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African Union Commission
Fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible
for Civil Registration
Meeting of Experts
Nouakchott, 4-6 December 2017

Report of the Meeting of Experts



APAI-CRVS
Everyone visible in Africa



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



CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
for CRVS Systems

I. Introduction

1. The Meeting of Experts of the Fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration was held at the Palais de Congrès in Nouakchott, from 4 to 6 December 2017.

II. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following member States: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, the Niger, Nigeria, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, the Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

3. The meeting was jointly organized by the African Union Commission (AUC), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the African Development Bank (AfDB). Also present were the following institutions: United Nations (Statistics Division), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank; European Union; Bloomberg, Centre of Excellence, Data for Health, INDEPTH, and Plan International.

III. Session I: Opening session

A. Opening of the meeting

4. The representative of AfDB said that a functional civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system was vital for monitoring the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Agenda 2063 and the five priorities of the African Development Bank, known as the "High Fives". Efforts made by many African countries in undertaking comprehensive assessments of their respective CRVS systems and developing strategic plans were encouraging. The African Development Bank had supported those initiatives and would continue to work with other partners to build the CRVS capacity of member States.

5. The representative of ECA highlighted the significant improvement of CRVS systems in Africa over the past seven years. Several critical resolutions and recommendations were passed during previous CRVS conferences to strengthen and accelerate CRVS systems in the region. As a result, the region had moved from isolated and project-based efforts to a more coordinated and holistic programmatic approach under the African Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS). The regional CRVS core group played a key role in coordinating and providing technical support. Despite the remarkable progress made, several challenges remained. They included inadequate financing, an understaffed and under-resourced APAI-CRVS secretariat and the absence of the research and development needed to better understand the CRVS process.

6. The representative of AUC welcomed all present, on behalf of Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of AUC. She said that the fourth conference was being organized as a follow-up to the previous conferences, to exchange views, share experiences and best practices, and identify challenges in the area of CRVS in Africa. The Heads of State and Government had prioritized the improvement of CRVS on the continent and institutionalized the ministerial conference in 2012 and declared 2017–2026 the decade for repositioning CRVS in Africa. With

the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, civil registration had become central to monitoring the implementation of the agendas in an integrated manner. She assured the meeting that AUC would continue to support member States in the production of reliable, harmonized and timely data through the implementation of the revised Strategy for Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSAII). Lastly, she called upon all to collaborate in order to realize the common vision of a united, integrated and prosperous Africa.

7. His Excellency Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, Minister of Interior and Decentralization of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania welcomed all representatives. Civil registration, he said, was critical to informing the development initiatives of a country, in terms of the registration of people wherever they were located. It was important to promote registration and put in place all the necessary machinery to that effect. The recording of population data had an impact on the socioeconomic development of countries across the continent. It was observed that such recording was the cornerstone of improving the living conditions of the people and that there should be better coordination of CRVS in Africa. Lastly, Mr. Ould Abdallah thanked the partners and representatives once again, and welcomed them to Mauritania, their second home.

B. Election of the Bureau

8. The participants elected the following countries to constitute its Bureau on the basis of rotational regional representation:

Chair:	Mauritania — North Africa
First Vice-Chair:	Zambia — Southern Africa
Second Vice-Chair:	Sudan — East Africa
Third Vice-Chair:	Gabon — Central Africa
Rapporteur:	Côte d'Ivoire — West Africa

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

9. The representative of Mauritania, the newly appointed Chair, presided over the meeting and proposed that the agenda be adopted without any amendments.

D. Objectives of the meeting

10. A representative of AUC gave a brief overview of the purpose of holding the fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration. The conference was in line with the decision taken by the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in July 2012 in Addis Ababa to endorse the institutionalization of such a meeting on a biennial basis. The meeting was expected to achieve the following: review progress made against the ministerial resolutions of past conferences; reach consensus on the strategic direction to be taken to revitalize APAI-CRVS; endorse the strategic plan for 2017–2021; and approve the establishment of an African fund for the improvement of CRVS systems.

IV. Session II: Civil registration and vital statistics: an imperative for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063

A. Civil registration and vital statistics for monitoring the progress made in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

Presentation

11. A representative of AUC gave a presentation on the genesis of Agenda 2063 and its aspirations. He pointed out that member States were expected to align their national development priorities with the global and continental development agendas in an integrated manner. He further highlighted that monitoring the progress on the implementation of many of the targets of the global and continental agenda in an integrated manner required data from CRVS. He concluded by noting the challenges in many African countries, which underscored the absence of necessary laws or infrastructure, making it difficult, if not impossible to register vital events on a regular basis. He also noted the lack of comprehensive CRVS action plans at the national level.

