

# EXHIBITION

## ETHIOPIA:

### A COUNTRY EXERCISING COUNTRY LED AND OWNED CONVENTIONAL CRVS ESTABLISHMENT INITIATIVE – EXHIBITION OF PROCESSES AND PRODUCTS

#### *Exhibition Note*

*“... after more than a decade of discussions, demographic statisticians in Africa realized that the civil registration system cannot be simply transplanted from advanced countries to Africa and that innovative ideas were required for creating such an institution in Africa.” The Kenya Civil Registration Demonstration Project, 1981-1984; by Benjamin Gil.*

#### **1. Objectives of the Exhibition**

This exhibition was organized at a time when African countries are looking for guidance on how they would translate the basic management and operational principles of the regional CRVS initiative agreed in their first ministerial conference in 2010. One of these principles refers to ensuring country ownership and leadership in all efforts of improving CRVS systems. Therefore, the objective of organizing the exhibition is to demonstrate how this principle has been exercised in a country, Ethiopia, which has played a key role in promoting the regional CRVS initiative.

#### **2. Brief Background**

Ethiopia does not have a functioning civil registration legislation as well as a national institution responsible for managing and operating civil registration activities and services. The country introduced municipal level civil registration legislation in early 1930s and vital event certification practices continued until this day in the capital and few major cities. Though the country's Civil Code incorporated over 100 articles on registration of vital events, however for the

past over half a century these provisions were not made operational. Efforts of activating the provisions referring to civil registration were started in late 1990s.

In Ethiopia generating vital statistics from the civil registration system has never been tried following conventional procedures. The focus and efforts of the statistics sector in generating improved vital statistics has been limited to experimentation and sample registration methodologies. Starting mid-nineties, the statistics sector disengaged from survey-based sample vital registration and statistics undertakings and officially initiated a program supporting the establishment of CRVS systems following UN standards and recommendations. The processes and documentations presented in this exhibition are the results of these efforts.

### **3. The Exhibitor**

The exhibitor will try to take you through some of the processes and products of the initiative of establishing conventional CRVS systems in the country. The exhibitor is one of the experts that led the initiative.

### **4. Arrangement of the Exhibition**

The exhibition is arranged targeting two types of viewers: those who observe in an exhibition area and those that view through electronic media. Setting up the site on an electronic media will initiate soon and be communicated as soon as it is ready.

### **5. Strategies followed in Ensuring Country Ownership and Leadership**

*“There is still a dearth of literature on civil registration. The most important publications originate from international organizations. There are very few texts of national origin devoted specifically to the study of this topic. It is no wonder, therefore, that its complex interdisciplinary nature has not been sufficiently stressed, an important fact because this characteristic may constitute one of the major barriers hindering study and improvement.”*

International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, ---.

**5.1 Domesticating CRVS and promoting indigenous knowledge** - civil registration is a public duty and its operation engages each and every individual and family of a nation. The operation and services of civil registration need to be communicated, understood and accepted by

the people. These conditions necessitates for the system to be integrated into the public administration system. The Ethiopian public administration uses its own language and alphabet that urged for CRVS to be presented and communicated in the national working language. Accordingly, all technical and operational documentations of the CRVS initiative were prepared and presented in the national working language, Amharic. For the first time, the name "vital event" was introduced in Amharic as "ወሳኝ ኩነት" in Latin alphabet reads as "Wesagn Kinet", which is now in use by the public administration.

**5.2 Prioritizing local needs** - Ethiopian public administration follows a federal and decentralized structure. The national CRVS initiative was introduced following the country's geopolitical and administrative systems. In such settings, regional states and local administrations are the most affected by the absence of CRVS systems. The demands of the federal states for disaggregated statistics for planning, budgeting and monitoring purposes; information for provision of efficient social services, such as health and education services; requirements for authentic personal documents in judicial proceedings, etc were among the needs and benefits that necessitated most for the establishment of the systems in the country.

