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**Highlights of the Contents of the Regional Guideline
for the Preparation of National Vital Statistics
Operation Manual**

Draft



African Union Commission



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I. Introduction

African countries have an urgent need for up-to-date vital statistics for policy making, planning, management and administration of public affairs such as public health, education, population and other economic and social affairs. The conventional and recommended source of information for vital statistics is the civil registration system. However, the attempts that were made over the years to improve the civil registration system have failed in the majority of African countries. This has created the absence of current, continuous, sustainable and timely data on vital statistics.

To ameliorate the lack of current and continuous data on vital statistics, countries have resorted to census and sample surveys as an alternative source through employing different indirect methods of estimation of vital rates. However, the resulting data and estimates do not provide inter-censal estimates and disaggregated data at lower administrations. The absence of adequate civil registration system has also implications in the provision of authentic legal and administrative evidences and information on individual's identity and civil status.

As was the case in the statistics sector, in the majority of African countries legal, public administration and various social service interventions and programme are being affected by the lack of complete and current civil registration system. As a result of these problems, African countries have launched a new regional initiative in 2009 that resulted in the preparation of a regional Medium-term Plan (MTP), which encompasses different interventions and activities for the improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems.

Among the activities included in the MTP is the preparation of regional operational guidelines on the different component functions of the systems. In the first attempt, two operational guidelines, namely the operational guideline for the preparation of national operation manual for vital statistics and for civil registration are being prepared by the CRVS secretariat at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). This guideline which focuses on vital statistics is being prepared in parallel with the other guideline on civil registration that will be presented in a separate publication.

Vital statistics from civil registration involves two major operations, one refers to the total process of collecting on the frequency of occurrence of specified and defined vital events as well as relevant characteristics of the events themselves and of the persons concerned from the civil registration system and the second is the total process of compilation, processing, analysis, evaluation, presentation and dissemination of these data in statistical form.

The purpose of this guideline is to serve as guiding tool in preparing a national operational manual for vital statistics at country level. The guideline brings together the concepts, definitions and procedures pertaining to the techniques, management and operations of vital statistics in line with the regional context and in reference to the UN principles and recommendations.

II. Highlights of the Content of the Regional VS Guideline

The Guideline constitutes twelve chapters or modules covering essential technical and operational aspects for the development of continuous, complete, timely and reliable data on vital statistics in a country. The guideline proposes the basic elements, principles, concepts, definitions, techniques and procedures for the development of complete vital statistics system in a country as per the UN recommendation. In this section, highlights of the proposed contents of the guideline will be presented by referring to each of the proposed chapters.

2.1 Chapter one outlines some background information on vital statistics which includes historical perspectives, current status of vital statistics in the continent and definition of CRVS, Regional initiatives on improving CRVS, such initiatives as the African Program for Accelerated improvement of CRVS within the next five years, the Regional Ministerial forms on CRVS and the Regional Statistical forums .

2.2 Chapter II outlines the basis and objectives of the preparation of the Regional VS Guideline for the preparation of the national Operation Manual for VS and its interface with the UN Handbooks. It has to be noted that the Regional VS Guideline for the preparation of the National VS operation Manual is prepared by the UNECA Department of Statistic as per to the initiatives and mandate of the Regional Ministerial Conference in order to accelerate the improvement of CRVS in Africa.

The Regional VS Guideline is planned and prepared to assist and guide African countries in the preparation of VS operation manual that would guide and enhance the establishment of new VS system or the improvement of the already existing but deficient VS system uniformly throughout the African Regions.

2.3 Chapter III presents the rational, objectives and the approaches to the preparation of the National VS Operation Manual by the National VS authorities of each African country. The chapter specifically focuses on the different approaches that countries should follow while preparing the Operation Manual. The Operation Manual is different than instruction manual. The Operation Manual is a guide for the establishment of a new or improvement of the existing VS system while the instruction manual gives instructions to the VS staff engaged in different activities within the existing VS.

The Regional VS Guideline proposes appropriate approaches for the preparation of the National VS operation Manual. Some of these recommendations include assessment of the status of VS in the country, consulting with major stakeholders and partners, establishing technical working groups, preparing national VS action plan, defining concepts and contents of the operation manual, etc. Countries may be planning to establish a new system or to improve the completeness and coverage and find remedies for the deficiencies of the existing system. In both cases, complete assessment of the existing current status of VS system and prepare nation action plan on the basis of the findings of the assessment.

