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Commission of African Registrars General: The rationale and terms of reference

Prepared by

Task Force on the Establishment of the Commission of African Registrars
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APAI-CRVS
Everyone visible in Africa



Decade for Repositioning
of Civil Registration and
Vital Statistics in Africa
2017-2026



¹ List of members of the Task Force is given in Annex 1.

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PART 1: THE RATIONALE

1.1 Background

1. It has been seven years since Africa began to write its own chapter on the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems. African countries embarked on this notable journey to improve those systems at the first Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, henceforth referred to as Conference of Ministers, which was held in 2010. The Conference of Ministers was institutionalized as a specialized technical committee of the African Union Commission with a mandate to report to the Heads of State and Government every two years on progress in the area of civil registration and vital statistics. The Conference of Ministers provides policy directions to the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) initiative which is being implemented through its secretariat in the African Centre for Statistics of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

2. The civil registration and vital statistics systems not only provide individuals with legal documents on the occurrence of vital events, realizing basic human rights to a name and identity, but they are also a source of vital events data, including causes of death, essential for good governance, policy planning and monitoring at the national and lower administrative levels. In the absence of functioning civil registration systems, many Africans have remained unrecorded and hence unrecognized by the State. Although it will be a long time before civil registration and vital statistics systems become fully functional and aligned with the international principles of compulsoriness, continuity, universality and permanence in the recording of vital events, African countries have demonstrated that they are committed to achieve this.

3. Despite remarkable progress, the African civil registration and vital statistics systems are still confronted with many challenges. One of them is the lack of intergovernmental coordination, namely a reporting mechanism that would work with the APAI-CRVS secretariat during the period between the ministerial conferences and report directly to the Conference of Ministers. Realizing the importance of an intergovernmental mechanism to deliberate on policy and technical issues related to the development of civil registration systems, the eleventh Africa Symposium for Statistical Development, held in Libreville from 23 to 25 November 2015, recommended the establishment of a regional commission of African registrars general.

4. In view of the above, ECA organized a task force meeting to deliberate on the merit of establishing a regional commission of registrars general² entrusted with the management and improvement of civil registration in their respective countries and in the region, and the purpose of such a commission. The Task Force meeting on the establishment of the commission of African registrars general was held from 7 to 9 October 2017 in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe and hosted by the Registrar General of Zimbabwe.

5. The Task Force reviewed two background documents³ and suggested changes and provided additional inputs to the two documents. It also decided to merge the two documents, resulting in this final to be presented to the Experts Meeting preceding the Fourth Conference of African Ministers

² The head of national civil registration offices has a different designation in different countries, such as registrar general, director general and manager. For the purpose of the present document, the person heading the civil registration of the national agency is referred to as registrar general. The registrar general, in some countries is also responsible for national identification, immigration and other duties in some countries.

³ The two documents, prepared by Yacob Zewoldi – consultant for ECA and the Centre of Excellence –are: Establishing a committee of Registrar General: the rationale, and Establishing a committee of Registrar General: draft terms of reference.

responsible for Civil Registration, hereafter referred to as the Conference of African Ministers, to be held in Nouakchott from 7 to 8 December 2017. The Task Force also selected a team of five countries from among its members.⁴ Zimbabwe as the Chair of the team representing the Task Force will present this document at the Experts Meeting.

6. The Task Force also discussed working modalities of the Commission of African Registrars General, as presented in a separate document entitled “Rules of procedures”. That document will be presented to the maiden meeting of the Commission of African Registrars General when it is endorsed by the Conference of Ministers.

1.2 Historical perspective on the development of civil registration systems

7. For historical and practical reasons, the development of international principles and standards that characterize a functioning civil registration system has been driven by statisticians. In 1950, the United Nations, realizing the need to “improve mortality, fertility and other population data necessary for the study of basic demographic problems and the interrelationships of demographic, economic, and social factors” initiated work on “detailed draft recommendations for the improvement and standardization of vital statistics”.⁵ The final output of this consultative work was the *Principles for Vital Statistics* from civil registration, which was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 1953. Although the focus of the publication was on vital statistics, it also covered civil registrations. Interest in improving civil registration and vital statistics as a system was stressed by the United Nations Statistical Commission, which revised and updated the principles and recommendations for a vital statistics system three times since 1953, in 1973, 2001 and 2014. The latter two updates were focused more on the design and operation of efficient civil registration and vital statistics systems.

8. On the other hand, over the past five decades, international organizations have not focused on the establishment or strengthening of civil registration systems at the national level, except for in some isolated efforts. In the majority of African countries, past initiatives and efforts aimed at improving civil registration and vital statistics systems were largely dominated by isolated project-based and institution-led ad hoc exercises. Those efforts were, for the most part, statistically oriented with a view to obtaining improved vital statistics on a regular basis. Support in that area mainly came from international organizations, such as the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and, to a certain extent, from the World Health Organization (WHO). The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) approached it from a child rights perspective and was mainly concerned with birth registration. The efforts appeared to be addressing a non-functioning statistical system and consequently, one of the major failures associated with them was the lack of a holistic approach to the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems. The involvement and contributions of regional organizations, such as ECA, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the African Union Commission, was limited.