Discussion

12. Following the presentations, it was noted that regarding the implementation of Agenda 2063, AUC had supported its implementation in 37 member States. In addition, AUC had worked with agencies with the United Nations system to develop common indicators for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The Commission was also finalizing the development of its Mid-Term Plan of the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063. Participants noted that the development of common indicators was done in close consultation with and the involvement of National Directors of Statistics who, among others, were instrumental in prioritizing CRVS-related targets. On recommendations emanating from the third Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, 23 member States were in various stages of evaluating their respective CRVS programmes, while 13 member States were yet to commence. Plans were under way to build capacities to evaluate and implement recommendations.

B. Civil registration and the health and development agenda

Presentation

13. In the presentation by the representative of WHO, it was noted that WHO had an integrated approach for linking civil registration with the health and development agenda. In that regard, cause of death and death statistics were being linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. WHO, through the Regional African Strategy for cause of deaths, had targeted 60% of death registration in 20 countries by 2020. WHO had also developed a Regional Framework for Universal Health Coverage with Health Information Systems as an integral component for better governance. Morbidity and mortality identification systems needed to be linked with data mining as being inclusive for health care systems. WHO and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) signed an agreement of collaboration on e-health infrastructure necessary for capturing causes of death and mortality data. Other direct linkages to health and development included health care delivery and immunization services, both of which were important in health development, health security and expanding routine health services.

Discussion

14. Regarding death certificates and causes of death, experts remarked that taking into account the need for confidentiality, records pertaining to causes of death should be distinct from formal death certificates. It was observed that some countries provided death certificates that did not include cause of death, for example Namibia. The challenge was to ensure registration of deaths that occurred at home. It was underscored that in order to ensure that deaths at health facilities were accurately recorded, health personnel needed to be adequately trained. In addition, the required processes and mechanisms to ensure the integration of such data within the broader health information systems needed to be made available. In that instance, collaboration among countries in the African region would facilitate the exchange of good practices. It was also noted that, in some countries there were no incentives for deaths to be registered, which made data on rural and remote settings difficult to capture. One way of addressing the problem was to provide funeral benefits and insurance.

C. Civil registration and vital statistics and the demographic dividend**Presentation**

15. In the presentation by an expert from South Africa, the following questions were put to the meeting: Did African countries have access to demographic statistics such as to allow them to understand and be prepared to deal with the opportunity of demographic dividend? Alternatively, would they face an impending demographic disaster due to the population bulge of young children and young people? He emphasized the importance of civil registration systems as a source of continuous basic demographic data on the number of births and deaths and population dynamics. He pointed out that data from civil registration is an imperative to understand demographic transition process and the associated demographic dividend in the region. He underscored the importance of CRVS to compile continuous population data disaggregated by age, sex, and other basic characteristics.

Discussion

16. Regarding CRVS and the demographic dividend, experts emphasized the importance of incentives to encourage people to register vital events in their family, in order to give them access to benefits including child support grants and social support for bereaved families. Experts recognized the need to adequately invest in national statistics systems, for example CRVS, to better understand the population dynamics and the opportunity of the demographic dividend in the region. It was noted that to harness the demographic dividend of young people (which represents of a high proportion of the population), it would be necessary to invest in high quality health services, education and employment opportunities for that group. Experts underlined that CRVS was equally important to census and surveys; different population data sources were interrelated and could not be separated from or replace CRVS and vice versa. On poverty-related youth migration from Africa to Europe and to the Middle East, experts recognized the urgency of carefully targeted policies on inclusive economic growth and the creation of employment opportunities for young people.

General recommendations

17. The following recommendations were proposed for member States:

(a) Put in place, together with regional economic communities, clear mandates and accountability frameworks for CRVS systems at each administrative level;

(b) Allocate adequate funding for CRVS in order to ensure the functioning of CRVS systems

(c) Adopt the new international Medical Certificate of Cause of Death form, designed by WHO, as an entry point;

(d) Train physicians and other health workers, with the support of WHO and partners, to use the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death form for health facility and verbal autopsy for community deaths, and monitor implementation, including with respect to electronic reporting, based on interoperability;

(e) Provide incentives to facilitate death registration and the collection of data on cause of death, such as burial permits, insurance and performance-based indicators, at health facilities and in communities;

(f) Promote and strengthen the sharing of good practices among African countries in the spirit of South-South cooperation

(g) Make effective use of African institutions of research and higher learning, such as INDEPTH.