2.4 Chapter four gives emphasis to the need for formulating legal provision for vital statistics and its interface with civil registration law and focuses on the need for both, the national civil registration law and the national statistics act to provide legislative provisions for the registration of vital events and compilation, analysis and dissemination of vital statistics from the civil registration system. Among other things, the civil registration law is expected to designate the responsibilities of the civil registration authorities to continuous and timely supply the 'raw' data required for the compilation, processing and dissemination of vital statistics.

Concurrently, the legislation on vital statistics should provide for the modality and procedures of transfer of data from civil registration authority to the agency compiling vital statistics. In addition, the statistics legislation should include clear provisions for the processes and procedures of compilation, analysis and dissemination of vital statistics data. The guideline also proposes the need for the operation manual to express the linkages and interface between the laws governing vital statistics and that of civil registration. It also proposes that the different legislations provide guidelines on the organizational and administrative arrangements of vital statistics, coordination and

collaboration between civil registration and vital statistics systems and on the need for standard definitions and concepts suitable for national and international comparability of data.

2.5 The fifth chapter proposes the need for setting up appropriate organization, administration and management system for VS. The VS is a continuous undertaking that needs to be implemented and maintained in a permanently established institution supported by an appropriately organized structure and well established management system. In this connection, chapter five presents the need for setting up an appropriate organization (that is compatible with the political administrative structure of the country) designation of an appropriate administrative institution and establishment of efficient management system.

In this respect, the Guideline proposes two types of organizational structure for VS system, namely nationally organized (centralized) and sub-nationally organized (decentralized) systems. The nationally organized VS system is a system where the collection, compilation, processing, report preparation and dissemination of vital statistics data for the whole country is done by the central government. On the other hand, the sub-nationally organized VS system is a system where the collection, compilation, processing, report preparation and dissemination of vital statistics data for each subnational is done by the subnational administration itself.

Pertaining to the administration of the CR system, the nationally organized system is administered by an institution designated by the central government whereas the sub-nationally organized system is administered by an institution designated by the subnational government.

The Guideline also suggests that countries when making decisions on organizational arrangement (centralized or decentralized system) and designation of responsible institution for administering vital statistics, should evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of both systems. It is also important to consider the size of the population and the geographic area of the country and the capacity of the sub-national government institutions to carry out the responsibilities of vital statistics.

On the other hand, basic to the VS system to continue and function properly and permanently is the creation of efficient management system. The institution responsible for compilation of VS should build up its technical and management capacities to efficiently run the day to day activities of the VS system. Thus, the management, among other things, has to be able to recruit, train and define duties and responsibilities of internal and external VS staff. The management has to integrate and coordinate CRVS systems, supervise the day to day activities of VS system, etc.

2.6 Chapter six presents the types, definitions, concepts and uses of vital events. Following the UN Guideline, the regional operational guideline proposes the types of vital events for vital statistics compilation and their definitions, concepts and uses. The guideline has proposed the type of vital events to be prioritized as per the regional context and the complementary events to be considered by the agency preparing the operation manual. In the African context, the priority events proposed are live birth, death, marriage and divorce.

2.7 Chapter seven specifies procedures for VS data collection. The type of vital statistics data collection instruments such as CR record and VS report and its format and the interface between the records, duties of the registrar with respect to VS and topics and themes of the VS report. Topics and themes refer to the type of variables required for the compilation of vital statistics. The Guideline presents their definition and uses as per the UN standard definition. , The chapter also describes the procedures for collection of causes of death information. The Guideline proposes that cause of death data has to be collected as part of the duties of the registrar, and forwarded to the compiling agency.

However, due to the fact that both the registrar and the informants are mostly non medical persons, they could not be in a position to certify the underlying cause of death. Hence the Guideline recommends that the cause of death should be certified by medical attendant or medical examiner. Furthermore, Due to lack of quality of cause death data, an alternate approach to the collection of cause of death data is recommended. One of the alternate approaches the Verbal autopsy method. The Guideline provides definition and method of Verbal Autopsy.

The chapter explicitly discusses as to the various ways of transmission of information/data from local registration office to higher level for compilation of vital statistics. It can be either a copy of the register itself or the extract of the statistical information from the register. This will depend on the administrative arrangement of the civil registration and the vital statistics organs and various levels and their interface. The choice of the method of transmission of statistical information will also depend on the level of computerization in both these offices.

