

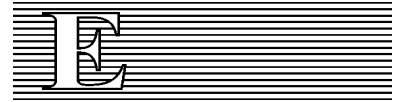


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**Strategy for Conducting Assessment of and Planning for
National Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems**



African Union Commission



African Development Bank

I. BACKGROUND AND ORGANIZATION

1. There is increasing recognition among African Governments of the value of civil registration systems and the data they generate. Yet, until now, with the exception of a few countries,¹ national statistical systems of Africa have tended to rely on statistical inquiries² for estimating birth and death related statistics. While these sources have filled the gaps in the data considerably, they have failed to meet both the statistical and non-statistical value of the civil registration system. For the incidence of marriage and divorce however, there have not been suitable substitute(s) for a source. In addition to providing the potential for generating vital statistics routinely and at regular short intervals, such as annually, civil registration records are required for various human rights or good governance objectives, including the setting up and maintaining of national identification systems and population registers.

2. Various international conventions call for systems that can routinely generate information pertaining to vital events, such as the recommendations of the Commission on information and accountability for Women's and Children's Health (CoIA), the millennium development goals (MDGs), and other international protocols. Substantial changes would be required if the data requirements of these conventions are to be met. Moreover, inherent in the resolutions of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration,³ is the call for a total overhaul of the civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems in countries.

3. With most countries having recorded decades of civil registration programmes, the current initiative is just one of several attempts that have been made to revamp national civil registration systems. There have been efforts even at the global level and continental levels to improve civil registration. This current regional initiative comes under unique circumstances that offer enormous chances of success if it would be well coordinated and systematically programmed. First, there is strong regional institutional collaboration and partnership, among the key components of the programme, i.e., political (with the African Union Commission (AUC) leading), financial (with the African Development Bank (AfDB) leading the way), and technical (with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) leading the steering committee of stakeholders). Secondly, the forum of Ministers responsible for civil registration, recently instituted, provides high level oversight and monitoring of the programme, and also the required high level mechanism to link the regional to national institutional arrangements. Thirdly, the Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD) provides the forum for technical review of progress and planning for interventions to correct any identified problems.

4. This paper provides a rationale for countries, regardless of their stage of development of CRVS systems to embark on a programme to increase the completeness of its registration system and outlines the avenue provided by ECA to support the development of a viable programme of intervention. In the next section, the paper presents the rationale for conducting comprehensive country assessments as a first step to developing a viable strategic plan for revamping national civil registration and vital statistics systems. The third section broadly proposes the process of the country-led assessment process. The fourth section elaborates on the regional support to the country-led assessment and the capacity building objective inherent in the shaping of the

¹According to the regional CRVS assessment study, only two or three countries have more than 90% percent completeness in the registration of births and deaths.

²Household sample surveys, Population and Housing Censuses

³Resolutions of the First Conference of Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, Addis Ababa, August 2010.

programme. The fifth and final section outlines the regional technical cooperation programme and its links with the national assessment and strategic plan.

II. RATIONALE FOR CONDUCTING ASSESSMENTS

5. Most countries in Africa are yet to attain the 90 per cent registration of vital events as required by the United Nations to classify the system as complete. Several countries have no estimate of the level of completeness. Moreover, within these systems there is lopsided development of the components of the associated events with respect to their coverage and the availability of the statistics from the registration systems. For example, for most of these countries the state of registration of births is substantially better than for deaths, with cause of death information lagging significantly behind the unacceptably low registration of deaths. At the other end of the system is the registration of events related to marriage—its institution, dissolution, etc.

6. Keeping in view the need to accelerating the improvement of CRVS systems on the continent ECA, in collaboration with other partners, developed a regional programme on the improvement of CRVS called the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) which is guided by the policy directives given by the Ministers responsible for civil registration in their first conference held in August 2010 in Addis Ababa. The programme makes a paradigm shift from the earlier fragmented and restricted approaches to a more holistic and integrated approach that meets the requirement of the multi-disciplinary nature of the system. The programme also entails an initial five year work plan that was endorsed by the conference of ministers which also called for an assessment of the CRVS systems in Africa to be undertaken. The initial findings of the regional assessment suggest the divergent stages of development of CRVS systems across the region. Of greater concern however, and the fundamental question that arises from the review is the significant lack of progress in systems that have existed for more than half a century in almost all countries.

7. Having successfully mobilized African countries to commit to conducting their censuses in the 2010 round, the ASSD, has directed attention to the improvement of CRVS systems. This is expected to improve governance and public administration systems and to invigorate the statistical offices to renew their interest in civil registration. While vital statistics are a component of the data production objectives of the statistics plans under the national strategy for the development of statistics (NSDS), the improvement of civil registration as a source of vital statistics is not a substantial element of the programmes. The Statistical Commission for Africa in its third session held in January 2012 recommended that the national statistics offices (NSOs) work with all stakeholders to integrate vital statistics derived from civil registration into their NSDSs.

