerial conferences that will be held every two years starting 2012. This exercise of linking the two regional fora was decided to be initiated from the 7th ASSD and be guided by a comprehensive roadmap.

The ASSD and the Ministerial conference are expected to feed each other. The conference is meant to be held every two years whereas the ASSD every year.

Technically, the interface between the two fora starts from the selection and assignment of focus areas or themes for the meetings. Accordingly, proposals of themes or focus areas for the ASSD and the ministerial conferences were presented to the CRVS expert group meeting held in Addis Ababa, in January 2011. The proposal indicated that the two meetings share the same focus area/theme when the ASSD overlaps with the conference year. Accordingly, the ASSD and the ministerial conference will have the same focus area in 2012, 2014 and 2016. The proposal was endorsed by the EGM and enriched through consultation with development partners. Below are the proposed focus areas/themes for ASSD meetings starting 2012.

ASSD year	Proposed Broad Theme/ focus area	Interface with Conference meetings	Venue (country)
2012	“Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Institutional and Human Infrastructure in Africa”	Same focus area with the 2 nd ministerial conference	South Africa
2013	“Standardization of Causes of Death Classifications and Statistics in Africa”		
2014	“Promoting Use of Civil Registration Records in Support of Advancing Good Governance in Africa”	Same focus area with the 3 rd ministerial conference	
2015	“Evaluating the Application of UN Principles and Recommendations on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in the African Region”		
2016	“Promoting Use of Information Technology (IT) Solutions in Improving CRVS in Africa”	Same focus area with the 4 th ministerial conference	

Below are the proposed focus areas/themes for the ministerial conferences, starting 2012 until 2020.

Conference year	Broad Theme/ focus area	Interface with ASSD meetings	Venue (country)
2012	“Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Institutional and Human Infrastructure in Africa”	Same focus area for 2012 ASSD (7 th ASSD)	South Africa
2014	“Promoting Use of Civil Registration Records in Support of Advancing Good Governance in Africa”	Same focus area for 2014 ASSD (9 th ASSD)	
2016	“Promoting Use of Information Technology (IT) Solutions in Improving CRVS in Africa”		
2018	“Evaluating the Application of UN Principles and Recommendations on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in the African Region”	Same focus area for 2016 ASSD (11 th ASSD)	
2020	“Upgrading Efficiency of Integration between Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems”		

3. Objectives

The primary objective of the 7th ASSD meeting is to address institutional and human infrastructure challenges member States facing in improving CRVS systems. Accordingly, the meeting is expected to address the following specific objectives:-

- Identify key factors contributing for the sluggish progress observed in the majority of African countries;
- Identify facilitating factors for accelerating the current regional and national initiatives of reforming and improving CRVS systems in Africa;
- Identify roles and responsibilities of NSOs in promoting regional as well as national CRVS policy decisions and intervention programmes;

- Propose measures need to be taken at policy and programme levels in harnessing the interface between national civil registration and vital statistics organs;
- Propose strategies and modalities to be followed in addressing CRVS institutional and human infrastructure challenges in Africa; and
- Endorse a roadmap for the next four symposia.

4. Expected deliverables

The 7th Symposium is expected to deliver the following:-

- Declaration specifying the commitments of CRAs and the NSOs in accelerating their efforts in reforming and improving CRVS in their respective countries in line with the regional initiative and the resolution of the conference of ministers;
- Policy statements and measures addressing bottle-necks in strengthening bilateral partnership between national civil registration authorities and vital statistics generating institutions;
- Strategies and modalities to be followed in addressing CRVS institutional and human infrastructure challenges in Africa;
- A roadmap for the next four symposia; and
- 7th ASSD resolution

5. Activities

The activities need to be dealt in organizing the 7th ASSD could be categorized into the following three sub-categories: pre-meeting activities, meeting deliberations and post-meeting activities.

The pre-meeting activities will include the following specific activities:-

- Preparing concept note and work programme;
- First meeting of focal points from lead partner organizations and host country;
- Sharing proposed task assignments;
- Undertake advocacy and resource mobilization activities;
- Invitation and arrangement of logistics; and
- Identification and communication of resource persons;

Activities during the meeting deliberation will cover primarily implementing the work programme of the meeting. Post-meeting activities refer to handling administrative

and logistics issues and preparation of reports and related activities. The organizers are expected to handle financial and logistics issues and preparation and dissemination of the meeting reports and final resolution of the meeting. The ASSD guiding manual will be referenced for the detailed activities for the organization of the symposia.

6. Organizers of the meeting

The 7th ASSD will be convened jointly with the 3rd meeting of the Statistics Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa III). The meeting is organized by the Statistic South Africa as host and Secretariat of ASSD, the ECA, AfDB and AUC. UNFPA, UNICEF, HMN, UNHCR and other development partners are providing support for the organization of the meeting.

7. Participants

The 7th Symposium is expected to bring over 300 delegates from countries, representatives from regional and international organizations and invited participants from different institutions and associations. Country delegates will be composed of heads of NSOs and CRAs and vital statistics and civil registration experts from the respective institutions and those experts dealing with death statistics from health ministries. Representatives and experts from regional and international organizations, young statisticians and representatives from regional training organizations will also attend the meeting.

8. Venue and date

The meeting will be held at the Lagoon Beach Hotel in Cape Town, South Africa, from 22 to 25 January 2012.