1.3 New era for civil registration and vital statistics systems

9. Unfolding global and continental trends and dynamics are reviving the importance of civil registration and vital statistics as an indispensable tool for achieving human rights, good governance and informed decision-making, among others. In the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*,⁶ civil registration is recognized as the most preferred source of vital statistics. Political support extended by the Conference of Ministers backed by continental and international technical and capacity support is helping countries transition from a fragmented and isolated approach in the improvement process to improve civil registration and vital statistics to one that is more holistic. Some

⁴ Zimbabwe, Chair; Zambia and Cameroon, Vice-chairs; and Namibia and Tunisia, Rapporteurs.

⁵ *Principles for a Vital Statistics System*. United Nations publication, Sales No.: 1953. XVII. 8.

⁶ *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*. United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.XVII.10.

of the major initiatives and programmes that are supporting the much-needed paradigm shift to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems are the following:

1.3.1 International initiatives

10. In an effort to accelerate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations launched the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health in 2010. Under the strategy, many commitments and actions that needed to be tracked were mobilized. Recognizing that accountability for financial resources and results is critical to achieving the objectives of the Global Strategy, at the request of the Secretary-General, the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women’s and Children’s Health was established in December 2010. In the final report of the Commission, “Keeping promises, measuring results” ten practical recommendations to fast track results for women’s and children’s health and achieve the goals in the Global Strategy were presented. In the first one, it is stated: “By 2015, all countries have taken significant steps to establish a system for registration of births, deaths and causes of death, and have well-functioning health information systems that combine data from facilities, administrative sources and surveys”.⁷

11. The World Bank and WHO, with input from several agencies and countries, developed the Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistic Scaling Up Investment Plan 2015-2024 in 2014. The Plan includes implementing activities over a 10-year period, with the goal to achieve “universal civil registration of births, deaths, marriages, and other vital events, including reporting cause of death, and access to legal proof of registration for all individuals by 2030”.⁸

12. In September 2015, Member States of the United Nations committed themselves to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda is rooted in universal rights and driven by the key principle of “leaving no one behind”. The Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda are ambitious, universal and transformational, and are aimed at balancing economic growth, social development and environmental protection. A well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics system for the implementation and monitoring is required to track about 40 per cent of the indicators envisaged in Sustainable Development Goals.

1.3.2 Continental initiatives

13. Initially, civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa were developed by countries sporadically on an individual basis. That changed radically with the establishment of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Civil Registration in August 2010, which heralded the much-needed high-level political commitment to improve such systems in the region. The Conference is institutionalized as a permanent platform that meets once every two years to provide policy directions necessary for transforming civil registration and vital statistics systems and to monitor and advise on progress in improving civil registration and vital statistics in the region. The ongoing efforts of the Conference of Ministers to enhance civil registration and vital statistics reflects the level of commitment by African countries to change the scandal of invisibility in their populations.

14. The major initiative, APAI-CRVS, was developed by pan-African institutions and key development partners and endorsed by the Conference of Ministers in 2012. The main objective of APAI-CRVS is to support countries in adopting a holistic approach to address systemic issues related

⁷ Commission on Information and Accountability for Women’s and Children’s Health, “Keeping promises, measuring results”. Available at: www.who.int/topics/millennium_development_goals/accountability_commission/Commission_Report_advance_copy.pdf?ua=1

⁸ World Bank and World Health Organization, “Global civil registration and vital statistics scaling up investment plan 2015–2024”, Washington, D.C., 2014. Available at: www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health/publication/global-civil-registration-vital-statistics-scaling-up-investment.

to legal, policy, management and operational aspects of civil registration and vital statistics. One of the major achievements in that regard has been the commitment made by the first Conference of Ministers, held in Addis Ababa in August 2010, to support a time-bound implementation plan of the reform process for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in their respective countries.

15. Improving coordination at the regional and country levels is another important guiding principle of APAI-CRVS. The African Regional Core Group on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics⁹ is an example of a best practice in coordination among development partners. The strong concerted effort and commitment of the group to support the continental framework has led to the alignment of institutional mandates and optimal use of available resources in the continent. It also has ensured that critical capacity-building support, technical assistance and advisory services extended to countries and efforts to promote South-South cooperation were carried out in an integrated and holistic manner. The Core Group and the APAI-CRVS secretariat have collaborated in the programme delivery at the continental level and set standards for similar arrangements at the country level.

16. Another important region-wide initiative is the South-Africa-led African Symposium on Statistical Development, which organized a series of five symposiums devoted to civil registration and vital statistics, starting in 2012. The symposiums brought together civil registration authorities and national statistical offices to deliberate on improving civil registration and vital statistics systems within the APAI-CRVS framework.

17. In 2015, the African Union adopted Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, and its accompanying first Ten Year Implementation Plan (2014-2023).¹⁰ The Agenda serves as a transformative development framework for achieving accelerated, sustained and inclusive economic growth that will spur sound, resilient and inclusive socioeconomic development on the continent in the next 50 years. Similar to the global 2030 Agenda, complete and efficient civil registration and vital statistics systems in the countries are required to monitor progress in implementing the continental Agenda.