8. With these and other regional initiatives in place to propel the development of civil registration across the continent, there is need to upscale the programme at national level for countries to benefit from all the support that is available for the programme. The APAI-CRVS has been conceptualized to be implemented in three phases: re-orientation phase, preparatory phase and operational phase. Countries are expected to move from one phase to another and while doing so they need to check whether their systems fulfill the requirements of the earlier phase. Each country is expected to devise its plans and programmes in line with this implementation approach. One of the key elements of the re-orientation phase is to get all stakeholders to appreciate and realize that CRVS is multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary in nature and agree to take a more holistic approach in their effort to strengthen the systems. This in itself requires the countries to first take stock of the CRVS system in its entirety and identify bottlenecks through a process of comprehensive assessment.

9. The many interventions aimed at revamping the CRVS system in countries, were too often, ad hoc, fragmented, and narrowly focused. They have tended to be reactive rather than strategic and

broad-based. Improvements have generally been short-lived, producing oscillations in the level of registration of the targeted event(s). In order to seize the opportunities presented by the global and regional initiatives, and assure Africa of reasonable success in its goal of “eliminating the scandal of invisibility”, there is need for each member state to develop a full-fledged programme that gives equal emphasis to civil registration on the one hand and vital statistics on the other.

10. A systematic approach for strengthening national systems would entail:

- (a) Conducting comprehensive assessment of the current system, as a first step to determining the strengths, weaknesses, etc.
- (b) Preparing a strategic plan for a national CRVS programme

11. The regional programme aims to support countries to design and implement a multi-faceted registration programme, i.e., addressing institutional, structural, content and coverage dimensions of the civil registration system of the country and of the output of such a system, to accelerate improvement of civil registration systems of countries across the region.

III. THE COUNTRY-LED ASSESSMENT

Goal and objectives of the assessment

12. In order to devise a strategy that effectively revamps the system with all its components, the assessment should take a completely fresh look at the national system in place, its operations, and challenges. Countries are at different stages of development of their civil registration systems, and the production of vital statistics derived from this system. Irrespective of the state of development of a country’s CRVS system, there are substantial benefits from a comprehensive assessment and an action plan for its improvement. For example, where coverage may not be a major concern, efficiency may be an issue for some, while the utilization of the information may be others’ major preoccupation.

13. The **overall goal** is to establish a foundation of knowledge and understanding of the current system of CRVS on the basis of which a viable programme for strengthening the system can be devised. Such knowledge is best derived from a comprehensive assessment of the national CRVS system so as to support, where necessary.

14. The assessment aims to identify strengths and weaknesses in the current system, draw lessons from what has worked over time, and how improvements have been made and sustained. The logical outcome of the assessment would be to provide the necessary information that feeds into the next stage of the programming—the development of an action plan for revamping the CRVS system in the country, or reengineering the CRVS system for greater efficiencies and more effective outcomes, in terms of coverage and completeness, outputs and their uses.

15. The **specific objectives** outlined in the following five areas of concern are:

- (a) Consolidating programme initiatives of stakeholders in CRVS
- (b) Broadening the level of understanding and knowledge about the state of the CRVS system in the country
- (c) Determining the required institutional arrangements, and whether greater efficiencies can be gained from leveraging stakeholder cooperation and advancement in technology
- (d) Mobilizing support for revitalizing the CRVS system in the country

- (e) Developing a comprehensive programme to improve the CRVS system in the country

Assessment process

16. Various types of assessments have been conducted over the years on civil registration systems. Many of these assessments have been focused by design on specific components of civil registration systems. The assessments have ranged from documenting successes of particular civil registration programmes, to focusing on selected vital events, e.g. births and deaths, marriages, divorces, etc., to reviewing the entire operations of the civil registration system. The choice of approach has depended on the purpose and intended uses of the assessment results.

17. For the current assessment exercises, the goal is for countries to gain substantial insight and knowledge about their system in order to evolve an effective strategy to surmount the past challenges. The comprehensive assessment therefore forms part of the preparations towards evolving a strategic plan, with well-costed programme of activities.

18. There are four clear stages to the current proposed assessment:

- Taking stock of what has been done to date, the results of previous assessments and how they have been used to improve the system
- An analysis of the information generated from the system, to determine any biases and limitations
- Stakeholder consultations and joint assessment of the system
- Field visits to assess institutional arrangements and actual functioning of the system

19. The four stages have been briefly elaborated below:

20. As mentioned earlier, many countries have undertaken assessments in the past so to determine the state of their CRVS systems. Some of these assessments were tied to specific programme initiatives or interventions, some assessments were issue-oriented case studies and others had broader scope. However, what is required is a comprehensive assessment keeping in view all aspects of CRVS. It is important that the proposed comprehensive assessment builds on what has already been done. Informing the current review by the previous experience, should not only serve as an input for the current exercise, but would also provide lessons about what interventions were used to address the findings from the assessment, and therefore provide some direction into what could work and what adjustments would be needed.

