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Highlights of the Contents of the Regional Guideline for the Preparation of National Civil Registration Operation Manual

Draft



African Union Commission



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I. Introduction

Civil registration is the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of events, including all vital events, pertaining to the population, as provided by decree or regulation, in accordance with the legal requirements of each country. It records information on every vital event as it occurs within a given time limit as defined under the law. Civil registration records provide legal and administrative evidences and information in establishing the rights and privileges of individuals and are used for various administrative and social services. It is also the main and preferred source for generating continuous and current vital statistics on live births, foetal deaths, deaths, marriages, divorces and the different complementary vital events.

The main purpose of this regional operational guideline is to provide a reference document that will help the development of national operation manual on civil registration countries in African countries. This guideline is the first of its kind being developed as per the recommendations of the Dar-es-Salaam regional workshop (June 2009) and the regional Medium-term Plan (MTP) adopted by the first ministerial conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CVRS) in August 2011 in Addis Ababa.

The Guideline aims at addressing technical, managerial and operational challenges that African countries have been facing for past fifty years in improving their CRVS Systems. It provides technical guidance on standards, concepts, definitions, and classifications for civil registration to further improve the quality of records and evidences produced from the system. The guideline reflects the peculiar circumstances and characteristics of African countries and seeks to provide practical solutions with alternatives. The guideline is intended to be used alongside the UN principles and recommendations for CRVS and the series of handbooks on CRVS systems produced by the United Nations over the five decades. The guideline will help African countries in developing capacities to establish, operate and maintain complete CRVS systems that enable the production of authentic legal and administrative evidences and reliable, continuous and timely statistics on births, deaths, marriages and divorces. This guideline is accompanied with another guideline being developed in parallel on vital statistics, which is presented in a separate publication.

II. Highlights of the Contents of the Regional CR Guideline

2.1 The guideline consists of 10 chapters that cover the essential elements that need to be considered in the preparation of a national operation manual for civil registration in line with the most recent regional CRVS policy directives and operational frameworks. The modules cover the basic principles, concepts, definitions and techniques recommended by the United Nations for the development, implementation, operation and maintenance of complete CRVS systems in a country.

2.2 The first chapter provides a historical perspective of civil registration in Africa. In a few countries, such as Senegal and Mauritius, registration of vital events dates back to the 17th century. However, in Africa, modern vital registration was introduced by the colonizers in large part in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In recent years, some African countries have gained some success in birth registration, which however had a setback as a result of political turmoil in the countries (Madagascar, Rwanda; DRC; Ivory Coast). The chapter further presents the initiatives, such as APAI-CRVS, the Regional Ministerial Conferences and on CRVS and Regional Statistical Forums, under taken to improve the current status of CRVS.

2.3 Chapter II outlines the basis and objectives of the preparation of the Regional CR Guideline for the preparation of national Operation Manual and its interface with the UN Handbooks. It has to

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

2.4 Chapter III presents the rationale, objectives and the approaches to the preparation of the National CR Operation Manual by the National CR 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 CR system while the instruction manual gives instructions to the CR staff engaged in different activities within the existing CR.

The Regional CR Guideline proposes appropriate approaches for the preparation of the National CR operation Manual. Some of these recommendations include assessment of the status of CR in the country, consulting with major stakeholders and partners, establishing technical working groups, preparing national CR 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 CR system and prepare nation action plan on the basis of the findings of the assessment.

2.5 The fourth chapter presents the recommended types of vital events for VS production. The UN recommends two types of vital events, the priority and complementary vital events. The priority vital events are live birth, foetal death, death, marriage and divorce. The complementary events are adoption, legitimization, recognition, annulment and judicial separation. The priority vital events live birth and death are given first priority for statistical production because of their importance for measurement of population change, calculation of health indicators, child mortality rate, mortality and expectation of life. The chapter presents the standard definition of each of the recommended vital events.

2.6 The fifth chapter outlines the essential elements that are needed to be considered in designing the legal and institutional frameworks for civil registration, a pre-condition for attaining and maintaining a complete civil registration system. The chapter provides guidance on how to draft a civil registration law. The chapter proposes some of the legal provisions that need to be reflected in the rules and regulations in the law for registration of events and production of legal and administrative documents concerning the civil status of individuals. It describes the various interfaces that the civil registration organ needs to build with other institutions in the country. Defining the duties and responsibilities of the registrars and registration personnel at different levels are key elements that need to be reflected in the civil registration law and in accordance with the organizational structure of civil registration system

2.7 Chapter VI describes the component parts and activities of CR process. The need for the partition of the registration process into component parts is to create an ideal situation for handling the preparation of the operation manual and differentiate the important items involved in the registration process. There are six component parts that need attention during preparation of the manual. These include

1. Registration instruments (registration record, VS report, computers and other electronic instruments for recording and storing of information and certificate),
2. Human infrastructure (registrar, informant, Notifier, witness, medical personnel, stakeholder, media personnel, families, households and the public, in general),
3. Institutional infrastructure (Agency responsible for administration of CR system and compilation of VS, local registration offices, National government, sub national governments and the media)
4. Topics and themes of the Registration process (topics and themes of the registration record, topics and themes of the VS report and topics and themes of CR certificate)
5. Procedures of the registration process (procedures for registering, method of registering, requirements for registering, collection of cause of death data, completing and issuing certificates and transcribing and forwarding of VS report)

Definitions of concepts pertaining to each of the above components and sub-component parts are given in the guideline in detail.

