Africa’s vulnerable go unseen: President Zuma

Without civil registration, people will continue to be born and die without leaving a trace in any legal record. Irene Naidoo reports

Africa’s most vulnerable people are unseen and unaccounted for because there is no record of their existence, said President Jacob Zuma.

Speaking at the 2nd Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Conference in Durban on Thursday, President Zuma expressed the concern over the scandal on invisibility — a situation where people are born and die without ever leaving a trace in any legal record of their existence.

“It has meant that the most vulnerable people in Africa remain unseen and not counted. They practically do not exist,” he pointed out.

It was important for the citizens of all of Africa’s 54 countries to be registered — a feat that could only achieved through efficient civil and registration systems.

Once everyone in Africa was registered and accounted for, the continent could plan better for its people and its development, the President added.

“Central to the advancement of Africa’s development is the social inclusion agenda, which we cannot successfully accomplish without proper and modern civil registration systems,” he stressed.

Civil registration and vital statistics was significant as part of the fulfilment of the dreams of the African people to shape their mother land in their own way, following the defeat of colonialism, President Zuma pointed out.

The conference was part of the exercise of Africa conducting its own affairs, as well as undoing the legacy of colonialism which deprived Africans of identity and citizenship.

“Africa cannot fulfil its development agenda unless we know, who we are, where we live, work and play and what we need to better our living conditions on the continent. Births, marriages, divorces or deaths are all vital events that must be recorded in any country,” he added.

In the current age of globalisation and greater interdependence among countries, civil registration was much more than about just identifying a person’s nationality.

“It is also a pre-requisite for the successful implementation of African regional integration, as it facilitates the smooth movement of people among countries.

Furthermore, the benefits of good vital registration have a far reaching impact on broad developmental programmes such as the planning and monitoring of education, health, social security, unemployment,” the President pointed out.

“Civil registration and vital statistics were also important in the implementation of policies for community planning, monitoring inequalities and future planning and resource allocation, he noted.

“Most importantly, civil registration is a critical tool for the promotion of democracy, in the event of the compilation of voters’ rolls.”

Africans found themselves promoting civil registration in day and age due to the history of the continent and respective countries.

“For example, South Africa, like other countries in Africa, comes from a history of colonial and apartheid regimes where most of the citizens were denied their right to citizenship.

As a result, a largely fragmented and selective civil registration system was used to perpetuate the discrimination and marginalisation of the majority of the population,” he said.

The colonial and apartheid regimes successfully used this system to deliberately and systematically prevent the African masses from exercising their right to vote and choose their own governments, President Zuma added.

Since 1994, the South African government has worked hard to ensure that citizens reclaimed their birth right and that their dignity was restored.

The country had recorded many successes with regards to its civil registration system and campaigns, President Zuma noted.

He assured delegates from the rest of the Africa, that Home Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, who headed South Africa’s civil registration campaign in recent years, would invest similar efforts into regional campaigns when she takes up office as the African Union Commission Chairperson. – SAnews.gov.za
‘A good foundation has been laid’

By Obakeng Ratlhogo

Thursday, 6 September 2012 marks the fourth day of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) conference. The conference started on a high note, with South African President Jacob Zuma and the Minister of Home Affairs who is also Chair of the African Union Commission (AUC), Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

Dlamini Zuma welcomed all the delegates who gathered to represent the African continent on such an important subject of CRVS.

The minister touched on the journey of the CRVS conference and how it has certainly been a productive road from Addis Ababa in 2010 to South Africa. “However, remember that integration of Africa is not just about political and economic integration. The free movement of our people is equally important and crucial for our integration. This cannot be managed effectively carried through, if we do not know who our citizens are.”

Dlamini Zuma says it is therefore essential that through this conference, strategies and plans are put in motion, to raise awareness and inform all the citizens of Africa. Making the citizens aware of the vision, mission and objectives of the CRVS, is just any important element, if not more important. “This is at the heart of the shared vision of development that informs the agenda of the African Union and our economic regions” said Home Affairs Minister.

The Minister emphasises that “A good foundation has thus far been laid in order to carry out this vision forward. The incorporation of the young people; particularly, young statisticians who are here today, will ensure continuity and drive the programme to improve civil registration in Africa into the future.”

In conclusion, Dlamini Zuma encouraged governments to give the children of the Africa a new vision, new possibilities and most importantly a new reality.

“Let us make the dreams of our founders come true, let this current generation, our generation, not be one of wasted opportunities. Let us use our opportunities wisely and to the best advantage for all our people, let us claim this 21st century as our own” said the Minister.