**5.3 Conceptualizing CRVS to the country's context** - In the Ethiopian CRVS initiative the knowledge and techniques of CRVS were conceptualized as opposed to translation or transplantation. Based on the national context CRVS conceptual frameworks were developed and applied in the national initiative (refer Exhibit No. ...).

**5.4 Re-orientating past practices** - experiments and alternative/provisional vital statistics generating methods that were promoted by the statistics sector were aborted and efforts diverted to the CRVS initiative. Birth registration campaigns that were being promoted by UNICEF were negotiated to be directed to civil registration program. Continuous efforts were made to engage the health sector in the CRVS initiative, and signs of shifting from the incidental exercises to the conventional method are being seen in the past few months.

- 5.5 Advocating for conventional CRVS systems** - various advocacy materials about the operation and benefits of CRVS systems were prepared in local languages and disseminated widely (refer Exhibit No. ...). The first national conference on CRVS was held in March 2006. The conference officially opened by the President of the country (refer Exhibit No. ...).
- 5.6 Promoting evidence based advocacy** - in the national initiative efforts were made to support all advocacy works with evidences and practical demonstrations. For instance, a thorough assessment study was conducted to show that the country is practicing certification without proper registration and also a pilot program was conducted to demonstrate the operations of conventional CRVS system.
- 5.7 Introducing and broadening partnership** - before the start of the national initiative there was no partnership forum even among the major development partners working in the country. A national task force under the leadership of key government agency was established and coordinated the various activities of the national initiative. The task force included members drawn from UN agencies, international and local NGOs. The partnership has also tried to link up with the private sector and professional associations.

## **6 Major Country Led Preparatory Works and Products**

*“The extensive activities carried out at the international level towards the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics indicate the fundamental importance of this problem. The efforts made in many countries in this regards are well known, but the results have not been very productive and little progress has been achieved in the past few decades.”*

International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, ---.

### **6.1 Assessment of the status of CRVS systems - country approach and practice.**

- 6.1.1 An assessment study conducted jointly by The African Child Policy Forum (Pan-African NGO based in Ethiopia) and Plan International local office is an exemplary work that needs to be modeled for most countries in Africa. The study contributed to the policy shift as well as changes in perception and attitude of the practice of registration

and certification of vital events in the country. One of the solid policy statements drawn from the study states as: "... What the study found out is however far from the desired outcome mainly because there is no BR system but birth certificate issuing practice in Ethiopia." This evidence has led government policy makers to accept the reality and move away from the incidentally introduced practice. The current practice in many African countries is not far from the experience evidenced in the study ... issuing certificates without proper registration system.

- 6.1.2 The study outcomes were used as key evidence-based advocacy instruments and presented in various national and regional fora. Conclusive statements such as the following that led to strong policy decisions were generated from the study: "*... Indeed, many of the informants have mistaken the practice of acquiring and issuing birth certificates for birth registration. The Survey showed that 55.9% of the informants in municipalities affirmed that they both register birth and issue birth certificates. The figure rather implies the erroneous understanding of the particular offices about what birth registration means. ... In principle, a birth certificate is an evidence of birth on which information gathered during birth registration is copied. ... The practice in Ethiopia is however to the contrary where the issuance of birth certificates based on information gathered from other sources is the rule rather than the exception. As a result verification of birth dates ...*" Report of Survey on Perception and Practice of Birth Registration in Addis Ababa, and the Regional States of Oromia, Amhara and SNNP.
- 6.1.3 There have been plan to conduct similar comprehensive assessment studies focusing on death, marriage and divorce registrations, which have not materialized due to various factors. Hopefully, these studies will be initiated in the near future.
- 6.1.4 An important lesson for Africa can be found in the full study report (refer Exhibit No. -----).

## **6.2 Preparation of national CRVS plan: the process and the draft National Action Plan**

- 6.2.1 The draft CRVS national action plan was prepared with the objective of giving a policy framework for the national CRVS initiative. The unique character and history of CRVS in the country urged for preparing such a policy document that gave insight to policy makers and experts of the goal, objectives, strategies, activities and implementation modalities of CRVS systems within the federal and decentralized government administrative setup of the country.
- 6.2.2 The Plan also served as one policy advocacy material in demonstrating how conventional CRVS systems be established and work in the country.
- 6.2.3 The Plan is expected to be reviewed considering recent developments.
- 6.2.4 The full document can be used as show case for preparation of CRVS plan at country level in other parts of Africa (refer Exhibit No. -----).