V. Session III: Civil registration and vital statistics as a foundational system for good governance

A. Birth registration as an opportunity to integrate civil registration and identity management systems

Presentation and panel discussion

18. According to the World Bank, Sustainable Development Goal target 16.9 clearly links CRVS with identification systems, the ultimate aim being to improve public delivery systems. Very few countries had effective joint CRVS with identification systems. The comment was made that birth certification was not enough, as other attributes were required for a complete identification system. That included, but was not limited to, biometric data, fingerprints and unique ID numbers, which were necessary. UNICEF also reinforced the importance of the formal registration of refugees and migrants.

19. In the presentation by the representative of Mauritania said that his Government instituted biometric registration in 2008, which was followed by the formal creation of the civil registration office in 2010. Accordingly, in 2009, Mauritania launched the CRVS registration process. At present, an estimated 80% of citizens in Mauritania were registered. The legal framework for birth registration had been developed and adopted; all citizens and foreigners had registration rights and unique IDs were provided to all at birth. The challenge was in registering death and providing a secured integrated system.

20. With respect to Namibia, an integrated system with a unique ID system was launched between 2010 and 2011, which included a biometric system linked to birth registration and population. The issue of citizens with multiple birth certificates and IDs was addressed.

21. According to the representative from Zambia, CRVS and identification management systems were under one department, with birth registration assigned a unique identification and, at 16 years of age, citizens were provided with national identification numbers. The National Integrated Registration Information System for new identification numbers at birth was currently under development.

Recommendation

22. The following recommendation was proposed:

- Encourages member States to create a unified system for civil registration and civil identification operations.

B. Civil registration and vital statistics and population movement

Presentation and panel discussion

23. The panel was made up of representatives of the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mauritania and UNHCR. The panel was moderated by Mr. Buchizya Mseteka from South Africa.

24. The discussion explored how CRVS systems should address the situation of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, as well as host communities, migrants and nomadic populations. Highlighting key challenges, solutions and recommendations, member States shared their experiences relating to the inclusion in CRVS systems of records of persons forcibly displaced.

25. The representative of UNHCR provided an overview of the situation of those subjected to forced displacement and the risk of statelessness across the region. In addition, the speaker provided an analysis of the current situation relating to the inclusion in CRVS systems of records of such individuals. Advantages were identified of including in CRVS systems data on refugees, internally displaced persons, host communities and stateless persons from the perspective of member States, host communities and affected communities. A number of good practices were also highlighted.

26. Ensuring that CRVS systems were accessible to all was recognized as a key measure to achieve the following:

- (a) Enable States to obtain comprehensive population data on all residents;
- (b) Improve State administration and governance;
- (c) Contribute to migration management and security;
- (d) Generate vital statistics to measure the achievement of the 2030 Agenda,
- (e) particularly in relation to maternal and child health.

In turn, those achievements would facilitate the monitoring of the overriding objective that no one should be left behind, including the different population groups considered in the present discussion.

27. CRVS systems were also recognized as a key protection tool, which contributed to achieving durable solutions, the prevention of statelessness and socioeconomic inclusion, benefiting all the affected populations, including host communities.

28. The discussion covered a range of issues including security and stability, legal, physical, economic and administrative barriers to the inclusion of data in CRVS systems on persons who were forcibly displaced. At the request of host States, gaps in coordination between functional refugee registration systems were often addressed by UNHCR and national CRVS systems. The participants agreed that common obstacles needing to be overcome were a lack of awareness of CRVS systems among affected communities and difficulties in meeting administrative requirements, including fees.

29. A wide range of good practices from across Africa was discussed, an example being the reform of the civil registration law in Ethiopia in 2017 to enable the birth registration of refugee children born in the territory. A further example was an innovative project developed by Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, in cooperation with UNHCR in the context of the voluntary return of refugees. The project in Côte d'Ivoire ensured that refugee children born in exile were registered at birth and a birth certificate provided as part of the return process. The expert from Côte d'Ivoire highlighted the benefits of including data on the situation of the forcibly displaced in CRVS assessments and national strategic improvement plans. At the end of the discussion, the inclusion of refugees in national poverty surveys by Cameroon and the Sudan was highlighted as an example of how national statistics reports could reflect the situation of such groups.

Recommendations

30. The following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Requests member States to review and, as necessary, reform national civil registration legislation to ensure that all persons, regardless of their origin, legal status, religion, or nationality can have their life events recorded at the place of occurrence;

(b) Requests member States to take special measures to include data on refugees, internally displaced persons, persons at risk of statelessness and stateless persons in CRVS system assessments, improvement strategies and scaling up plans, including specific baselines and targets;

(c) Requests member States to put in place effective and inclusive CRVS systems that are flexible and responsive to the situation of forcibly displaced populations and those at risk of statelessness;

(d) Encourages greater coordination and facilitate the appropriate sharing of data between government departments and relevant stakeholders, including UNHCR.