1.4 Making everyone visible in Africa: major achievements and challenges

18. In the historical first conference of the African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, the Ministers emphasized the centrality of civil registration and vital statistics systems for the development of Africa and laid the foundation for securing the much-needed political commitment for accelerating the improvement of it in African countries. The Conference also emphasized the need for a coordinated and integrated approach for strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems at the national level and requested the three pan-African institutions to support the initiative in partnership with the United Nations and other organizations. The second Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2012, took action to work with countries committed to undertake comprehensive assessments and develop costed action plans supported by the Core Group. The Ministers in their third conference, held in Yamoussoukro in 2015, provided directions on various technical aspects, such as use of information communications technology, causes of death, linkage with national identification programmes, vital statistics and realization of human rights. In the past six years, African countries have significantly enhanced their

⁹ The Core Group comprises the three pan-African organizations (African Union Commission, AfDB, and ECA), the African Symposium on Statistical Development, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR), UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, the INDEPTH Network, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century and the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Data for Health Initiative.

¹⁰ African Union Commission, *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (Addis Ababa, 2015). Available at www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf.

civil registration and vital statistics systems. However, going forward, they still must overcome some serious challenges to improve them.

1.4.1 Achievements

19. The guidance of ministers since 2010 has proved to be critical in ensuring political commitment and leadership at the highest level and in steering the APAI-CRVS initiative in the right direction at the regional level as well as in a large number of countries. In that connection, some of the major achievements of the initiative are as follows:¹¹

- (a) The Executive Council of the African Union Commission, in their twenty-ninth ordinary session, held in Kigali from 13 to 15 July 2016, declared 2017-2026 as the decade for repositioning civil registration and vital Statistics in Africa;¹²
- (b) Taking leadership and ownership, most countries have adopted a holistic approach towards improving their civil registration and vital statistics systems. There has been increased engagement and involvement of the health sectors in countries in improving birth and death registration coverage. To date, about 40 countries have conducted or initiated comprehensive assessments of their civil registration and vital statistics systems; many of those countries have developed costed national action plans and a few of them have begun to implement them;
- (c) In most African countries, particularly those that have begun to implement plans to improve their civil registration and vital statistics system, high-level interministerial steering committees and technical committees were constituted to provide oversight and guide the implementation process. In many countries, joint United Nations support for the process was also ensured;
- (d) Most of the countries that have conducted assessments identified existing civil registration laws to be major impediments to the improvement of the registration process and have taken steps to amend them. This has enabled the simplification of the registration process, while taking into account the local culture and social norms, and evolving needs and additional requirements related to the digitization of civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- (e) In some of the countries, Governments have agreed to fund their civil registration and vital statistics improvement plans, decreasing their dependence on external assistance;
- (f) Several regional tools and publications have been developed by the APAI-CRVS secretariat in collaboration with the Core Group, for use by the countries. Those include: civil registration and vital statistics comprehensive assessment tools and guidelines; strategic planning guidelines; a civil registration and vital statistics digitization guidebook; a handbook for developing a vital statistics report; a trainers manual for the production of vital statistics from civil registration records; a strategy to improve mortality statistics in Africa, covering the period 2015-2020; and a practical guide on death registration and causes of death processes in civil registration. More such guides and handbooks will be produced;
- (g) Taking into account the different legal and technical requirements in French-speaking African countries, a regional support group on civil registration and vital statistics for Francophone countries was established in early 2015. ECA is leading this initiative, in collaboration with UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO. Two other organizations involved in this initiative are AfDB and the Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS). That group is

¹¹ A detailed list of achievements is provided in the concept note prepared for the Fourth Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration. AUC/CRMC4/2017/01 (July 2017).

¹² African Union Commission, Decision 921. Available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/31275-ex_cl_dec_919_-_925_and_928_-_938_xxix_e.pdf.

proving to be useful as more and more French- speaking countries seek assistance in assessing and planning their civil registration and vital statistics systems.;

- (h) A few countries have come up with innovations to improve their civil registration operations, in particular with regard to improving service delivery to hard to reach and vulnerable population groups.

1.4.2 Challenges

20. Africa must do more to achieve the vision “Everyone visible in Africa”, which although seems distant, cannot be lost sight of. Consequently, there is urgent need to take stock of the challenges associated with the implementation of APAI-CRVS and make strategic course corrections, if required. Several challenges were encountered during the last six years in implementing this Programme at the regional and country levels, which can be categorized as technical, logistical and administrative. Some of the major challenges are listed below:

- a. In some countries, particularly those in Western and Central Africa, leadership and ownership with regard to the implementation of APAI-CRVS remain a challenge;
- b. Coordination at the country level among the government ministries and departments and development partners has not been at the desired level in many countries;
- c. The coverage and quality of the assessments and plans related to APAI-CRVS have not always been in accordance with standard procedures. For example, in some countries the element on causes of death was completely missed out. In most countries, the “as-is” and “would be” business process mappings were not done at all, resulting in lack of a clear vision and hence strategies that are not in line with the vision;
- d. After countries have conducted comprehensive assessments, there has been no guidance on how to proceed with the implementation – Who should take the lead? Where to start? How to start? and how to prioritize?
- e. Because the civil registration and vital statistics systems are multifaceted, technical support is required in a variety of areas, requiring many experts. For example, technical support for amending a law is completely different from the technical support needed to set up a cause of death system, this cannot be provided by one expert,
- f. With the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems gaining momentum in Africa, various donors and development partners are starting to show renewed interest in this area and are, consequently, providing support and funds for different technical aspects of civil registration and vital statistics. However, sometimes this support comes with strings attached. Those kinds of donor interventions have helped advance the work of APAI-CRVS, but, occasionally, they have proved to be counterproductive by diverting the attention of countries from the civil registration and vital statistics improvement process. Some countries have shown that with strong leadership, individual interests of donors can be centralized with the objective to apply a more integrated approach in sourcing the already existing civil registration and vital statistics improvement plan.
- g. Most countries lack a monitoring and evaluation system as a part of their civil registration and vital statistics plans. Only a few of them have in place a system for counting even the basic number of vital events that need to be registered. Accordingly, the rate of completeness of coverage cannot be measured for most countries.