## **6.3 Costing CRVS in a country**

- 6.3.1 Policy makers and development partners after listening and reviewing the approaches and processes followed by the country in establishing and developing conventional CRVS systems in the country, requested the technical focal institution to provide them the CRVS cost estimate for the country. It was obvious why they looked for the cost estimate, but let alone providing an estimated figure none of the experts had the preparation on how to approach and prepare such an estimate.
- 6.3.2 The experts could not find such an exercise made in the past or guidance from the UN CRVS publications.
- 6.3.3 As an outcome of the CRVS pilot program, a method and an initial CRVS operation cost estimate was proposed for the country. If you refer Exhibit No. .... you will find the operation cost estimate for

producing a single birth record in Ethiopia. CRVS planning exercise in countries require a proper budgeting technique, where the Ethiopian experience would highly be relevant to other African countries.

#### **6.4 Demonstrating how CRVS operates in the country**

- 6.4.1 The technical focal institution promoting CRVS initiative in the country was challenged by the federal policy makers who wanted to know whether regional states and the public are supportive of the initiative. This inquiry was posed considering the principles of federal government system. A pilot program was initiated and conducted for two years in few regions in selected areas. This reveals one peculiar situation why CRVS should be guided by internal needs rather than externally driven project ideas.
- 6.4.2 The approach, design and methods of operating the CRVS demonstration project required innovative ideas and processes. Challenges and successes of the project are documented in the final evaluation report of the study (refer Exhibit No. -----).
- 6.4.3 The objective of the above stated pilot program is very much different from what we commonly know. In short, it was never meant for scale up purpose. From the documentations of the pilot program, most African countries would learn more on how to design and manage CRVS pilot programs.

#### **6.5 Development of CRVS operation tools**

- 6.5.1 The development of CRVS operational tools was prioritized primarily by the demands and pressure coming from policy makers and state level decision makers. Accordingly, the different CRVS operational materials prepared in office were tested and validated on the field through the pilot program.
- 6.5.2 The different vital event registers and booklets, registrar's manual, guidelines on organizational and administrative arrangement, educational and advocacy materials, etc were validated in the pilot project (refer ....).

- 6.5.3 Countries can learn a lot on how the pilot program was designed and used in developing the different CRVS operation tools.

## **6.6 Drafting the country's civil registration law: technique, processes and products**

*“In order for the civil registration program to achieve its goal, particularly with respect to the completeness of registration of vital events, the civil registration system will have to rely on the members of the community. Registration is therefore an indicator of the public participation in the judicial system. In this way, civil registration contributes to the social effectiveness of the law.”* International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, ---.

- 6.6.1 Sharing Ethiopia's civil registration law drafting experience will help other countries to move faster in their improvement initiative. In 2008 Ethiopia introduced a new law drafting technique through its justice system reform program. Civil registration law was taken among the first four laws to be drafted following the new drafting technique. The legislative theory, methodology and technique of law drafting were adopted from Boston University Program on Legislative Drafting for Democratic Social Change (refer Exhibit No. ....).
- 6.6.2 The basic principles of the legislative technique lay on the need for research and evidence-based legislative study. The legislative research report is the foundation for the preparation of effectively implementable legislation. The central law drafting institute prepared legislative drafting manual to serve as a national law drafting guiding tool (refer Exhibit No. ....).
- 6.6.3 The techniques and approaches followed in conducting the study and preparing the legislative research report can serve as a model in sharing lessons to other countries (refer Exhibit No. ....). As part of the preparation process, the draft bill accompanied with the research report was presented in more than three national stakeholders' fora for review and feedback (refer Exhibit No. ...).
- 6.6.4 Based on the Ethiopian experience, experts from Boston University were invited to share their knowledge in the Tanzania CRVS regional



workshop in 2009 and in the first ministerial conference held in August 2010. Their interventions were welcomed by the regional CRVS initiative and member States.