Young statisticians come of age

A powerful trumpet was sounded today in the voice of President Jacob Zuma as he officially opened the Civil Registration Vital Statistics (CRVS) meeting for the African Ministers who congregated at the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Durban.

In 2009, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) successfully hosted the 57th Session of the International Statistics Institute (ISI) in Durban.

In 2010 in Dublin, Ireland at the 58th Session of the International Statistics Institute (ISI) on behalf of government and representatives of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In 2012, in the ICC, the Minister of Home Affairs welcomed the 126th Session of the International Statistics Institute (ISI). The ISBalo Legacy has come of age in the name of the IY AS – the ‘Young Africa’.
Declining birth registrations and lack of universal access to civil registration are some of the challenges facing southern African countries. A Southern African Development Community (SADC) perspective provided during the 2nd Civil Registration and Vital Statistics conference indicated that poverty and living in remote areas were some of the factors contributing to declining registrations. Namibia, for example, had a problem of decreasing registration owing to poverty and the great distance people had to travel to access the registration service. In 2000, 70.4% of the population had been issued with birth certificates, this dropped to 66% in 2006.

“We are determined to reverse this decline...we are hunting for babies,” said Lydia Kandetu, a deputy director for civil registration, in reference to that country’s innovative initiative of partnering with the health department and opening civil registration offices across the desert country’s hospitals.

It is increasingly becoming clear that civil registration has gained traction and had become a focal point as a primary source of data for development planning.

Countries have identified a number of strategies to include all citizens in their population registers. Progress made in completing population registers by individual countries provides an example of what can be achieved through strategies that are tailored to each country’s conditions.

“Decreasing registration was linked to poverty and the long distances people had to travel to get to registration points,” said Kandetu.

Namibia has a population density of 2.5 people per km².

The country adopted a number of approaches to counteract this negative trend in registration. The ministry of health and social development were approached to collaborate in ensuring every child was registered.

The opening of new sub-regional offices also brought the services closer to the people, thus ensuring accessibility to government services. There was also a joint outreach programme with other relevant government departments. “We took registration to the people so that we could reach the most vulnerable,” said Kandetu.

One of the key innovations introduced was the use of technology, which allowed for video conferencing, training and, importantly, a web-based national registration system that could be accessed via the internet. “Our system is interoperable and the law that protects children will not protect you,” he pointed out.

Williams attributed the blame for non-registration to both the governments and parents. “Countries do not have proper systems in place. They are still dealing with outdated, colonial relics - laws that have never been modernised, systems that have not been modernised. You have paper-based systems,” Williams said.

There is still a country that uses typewriters. They have two typewriters in their national office that is used to type birth certificates because that’s the law and the law is outdated,” Williams said.

The civil registration system of such countries could not be digitised because there was no money for it.

Another barrier was the cost factor of the documents. “In one African country, we did a calculation and it cost $25 for someone in a rural area to travel all the way to a town centre to register their child and get a certificate. It costs $25 in a poor country where you have majority of people living on less than $1 a day,” he pointed out.

With regards to parents, he said that some, particularly those in rural areas, did not see the need for their children to have birth certificates as they were not expected to attend school.

Others showed urgency in registering their children when the child needed to go to school or access services from the state.

“When the child needs something from the state that requires proof of identity then it kicks in. It’s the private use that drives the need for registration,” Williams said.

However, the situation was looking up. With Africa finally beginning to acknowledge the importance of civil registration.

“Proof of that is the Africa countries gathered here...They have recognised they can’t express their wishes, their rights, their place in this modern state without civil registration,” he pointed.

There is a movement and growing recognition that Africa must change,” he added.

Fifty-four African Ministers responsible for civil registration and vital statistics are involved in this year’s conference, as well as about 500 delegates, including senior civil registration technical experts, development partners, young statisticians and professional associations.

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Babies should be registered at birth to ensure that they are able to access social services and schooling when they grow older. Photograph: Mbongiseni Mndebele

No records of existence for about 50% of African children

There are no records of the existence for about half of all the children on the African continent, writes Irene Naudo. The births of these children were never registered, meaning the state knows nothing of their existence and are making no provisions for them, says Cornelius Williams, Regional Adviser: Child Protection at the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

Williams, from UNICEF’s Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, was one of the delegates at the 2nd Civil Registration and Vital Statistics conference in Durban.

“Could you imagine a child not having an identity, not having an existence written down and so you’re born, you live your life, you die and you never existed in any document...It’s like you were never there. There’s no official record of your existence as a human being,” he said.

