



**African Development
Bank**



**United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa**



**African Union
Commission**



**Federal Democratic
Republic of Ethiopia**

Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration

Concept Note

*“Towards Improved Civil Status Information for Efficient Public Administration and
Generation of Vital Statistics for National Development and MDGs Monitoring in Africa”*

13-14 August 2010
Venue – UNCC, Addis Ababa Ethiopia

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1. Background

African development endeavors have been continuously challenged, not only by the well-acknowledged natural and manmade disasters such as draught, conflict and civil unrest but also by the failed attempts of building modern public administration systems contributing to weak and inefficient public services and lack of accountability and responsiveness to the people they serve. In the majority of African countries, public administration organs have been used to be instituted far away from the beneficiaries hanging in the capital cities and major urban centers. Such biased public administration infrastructure has left the bulk of the population residing in the rural and semi-urban localities marginalized in participating as well as benefiting from public services as citizens of their countries.

Current development initiatives and trends being underway in the majority of African countries, marshaled through decentralization and democratization programs and processes is paving the way for the public service to move to people rather than the latter to seek for the services concentrated in cities and major urban centers. For instance, the Government of Sierra Leone in its 2004 Local Government Act devolved the functions performed by the Central Government to the local councils on the principles of decentralization and power devolution to local governments. Similar development trends and reforms of the public administration are underway in almost all African member states. Nevertheless, these development trends are being challenged by the existing and long-remained weak, disorganized, un-systematized and traditionally run civil service infrastructure and administration. One of the deeply rooted sources of the problem originates from the un-systematized nature and very weak management of the countries human capital: the people.

Most African governments do not properly know the people they are accountable for. *Most people in Africa born and die without leaving a trace in any legal record or official statistics making it difficult for the public sector to manage and monitor its human capital.* The Working Group on Monitoring Vital Events has called this “*A scandal of Invisibility*” because absence of reliable evidence and information for births, deaths and causes of death are the root causes that left *most of the world’s poor as unseen, unaccountable and hence uncoun ted*. Systematic recording of vital events, that is, births, deaths, marriages and divorces in some African countries goes back to the 17th and 18th centuries (few examples, Mauritius 1667, South Africa 1842, Ghana 1888, Egypt 1839, and Uganda 1904). Countries have been conducting these registration operations before as far as after independence. Nevertheless, with the exception of 2-3 countries, none has maintained the civil registration system to the international standards that would lend its services to building and supporting the nations’ multi-sectoral development endeavors.

Countries ability in managing their human capital depends on the public administration’s capability in keeping and using the records of vital events primarily births, deaths, marriages and divorces in a systematic, continuous and permanent basis. In the recent past, African government administrations are more than ever opting for a viable technique and approach for improving their civil registration systems that would provide more accurate and dependable evidence and information for the justice administration, public services, such as, issuance of national identification cards, passports and immigration administration, and updating public databases, like business and electoral databases with the support of information technology (IT) solutions. Furthermore, the decentralization process has brought fresh data and information demands for preparing local government

plans, implementing basic social services such as health and education services and monitoring and reporting of progress made in smaller administrative units.

Civil registration is the conventional data source in the provision of vital statistics. However, National Statistics Offices (NSOs) in Africa are suffering greatly from the inadequate nature of civil registration systems in generating routine population dynamics information, that is, fertility and mortality measures, which left them to depend on ad-hoc statistical operations such as censuses and sample surveys. Furthermore, due to the absence of comprehensive and complete civil registration systems, compilation and classification of causes of death statistics, including maternal mortality levels and trends for the health sector could not be possible leaving a huge data gap in the National Statistical Systems (NSSs) of most African countries. Despite significant improvements in the awareness of the importance of statistics, in recent years population census enumerations, estimation and projection results are being challenged and losing credibility due to lack of current and routine dynamic and flow statistics that would have been used in updating, verifying and validating of the results.

