

STATUS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

INTRODUCTION

The Civil Registration systems and Vital Statistics in The Gambia, is being conducted by three Ministries i.e. Health, Justice and Finance. The Ministry of Health is responsible for the Registration of Births and Deaths, while the Ministry of Justice is responsible for the Registration of Marriages and Divorces. The Gambia Bureau of Statistics under the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs is responsible for the collection and analysis of Vital Statistics data.

Following the first meeting of Ministers responsible for Civil Registration and vital statistics in Africa, Addis Ababa Ethiopia in August 2010, a taskforce was constituted by the then Attorney General and Minister of Justice Mr. Edward Gomez who attended Addis Ababa meeting comprising of Ministry of Health, Justice and The Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS). The taskforce was task to prepare a work plan for the implementation of civil registration and vital statistics strategies. The taskforce only meet once and before the second meeting Mr. Gomez was relief of his position. Since his relief from the post the vice chair who was the Minister of Health was on sick leave and later pass away. There was no other meeting. During the first meeting which was poorly attended, task was given to individual ministries to report at the second meeting.

Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare as mandated by the constitution of The Gambia is responsible for the registration of Births and Deaths. Births are being registered at all public and Non-Government Health Facilities throughout the country. There are about 35 Registration of Births points throughout the country. Accessibility to a Birth Certificate is very high with 53% of children under five years of age having a birth certificate (Multiple Indicators and Cluster Survey (MICs V 2010)). The registration of births points are not more than seven kilometres to the nearest point. As The Gambia is predominately a Muslim country, births are only registered after one week of delivery when the child is given a name. Late registration is the most common registration of births in The Gambia. People in The Gambia mostly register their children when they are about to be enrol in school or travel. A minimum fee of less than one Dollar is charged for late registration, while it is free for early registration within the first three months of life. There was mass campaign of registration of births in one of the Regions in 2007 funded by UNICEF. The Gambian Birth Certificate Consist of the following;

Date of Birth: Place of Birth, Child's Name: Father's Name: Mother's Name: Father's Occupation: Who Register's the child: Date Registered: Registrar's Name: Signature of Registrar

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is also responsible for the registration of Deaths in The Gambia. Deaths are only registered for only those who died in Hospitals where the cause of death is ascertain by a Medical Doctor who can diagnosis the disease the person was suffering from. Post-mortem on Cause of Death can only prepared by the Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital (RVTH). Cause of Death can only be prepared by Hospitals for those who died in those hospitals for burial permit in The Gambia. The Gambia has only four public hospitals in which cause of death can be ascertain. Registration of death is not common in The Gambia. Gambians have the believed about not to talk about their death relatives. Most deaths in The Gambia happened at home. The Ministry of Health only keep Death Register of only those who died in the RVTH for whom the burial permit is being prepared. Deaths that occurred in Health facilities are also reported in the monthly health statistics reports. Deaths that occurred at homes are rarely reported. Only deaths that occurred in health facilities are reported. Death certificate are not prepared by Health facilities in The Gambia. Death Certificate are only prepared by Births and Death Registry Unit at Medical Head Quarters in Banjul the capital. The death Certificate Consist of the following;

Date of Death: Place of Death: Cause of Death: Occupation of Death: Name of the Registrar: Signature of Registrar

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the registration of Marriages and Divorces. Marriages are only registered in the Anthony General's Chambers in the Ministry of Justice. Since about 98% of Gambians are Muslims and most marriages occurred in Mosques and Homes. Christians who consist only 2% of the population do register their marriages with their churches. Marriages registered by churches are unlikely to be registered by the Ministry of Justice. Most of the churches marriages stop at the respective churches. Most people in The Gambia don't see the need to register their marriages. Marriages are normally registered when couples want to travelled outside the country, or applying for a social security housing scheme.

Divorces are rarely registered in The Gambia. Muslim men can marry today and divorce tomorrow. Muslim men has the options of marrying four wives and can divorce any one of them at anytime, the frequency of divorce is very high. As Muslim men in The Gambia don't see the need to register their marriages, they also don't see the need to register their divorce. The information about marriages is spread widely while the information about divorce is only within the family of the husband and wife. Divorces in The Gambia are usually a secret. Gambians don't want to talk about their divorce wives. Hardly women divorce their husbands it is usually the husbands who divorce their wives. If a Muslim man don't want to divorce his wife even if the wife ask for divorce she cannot be divorce and she can never be married to another man unless and until she is divorced with her husband. Must of divorce request by wife are settled by Muslim court.

The ministry of justice has the mandate according to the law to register marriages and divorces.

Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs

The Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS) under the ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs are responsible for the collection and analysis of Vital Statistics Data. A unit was created in the Bureau responsible for all the vital statistics data. The unit planned to work with the ministry of Health and Justice for the compilation of vital statistics data that has been generated by them. The vital statistics collected by the ministry of Health and Justice are the number of births and deaths by that has been registered by the ministry of Health and the number of marriages and divorces by the ministry of justice.

The statistics of births and deaths are disaggregated by sex, year and region. All the registering health facilities sent in their yearly returns to the central unit of Births and Deaths at the Medical Headquarters in Banjul. This statistics is further collated by the central unit in collaboration with The Gambia Bureau of Statistics. Further analysis of the data will be done by GBoS.

The data collected by the ministry of justice is also further disaggregated by sex, age, and regionally. Most of the registered marriages in ministry of justice are other nationalities married to Gambians. There is very little statistics on divorces as Gambians don't register their divorce.

The Gambia Bureau of Statistics has the mandate according to the Statistical Act to collate all the statistical data for processing and dissemination. The vital statistics data is to be collated process and disseminated by GBos.

STRATEGIES OF THE GAMBIA

Among the strategies to be taken by The Gambia are the following;

- Intensive mass campaign on registration of births and deaths in both rural and urban communities
- Intensive Media campaign in both electronic and media on civil registration throughout the country
- Introduction of civil registration and vital statistics with training institutions curriculums.
- Compulsory registration of births at the first clinic attendance of each child throughout the country
- Intensive Mass campaign on mosques and churches to register marriages and divorces.
- Organise Radio and Television programmes and spot on civil registrations and vital statistics
- Open civil registration offices in the regional Governor's Offices for each administrative area
- Make it a law that all marriages and divorces in The Gambia must be registered with the authorities.
- A Birth Certificate must be an entry requirement in all pre-school (Nursery) and Islamic (Madarasa) School.
- Compound to compound campaign to register births, deaths, marriages, and divorce throughout the country.
- Meetings with Regional Governors and Chiefs about Civil Registration and vital statistics.