2.7. Chapter VII provides guidelines for setting up appropriate organizational, administrative and management system for CR system. The collection of vital events information is done through a chain of national, subnational and local registration offices throughout the country. Because of this Cr 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 seven 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 CR system, namely nationally organized (centralized) and sub-nationally organized (decentralized) systems. The nationally organized CR system is a system where the collection of CR data (registration of vital events) for the whole country is done by the central government. On the other hand, the sub-nationally organized CR system is a system where the collection of CR data (registration of vital events) 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. It should be noted that whether the CR system is organized centrally or sub nationally, both the institutions designated by the central or subnational governments must have branch offices extending down to the lowest level of administration and in each lowest level of administration the local CR registration offices must be established. Therefore, among other important criterias, due consideration has to be given for this specific criteria during designation of the agency responsible for administration of the CR system.

On the other hand, basic to the registration process to continue and function properly and permanently is the creation of efficient management system. The main goal of registration system is to achieve complete registration of vital events occurring in the jurisdiction of the country in question. Thus, the management, among other things, has to be able to recruit, train and define duties and responsibilities of registrars and other internal and external staff. Moreover, the management must identify and define duties of informants and notifiers, establish adequate local registration centers, integrate and coordinate CRVS systems, supervise the day to day activities of CR system, etc.

2.8. Chapter VIII presents procedures for the evaluation/assessment of completeness of registration of vital events and coverage of resident population groups and geographic areas of the country. What makes the CR the best preferred method of collecting vital events data is its ability to provide complete registration of vital events occurring in a given period of time in a given country and if properly managed. Though, this is true theoretically, it is not always achieved practically in African countries, in particular. Measures have been taken to improve the existing situation. Despite these measures there still is observed problems of completeness and coverage problem in African CR system. These problems call for developing a strategy for measuring completeness and coverage of CR data and take the necessary remedial steps to control the deficiencies. The chapter outlines the sources of incompleteness of registration, techniques of detecting problem areas and measuring level of completeness of vital registration.

2.9 Chapter IX presents the essential measures to be taken to improve the registration of vital events. Completeness of registration is attainable if the various methods of assessment of the completeness of registration vital events are implemented. The registration office must implement the method suggested in chapter VIII. Chapter IX presents measures that will further improve the completeness of CR system. These measures include,

- a. Improvement of the management system,
- b. Automating the system and
- c. Designing of communication strategy to inform and educate the public.

Management has been defined as the process by which the agency responsible for registration administers and manages the activities of CR. Proper management plays a greater role in the improvement of completeness of registration. Management is the backbone of CR system. Some of the management activities have been mentioned in chapters 6, 7 and 8. This chapter presents additional management activities. These include, maintaining security and confidentiality of registration records, maintaining safety of records, periodical review of quality of data, amending of records properly, supervising the registration process periodically and improving of service delivery.

Automation of CR system, on the other hand, is the process of introducing information technology developments in order to improve and transform the CR system. Computers and the various technology solutions linked to it are changing the operational and management traditions of CR system. Countries must take advantage of these information technology developments. Using computers and communication technology have simplified the handling of records. Huge volumes of registration records that used to be stored in large stores and warehouses are now handled in single desktop and minicomputers in a room.

However, it has to be realized that the use of computer for reporting of events, the control of records, the issuance of certificates, the amendment of records, the extraction of data files for release of VS reports, etc. may take several years and careful planning. Because of this, the process of computerization/ automation must be undertaken step by step. It is advisable first to prepare the necessary infrastructure, second to computerize the registration operation and thirdly to computerize production of certificates and finally computerizing extraction of information for VS compilation.

Formulation of communication strategy to inform and educate the public is the most important undertaking to improve and achieve completeness of CR. Changing and winning the support, collaboration and cooperation of families, households, and the public in general and attaining the commitment of the higher level policy decision makers will contribute tremendously for completeness of CR. The greatest barrier to registration is the lack of awareness resulting from lack

of education, traditional and cultural taboos from the side of the public and the lack of commitment and motivation from the side of the higher policy decision makers.

Communication with regard to improvement of CR is the process of sharing ideas, views, experiences, values and uses of registration with all sections of society to achieve ultimate goal of changing attitudes, awareness, knowledge and practices of the population of the country through appropriate channels of communication to achieve completeness of CR. Communication strategy includes advocacy and social mobilization. Advocacy aims at changing attitudes, actions, policies and laws by influencing people and organizations with power or higher level decision makers.

Social mobilization, on the other hand, is a process of bringing together all the feasible interests of social partners to identify needs for the improvement of CR and raise the awareness and demand for the improvement and development of program of CR. Communication strategy implementation has to commence according to the following plan of activities.

1. Identifying the problems and issuers,
2. Identifying target groups to address the issues,
3. Setting of goals and objectives,
4. Developing of messages to target groups,
5. Selecting appropriate channels for communication,
6. Mobilizing resources for implementation of the strategy
7. Preparation of action plan and implementation
8. Monitoring and evaluating of the outcomes of the strategy

2.10. Chapter ten focuses on financial resources for civil registration activities. The chapter considers the issues surrounding the current structure of civil registration within countries and the implications of financial resources on the initiatives of reforming and improving civil registration system in a country. Lack of adequate funding for civil registration is one of the deterring factors facing most African countries. Without allocation of sufficient funds for capital and recurrent expenses, such as salaries, printing of registration forms, office and storage equipment, transport and related costs, it is not possible to maintain a satisfactory system, no matter how good the intentions are.

Although national and international organizations, stakeholders and partners essential and expected, any external support outside the government structure should be seen as supplementary input that would be used to fill the resource gap. The national institution(s) mandated in civil registration and vital statistics should have a long-term strategy in building their capacities in leading and owning the process and in raising and managing core resource requirements from the government treasury.

Conclusions 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 civil registration 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 civil registration. It is again hoped that all the concerned authorities and officials will make available the needed infrastructure for the preparation and implementation of the operation manual as part of the improvement of civil registration in their respective 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 forums the guideline will be finalized. After finalization, 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.

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