1.5 The rationale for establishing the Commission of African Registrars General: who should tell the story?

21. To strengthen and support the work of the Conference of Ministers, there is need for an intergovernmental process to sustain the momentum and accelerate progress in the development of civil registration and vital statistics. This process, which would entail deliberating on important related issues and working with the APAI-CRVS secretariat, can be achieved by establishing a commission of representative government institutions entrusted with the registration of vital events in the countries – a commission of African registrars general.

22. The establishment of the intergovernmental body based on the noble commitment to change the civil registration and vital statistics landscape in Africa provides many benefits. The Commission of African Registrars General will ensure that Africa has a common voice and position that would guarantee collective action in determining civil registration issues and that government officials will with other key stakeholders in addressing common challenges. The Commission, working with the APAI-CRVS secretariat, will ensure the implementation of recommendations of the Conference of Ministers; and advise on the strategic direction of the work of pan-African organizations on the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems and the implementation of related activities. It will also serve as a forum to discuss new innovations and technologies and emerging issues.

23. The idea of forming such an intergovernmental body is not new. Latin America and Caribbean countries have a similar arrangement, which was launched in 2005 and the Pacific Civil Registrars Network was formed in 2015. Important lessons can also be learned from other communities, such as statisticians and those working in the health sector. The directors general of the national statistical offices of African countries meet once every year.¹³ Through those forums, the statistical community has, for example, developed common methodologies, concepts and standards; shared valuable lessons and experiences in adopting new technologies; and taken a common position in determining capacity building requirements.

24. The Community of registrars general are better equipped to tell their own stories and to discuss issues related to civil registration than any other group. In that regard, they are in the forefront in, for example, addressing the main issues and concerns; identifying which of the challenges brought up in a comprehensive assessment need to be dealt with as a matter of urgency; and prioritizing a costed strategic plan; and processing the scaling up of the implementation of improvement plans. There are also major general issues that are better tackled by a team of peers from different African countries with a shared vision than by individual countries. Some of these issues are listed below.

1.5.1 Ensuring continuous leadership from the Conference of Ministers

25. The Conference of Ministers is expected to meet every two years, unless the situation requires the meeting to be postponed. The inaugural conference was held in 2010, in Addis Ababa. The second conference meeting was held in Durban, in 2012, exactly two years later. The ministers held their third conference in Yamoussoukro in February 2015, after a six-month delay. The fourth Conference is scheduled to be held in December 2017 (see the table below). The first two conferences were organized by ECA. Delays in holding the conferences are to be expected but if the trend continues then the delay period may increase. The implication of that is that the much-needed political support

¹³ This intergovernmental body meets once every year as a joint Committee of Director Generals under the auspices of the African Union Commission and the Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa). The meeting is organized by ECA.

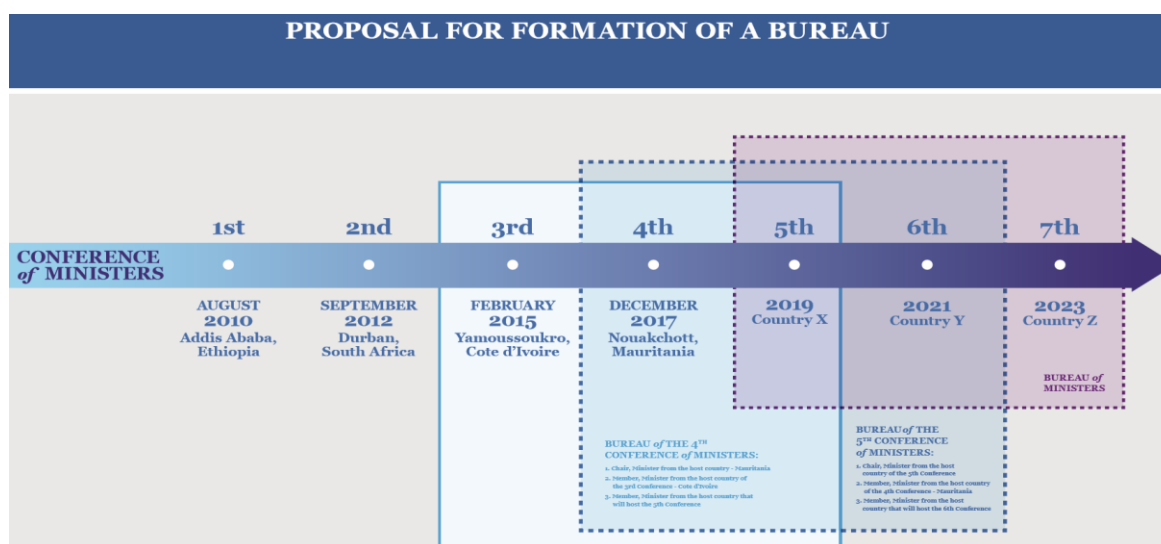
and leadership on various issues could weaken and policy directives may come far apart as a result of the delayed meetings.