6.6.5 Application of evidence based legislative drafting technique involves high level research capacity and competent CRVS technical staff as part of the drafting team. The processes and documents exhibited on the Ethiopian experience will provide a practical lesson for almost all African countries that need to undergo rigorous legislative revision process.

## **6.7 Developing communication strategy: technique, processes and results**

6.7.1 The approach followed in the development of a communication strategy for CRVS systems in Ethiopia urged for evidence and information on the operations, organization and socio-cultural milieu the CRVS meant to be operating. The pilot program was designed to provide this varied information. A draft document was produced as part of the pilot program (refer .....).

6.7.2 The technique and the process followed in developing a CRVS communication strategy in Ethiopia can help other African countries to initiate the process.

## **6.8 Computerizing CRVS: approach and products**

6.8.1 Development of CRVS tools and operational and organizational settings took technological innovations and services as an integral part of the whole CRVS establishment initiative. Application of IT solutions was considered as key strategic direction in promoting low cost and accelerated improvement of the national CRVS initiative.

6.8.2 As an integral part of the pilot program, a customized software program was developed (refer Exhibit No. ....) addressing legal, administrative and statistical services of the systems. The experience followed in Ethiopia in the development of the tool would be beneficial to the rest of Africa.

## **6.9 Assigning causes of death: approach and results**

*“ ... Furthermore, after trials and errors, statisticians took note that civil registration is perhaps a more complex and arduous undertaking than the decennial population census.”* The Kenya Civil Registration Demonstration Project, 1981-1984; by Benjamin Gil.

6.9.1 In Ethiopia almost all deaths occur outside health facilities. Standard WHO recommended causes of death certification and ICD classifications cannot be applied directly. As part of the pilot program, Verbal Autopsy (VA) tools were developed with the objective of integrating them into the conventional death registration operation. The plan has been to test the tool in the pilot program, which was not materialized due to delays in securing funds. The VA questionnaires were prepared in Amharic and English (refer Exhibit No. ...).

6.9.2 The process followed in developing the tools and the products can serve as a basis in developing a model VA tool for the African CRVS initiative.

## **6.10 Managing backlog of unregistered vital events: approach and results**

6.10.1 As is the case in almost all African countries, clearing the backlog of unregistered vital events is a major challenge for Ethiopia. A study on the approach and operational procedures of registering and clearing the backlog was conducted as part of the pilot program. A pilot study was conducted with the support of UNICEF Ethiopia (refer Exhibit No. ....).

6.10.2 The tools and experience gained from Ethiopia can serve for other African countries.

*“ ... In developing countries the opposite is true. The need for universal and complete registration, especially of births and deaths (including foetal deaths or still births) for purposes of research, planning and administration is foremost while registration for individual benefits and consequently, motivation to register are rare or only incipient. ...”* The Kenya Civil Registration Demonstration Project, 1981-1984; by Benjamin Gil.

## **Comment from the Exhibiter:**

The products and processes of the CRVS establishment initiative presented in this exhibition were led by the expertise available in the country. In large part, resources available from regular government budget and those allocated from regular UN country plans were utilized in facilitating the country initiative. As per the APAI-CRVS phased-based implementation strategy, Ethiopia has almost finalized the re-orientation phase and accomplished large part of the preparatory phase. However, for the country to move and initiate the operation phase, it requires the technical support of the regional CRVS initiative.

The unique aspect of the Ethiopian experience lies on the process followed in applying the UN CRVS principles of universality, continuity, compulsoriness, permanence and holistic approach based on the country's socio-political and administrative context. The Exhibitor believes that the knowledge and experience would help the regional programme in guiding countries in the application of the phased-based implementation framework. Furthermore, the way the exhibition is designed and results displayed may help in guiding exhibition settings and arrangements in CRVS conferences and meetings.

The END.