Birth registrations were particularly poor in countries like Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda, Williams added.

Children who were not registered were immediately at a disadvantage because with no record of their existence, planning for their future proved to be difficult.

“Some parents might not even know what it is that when it comes to planning, government plans don’t cover these children, especially if they come from marginalised communities...They don’t plan for you and if you are caught breaking the law, you treated like an adult because you don’t have a birth certificate to show that you’re not an adult.

“This means the law that protects children will not protect you,” he pointed out.

Williams attributed the blame for non-registration to both governments and parents. “Countries do not have proper systems in place. They are still dealing with outdated, colonial relics - laws that have never been modernised, systems that have not been modernised. You have paper-based systems,” Williams said.

“There is still a country that uses the typewriters. They have two typewriters in their national office that is used to type birth certificates because that’s the law and the law is outdated,” Williams said.

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However, the situation was looking up, with Africa finally beginning to acknowledge the importance of civil registration.

“Proof of that is the Africa countries gathered here...They have recognised they can’t express their wishes, their place in this modern state without civil registration...With this conference we are now seeing a movement. There is a movement and growing recognition that Africa must change,” he added.

Policy makers and political leaders were finally talking about and tackling the issue, Williams noted.

Fifty-four African Ministers responsible for civil registration and vital statistics are involved in this year’s conference, as well as about 500 delegates, including senior civil registration technical experts, development partners, young statisticians and professional associations.

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‘We are hunting for babies’

Many African countries have developed innovative approaches to improving civil registration. Cheryl Taylor reports
It is Done!

Walking TALL ...
AFRICA Power, working with passion, courage and dedication!
CRVS Journey Growing in Strength:
Addis Ababa 2010, Durban 2012, Coté d’Voire 2014. The road map has been defined for Africa’s Leaders and her Young African Statisticians to measure today in order to manage and plan a better Tomorrow!
Resolutions from the experts meeting

A. Introduction

1. An Experts’ Group Meeting was held from 3 to 5 September 2012 at the UA Centre in Durban, Republic of South Africa to prepare for the Second Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration to be held in the same venue on 6 and 7 September 2012. Both the Conference and the preparatory meeting of Experts are being organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Union, the African Development Bank, the Department of Home Affairs of the Republic of South Africa, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN-Habitat, the AUC, and the SSDC. The meeting was organized in accordance with the resolution of the First ministerial meeting, which recommended that the Conference be institutionalized as a standing forum to be organized every two years.

B. Attendance

2. The meeting brought together over 230 participants from member states, including Heads of civil registration authorities, National Statistical Offices (NSOs); country experts responsible for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS); representatives of the CRVS Core Group, including the AUC, AfDB, UNFPA, UNECA, UNICEF, UN-Habitat, and the AUC, SSDC, representatives of regional and international organizations, sub-regional and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, and a group of young African statisticians.

C. Opening Session

3. Welcoming remarks were made by the Director General, Department of Home Affairs of the Republic of South Africa as host of the meeting. Opening remarks were delivered by the representatives of the UNECA, AUC, and the SSDC. Opening remarks were also made by the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs of the Republic of South Africa, Honorable Mrs. Fathima Chisam, the meeting was formally opened by the President of the Provision of KwaZulu-Natal, Mr. Sipho Seepe. The President of the Republic of South Africa, the Honourable Mr. Jacob Zuma, was present.

4. The opening session of the meeting observed a moment of silence in honour of the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abdi Meles Zenawi, who passed away recently.

5. The meeting was conducted in English and 3 breaks were scheduled, focusing on the following major topics: Rule of CRVS in the Africa’s development agenda; proposal for organizing the regional CRVS initiative as the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of CRVS (APA-CRVS); progress report on CRVS interventions by regional organizations and United Nations agencies, and other regions. The meeting was opened with the following agenda: general introduction and statement of the purpose of the meeting were made in the following sessions under general conclusions; CRVS and African Integration; Children’s Rights; Regional issues and Challenges; Public Health; Social Service and Management; Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Indicators; Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHA-PAN); APA-CRVS Progress Report; APA-CRVS Progress Report on the Regional CRVS Initiatives; CRVS and the Health Sector; CRVS and National Development and Application of IT; Monitoring of CRVS Operations; Services Delivery and CRVS; CRVS in Post Conflict Situations; Registering Death, Ascending and Certifying Cause of Death and Compiling Death Statistics under APA-CRVS; Strategic Action Plans for Improving CRVS Institutional and Human Infrastructure; Strategic Role of Statistics and the ASA Strategic Plan; CRVS Integration into the Socio-Economic Development Perspectives of the Isibalo Young African Statisticians; CRVS Inter-American Development Bank Experience on CRVS; Role of Private Sector in Improving CRVS in Africa; Financial Partners Perspectives.