Absence of comprehensive and complete civil registration systems has multi-faceted implications on the socio-economic development endeavors of a country. Major sectors and services affected by the incomplete or inadequate nature of civil registration systems include:

i) Public administration services:

- Establishment of identity of individuals (name, date and place of birth, ...);
- Establishment and monitoring of citizenship;
- Implementation of National Identification Systems (NIS);
- Improvement of passport issuance and administration;
- Control and administration of immigration cases; and
- Planning, verification and administration of electoral functions (constituent formation, electoral registration, verification and database updating).

ii) Protection of children and women from abuses and exploitation:

- Establishment of identity of children (right to a name, nationality, parentage, ...);
- Proper management and documentation of adoption cases, recognition, legitimation, ...;
- Identification and administration of abandoned/orphaned children (including children who lost their parents due to HIV/AIDS);
- Protection of children from harmful traditional practices (early/child marriage, neglect of children with birth defects, ...);
- Establishment of rights to some benefits (birth grants, child care, family allowances, disability allowances, ...);
- Protection of children from child labour, child soldier, trafficking, child prostitution, ...;
- Protection of the rights of women during marriage; and
- Protection of the rights of children and women during dissolution of marriage.

iii) Administering civil matters and associated criminal cases in courts:

- Presiding paternity and maternity court cases;
- Administration of court cases concerning minor's;
- Administering juvenile delinquent court cases (including crimes that lead to death penalty);

- Declaration and termination of absence of persons;
- Administering marriage court cases;
- Administering divorce court cases;
- Testifying a death, specifically criminal cases; and
- Establishing identity and change of name.

iv) Provision of public health and education services:

- Post-natal care of mothers and children including nutrition and follow-up of low birth weight children;
- Other public health programmes such as provision and follow-up of vaccination, children born with defects, physically handicapped children, pre-mature infants not attended by physicians, attending delivery complications, family planning services,...; and
- Monitoring and control of infectious diseases including taking measures to find cases of epidemics and protection of all possible contacts for intervention purposes;
- Monitoring of school enrollment and evaluation of coverage of universal primary education at all levels;

v) Provision of current and continuous health and demographic statistics:

- Provision of current population estimates and projections starting from the smallest administrative unit that is valuable in planning, monitoring and evaluation of various development interventions such as primary health care, education, family planning, nutrition, public housing and etc.;
- Preparation and use of demographic and health indicators (infant and child mortality, maternal mortality, cause specific death rates, fertility indices, life expectancy ...) for all administrative units;
- Verification and validation of population and housing census results;
- Improving the quality of census and sample survey data;
- Establishment and maintenance of national population registers and databases; and
- Establishment and maintenance of causes of death classification as per the international recommendation (currently ICD-10 classification).

vi) Measurement and monitoring of MDGs:

Building conventional data sources for generating flow of statistics for most of the MDG indicators (for instance, measuring the indicators for achievement of universal primary education, reduction in child mortality, improvements in maternal health, and reductions in prevalence of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases).

vii) Provision of epidemiological and other research data inputs:

Availability and use of civil registration records for scientific enquiries in prospective and retrospective longitudinal studies in the area of health, environment, genealogy, etc.

2. Progress made in the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Tanzania Regional Workshop

The regional workshop on civil registration and vital statistics systems that was convened in June 2009 in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania was the foundation that brought for the first time the issues and challenges of civil registration and vital statistics systems in a regional context and in a comprehensive and forward looking perspective. The workshop was jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission (UNECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), InWent and hosted by the United Republic of Tanzania. The workshop delegated the ECA and AfDB to lead and serve as custodian of the regional initiative in partnership with key development partners in ensuring the proper implementation and follow-up of the recommendations of the workshop. Accordingly, the ECA and AfDB as per the work program of the post-workshop activities were able to accomplish very basic advocacy and documentation works that benefited each of the member states. Among the activities undertaken and those on progress include:

- a. the mobilization of member states in the celebration of the 2009 African Statistics Day under the theme dedicated to strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa:
 - the ECA has prepared different advocacy materials, including posters, communiqué and a comprehensive technical note for use by member states during the celebrations;
 - the advocacy materials were distributed to all member states well in advance of the celebration day.
- b. published the workshop report and documentation that was distributed widely to all member states and development partners.
- c. documented the status and current practice of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the region.
- d. the ECA jointly with AfDB and Africa Union Commission (AUC), UNSD and the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia are currently engaged on preparatory activities of the organization of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration.
- e. the ECA is also engaged in the preparation of a medium-term regional civil registration and vital statistics program document:
 - field assessment visit missions to five countries concluded;
 - preparation of the program document will be finalized and endorsed in the coming months.
- f. ECA is also engaged in the preparation of two regional operational manuals on civil registration and vital statistics systems aimed at building the knowledge base – the manuals will be finalized within the coming months.