VI. Session IV: Reviewing progress, implementation challenges and the strategic plan of the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (APAI-CRVS)

A. Review of progress against the ministerial declarations

Presentation

31. The representative of AUC gave a brief overview of progress. She said that the achievements demonstrating political commitment on the part of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government were the institutionalization of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration and the Declaration of 2017-2026 as a CRVS decade. It was noted that progress had been made in promoting collaboration between key actors of national CRVS systems, capacity-building and promotion of knowledge sharing among member States. Challenges identified included inadequate funding at country level and unpredictability of resources for the APAI-CRVS secretariat.

B. Report on the status of civil registration and vital statistics in Africa: outcome of the APAI-CRVS monitoring

32. In his presentation, the representative of ECA noted that in response to the call by African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration made during their second conference in Durban, South Africa in 2012, “Develop results-based monitoring and evaluation systems and tools to monitor and report on progress on CRVS”, the APAI-CRVS secretariat had developed a framework to document and monitor progress made by member States in the improvement of CRVS systems. The report focused on APAI-CRVS web-based monitoring. The achievements of each country in various aspects of CRVS were measured. The report presents a summary of the findings based on responses to the questionnaire, in which 39 out of 54 member States participated.

Discussion

33. In the discussion, participants noted that weaknesses in national legislation relating to CRVS systems and that some laws on CRVS needed to be amended. In cases where there was no legislation, it was recommended that a formal procedure be launched to develop effective laws, drawing from various country experiences. The participants agreed that “causes of death” data collection tended to be problematic, as indicated in the report, and that collaboration was needed at all levels to resolve the problem. Issues related to lack of funding were mentioned by several countries. The need for measures to be undertaken during the conference was highlighted by participants, in particular those measures relating to lobbying for resource mobilization to improve CRVS systems. It was noted that in the 2010 round of African population and housing censuses the continent was able to mobilize its own resources and that approach could be adapted to CRVS requirements. The limited use of technology in CRVS was also raised.

Recommendations

34. The following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Revises the questionnaire so that the focus is on historic perspectives that determine the changes which have occurred over the years, especially after 2010, when the APAI-CRVS programme became effective;

(b) Drafts a monitoring and evaluation report that measures the performance of the APAI-CRVS programme and to ensure that the resulting assessment is included in the report;

(c) Requests that pan-African institutions develop a resource mobilization strategy and that they take the lead in raising additional resources for CRVS.

C. APAI-CRVS strategic plan for the period 2017-2021

Introduction

35. In his presentation, the representative of the APAI-CRVS secretariat mentioned that the APAI-CRVS secretariat had achieved a great deal with regard to political commitments, since the first Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, held in 2010. However, several activities forecast under the medium-term plan during the period 2010–2015 had not been undertaken owing to the under-resourcing of the secretariat of APAI-CRVS. Other weaknesses observed in recent years required a concerted effort to bring all African countries to a minimum operational level required for CRVS systems to be fully functional. In that regard, the regional CRVS Core Group had developed a five-year strategic plan for the first half of the CRVS decade (2017–2021).

Discussion

36. Following the presentation, participants focused on mechanisms for financing the APAI-CRVS initiative for the first half of Africa CRVS decade as laid out in the strategic plan. There was general agreement to change the current state of the APAI-CRVS secretariat and the need to make it a top priority. Experts underscored the need for coordinated efforts to mobilize the required budget to implement the strategic plan. Participants agreed that the strategic plan provided guidance for the next five years relating to the accelerated improvement of CRVS systems in the region. It was suggested that the mission statement be revised to focus on good governance in Africa. It was also noted that the first year (2017) of the five-year period of the strategic plan had already passed and the document needed to be adjusted accordingly. In addition, it was observed that the proposed budget was reasonable in view of the stated objectives and activities of the strategic plan. There was overwhelming support for the strategic plan and the costing of the plan was considered to be appropriate. Organizers were requested to include a set of recommendations to be presented to the Conference of Ministers for endorsement.

Recommendations

37. The following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Requests AUC, in collaboration with ECA and AfDB, to set up mechanisms for resourcing the APAI-CRVS initiative for the first half of the decade, as laid out in the strategic plan, in line with AfDB work, which had established a fund for the International Comparison Programme;

(b) Requests future revisions of the strategic plan to incorporate direct support for countries involved in CRVS improvement processes.

VII. Session V: Towards the accelerated improvement in civil registration and vital statistics systems in African countries: challenges in their implementation (parallel sessions)

A. Moving from plan to implementation

Parallel session 1

38. The contributions of participants focused on their experiences at different stages of moving from plan to implementation. Presentations were given by Burundi, Ethiopia and Mozambique, followed by contributions by several member States.