21. Even though many countries are yet to attain the complete coverage, and some have substantially low coverage, there is a lot that can be learnt from the information gathered so far from the incomplete coverage. Analysis of data from the current system can provide some clues about peculiar challenges of the system.

22. CRVS is a multi-sectoral system, with different players, on the one hand covering civil registration and on the other dealing with statistics. The assessment is also involving, as many partners would bring their expertise and experience to bear on the assessment. A team of stakeholders should be constituted to follow the process through. The assessment starts with the stakeholders' consultations and dialogue and should also end with stakeholders' validation of the assessment outcome.

23. Field visits should form the essential part of the process of assessment. This will help assess institutional arrangements, the set up at the sub-national level, links with other stakeholder institutions and the flow of registration forms and outputs. This visit should lead to a thorough representation of the system on the ground, the bottlenecks and good practices in the field. The visit should cover all the key institutions, and cover the various levels of events registration and processing.

24. One of the goals of the field visits is to identify relative strengths of institutions at the different levels and document what strategies are working, where, how and why? It should also bring out examples of initiatives taken by communities or local institutions to improve registration. It would also be important through field visits to gauge the perception of the public with regard to the difficulties they face in obtaining the registration services

25. While the detailed process to be adopted for comprehensive assessment will be worked out in due course, one thing is clear that the country assessment has to be completely country-led and cannot be driven by external consultants.

IV. REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR COUNTRY-LED ASSESSMENT

26. Although most countries have had a civil registration system in operation for decades, many of the systems have suffered neglect, to the extent that the systems have capacity and are not able to provide reasonable coverage of the vital events. It is expected that many countries would need some technical support to complete the comprehensive assessment required to develop the strategic plan for improving and sustaining a viable registration and vital statistics system.

27. The proposal is to constitute a pool of experts to complement countries' efforts. The experts, who will be drawn from all over Africa, will be assigned to countries over the initial period to guide countries through the assessments and preparation of the strategic plan. In addition to the technical support, the expert assigned to a country will work directly with the focal points to guide, train and mentor over the review period.

28. For the comprehensive assessment, the services of an expert will be made available on request. The outputs of this further exercise would be:

- (a) The Assessment Report
- (b) Strategy for the Reengineering of the National CRVS System, with a costed work plan.
- (c) Lessons from other countries on special initiatives that yielded dividends
- (d) Cadre of trained CRVS officers, including young statisticians

29. The request for assistance would have to originate from countries. To maximize the benefit of the technical assistance to countries, the expert shall respond to the express need of the country. He/she shall work with the national committee to prepare the orientation materials to be presented; and will make presentation only on topics for which the country requests training. The expert will review documents prepared by the group and provide comments, when and as needed.

30. It is important that the team selected to work with the experts appreciates the value of civil registration and vital statistics, and is prepared to develop a career in this field. It would be ideal to have the membership of the team drawn from the key institutions involved in CRVS and even bring in development partners and civil society organizations:

31. To encourage the youth to develop interest in this area, and more critically to promote the use of the data for research, one or two university students who should preferably be members of the Isibalo Young African Statisticians Association, may be invited to work with the team.

32. The main activities of the experts would be as follows:

- (a) Guide the national committee to organize and sensitize stakeholders to the need for an efficient system of civil registration
- (b) Accompany national task team on field visits to selected registration sites and communities and provide insights on the investigations to be conducted
- (c) Identify programme achievements and assess sources of success
- (d) Advise on analysis of available data to determine gaps and selection biases in registrations
- (e) Provide guidance for the comprehensive assessments, including
 - i. Developing an assessment framework and programme of activities
 - ii. Adapting available tools to national specificities
 - iii. Signaling areas for more in-depth assessment
 - iv. Identifying potential contributors to the assessment
- (f) Actively seek examples of success stories and case studies from country's experiences and initiatives taken
- (g) Review and comment on drafts of the national committee and of the focal team
- (h) Help the team to prepare a report
- (i) Conduct debriefing session to agree on the way forward.

33. The arrangements should include briefing and debriefing sessions with stakeholders as a group and direct meetings with major contributors to the civil registration system (producers and funding agencies) during the course of the visit.

34. In summary an expert is expected to assist the national team to successfully conduct a comprehensive assessment, develop a strategic plan for resource mobilization, and develop the capacity of a team of focal points through training, supervision and mentoring. The assessment should be country-led. However, once the country has initiated its request a lot rests on the expert to establish and maintain a dialogue with the main contacts to ensure that the task of generating a costed plan for CRVS is completed.

