



Unedited

Sixth Conference of Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration in Africa

Issue Paper Title: *Regional practices in the production and use of civil registration based vital statistics to monitor progress of SDGs in Africa*

Paper prepared by UNFPA, AfDB and GPSD

Background

1. The SDG Target 16.9 (“legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030”) and SDG 17.19 for support to statistical capacity building in developing countries, monitored by the indicator “proportion of countries that have achieved 100 percent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration”, are key to advancing the 2030 Agenda’s commitment to leave no one behind. Twelve out of the 17 sustainable development goals require civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) data to measure their progress and 67 out of the 232 sustainable development goals (SDG) indicators could be completely or partially calculated using data from the CRVS system. Collecting and disseminating real-time vital statistics and cause-of-death information would not only help in monitoring progress towards the achievements of the SDGs, but also the African Agenda 2063 and national development frameworks. Indeed, a functional CRVS system is uniquely positioned to provide legal and administrative advantages for individuals as well as statistical benefits to most sectors of the economy.
2. Since 2012, most African countries have embarked on improving their civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems. Many of these countries have achieved noteworthy improvement in their civil registration systems. However, the development of register-based vital statistics is still in its nascent stage. In establishing or improving a vital statistics system, the UN recommends that it should ensure the registration of live births and deaths including causes of deaths, and marriages and divorces. The African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration have also echoed these recommendations in the previous conferences held to monitor progress of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of CRVS (APAI-CRVS).
3. The assessments on CRVS undertaken by UNECA, UNFPA and other partners show that only a few countries in Africa have managed to maintain an almost universal registration system that meets international standards. Notwithstanding the fact that CRVS in Africa has improved in recent years, the availability of reliable register-based vital statistics remains low in most of the countries. The status of the civil registration system has direct influence on the register-based vital statistics. The better the completeness of

coverage and the accuracy of data items collected within the time allowed by law, the more trusted will be the CRVS as a source of vital statistics. It is important for the agencies responsible for the production of vital statistics to recognize CR as an important source of statistics and commit to work with the CRVS agency on every step of the vital events business processes from the drafting of notification forms to the sharing of data and production of CRVS reports. While a low performing CRVS system could take several years on a maturity pathway to realize its full potential, improved investments in the CRVS system today can help countries to harvest significant statistical benefits in the short to medium term.

4. The main challenges faced by the register-based vital statistics in Africa as are: Information collection, correctness of contents and confidentiality; availability of vital statistics: supply-driven usage of vital statistics; user-producer dialogue; responsibility of users; complementarity of different sources of vital statistics; and almost non-existent statistics on marriage and divorce.

5. What has come out clearly from assessments of CRVS in the continent is the need to support countries in bridging the gap between what is currently available and users' data needs and strengthening statistics and indicators for monitoring national and international development plans. Given the broad scope of the SDGs, almost all countries are not in a position to report on many of the indicators and targets. To achieve this, a multi-year strategy for statistical capacity development is needed for each country, based on an adequate mix of national commitments and external technical and financial support.

6. Strategic areas that member states and the African Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI CRVS) partners could focus their capacity-building efforts in Africa on include the following: -

1. Methodological guidance through training and professional advice on the implementation of international standards and analytical capabilities, including on a number of thematic areas such as gender statistics;
2. Development of appropriate institutional arrangements within the national statistical offices (NSOs) by setting up a division or unit solely responsible for the collection, processing and dissemination of register-based vital statistics, where it does not exist;
3. Supporting coordination and training efforts within the CR domain and the national statistical systems so that lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic could be institutionalized, and CRVS systems could respond to any future emergency situations easily and generate real-time statistics for informed decision making;
4. Adoption of modern technologies and systems for data collection, processing and dissemination;

5. Laying the ground for population registers, where work has not started and strengthening the existing ones; and
6. Supporting the development of capabilities to collect, compile and disseminate marriage and divorce statistics, which at this stage are lagging behind in comparison to birth and death statistics.

Objective of the session

7. The main objective of this session is to share the global and regional practices as well as the status of vital statistics in Africa. This includes focusing on factors influencing the completeness, collection, production, dissemination and usage of register-based vital statistics, with a focus on data and statistics relevant to monitoring progress of the SDGs and national development frameworks. The discussions will highlight global and regional efforts to strengthen the generation of regular (annual) vital statistics even in countries with low registration coverage and completeness, and in instances of pandemics such as COVID19.

8. The session will share best practices and lessons learnt from African countries and from other regions. Selected countries (Rwanda, Zambia, Mauritius, Cape Verde and Egypt) at different stages in terms of completeness of CRVS and generation of vital statistics (VS) reports will share their experiences through panel discussions. Most member states continue to make strides to generate annual reports hence they will share their successes, key challenges and barriers faced in production and dissemination of vital statistics from civil registration systems. In addition, the countries will be expected to identify key actions needed to take to effectively tackle identified challenges and to suggest recommendations to be presented to the ministerial meeting. The recommendations will be useful to the rest of the countries that are yet to start generating VS reports, the APAI-CRVS secretariat, the Regional Core Group and other development partners providing technical support on vital statistics.

Structure of session:

9. The session is planned for One hour and 30 minutes to be divided as follows: -
 - Plenary Overview (5 minutes) - This will introduce the topic, its importance, context and share session outline and speakers.
 - Plenary presentation (15 minutes) - this will provide the detailed global and regional situation of VS including best practices, status, achievements, challenges and opportunities towards generating quality, complete and timely VS for achieving the Agenda 2030 SDGs, Agenda 2063, and national development plans.
 - Panel discussions (45 minutes) for 5 panelists (Rwanda, Mauritius, Zambia, Egypt and Cape Verde) on the VS efforts, challenges and experiences. The panelists will

discuss the issues on best modalities for improving the generation of VS, including on marriages and divorces;

- Plenary Discussion: (20 minutes) - The plenary discussions will be led by the moderator who will open the floor to comments, questions and answers
- Closing remarks by the Moderators highlighting major issues from the session.

Issues for discussions

10. In light of the above, the following key issues would be used as the basis of discussions:

- a) What measures can countries take to improve national coordination mechanisms, strengthen collaboration and improve advocacy for resource allocation and working arrangements among key CRVS stakeholders, in particular the civil registration office (CRS and Justice), national statistics office and health information system, in the production of civil registration-based vital statistics?
- b) How can countries improve the quality of civil registration records and vital statistics, including timely registration, accuracy of vital records and transmission of records to the national statistics office or office that generates vital statistics?
- c) What policy and legal framework reviews are required to institutionalize the regular production and dissemination of vital statistics from civil registration systems?
- d) How would information technology and innovation help to improve the compilation and dissemination of vital statistics, including statistics on deaths and causes of death and marriage and divorce information to meet the requirements of many of the health-related indicators of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 targets, in particular those that require an emergency response?
- e) How would countries integrate their annual production and dissemination of vital statistics into (and support) National Strategies for the Development of Statistics?
- f) What are the bottlenecks or challenges for implementation of CRVS strategies in countries? i.e. human resource, skills, infrastructure, legal context, etc.
- g) What types of technical support and capacity-building efforts, and country-support in the spirit of South–South cooperation should the APAI-CRVS secretariat facilitate to support countries in their efforts to move more quickly to improve the production and dissemination of vital statistics from their civil registration systems?
- h) Why are the statistics on marriages and divorce often not included in the VS reports and what should be done to improve the situation in Africa?
- i) Are there any lessons from COVID19 that we may need to take note of as we move forward?