The ECA in partnership with AfDB, AUC and UNSD taking civil registration and vital statistics systems as one pillar activity of their respective organizations, will continue intensifying their efforts and commitment in the implementation of the recommendations of the Dar-es-Salaam regional workshop and the forthcoming high-level ministerial conference.

3. Rationale

Civil registration is the conventional data source for the generation of continuous and complete vital statistics that provides key health and demographic statistics, including many of the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) indicators. Furthermore, civil registration produces various legal and administrative information that are the basis in safeguarding basic human rights, including child and women's rights, and also critical information for the implementation of decentralization and democratization processes currently progressing in most African countries. Despite the importance accorded to the system, nearly all African countries lack adequate civil registration and vital statistics systems (CR&VS). This state of affairs is contributing and perpetuating the observed weakness and fragility of most African national statistical systems.

One of the critical impeding factors identified by the Dar-es-Salaam regional workshop in the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa was the very weak and in most instances the absence of political commitment and leadership of African governments. Accordingly, the workshop emphatically expressed its concern and recommended as an immediate measure the organization of a High-level Regional Ministerial Conference on improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa. Accordingly, the Conference will be convened in August 2010 setting two general objectives.

4. Objectives

The first objective of the high-level Ministerial Conference is to mobilize and rally political commitment and leadership of national governments, civil registration authorities and national statistics offices in the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa. In this respect, the high-level Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration is the first ever initiated regional undertaking that seeks to set a regional agenda and secures high-level political commitment for strengthening and maintaining comprehensive national and regional civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa. It is to be recalled that one of the key drawbacks of past initiatives and interventions in the area of civil registration has been the non-inclusiveness of the ministries in charge of civil registration and the incapability to attract and involve high-level national policy makers and decision making bodies.

The second objective of the Conference is to address the need for an enhanced regional commitment and partnership in the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa. The Dar-es-Salaam workshop beyond empirical and historical evidences has re-confirmed and reflected the interest and eagerness of all national institutions in re-vitalizing their commitment in improving their civil registration and vital statistics systems, irrespective of the magnitude and varied nature of the problems and challenges encountered.

5. Expected Accomplishments

The Conference is expected to deliver the following three major accomplishments:

- EA1: Creation of a high-level regional platform** - the Conference is expected to create a high-level regional platform that would engage national governments, sub-regional and regional organizations in a continuous and sustainable dialogue, mutual support and partnership in promoting good practices between and among national governments. Such regional forums would also lend opportunities in creating conducive environment for the global community and development partners to actively participate and avail their support and engage in partnership schemes with national governments and regional organizations.
- EA2: Enhanced awareness and commitment of national governments** – operation and maintenance of civil registration requires a long-term engagement and commitment that should be owned and led by national governments. In this respect, the Conference is expected to lay the foundation for national governments in taking measures that would enhance their capability in managing and coordinating civil registration operations and mobilization of national resources and external support in a coordinated and harmonized manner at the highest level.
- EA3: Endorsing resolutions and recommendations** – the high-level Ministerial Conference is expected to endorse resolutions and recommendations that would lead and govern African civil registration and vital statistics systems for the coming years.

6. Theme of the Conference

Civil registration serves two broadly categorized purposes: it serves legal and administrative purposes and generates a range of health and demographic statistics. The end result of the legal and administrative purpose is to enable governments to build a modern and efficient public administration system and individual citizens to properly exercise their rights and privileges, while health and demographic statistics enable the provision of continuous and complete vital statistics, including the production of population dynamics data and critical health indicators that encompasses the majority of MDG indicators.

Therefore, the theme for the Conference is framed to reflect the integrity, interface and prospective engagements of the component functions and purposes of civil registration and vital statistics systems as: ***“Towards Improved Civil Status Information for Efficient Public Administration and Generation of Vital Statistics for National Development and MDGs Monitoring in Africa”***. The choice of the theme is timely as the Conference will address issues pertaining to the monitoring and evaluation of progress or lack of progress made towards the MDGs at the 2010 review.