Table 1: Venues and dates of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Civil Registration

Conference of ministers	Venue	Date
First	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	August 2010
Second	Durban, South Africa	September 2012
Third	Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire	February 2015
Fourth	Nouakchott, Mauritania	December 2017

26. In the past three conferences, an informal bureau of ministers was formed for the duration of each conference, lasting only for two days. This arrangement is not effective. One approach to ensure the much-needed leadership and engagement of the ministers on issues pertaining to civil registration and vital statistics on a continuous basis is to establish a rolling but permanent bureau of the Conference of Ministers. Members of this bureau would be, for example, the minister from the country hosting the conference, as chair; and the minister responsible for civil registration of the country that hosted the third Conference of Ministers (in this case Cote d’Ivoire), and the minister responsible for civil registration of the fifth Conference of Ministers (expected to be Zambia). This approach, depicted in figure 1 with example of proposed bureau members. The approach is consistent with the current practice of the assembly of heads of states of Arica. The proposed commission of African registrars general and the APAI-CRVS Secretariat would support the Bureau in its dealing on policy, technical and administrative matters on a continuous basis.

Figure 1: Proposed structure of the bureau of the Conference of Ministers



1.5.2 Thinking beyond civil registration and vital statistics systems

27. The institutions involved in the civil registration and vital statistics system can be roughly grouped into three categories:¹⁴ (a) those directly involved in the civil registration and vital statistics processes,

¹⁴ World Bank, CRVS eLearning, module 3: Institutional arrangements of civil registration and vital statistics systems. Available at <https://olc.worldbank.org/content/civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-systems-self-paced>.

such as those that register vital events (including births, deaths, marriage, divorces)¹⁵ or produce vital statistics; (b) those that provide input into the civil registration and vital statistics system, such as health institutions, for events occurring in health facilities and also provide information on causes of death; and (c) those that use outputs from the civil registration and vital statistics system to carry out their mandates and deliver their services, such as education and national identification services. Before embarking on the civil registration and vital statistics reform process, it is important to know the major actors and stakeholders and their level of influence. Improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa requires active participation of the key actors in a cohesive manner similar to the approach being undertaken at the civil registration agencies and national statistical offices. For example, with the advent of the data revolution, the private sector is now keen to work with the public sector. The system, therefore, should be flexible enough to accommodate new stakeholders getting involved in civil registration and vital statistics.

1.5.3 Coordination at country and continental levels

28. Improving coordination at continental and country levels is yet another important guiding principle of APAI-CRVS. The Core Group mechanism has proved to be very effective in coordinating the programme across the continent. In many of the countries, particularly those that have initiated the plans to improve their civil registration and vital statistics system, high-level interministerial steering committees were constituted to provide oversight and technical committees to ensure implementation. A similar collaborative mechanism for countries is missing at this stage at the continental level, particularly a technical forum of practitioners to discuss developments, plans, challenges and achievements. The Commission of African Registrars General will serve as a platform to improve coordination and collaboration among countries.

1.5.4 Capacity-building

29. For many years, the authoritative and widely used civil registration and vital statistics documents have been the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System* and the supplement civil registration and vital statistics handbooks. Those documents are still very useful. Since 2010, as noted earlier, several publications and tools have been developed by the African Regional Core Group on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics for countries. Among them are: (a) civil registration and vital statistics comprehensive assessment tools and guidelines; (b) strategic planning guidelines; (c) a civil registration and vital statistics digitization guidebook; (d) a handbook for development of vital statistics reports; (e) a trainers manual for production of vital statistics from civil registration records; (f) a strategy to improve mortality statistic in Africa, covering the period 2015-2020; and (g) a practical guide on death registration and causes of death processes in civil registration. The production and updating of more guides and handbooks are in the pipeline. The production of those documents has been more supply driven rather than demand driven. The Commission of African Registrars General is expected to suggest the types of documents needed to advance efforts to improve CRVS systems and will actively participate in the production of these public goods

30. An important step in building sustainable capacities in Africa in civil registration and vital statistics was the development of a pool of regional experts. Those experts have received training in various aspects of civil registration and vital statistics, including in the use of comprehensive assessment and planning tools. They have been assisting countries in undertaking assessments of and developing national action plans and have trained many civil registration and vital statistics officials, which has resulted in in-country knowledge-sharing and transfer. Many civil registrations and vital statistics country champions have emerged and are being deployed to support other countries in the region. Several training workshops on various aspects of civil registration and vital statistics have been

¹⁵ In a few countries, there are separate registration institutions, one for births and deaths and another for marriages and divorces.

organized to train civil registration and vital statistics experts as part of the capacity-building effort in the region. The Commission of African Registrars General, working with the APAI-CRVS secretariat and the Core Group, should be involved in defining the kind of training required by countries.

