

## **BACKGROUND**

Civil Registration commenced in Sierra Leone since the founding of the Colony at about 1791 with the mandate to register births, deaths and Marriages for both settlers and immigrants.

In 1901 a law was enacted making the registration of vital events compulsory for the founders of the colony of Freetown and Bonthe Island. Though penalties for non-registration were imposed yet this law was largely ineffective because by 1825, the Colonial Secretary admitted the unavailability of Births and deaths records as a means of ascertaining the causes of Births and Deaths. This trend occasioned a series of amendments in rapid succession.

The 1983 Births and deaths Act No.11 harmonized and made the registration of Births, Stillbirths and deaths compulsory. This meant all births; Stillbirths and Deaths were to by law be registered. This act therefore served a basis for the registration of Births, Stillbirths and Deaths in the Country. Since this method are being made to update the Act to grapple with registration challenges. As recent as the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2012, a workshop was held with participants drawn from all works of life to formulate national Births and Deaths policy and to review the existing Act.

## **CIVIL REGISTRATION PROCESS AND COMPLETENESS STATUS**

The Civil registration process in Sierra Leone is still low. UNICEF sponsored assessment of Birth and Deaths situation in Sierra Leone puts it at 51%. It completeness is far from satisfactory particularly in the provinces as the structures and facilities central to the process are grossly inadequate.

The process is heavily dependent on other health care service providers, and the good will of Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to survive the rigors associated with the process.

The political will is there but there is need for heighten political commitment by committing resources, upgrading the capacity of the institution and the existing staff.

At district level, the process is carried out by district registrars working under the supervision of the District Medical Officers in collaboration with District and Town Councils.

Registration is carried out in all health facilities in the districts by registering all births and deaths occurring in the catchment or attending villages. Reports of the various registrations are forwarded to the district Headquarter monthly for onwards transmission quarterly to the national Headquarter.

It must be borne in mind that the Local Government system introduced in 2004 is still in a transitional phase as the councils are still to understand and assume their roles for the devolved functions precisely for births and deaths. They need proper orientation in order for them to determine how they could play their roles effectively. Having proper resources is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of the system and its sustainability.

Births and Deaths registration is under resourced. There is inadequate office space at both national and district levels. Moreover, there are no means of transportation in all the offices in order to manage a countrywide operation.

#### **VITAL STATISTICS COMPILATION, ANALYSIS AND REPORT DESSIMINATION**

Vital statistics compilation, Analysis and Report dissemination is done on a quarterly and annual basis.

Statistical returns on births, still births and deaths are registered and recorded by offices in the periphery and forwarded to the district offices every month. These offices in turn collate and compile these figures which are sent to the National Headquarters quarterly.

The National office compile, analyze and circulate these data for the consumption of Government, NGOs, and the public.

#### **CAUSES OF DEATH REGISTRATION AND THE REPORTING STATUS**

Causes of death registration and reporting status in Sierra Leone are undertaken for deaths occurring in Health centre's and homes, a medical certificate of cause of death is issued out by the medical practitioner who manage the ailment in order of primary, secondary, and antecedents causes of a particular death.

For those occurring at home, the death statistical/notification report is normally administered to ascertain the cause of death.

The reporting status of deaths particularly in the western area appears very much encouraging, while the reporting status at grassroots level (provinces) needs improvement.

## **INTEGRATION BETWEEN THE BIRTHS AND DEATHS OFFICE, STATISTICS OFFICE AND INVOLVEMENT OF PARTNER INSTITUTIONS**

The integration between the births and deaths office and Statistics Sierra Leone in civil registration is through meeting, consultations, collaborations and discussions on issues of mutual interest between the two institutions. Recently, Statistics Sierra Leone has expressed its desire to strengthen the vital statistics in the Births and Deaths office hence the stronger integration.

Involvement of other partners like UNICEF and Plan Sierra Leone has been very much helpful to the department since 2004. Both Plan and UNICEF jointly conducted mass birth registration of children less than 18 years of age country wide save the Western Area between 2004 – 2007.

As recent as 2010, UNICEF field in a consultant to assess and evaluate births and deaths situation in the country. The result was a two way consultation workshop from 11 -12<sup>th</sup> July 2012 which was facilitated by the same consultant.

A proposal formulated was sponsored by Human Desiring Foundation through plan Sierra Leone to upgrade birth registration in three districts, western area, Kailahun and Port Loko for five years.

Christian Brothers, a catholic NGO is also partnering with Plan Sierra Leone to upgrade birth registration in its areas of operation. I.e. Western area Rural, Makeni, Kenema and Moyamba.

## **CHALLENGES AND MEASURES TAKEN IN ALLEVIATING PROBLEMS RELATED TO CIVIL REGISTRATION**

- The current staff strength is not enough to cover the entire country.
- There is need to build on the capacity of existing staff in civil registration techniques and the recruitment of additional staff.
- There is inadequate logistics to ensure increase registration coverage.
- There is need for a computerize system of registration.
- Vehicles, motor bikes and bicycles are necessary for an effective supervision, monitoring and collection of data.
- Regular supply of registration documents, desktop computers and laptops should be made available.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEM IN SIERRA LEONE**

Currently Statistics Sierra Leone has expressed its desire to strengthen vital wing of births and deaths. To this end, during the first meeting the births and Deaths office was requested to present a concept paper which was followed by a needs assessment conducted by officers of statistics Sierra Leone. The data collection tool of the Births and Deaths office was also made available to Statistics sierra Leone for fine-tuning so that it meets international standards.