7. Conference Implementation Strategy

The strategy in the organization of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration will be based on the following operational pillars:

- A) Conducting an Expert Group Meeting (EGM)** – the high-level Conference will be preceded by an Expert Group Meeting that would prepare the draft resolutions and recommendations of the conference. The ECA, AfDB and UNSD will facilitate the EGM and prepares background technical documents and preliminary drafts of the resolutions and recommendations. The EGM is expected to last for three days.
- B) Establishing joint conference organizing committee** – ECA, AfDB, and AUC will form a joint conference organizing committee. In addition, ECA and the host nation, the Ethiopian Government, will form a committee that will guide the implementation of the conference activities in the host nation. The ECA will be represented by the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) and representative of the Office of the Executive Secretary, while the host government will be represented by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Statistics Agency.
- C) A Consultant will support ECA staff** – the ECA and AfDB will hire a high level consultant with vast experience and expertise in civil registration and vital statistics systems that would facilitate and lead the technical preparations and facilitations of the conference and EGM.
- D) Delegates of selected countries will deliver speeches** – the ECA, AfDB, AUC and the host government will communicate selected Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration to deliver speeches on the topic on the opening and closing sessions of the Conference.
- E) Endorsing resolution and recommendation** -the high-level Ministerial Conference will primarily engage in reviewing and then endorsing the draft resolutions and recommendations prepared by the EG that is expected to lead and govern African civil registration and vital statistics systems for the coming years.

8. Activities

The activities surrounding the organization of the Conference could be categorized into the following three sub-categories: pre-conference activities, conference deliberation and post-conference activities.

The **pre-conference activities** will include primarily organizing the EGM and making all necessary travel, protocol and administrative arrangements for the high-level conference participants. All technical preparations required for the conference will also be performed during this time. As an output, it is expected to produce the official documents that would be presented to the ministerial meeting and also make the necessary preparations and travel, protocol and administrative arrangements for the high-level conference participants. ECA jointly with AfDB, AUC and the host government will facilitate preparatory activities of the conference. Specific task assignments will be indicated in the detailed action plan.

The **conference deliberations** will cover activities that will be conducted during the conference days as per the conference agenda. The Conference will include on the first day official opening ceremony and report of the regional organizations on initiatives, accomplished and ongoing activities on civil registration and vital statistics systems in the region in the past year. There would also be official statements from delegates of selected countries. Technical deliberations and review of the proposed resolutions and recommendations of the Conference will take most of the remaining time of the first day. On the second day the ministers are expected to endorse the draft resolutions of the conference.

Concerning **post-conference activities**, the immediate activity would be to finalize travel and protocol arrangements of the return of the conference delegates to their respective countries. As a follow-up to the high-level conference there will be several activities that would be accomplished by the conference organizers and key development partners as per the resolutions and recommendations of the conference. Accordingly, the first follow-up activity would be for the ECA and AfDB to publish and disseminate the resolutions and recommendations and facilitate the modalities for the implementation of the outcomes of the conference. In addition, the ECA jointly with AfDB, AUC and UNSD will prepare an official proceeding report of the conference and disseminate to all member states and participating delegates.

9. Organizers of the Conference

Civil registration and vital statistics are of interest to various stakeholders that rallies major sectors and services working on human development and welfare of individuals and societies, including addressing legal and human rights issues, public health concerns, public sector reforms and administrations, provision of critical demographic and health statistics, measurements, and monitoring of development indicators and supporting research endeavors. At the national level, government ministries and institutions engaged at policy level as well as provision of services in the justice, decentralization and local administration, health, statistics and social affairs are the major stakeholders and custodian of the systems. Likewise, at regional and global level, organizations and agencies working on human development and welfare constitute the resource base for strengthening the systems in the region. Accordingly, the Conference is expected to be organized with the contribution and support of these varied stakeholders that would benefit from the outcome of the Conference.

The Conference will be jointly organized by the ECA, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the African Development Bank (AfDB), Africa Union Commission, (AUC), Health Metrics Network (HMN), and other technical and financial partners with special interest on the topic. The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is hosting the Conference involving primarily the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office and the Central Statistics Agency.

On the host government side, every effort will be made to rally the support and partnership of various key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Capacity Building, Ministry of Education, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Ethiopian Statistics Association, Ethiopian Population Association, and UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCHR, ILO, UNHCR, UNESCO country offices and prominent NGOs.