1.5.5 Developing civil registration as a discipline and the role of learning institutions

31. The principles of permanency and continuity are essential for a well-functioning civil registration system, which requires an uninterrupted supply of qualified registrars. There are hundreds of thousands of civil registration officers in Africa. For instance, Ethiopia alone has about 20,000 registration officers. To maintain civil registration systems, a continuous flow of registrars trained at different levels is required. Workshops alone cannot satisfy this demand. The Commission of African Registrars General can play a catalytic role in supporting efforts to build expertise in civil registration, vital statistics and cause of death; and encourage existing educational institutions to revise their curricula and produce civil registration professionals at different levels. In the long run, civil registration could also become a discipline with equal standing to, for example, statistics, demography and sociology. The Commission of African Registrars General can lay the ground for this.

1.5.6 Narrowing the civil registration operations divide between groups of African countries

32. As discussed earlier, one attempt to narrow the gap in civil registration operations between groups of African countries is the establishment of a regional support group on civil registration and vital statistics for French-speaking African countries that takes into account their special legal and technical requirements. The experience in the main language – English, French and Portuguese – groups of African countries needs to be shared and commonalities and differences should be discussed. Ways need to be devised to bridge the gaps or build interfaces between the two systems in the English and French speaking countries. Experiences in such countries as Rwanda, where transition from one system into other is taking place gradually, needs to be studied.

1.5.7 New and emerging issues

33. Existing and emerging information and communications technology, social media and mobile devices (with or without access to the Internet) used for creating awareness and recording information and transmitting registered information can play an important role in building an enabling environment for civil registration offices to improve the coverage and timeliness of their services. Other developments, such as verbal autopsies to record probable cause of death in communities and integrate the process in the civil registration and vital statistics systems, are contributing significantly to the effort to improve the dismal state of death registration and collecting information on the cause of death.

34. Regarding the statistics sector, Africa is an early innovator and participant in the data revolution era. A data revolution in Africa would afford the continent the opportunity to interact with diverse data communities and to embrace a wide range of data sources, tools and innovative technologies. This would enable the continent to produce disaggregated data, including gender-disaggregated data, for decision-making, service delivery and citizen engagement. A civil registration system is central and necessary for the transformation of Africa.

1.6 The Commission of African Registrars General and the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics secretariat

35. The overall objective of the Commission of African Registrars General is to deliberate on how to make strategic shifts to advance the APAI-CRVS initiative to the next higher level by taking stock of the achievements made so far, identifying and prioritizing the available opportunities, and devising

ways and means of tackling the challenges associated with them. The Commission will work closely with the APAI-CRVS secretariat in formulating policies related to civil registration in the continent in support of the Conference of Ministers. It will also deal with national and continental civil registration, methodological issues and support the coordination and integration of the African civil registration and vital statistics systems and technical cooperation activities related to civil registration organizational matters, among others. It is intended to provide strategic support to the Conference of Ministers and the work of AfDB, the African Union Commission and ECA on the development of civil registration systems in Africa.

36. In general, the Commission will collaborate with the APAI-CRVS secretariat in the following activities:

- a. Contextualizing APAI-CRVS against the backdrop of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 so that no one is left behind;
- b. Identifying key challenges in implementing APAI-CRVS at the regional level and in countries, and proposing practical solutions;
- c. Deliberating on possible corrective measures aimed at improving the delivery of APAI-CRVS;
- d. expanding the wholistic approach of APAI by working at integrating civil registration and identity systems as a critical tool in supporting and strengthening good governance in Africa; and
- e. Designing strategic directions to revitalize APAI-CRVS through a systematic review and improved coordination, implementation, monitoring and reporting on enhanced civil registration systems at continental, regional and country levels.

PART 2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

37. The rationale for the establishment of the Commission of African Registrars General has been set out in part 1 of the present report. Part 2 of the report deals with the terms of reference.

2.1 Title

38. The Commission, once established, will be known as the Commission of African Registrars General.

2.2 Membership

39. The Registrars General or heads of the civil registration government institutions of African countries will be the members of the Commission.

2.3 Honourary membership

40. The Commission may bestow honorary membership to former registrars general.

2.4 Purpose

41. The main purpose of the Commission of African Registrars General is to establish a consultative forum that provides several elements: effective support to the Conference of African Ministers; a close working relationship with the APAI-CRVS secretariat on issues of concern related to the development and improvement of national and continental civil registration systems, coordination and integration of the African Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems; and support to technical cooperation activities; implements and monitors the implementation of the initiative, “Decade for the repositioning of civil registration and vital statistics in Africa: 2017-2026”,¹⁶ among others.

2.5 Aims and objectives

42. The overall objective of the Commission of African Registrars General is to deliberate on how to make strategic shifts to take the APAI-CRVS initiative to the next level by taking stock of achievements, identifying and prioritizing available opportunities, and devising ways of addressing current challenges. To that end, working closely with the APAI-CRVS secretariat, the Commission shall:

- i. Contribute towards the setting of policies on civil registration across the continent in support of the Conference of African Ministers;
- ii. Consider a range of issues of concern, including the development of national and continental civil registration methodology;
- iii. Engage in the coordination and integration of the African Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System;
- iv. Support technical cooperation activities related to civil registration organizational matters;
- v. Provide strategic support to the Conference of African Ministers and to the work of AfDB, the African Union Commission and ECA.