39. From a national perspective, the representative of Ethiopia gave an overview of his country's budding CRVS system (only one year old). Ethiopia had the lowest rate of birth registration (3%) according to the 2016 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey. Community health workers played an important coordination role in ensuring that new mothers were in contact with registration centres following delivery. The challenges identified in the initial implementation included: clearing the backlog of registrations; low notification of births and deaths by health institutions; financing the transactions; and lack of public awareness about the importance of registering births. Promising practices included the request by priests for legal birth certificates prior to baptizing, and the partnership in place between those priests and health facilities to notify births and deaths.

40. The representative of Mozambique said his Government demonstrated strong political commitment by introducing legislation to integrate and strengthen CRVS systems. He informed the meeting that by recognizing the importance of information and communications technology for CRVS systems, a corresponding Commission had been established and data centralization and storage were secure.

41. In his presentation, the representative of Burundi informed the meeting that comprehensive CRVS assessments were carried out and an action plan had been developed based on those assessments. The main constraint was the lack of funding to reform the process.

42. Following the presentation, discussions revealed that many countries had conducted comprehensive assessments of their CRVS systems and major steps had been taken to improve the CRVS systems through the development and implementation of relevant strategic plans. Many challenges had been identified, which hindered efforts on the part of States. Among them were lack of political will, financial constraints, persisting low registration rate of vital events, weak legal framework, lack of coordination among various key stakeholders involved in civil registration, lack of community awareness on the importance of birth registration, and absence of digitization of CRVS systems in some countries.

Recommendations

43. The following recommendations were proposed:

- (a) Ensures government ownership for the implementation of CRVS strategic plans;
- (b) Requests member States to ensure the interoperability of systems relevant to civil registration, to health, and to other sectors, paying particular attention to the confidentiality of personal data;

(c) Encourages member States to promote the use of information and communication technologies to improve CRVS systems;

(d) Requests member States to develop a robust monitoring and evaluation system;

(e) Requests that member States enhance the use of mobile registration teams with the aim of improving CRVS systems and reaching remote populations, and also requests that member States create mobile teams for nomadic populations.

B. Improving mortality statistics and cause of death recording and its linkages to CRVS systems in Africa

Parallel session 2

Presentation

44. The representative of WHO outlined the objectives of the session, which included resource mobilization, support for the use of WHO standards to record mortality and causes of death, and the exchange of experiences among countries. Recent statistics on mortality and cause of death statistics indicated that 12 countries had 60% death registration covered, while the target was 20 countries by 2020 in the regional technical strategy. WHO considered CRVS to be an integral part of the health information system that could then be leveraged in countries with immunization systems, to record mortality and cause of death. Health information was also a key component of the WHO regional strategy on health system strengthening for universal health coverage.

Discussion

45. The representatives of Egypt, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique and South Africa shared views on capacity, technology, accountability and incentives in CRVS systems.

46. The representative of Egypt indicated that its civil registration system started in the previous century and that the system was moving towards full digitization. Most deaths were registered following WHO rules and the death certificates were provided.

47. The representative of Kenya gave an overview of mortality and cause of death, and described the infrastructure, including registration centres and health facilities. Deaths occurring in the health facilities were registered effectively; however, births occurring in the community were not always recorded.

48. The representative of Mozambique indicated that his country had introduced the use of ICD 10 with the help of funding from the Government of Canada and other partners. Capacity-building was required to ensure that statistics on cause of death and mortality were reliable.

49. The representative of Mali described the national mechanisms in place for the recording of mortality and reporting of cause of death. Each certification was followed by a monitoring mechanism involving the ministries of civil registration, health, and justice, and the statistics agency.

50. The discussion was an opportunity for participants to share experiences and exchange information on processes. Questions focused on methods in place to record mortality and causes of death. Responses provided insights into monitoring techniques, frameworks, and partners and stakeholders. The representative of Morocco indicated that the information presented by WHO regarding death registration figures needed to be updated. Moreover, the map should be updated according to the WHO map of its East Mediterranean Regional Office.

Recommendations

51. The following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Encourages member States to strengthen capacity-building of health workers and the CRVS system for notification and recording of deaths and causes of death;

(b) Encourages member States to develop and implement innovative and cost-effective methods for notifying and registering vital events with a view to increasing coverage and improving accuracy of data.

C. Innovation and civil registration and vital statistics digitization

Parallel session 2

52. It was noted that information and communications technology had the potential to provide transformative improvements in CRVS systems based on its ability to extend registration coverage, standardize and streamline CRVS processes, integrate data from multiple systems and securely store data at scale, all in a cost-effective way.