D. Preamble

6. We, the representatives of Civil Registration Authorities and Vital Statistics from across Africa and other development partners, gathered in Durban, the Republic of South Africa from 3 to 5 September 2012 during the preparatory meeting of Experts of the Second Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, to prepare for the Second Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, under the theme, Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Institutional and Human Infrastructure. We, representing the hospitality of Government and people of the Republic of South Africa for hosting the meeting.

7. We welcome with appreciation the decision of the sixth session of the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration to host the sixth session of the Conference on Statistical Development (APSC) to prepare CRVS project as the thematic focus of symposium for the next few years beginning in 2011; and

8. Note with appreciation the active participation of the Isibalo Young African Statisticians on the subject of the future development of CRVS systems in Africa.

9. Take note of the decision of the Assembly of Heads of States and Government of the African Union endorsing the secretariat for the First Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration to initiate the institutionalization of the bimonthly meeting of the African ministers responsible for civil registration within the framework of the relevant specialized technical committee of the African Union.

10. Take note of the contributions and efforts of African ministers responsible for Civil Registration to continue to give priority to thecontinuation to improve CRVS systems;

11. Recognize the crucial role of CRVS in promoting and realizing the African integration agenda and to contribute to the achievement of the Agenda 2063:

a. the central role that CRVS play in governance and economic development;

b. The critical importance of access to basic services at all levels, including the members of the MOGA;

c. their strategic role in the use and application of technology;

d. the strategic input to privacy laws and respect for citizens’ dignity;

e. the pervasive way in which CRVS impact on individuals in their daily social, political and economic lives;

f. Enact policies to promote CRVS systems as a tool for effective governance and development;

39. Explore research and innovation opportunities to promote CRVS improvement.

40. Enact new legislation on data protection and privacy for the protection and control of personal data collected through CRVS systems.

41. Request the secretariat to establish a regional CRVS clearing house.

42. Undertake capacity building activities through training and workshops on registration of death and causes of death targeted at government officials and health professionals.

43. Internally public education to reduce stigmatization especially in cases where the cause of death is HIV related;

44. Establish an effective system for death registration in countries affected by war;

45. Pioneer the establishment of a regional CRVS clearing house.

46. Establish effective coordination mechanisms to respond to the need for better coordination between the different ministers that will support CRVS registration functions.

47. Establish partnerships and joint working committees on CRVS for monitoring civil registration activities and coordination.

Support the implementation of the APAI-CRVS and the need to continue efforts in their implementation;

Assure the implementation of the APAI-CRVS and the need to continue efforts in their implementation;
Making use of social media

To her address to the media on Wednesday, Home Affairs Minister, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma highlighted the need to sensitise African communities about the importance of civil registration systems. Social media platforms have emerged as one of the preferred modes of information sharing by organisations and individuals alike. Sivuyile Mangxamba spoke to the Knowledge Network Facilitator at UNeca, Hermella Ayalew about plans to utilise this channel to create awareness on the importance of CRVS.

Civil registration institutions prefer face to face communication platforms such as roadshows, what are you looking to achieve from this channel of communication?

Face-to-face interactions at conferences like this one are important to solving problems but continuing the discussions beyond the conference and sharing our knowledge among ourselves even after the conference is crucial to ensure the recommendations are best positioned for implementation. UNeca facilitates the coordination and management of knowledge exchange on CRVS. A community of practice and a knowledge sharing platform http://crvs.africa-devnet.org has been established to foster an ongoing dynamic online interaction between conference participants and civil registration experts to continue sharing knowledge and best practices during and after the conference.

How viable is this channel for tackling civil registration?

Through this platform, experts and ministers responsible for CRVS will continue to generate knowledge in collaboration; follow up on implementation of recommendations as well as share lessons learned; conference materials; and best practices of member states on civil registration and vital statistics during and after the conference. It is available online at all times with a very reliable repository of CRVS related materials and resources generated by African member states.

How different is this new form of communication channel from traditional ways of lobbying?

This knowledge-sharing channel is already established, it can be accessed at http://crvs.africa-devnet.org. It provides a mechanism to provide experts and ministers responsible for civil registration in Africa the appropriate knowledge and most importantly country specific best practices of civil registration. Member states no longer have to wait two years for this conference to share among themselves best practices on CRVS and learn from each other. They can now raise key issues and engage in discussions well in advance. In this process member states can collaborate for practical implementation actions in their respective countries. At the national level we hope these actions will influence policy making around effective registration of citizens.