¹⁶ In July 2016, Heads of State and Government declared 2017-2026 to be the “Decade for the repositioning of civil registration and vital statistics in Africa’s continental, sub-regional and national development agendas”.

2.6 Functions

43. The commission will provide a forum for work on all matters related to civil registration that are of interest to its members and for the advancement of civil registration and vital statistics systems across the continent. In particular, the Commission has the following functions:

- (a) Identify key challenges in the implementation of APAI-CRVS at national and continental levels, and propose solutions so that objectives of the “Decade for repositioning” is achieved and the vision of the APAI-CRVS initiative, “Everyone visible in Africa”, becomes a reality;
- (b) Work with the APAI-CRVS secretariat in ensuring that all past and future recommendations of the Conference of African Ministers are implemented;
- (c) Promote the development and improvement of national civil registration systems for better governance in the spirit of “leave no one behind”, by taking into account all pertinent national, continental and international legal instruments;
- (d) Promote effective coordination and collaboration among key stakeholders at national and continental levels;
- (e) Provide a forum for member States to deliberate on activities related to civil registration of the pan-African institutions and other members of the Africa CRVS Core Group (referred to as the Core Group), and provide advice in order to ensure their relevance to the needs of countries; and to establish working mechanisms in implementing continental strategies and initiatives aimed at supporting major international development initiatives and the African integration agenda;
- (f) Ensure that countries have in place comprehensive civil registration laws or regulations aligned with international standards;
- (g) Explore ways to ensure that civil registration records are, where appropriate, the conventional instruments in the proper implementation of various human rights provisions embedded in national laws and international instruments;
- (h) Encourage member States to institute adequate organizational structures for civil registration systems, using appropriate business management models, with an adequate monitoring and evaluation framework;
- (i) Facilitate the sharing of experience in the use of new technology and encourage countries to put in place comprehensive, appropriate, integrated and secure information technology solutions in their civil registration systems;
- (j) Support the research work of the APAI-CRVS secretariat and share experiences, where necessary, on issues being investigated, and recommend studies that may be required to further the objectives of the APAI-CRVS initiative;
- (k) Deliberate on the external environment in order to create opportunities or to reduce factors that put at risk the development of civil registration systems at national and continental levels;
- (l) Promote the development and improvement of relevant national systems by ensuring the quality and comparability of vital statistics at the national and international levels by working closely with the national statistical offices;
- (m) Review the annual report of the APAI-CRVS secretariat, which corresponds to its five-year costed strategic plan;
- (n) Set up, in collaboration with the APAI-CRVS secretariat, a peer-review mechanism process in which a group of countries reviews the performance of selected countries, but as an ongoing process until all countries are reviewed at least once;

(o) Amend, where necessary, its priorities and methods to meet new requirements and maintain a balance between matters of current concern and the longer-term development aspects of the civil registration systems.

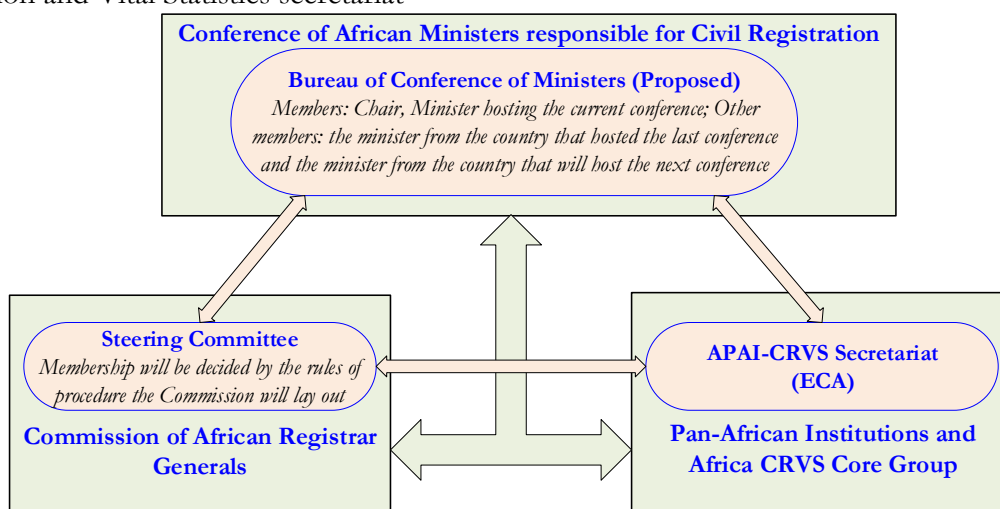
2.7 Steering Committee

44. The Commission of African Registrars General will elect members from among its members to form the Steering Committee, in accordance with its rules of procedure¹⁷ and in consultation with the APAI-CRVS secretariat. The Steering Committee, which will serve as an implementing body of the Commission of African Registrars General, will work with the APAI-CRVS secretariat in implementing policies defined by the Commission and the Conference of African Ministers. The members of the Steering Committee will undertake to devote the time necessary to ensure the adequate discharge of their duties during their term in office. The Chair of the Steering Committee will preside over the meetings of the Commission of African Registrars General for the period of time specified in the rules of procedures that the latter will establish. To the extent possible, regular meetings will be conducted electronically.