53. Examples were shared by countries showing significant increases in civil registration rates by automating processes and by using mobile phones to capture data in remote areas. That had successfully increased access to registration services and decreased the associated cost burden.

54. When digitizing their CRVS systems, member States encountered the following challenges:

(a) Systems were developed to perform similar functions in parallel but were not linked or interoperable;

(b) Online systems did not function in remote locations;

(c) Systems were procured and transferred from a foreign vendor, leading to maintenance contracts that were long-term and costly.

55. The following challenges were identified during a digital transformation:

(a) Inefficient business processes that required re-engineering;

(b) Poor alignment between the CRVS business and chosen technologies;

- (c) Difficulties in integrating existing systems and ensuring their interoperability.

56. The CRVS Digitisation Guidebook created by the APAI-CRVS provided an effective way to properly plan, analyse, design and implement digitized CRVS systems. The Guidebook had already been put into full effect in countries like Ghana, where the analysis and design phase was conducted over 8 weeks in 2017. The future state technology architecture for Ghana was now defined and the reference deliverables of that work was now embedded within the guidebook. The countries present expressed their enthusiasm for using the Guidebook and it was confirmed that it was equally applicable for countries that already have digitized CRVS systems and those without.

57. Countries also expressed an interest in the development of the Open CRVS platform, a standards based, freely available software solution for CRVS.

Recommendations

58. The following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Encourages Member States to scale up the use of the CRVS Digitisation Guidebook across Africa, including the training of local personnel to improve the applicability and effectiveness of information communication technology solutions for CRVS systems;

(b) Creates an expert review group to ensure that Open CRVS is developed to fit the CRVS needs of all African countries;

(c) Creates an Africa-wide common policy on privacy and data protection, similar to that in Europe or the United States of America;

(d) Creates a game-changing technology strategy that will benefit all Africans (an ambitious objective, given that it promises to become most populous continent in the next 60 years).

D. Global Financing Facility in support of Every Woman, Every Child and World Bank support for civil registration and vital statistics in Africa

Parallel session 3

Introduction

59. The discussion focused on key challenges in CRVS; financing for CRVS and activities currently supported; collaboration of civil registration agencies with the ministries of health and national statistics offices. Participants shared information on progress made and lessons learned. Information in the Global Financing Facility (GFF) was provided, in particular the individual cases of the beneficiaries of financing, including Cameroon, Ethiopia, Liberia and Uganda. In the context of support for CRVS in Africa, the discussion covered the partnership between the GFF Trust Fund and the World Bank and their activities relating to strengthening CRVS systems through health projects that were being implemented at the national level.

Discussion

60. Challenges faced by countries in strengthening CRVS systems included the backlog in registrations, limited financial and human resources, lack of capacity and coordination at country level and paper-based /or parallel registration systems. With financing available from the GFF Trust Fund and the World Bank, the focus countries were working on different areas to strengthen CRVS, including digitization of CRVS systems; expanding civil registration offices and mobile outreach services to remote and underserved areas; using performance-based financing to provide incentives for registration; and using community health workers.

61. It was noted that opportunities were available for CRVS financing, including domestic resources and support that was available through the Global Financing Facility and lending operations from the World Bank and other development partners. In addition, the need to have good coordination at country level was recognized. However, further discussions were required on implications of the GFF and World Bank financing and the role of African regional institutions.

Recommendations

62. The following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Ensures a strong level of advocacy for increased financing and allocation of national budget for CRVS systems, and leveraging and harmonizing financial support available through several development partners, to redress the current problem of limited financing for CRVS;

(b) Encourages member States to advocate for increased financial and technical assistance for strengthening CRVS from different sources (for example, national budgets and aligned support from development partners) for various activities prioritized at country level, including facilitating the integration and digitization of CRVS systems;

(c) Requests member States to strengthen coordination among stakeholders who are providing support for CRVS;

(d) Requests AUC, ECA and AfDB to take the lead in coordinating the financing and support to CRVS, consistent with the objectives of APAI-CRVS.

E. Vital statistics from civil registration

Parallel session 3

63. Participants discussed the issue of generating regular vital statistics based on civil registration records. Panellists from countries where advanced vital statistics systems were already in place (namely, Botswana, Kenya and South Africa), shared their experiences on compiling vital records and producing annual vital statistics reports. Key challenges and barriers to producing and disseminating vital statistics from civil registration systems were explored, as were actions for overcoming the challenges and approaches for improving the vital statistics systems.