2.8 Chapter eight proposes the need for taking appropriate action to improve completeness of VS. The Chapter presents technical and operational procedures for measuring and monitoring the coverage and completeness of vital statistics. Completeness of registration of vital events is an important determinant in the operation of vital statistics system. As per the international standard, one measure of the success of vital registration is the requirement for civil registration to cover 90 percent of the vital events occurring in the whole country. There are a number of methods available for measuring completeness of registered vital events. Monitoring as one means of improving completeness, coverage, accuracy and quality of vital statistic system are described and some of the measurement techniques suggested by the UN are presented.

The guideline underlines the need to ensure that the vital statistics report to the compiling office should be complete in terms of geographic coverage, events and population groups. It is also expected to contain all the events that have occurred and registered in all the sub-divisions of the country and population groups such as displaced persons, nomads, refugees and those temporarily residing outside of the country. Uniformity, consistency and timelines are the other factors to be given due consideration while transmitting of data to the agency responsible for the compilation of vital statistics.

2.9 Chapter nine presents the guidelines for compilation of VS data. , Compilation is the process of condensing and summarizing information on vital events by classifying and tabulating data into categories to produce vital statistics according to the predetermined tabulation formats. Components of compilation of vital statistics data include editing, querying, coding, verification data entry, tabulation and posting if it is necessary In addition, compilation, processing and tabulation of cause of death data are dealt in this chapter. The objective of compilation of VS data is to provide annual, quarterly and monthly summary counts of each vital event. The Guideline outlines that the compilation of vital statistics data can be done either by a centralized or decentralized system. The guideline further elaborates the advantages and disadvantage of compiling VS by a centralized or decentralized system. The Guideline stresses that the form of data reported to the compiling agency must be raw data transcribed to the VS report rather than a summarized one.

2.10 Chapter ten focuses on the procedures of analysis, report preparation and dissemination of vital statistics. The 'raw', data after going through the process of evaluation and verification for accuracy, will be entered into the computer for tabulation. The tabulation program of the national vital statistics system is suggested to provide monthly, quarterly, half yearly and annual reports for different administrative levels. It is proposed that, depending on the needs of individual countries, the statistics on vital events need to be able to generate trends, differentials by geographic area and population groups for the most important characteristics of the vital events. The importance of

dissemination of the data through various channels targeting the different categories of users and the public are presented.

2.11 Chapter eleven presents guideline for evaluating vital statistics. Incompleteness and inaccuracy of vital statistics can occur in two ways. The first and most important source is during registration of vital events and the other is during transfer of information from the original register to the statistical report. The guideline proposes that the evaluation program of vital statistics must be integrated with the evaluation program of civil registration. In this connection, the Guideline points out the sources of incompleteness during registration, which include those arising from lack of awareness and problem of time and place of registration. The guideline also raises issues related to problems of indirect method of estimation. Moreover, the guideline proposes methods of evaluating completeness of civil registration, methods of assessing completeness, accuracy and quality of statistical reporting.

2.12 Chapter 12 outline the need for resource allocation for VS system. Allocation of sufficient financial resources to run vital statistics activities are essential and important components of VS system. . The agency compiling vital statistic, like any other government institutions is expected to receive budget from the government treasury. The budget allocated from the government should adequately cover activities that should be undertaken through recurrent and capital budget. Any support outside the government machinery is expected to be treated as supplementary addition to the regular government budget. In addition, it is proposed that the vital statistics system be able to generate some finance from the service it renders to its customers, for instance through the sale of monthly and yearly bulletins.

III. Conclusion and Way Forward

The Guideline has attempted to cover the major topics, definitions, concepts, procedures that are essential for the preparation of a standard national operation manual for vital statistics system. It is hoped that countries will pay due consideration and make sufficient effort in preparing the operation manual which will be an important guiding document for the improvement of vital statistics. It is again hoped that all the concerned authorities and officials will make available all the needed infrastructure for the preparation and implementation of the operation manual as part of the improvement of vital statistics so as to improve the current status of vital statistics in member countries.

The draft guideline will be presented to national civil registration and vital statistics experts for review. The final draft will be presented during the second ministerial conference in September 2012. Based on the feedbacks from the various fora, the guideline will be finalized. As part of the preparatory process of implementing the Guideline, a series of trainings will be conducted in the coming two years. The content of the regional guideline in its draft form is annexed to this note. Currently, the regional guideline is under-preparation.

Annex

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