2.8 The African Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics secretariat and the Steering Committee

45. The African Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems secretariat in the African Centre for Statistics of ECA will serve as the secretariat of the Commission of African Registrars General and its Steering Committee. The secretariat will, among other things, work with the Steering Committee on the implementation of the recommendations of the Conference of African Ministers; handle official contacts; correspond with countries, the Core Group and other governmental and non-governmental experts, including experts from international agencies involved in civil registration and vital statistics; assist in the scheduling of meetings and other activities for adoption by the Commission; and support the preparation and translation of progress reports of the work of the Steering Committee, which will be reported to each general meeting of the Commission.

Figure 2: Work flow structure of the Bureau of Ministers, the Steering Committee of Commission of African Registrars General and the African Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics secretariat



¹⁷ Draft rules of procedure of the Commission will govern its work, that of its Steering committee, and the working relationship with the APAI-CRVS secretariat.

2.9 Other participants and observers

46. Standing invitations will be extended to the pan-African institutions to participate in all meetings of the Commission; and they will be invited to the meetings of the Steering Committee, when it deems it necessary. The Commission may decide to invite selected or all members of the Core Group to its meetings.

47. The Commission will make arrangements for regular joint meetings with the Statistical Commission for Africa and the health sector. The members of the Statistical Commission are the Directors General of the national statistical offices in Africa. In addition, the Commission will make efforts to involve other key continental and regional level stakeholders, such as from the health sector, national identification management agencies, electoral board commissions, and immigration offices. It will reach out to African training institutions, civil societies and others as observers if the agenda of its meeting requires it.

2.10 Meetings

48. It is proposed that the Commission of African Registrars General meets once a year. A one-day meeting is proposed to be held preceding the Conference of African Ministers and once per year between the Conference of African Ministers. The meeting will be held under the auspices of ECA, in collaboration with the African Union Commission and AfDB, at a time and venue to be fixed by the APAI-CRVS secretariat. The Steering Committee, in consultation with the APAI-CRVS secretariat, may accept requests from Governments of Africa to host the regular annual meeting.

49. The Commission or the APAI-CRVS secretariat may call for an extraordinary meeting of members.

2.11 Report

50. The commission will submit an annual report to the Conference of African Ministers.¹⁸ The report will be drafted by the Steering Committee in collaboration with the APAI-CRVS secretariat.

2.12 Task teams

51. The Commission, in consultation with the APAI-CRVS secretariat and the Statistical Commission for Africa, may establish, maintain or retire technical groups or subcommittees to advance the civil registration improvement objectives. The form and scope of a technical group will be determined by the terms of reference created for the particular group and according to the rules of procedures of the Commission.

2.13 Working modalities

52. The work of the Commission will be organized according to the modalities it establishes. A draft of the rules of procedure will be the first agenda item of the first meeting of the Commission of African Registrars General. The working modalities are proposed to serve as a tool for the smooth functioning of the Commission.

2.14 Amendments to the terms of reference

53. The Commission of African Registrars General may propose changes to its terms of reference to the Conference of African Ministers, as necessary.

¹⁸ The annual report will be submitted to the Bureau of the Conference of African Ministers, if it is formed.

Annex. Members of the Task Force

No.	Country	Name	Title of CR Chief	Institution
1	Cameroon	Mr. Alexandre Marie Yomo	Director-General	Bureau National de l'Etat Civil (BUNEC)
2	Ethiopia	Ms. Elsa Tsefay Gebreegzi	Director General	Vital Events Registration Agency
3	Kenya	Mrs. Joyce Wanjiru Mugo	Director General	Civil Registration Services,
4	Lesotho	Mr. Tumelo Ephraim RABOLETSI	Director General	Department of Civil Registry and National Identity
5	Liberia	Mr. Chea Sanford Wesseh	Assistant Minister for Statistics	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
6	Mozambique	Mr. Sergio Amone Sueia	Head of the Civil Registration Department	National Directorate for Registration and Notary , Ministry of Justice and Religious and Constitutional Affairs
7	Namibia	Ms Anette Bayer-Forsingdal	Acting Deputy Permanent Secretary	National Population Register, Identification and Production Department of Civil Registration, Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration
8	Nigeria	Mr. Eze DuruIheoma (SAN)	Commissioner	National Population Commission
9	Sierra Leone	Mr. Richard Bambanga Konie	Deputy Chief Registrar	National Office of Births and Deaths, Ministry of Health
10	United Republic of Tanzania	Ms. Lina Robert Msanga	Acting Director, Legal Rights Protection	Registration Insolvency Trusteeship Agency- (RITA), Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs
11	Zambia	Mr. Martin Nyahoda	Deputy Registrar General	National Registration, Passport and Citizenship
12	Tunisia	Mr Mokhtar Hammami	President	Instance Générale de Prospection d'Accompagnement du Processus de Décentralisation (IGPAPD)
13	Zimbabwe	Mr. Tobaiwa Tonneth Mudede	Registrar General	Registrar General's Department