64. Participants underscored the importance of vital statistics for evaluating the performance of CRVS systems and for computing health-related development indicators of

the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 targets. Participants emphasized the need for effective coordination, a quality assurance mechanism, use of information and communication technologies, and capacity-building in statistical data management and analysis methods. It was noted that vital statistics data helped to advance the CRVS improvement agenda in many ways. For local registration offices, the vital statistics report informed their daily activities by evaluating completeness and quality of their registration records. At the national level, it showcased the state of civil registration systems and was useful for advocating for additional resources for improving the systems. National civil registration and vital statistics systems should benefit from lessons learned from research-based civil registration processes in the Demographic and Health Surveillance Systems, particularly in respect of death registration and recording causes of death.

Recommendations

65. The following recommendations were proposed:

- (a) Requests member States to implement capacity-building mechanisms designed to enhance the skills and deepen the knowledge of staff members responsible for the annual vital statistics report;
- (b) Requests member States to integrate their techniques used for annual CRVS into their national strategies for the development of statistics;
- (c) Encourages member States to compile annual vital statistics, irrespective of the level of coverage and completeness of the vital registration process;
- (d) Encourages member States to incorporate CRVS in development plans and government programmes;
- (e) Encourages universities and training centres to incorporate curricula on CRVS.

F. Civil registration in the context of conflict and emergencies

Parallel session 4

Introduction

66. The discussion explored the challenges and effects of emergencies on the infrastructure relevant to civil registration. In the context of Africa, practices and innovative approaches were shared in order to explore opportunities for improving preparedness and response to civil registration in emergency situations.

Discussion

67. The presentation by the expert from Jordan focused on issues related to the registration of refugees and displaced persons and the effect on civil registration of crises and conflicts involving mass population movements. The example given was that of the refugee crisis of Syrians in Jordan, being an illustration of the vital role played by civil registration, which was a key data source for displaced populations. A toolkit for birth registration in emergencies was

presented by Plan International. The presentation by UNHCR revealed established practices on maintaining vital event registration during conflicts and emergencies and on restoring civil registration records and services in an efficient manner post-crisis. They included: development of preparedness and resilience plans to mitigate the impact of refugee crises; integration of civil registration emergency and disaster response and recovery plans; and systematic registration of refugee children or undocumented people.

68. The panel discussion covered first-hand experiences of registration practices from countries that had gone through different types of emergency situations, including: the crisis involving refugees and internally displaced persons (Uganda); migration and mass movements (Niger); statelessness (Côte d'Ivoire); and a public health emergency (Sierra Leone). Innovative approaches were put in place in several countries to address the multiple challenges faced with the task of registering displaced persons or refugees. Those approaches included an in-depth analysis of registration practices and habits of refugees, granting citizenship to children without known parents or affiliations, revising laws to allow registration of foreign nationals, and building on experiences and structures created during crises, using as an example Ebola Virus Disease, and the consequent death registration and reporting of cause of death.

Recommendations

69. The following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Requests the APAI-CRVS secretariat to develop practical guidelines that address different types of emergencies with standard operating procedures, to include both humanitarian and development contexts in order to protect personnel working on CRVS systems, and to protect, maintain and restore civil registration services and records;

(b) Request member States to improve both the low rate of registration of deaths in emergencies and the recording of causes of death in such situations;

(c) Encourages member States to promote the need for cultural understanding and sensitivity by host countries when registering refugees and stateless persons;

(d) Requests pan-African institutions to create forums for exchanging experiences among countries on functional civil registration in emergency and other similar situations;

(e) Requests member States to conduct in-depth analyses on early marriage trends affecting displaced underage girls;

(f) Transforms the civil registration and civil identification centres into protected areas during armed conflicts, in order to shield the centres from the warring parties.

VIII. Session VI: Setting up the Commission of Registrars General

Commission of Registrars General: rationale and mechanism

Presentation

70. The representative of the Task Force on the Establishment of the Commission of African Registrars General gave a presentation on the outcome of their meeting held from 7 to 9 October 2017 in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, which was hosted by the Registrar General of Zimbabwe.

The agreed outcome document was presented during deliberations of the current meeting (Meeting of Experts) preceding the Fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, held in Nouakchott from 7 to 8 December 2017. The Task Force nominated its officers as follows: Chair (Zimbabwe), Vice-Chairs (Cameroon and Zambia), and Rapporteurs (Tunisia and Namibia). The method of work of the Commission of African Registrars General was discussed and the Rules of Procedure were presented. The latter were endorsed by the Fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration.

