



APAI-CRVS
Everyone visible in Africa



**Decade for Repositioning
of Civil Registration and
Vital Statistics in Africa
2017-2026**

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**Strengthening institutional Complementarity between Civil
Registration and Identity Management**

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a. Background – Provide a background to the topic, including the status of countries on the continent in relation to the topic presented.

Current trajectories in Digital ID implementation

Many countries in the continent are advancing towards the adoption of various forms of Digital ID systems and platforms. The continental Digital transformation Strategy adopted by the AU Head of States Summit of 9 February 2020 which places Digital ID as one of the key enabling pillars for effective digital transformation to happen. Since then, the number of countries adopting digital identity systems has increased. Currently, there are more than 15 countries receiving active funding from the world bank ID4D program for implementation of one or other forms of digital Identity systems and enabling pillars such as legislations, privacy data protection as well as capacity development.

State of CRVS implementation and digitalization

As we advance within this second decade of action for improving CRVS in the continent, there is a vast space of implementation traction required for the attainment of the SDG 16.9 “by 2030 provide legal identity for all including free birth registrations”. Most countries have mechanisms in place for registering births; however, rates of birth registration vary substantially across and within countries. As the continent carrying a large volume of unregistered births globally, the advancement of this target is equally an advancement of the global target; as much the failure in attaining translates into global failure as well. There are numerous challenges affecting the advancement of Civil Registration in countries in Africa.

Out of the 383,000 children born every day globally¹, 115,000 are unregistered and 46,000 are uncertified. In Africa, out of the 107,000 children born every day, 60,000 are unregistered while another 14,000 do not get certified or do not get a certificate. The current birth registration rate in the continent is standing at 49% compared to an institutional delivery rate of 69%, where children need to be registered at birth. This gap could have been easily addressed if registration was done where children were born. Africa has an annual compounding annual rate of increase by 7% for birth's registration as it was in 2008 49% and stands at 51% in 2020. If Africa is to meet the SDG goal 16.9, the progress has to be increased by more than twenty folds.²

Zooming in on countries, there are heterogenous implementation tractions between countries. There are about 20 countries in the continent which are on

¹ <https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/a-new-solution-for-birth-registration/>

² ID4AFRICA 2022 Workshop Reports featuring UNICEF & World bank

track towards attaining the set target. These countries include Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Capo Verde, Comoros, Congo, Gabon, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, Liberia and Niger. Some countries have done well, while others have fallen behind or retrogressing. The focus giant countries with the highest population such as Nigeria, Ethiopia and DRC need further traction to be able to attain the set target. Globally, 50% of unregistered children reside in 5 countries;³ and three of these countries are in Africa; Nigeria, Ethiopia and DRC. If the continent as a whole is to make progress towards the attainment of this goal, it is critical to address these underlying differences in implementation in order to ensure the Mission 100 by 2030. Hence, this translates into advancing the progress in these three countries.

Some of the root causes of these challenges are

- Discriminatory laws and practices which date back to the colonial era and need to be reformed. For example, laws and practices preventing single and unmarried mothers from registering.
- Access and affordability Even if no fees are charged, the long distance and multiple visits required for registration make it difficult. Fees for registration, certification, or delayed delivery as well as travel costs involved make the registration process and motivation cumbersome.
- Complicated birth registration processes which include centralized nature of services as well as passive approach to notification, the lack of technological applications to addresses such challenges.
- Insufficient twinning with the health sector, which has an extensive power for supporting registration through the routine health sector data for declaration and notification.
- The lack of demand for registration in account of the utility of birth registration and certification and its actual benefits and uses.
- Most importantly, institutional set ups at countries level have not been properly structured to be able to deal with this challenge. At countries level Ministries of health where child birth and registration is taking place not properly engaging or communicating with respective registrar general offices and structures. What's more, there is no legislation that provides for collaborative framework around these issues.
- The enabling environment in regards to the legislation process that make birth registration a requirement is seen to have loopholes in many of these countries.
- Capacity is also a major issue in regard to both the skills necessary to administering Civil registration such as in the hospital and health centre as well as resources capacity necessary to see the implementation through.
- Technology required for addressing the gaps in registration and delays is also seen to be pausing a major challenge including the interoperability.

- Sensitization campaigns that continually relay the importance of registration and its benefits involving key stakeholders such as the national Statistical office, Ministries of Education and Health are scant and, in some cases, missing. These have to be backed up by political action, which is beyond political commitment and lip service only.

Similarly, death registration plays a vital role in the flow of data both in CRVS and identity management processes. The UNECA assessment on this case illustrates that in most parts of Africa, death registration lags far behind birth registration coverage. Most deaths in Africa occur outside health facilities and their causes are rarely certified by a doctor. The existing international guidelines and standards on improving civil registration do not capture this unique context in Africa, thus the need to design and adopt innovative approaches that are specific for the situation on the continent. Of the 46 member States in the World Health Organization (WHO) African region, only one country can provide high-quality cause-of-death data (Mauritius), with another three able to provide low or medium-quality data (Seychelles, South Africa and Zimbabwe). In addition, Egypt and Morocco can provide low to medium-quality cause-of-death data.³ The World Bank recently noted that lack of information on deaths and causes of death means that problems arise from using estimates, and the only way to accurately track progress will be through complete civil registration and vital statistics systems.⁴

b. Key issues and recommended approaches

Key institutional complementarities in National ID and CRVS

Civil registration is not strongly perceived as a developmental issue and target and provided equal pedestal for funding as other infrastructure and hardware priority projects in the countries. This is despite the availability of funds from development partners regionally and globally. Investment prioritizations are essential. Furthermore, the enabling institutional environment in regard to the prerequisite legislations embedded in the constitution mandating and delineating the work of CRVS with respect to complementary initiatives such as Digital or national identity management efforts.

Challenges and potential pitfalls in the way forward

Digital Identity Management systems are being implemented at a faster and stronger pace across the continent. Owing to the funding opportunities and availability of ready-made technology for such platform, the identity agenda is

⁴ https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/Statistics/CRMC3/death_registration_en.pdf

taking shape and root faster than its much-needed integration with the Civil Registration systems. This has caused CRV efforts to be seemingly left behind as a result of the lacking institutional integration necessary from the onset of all initiatives. As a result, the development of parallel initiatives and legislations creating further confusion there by diluting efforts towards attaining the Mission 100 target by 2030. This is currently evident in replicative legal and policy frameworks being developed separately for ID and DR in many countries across the continent. There is a need to address this immediately in order to not only lose momentum for the achievement of the SDG goals 16.9, but also to ensure the creation of lasting systems and legacies in both identity management and CRVS are building blocks for digital transformation and sustainable development.

Discussion points and questions:

- What are the key institutional remedies to ensure continued and effective collaboration between CR and Identity management systems at countries level?
- What are the mechanisms for improving funding for modernizing CR systems?
- How can institutional arrangement be done more complementary between CR system and Identity Management entities?