The ECA jointly with AfDB, AUC and the host government will extend formal invitation to potential regional and global development partners requesting their support and partnership in organizing the conference as soon as possible.

10. Participants

The high-level ministerial conference is expected to gather 250-300 participants, including the 53 African Ministers responsible for civil registration. The conference is expected to officially be opened by a high-level official of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. H.E. Abdoulaye Jannet, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the ECA and Ministers of various African countries will deliver opening statements and remarks to the conference. The ECA jointly with AfDB, AUC and the host government will extend invitations to country delegates, development partners and other invitees. The participants include:

- a) For the conference, all African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration in the 53 member states will be invited to attend the conference. Heads of NSOs and civil registrars of all member states will be invited to the conference. Senior civil registration technical experts from each of the civil registration offices of the member states will also attend the conference.
- b) Representatives of regional and international organizations working on civil registration and/or vital statistics will be invited to the conference.
- c) African Ambassadors residing in Addis Ababa, representatives of UN regional organizations and UN country offices residing in Addis Ababa and representatives of non-governmental organizations affiliated to civil registration will be invited to attend the opening ceremony of the conference.

The participants of the EGM will comprise 15-20 experts representing selected African countries, regional training institutions, selected regional and international organizations and academic and research institutions. The ECA and AfDB will identify the participants and make arrangements for their representation.

11. Venue and date

The Conference will be convened at the UN Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The Conference will take place from 13-14 August 2010. Immediately, preceding the Conference the EGM will be conducted from 10-12 August 2010.

12. Preliminary Draft Agenda Items

Preliminary agenda items for the Conference and the EGM are reflected in the attached annex.

Appendix

The 1st Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration

*UN Conference Centre
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
13-14 August 2010*

PROVISIONAL AGENDA

Theme: *Improved Civil Status Information for Efficient Public Administration
and Generation of Statistics for National Development and MDGs Monitoring
in Africa*

1. Registration
2. Opening of the Conference
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Programme of Work
4. Background on Revitalizing Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa
5. Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa
 - a) *Legal, administrative and statistical purposes and functions of civil registration and vital statistics systems*
 - b) *Management and operations of civil registration and vital statistics in the African context*
 - c) *Generation and use of health and demographic statistics and information*
 - d) *Challenges and opportunities for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa*
 - e) *Importance and operations of cause of death recording, compilation and processing and preparation of national causes of death classification*
 - f) *Resource requirements and administration for civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa*
6. Country Case Presentations
 - *Best practice country cases*
 - *Countries with ongoing efforts*
 - *Countries with extraordinary challenges*
7. Proposed Medium-term Regional Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Plan
8. Presentation of the Draft Resolution and Recommendation
9. Discussion and Motion on the Draft Resolution and Recommendation
10. Endorsing the Resolution and Recommendation
11. Any other Business
12. Closing of the Conference

***Preparatory Meeting of Experts for the 1st Conference
of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration***

*UN Conference Centre
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
10-12 August 2010*

PROVISIONAL MEETING AGENDA

***Theme: Improved Civil Status Information for Efficient Public Administration
and Generation of Statistics for National Development and MDGs Monitoring
in Africa***

1. Registration
2. Opening of the Meeting
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Programme of Work
4. Objectives of the Meeting
5. Why Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa?
 - g) Importance and services of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa*
 - h) Technical, administrative and operational aspects of civil registration and vital statistics systems*
 - i) Challenges and opportunities for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa*
 - j) Importance and operations of cause of death recording, compilation and processing and preparation of national causes of death classification*
6. *Regional Initiatives and Strategies*
 - a) The Tanzania regional workshop outcomes and progress on the implementation of the recommendations*
 - b) The proposed medium-term regional civil registration and vital statistics plan*
 - c) Partnership building and resource requirements and mobilization*
 - d) Organization and expectations from the Ministerial conference*
7. Technical and Policy issues: Issues to be addressed in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa
8. Breakaway Sessions
 - a) Discussion on technical and policy issues*
 - b) Preparation of draft resolutions and recommendations*
9. Plenary on Draft Resolutions and Recommendations
10. Presentation of Final Draft Resolutions and Recommendations
11. Any other Business
12. Closing of the Meeting