Discussion

71. Following the recommendation made by the Commission of Directors General of Statistics, held in Libreville in 2015, the Committee of African Registrars General was discussed. The importance of setting up the Commission, which would be responsible for monitoring the implementation of resolutions emanating from ministerial conferences and promoting CRVS-related issues, was underscored. It was agreed that the Bureau of the Commission of Registrars General would continue its work in between meetings of the Commission and that the Bureau would act on behalf of the Commission.

72. The Legal Counsel of AUC gave an overview of the procedural aspect and institutional framework of the specialized technical committees and provided guidance on setting up a subcommittee on civil registration, based on AUC rules and procedures.

Recommendation

73. The Fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration recommended the creation of a subcommittee on civil registration, under the relevant Specialized Technical Committee of the African Union, based on the Commission rules and regulations.

IX. Session VII: Introducing the global civil registration and vital statistics e-learning course

cancelled

X. Session VIII: Leveraging partnerships in civil registration and vital statistics systems improvement initiatives

Panel discussion

74. The Panel was made up of representatives of AUC, ECA, UNICEF, WHO, AfDB, and GFF. The panel was moderated by Mr. Buchizya Mseteka from South Africa.

75. The representative of AUC stated that CRVS was a developmental issue and could provide important input into a development plan. The role of AUC was to mobilize member States and partners to work together and support the implementation of a functional CRVS system on the continent. He emphasized that countries were at different stages of implementation and that the support needed to be aligned to their requirements.

76. The representative of AfDB stated that important issues to strengthen CRVS included: strong advocacy to bring CRVS to the attention of decision makers; coordination between key

stakeholders; and promoting the involvement of the private sector for financing support for and benefit from well-functioning CRVS systems in the region. He reiterated that AfDB would mobilize resources to support CRVS as the Bank was doing for other development efforts, such as ICT and agricultural statistics. He advised that in order to access the Bank's operational fund, clearance by the Ministers of Finance was a requirement. He commented that the Trust Fund was another potential source of funding for CRVS activities, and added that the Bank had provided training courses to improve development efforts in the region. He elaborated that, apart from financing, AfDB had developed training courses (as mentioned above) through their African Development Institute. The latter provided countries with capacity-building services for the implementation of projects.

77. The representative of ECA emphasized that concerted efforts of coordination needed to be put in place at the national level through different ministries and development partners, and the regional level through partners, to strengthen CRVS improvement efforts financially and technically. According to the speaker, it was crucial to identify the right partners willing to support and fund projects with one common aim in order to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure efficient utilization of resources. Governments needed to take ownership of CRVS efforts and commit adequate resources for the improvement of CRVS systems at the national level. For effective coordination at the regional level, ECA was working with different partners through the regional representatives of the CRVS Core Group. Signing a memorandum of understanding would ensure there was one main mechanism to strengthen regional CRVS initiatives. ECA was conducting a study that would demonstrate the socioeconomic benefit of CRVS. It was expected that the results would reinforce the case to increase mobilization of financing and engage in policy dialogue.

78. The representative of UNICEF stated that the organization worked with other development partners to improve birth and death registration and with member States to address the country-specific context. It was highlighted that UNICEF was not a donor institution and worked with the public sector, academia, and non-governmental organizations, and partners from the private sector.

79. The representative of WHO mentioned that the biggest challenge was producing reliable data that covered entire countries in real time. It was noted that challenges remained, including in the following areas: governance; leadership; financing and human resources.

80. The representative of the Global Financing Fund, noted that CRVS had not been adequately financed in the past. Currently, 12 African countries benefited from GFF financing and 6 countries were in the process of being considered. The speaker made the point that ministries of health across Africa were major partners, and that GFF worked collaboratively with UNICEF, WHO and others. The following major challenges were identified: sustainability; managing effective coordination at the national level; inadequate funding to countries to implement their CRVS improvement plan; and coordinating development partners involved in parallel activities.

Recommendations

81. The following recommendations were made:

- (a) Establishes a trust and retention fund for the APAI-CRVS initiative;

(b) Puts in place capacity-building initiatives for efficient civil registration systems and in order to obtain better quality statistics;

(c) Ensures effective coordination at national and regional levels with development partners, government officials and pan-African institutions;

(d) Builds the capacity of health and CRVS systems to improve their effectiveness and reliability;

(e) Promotes strong partnerships between ministries of telecommunication, health and civil registration in order to help in the collection and processing of data;

(f) Proposes the organization of a workshop at Nouakchott in 2018 to build the capacity of member States on civil registration and vital statistics, under the leadership of AUC, in collaboration with ECA, AfDB and other partners.

XI. Session IX: Conclusions and recommendations

82. The report of the Meeting of Experts was adopted with amendments.

XII. Closing of the meeting

83. The Meeting of Experts closed at 7.20 p.m.