35. The qualification and experience needed for selection of experts and the process to be followed in their selection are being worked out. It is proposed to create a pool of 20 experts to be selected from various regions in Africa with due representation of language. A team of mentors also needs to be identified to support the work of the experts at the initial stages. These experts once selected will be undergo comprehensive training for a minimum of two weeks so as to equip them with all the knowledge required for them to be able to perform the role of experts.

V. ELEMENTS OF THE REGIONAL TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME

36. Many of the countries would need technical assistance to conduct the initial activities leading up to the development of the Strategic Plan. It is envisaged that a team of experts will be constituted and trained to provide advisory services upon request. The aim of this technical cooperation programme is to build sustainable capacity to, successfully implement the programme, having already developed a programme for revamping the CRVS system in the country.

1. Establishing High-level Coordination Committee on CRVS

37. It may be a strategic choice for the country to establish a high level committee which can provide the necessary leadership and policy direction for the improvement of the CRVS system. Such a committee can be led by the Minister in-charge of Civil Registration and include highest level functionaries from the various departments/ministries, experts, professionals and representatives of international agencies, if required. The main functions of this committee should include among others, taking policy decisions, ensuring smooth coordination among different stakeholders, providing oversight on the implementation of the action plan that a country may be implementing and arranging for requisite funds. A country can also choose to establish coordination committee(s) at the working level whose main function will be implementing and monitoring of CRVS plan and programme.

38. Many national civil registration systems have operated without strong links with the NSO, the coordinating institution for the production of official statistics. The goal of the technical assistance initiative is to secure the involvement of the NSO. The heads NSOs should contribute to the formulation of the technical cooperation strategy of the regional programme.

2. Constituting CRVS Technical Advisory Group

39. To ensure speedy response to countries/ request for technical assistance, a pool of experts will be identified and trained to provide advisory services on call. The experts will represent regional and language groupings to facilitate delivery of the services as required. The experts will support the national programme in four broad categories:

- Guiding the conduct of the national CRVS assessments
- Supporting the preparation of the strategic plan
- Building capacity of the national focal team (through mentoring, supervision, and coaching)
- Documenting success stories for dissemination.

40. The experts will use opportunities presented through country visits to provide direct training and direction to the members of the focal team.

3. Organizing a training workshop for CRVS Experts

41. The experts will be trained in the major components of the programme, namely the assessment framework, the strategic direction of the regional initiative, and the thrust of the national strategic planning. For the training to be most effective, it is expected that the participants of the training will complete a pre-workshop assignment that will acquaint them with the state of civil registration and vital statistics in their respective countries.

42. As an output of the workshop, advisors would be expected to develop individual plans on how the technical advisory services and mentoring of the focal team would be accomplished.

4. Rolling out technical cooperation programme

43. ECA, the Secretariat for the regional programme, is to provide the administrative backstopping for the advisory services. Requests from countries will be directed to and processed by ECA. As part of the rolling out exercise, ECA will compile a list of countries requiring assistance and assign experts to countries.

44. The experts, once assigned may establish direct contact with the offices to provide the necessary guidance for the preparations towards the stakeholders' consultation and assessment exercise. The experts are to maintain contact with ECA, provide regular feedback on progress and alert the secretariat of any major challenges requiring intervention at a higher level.

5. Producing country assessment and strategic plan for CRVS

45. The primary outputs of the current programme, which spans the intervening two years between the ministers' conferences, are to have undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the CRVS system and to produce a national strategy for accelerating improvements or reengineering the CRVS system.

46. This programme of work involves stakeholder consultations, task team work, and supervised by a national committee. Development partners are also to be involved at various stages of the conceptualization, review and finalization of the Plan. Involving development partners early in the work will secure their buy-in and interest in providing additional support to complete the work.

47. A launch of the strategic plan would be organized to publicize the initiative and secure government support for the strategy. An effort will also be made to link the strategy to existing statistical master plans or NSDS.

6. Providing follow-up technical support to countries

48. As stated above, it would be necessary for the capacity of a team of national officials to be built over the period of the development of the strategy, in order to prepare countries for the implementation phase. It is thus envisaged that the focal team would work as an arm of the national committee to prepare consolidated and synthesized drafts of outputs resulting from the stakeholder and task team consultations. The experts, by working with the focal team on these drafts, providing comments and supervising the work at various stages, as well as scheduling some training sessions, will build the team's capacity.

49. The plan on how such mentoring and capacity building can be achieved will be one output of the training of advisors.

7. Instituting monitoring and reporting mechanism

50. To motivate national offices, and provide further information on what would be required for the programme success, it is necessary to have regular reporting on the progress made by countries. To this end a segment of major regional fora for statistics will be taken to showcase selected countries and to report on general progress. An annual review of the state of progress on the development of the national programme will also be conducted.