Civil registration offices

The United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon established a commission to recommend ways of helping these countries. Vital statistics, health indicators and innovation on the use of ICT in health information systems were identified as one of the UN recommendations. Prof Were said the Ministry of Health and civil registration authorities, as well as vital statistics can all help in bringing about the change that is needed, because through CRVS a country can know the causes of death. She said that it is an important task to make sure we change the high rate of death among women and children.

She said: “In Africa we like to have strong families, we cannot have strong families when the mothers and children are dying. Both men and women of Africa are called upon to address this problem.”

More than simply an administrative tool

Death registration provides government with important socio-economic data.

Thabo Mokgola reports

A technical team of experts on Tuesday called for death registration processes to be beefed up so that countries adopt a systematic approach to dealing with the matter in a holistic manner.

Presenting deliberations based on the subject: Registering death. assigning and certifying cause of death and compiling death statistics under APAI-CRVS, experts called on the development of workstreams and work processes dealing with birth, death, marriage and divorce.

They called for a new approach in the form of regional initiatives. Prior to the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS), the group noted the lack of regional policy, directives as well as focal points whereas studies and research programmes within the continent were primarily spearheaded by international institutions.

“Death registration is more than an administrative and statistical operation... Therefore there is a need for administrative and statistical perspectives,” the group explains.

“It proposes the following definition for death registration: “Death registration is defined as the legal and administrative recording of an event of death of a person so as to acknowledge his/her death irrespective of his/her age, sex and citizenship/nationality, in a defined territory through a defined legal, administrative and statistical processes and procedure.”

“In the definition, the legal, administrative and statistical processes and procedures are included to underscore the rationale for a country to acknowledge a person’s death from legal, administrative and statistical perspectives,” the group explains.

It is these interventions with which these experts hope to assist ministers in their deliberations with a view to emerging with a common policy position on the death registration matter.

While Africans make up only 10% of the global population, more than 50% of mothers and children who die are from this continent, reports Mathando Sharon Lukoto. This was according to Prof. Miriam Were from Kenya, who was speaking at the 2nd Ministerial Civil Registration and Vital statistics conference.

Quoting from a United Nations review on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Prof. Were said 75 countries in the world were still experiencing serious problems with regard to MDG four and five, which are about reducing child births and maternal deaths.

It was especially worrying that 47 of the 75 countries in the report were from Africa.

The United Nations conducted a review on all the eight MDGs in order to help the countries that were lagging behind in implementing these goals.

“Even in deaths occurring within these health institutions, it is not very clear whether medical doctors are well-prepared to use international classification of diseases to determine causes of death,” they observed.

In their Inception Paper, the experts explained that the APAI-CRVS provides a policy and implementation framework for CRVS systems in the region.

“Considering the different levels of development of CRVS systems in the continent, APAI-CRVS proposes a phase-based implementation approach, which is expected to be applied across all workstreams of CRVS as a part of its reform process,” they said.

“In relation to governments’ need for establishing death registration, it was noted that this is necessitated by interest in systematically managing economic and social transactions between citizens and state machineries through written and legally accredited documentation.”

“The socio-economic information obtained from death registration is required at various administrative levels for formulating, monitoring and evaluating policies, programmes and plans in the different sectors,” the paper stipulates.

Interestingly, it is the UN definition as “the permanent disappearance of all evidence of life at any time after live birth has taken place”, that has come under scrutiny.

“The approach followed at the international level in defining death and the other vital elements fell short of addressing legal, administrative and statistical purposes in a holistic manner,” states the paper.

A policy and implementation framework

In May 2010 the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon established a commission to recommend ways of helping these countries.

Vital statistics, health indicators and innovation on the use of ICT in health information systems were identified as one of the UN recommendations.

Prof Were said the Ministry of Health and civil registration authorities, as well as vital statistics can all help in bringing about the change that is needed, because through CRVS a country can know the causes of death. She said that it is an important task to make sure we change the high rate of death among women and children.

She said: “In Africa we like to have strong families, we cannot have strong families when the mothers and children are dying. Both men and women of Africa are called upon to address this problem.”

Photograph Mbongiseni Mndebele

Recording the correct cause of death on death certificates allows authorities to respond to the needs of the population.

Thabo Mokgola reports

Africa must address mother and child mortality

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Unity, Strength, Saving Lives

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