

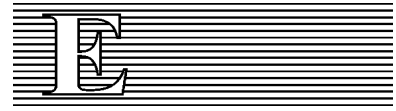


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**Report of the Regional Assessment Study of Civil Registration
and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa**



African Union Commission



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I. Background

1.1 Introduction

1. The regional workshop on strengthening of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (VS) systems in Africa held in June 2009 in Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania addressed some of the fundamental bottlenecks that came in the way of improving the CRVS systems on the continent. Lack of knowledge on the status of CRVS systems in member States was identified as one of the major bottlenecks in initiating actions for improvements in the CRVS systems in Africa. The experts recommended that a comprehensive regional assessment be undertaken of the CRVS systems in Africa based on information obtained from all the countries. The First Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration that was convened in August 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia endorsed this recommendation and identified this as the first priority activity in the regional Medium-term Plan (MTP)¹. Accordingly, a regional assessment questionnaire was developed by the CRVS Secretariat at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and reviewed by the country experts in January 2011. As per the recommendation of the experts the draft questionnaire was piloted in few countries and thereafter sent to all member States.

1.2 Objectives of the Assessment Study

2. The primary objectives of the assessment study are the following:-

- To assess the current status of CRVS systems in member States;
- To create a regional database on the status of CRVS systems in Africa;
- To provide baseline information for monitoring the progress in the implementation of the MTP;
- To help countries in developing their own national assessment tools; and
- To assist in preparing evidence-based reports for the second ministerial conference on CRVS and other regional meetings on CRVS.

1.3 Structure of the Assessment Questionnaire

3. The assessment questionnaire was designed to collect information on the status of CRVS systems in sufficient details from member States. The questionnaire sought to assess the present status of registration of live births, deaths, foetal deaths², marriages and divorces and compilation and dissemination of vital statistics from the registration system. A few questions were also included on registration of complementary vital events³ and compilation of the statistics. The questionnaire has four

¹ Medium-term CRVS regional plan, 2010-2015, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and African Development Bank (AfDB) was endorsed by the Ministers in their first conference.

² If a country registers “still birth” instead of “foetal death” then all questions referring to foetal death were to be replaced by still birth.

³ Complementary vital events include adoption, annulment, judicial Separation, legitimatization and recognition

In some tables in this report, the number of countries do not add up to 45 either because of non-response from some countries, or non-applicability of some of the questions to countries on specific items

broad sections. Section one deals with civil registration and section two with vital statistics. Some specific questions on the use of civil registration records and vital statistics data were included in Section 3. The last section includes few general questions pertaining to complementary vital events.

1.4 Administering the Assessment Questionnaire

4. The questionnaire was sent simultaneously to both the national Civil Registration Authorities (CRAs) and National Statistics Offices (NSO) or their equivalents in all the countries. Although, the civil registration authorities were required to fill in the part pertaining to the civil registration (Sections 1 and 3) and the NSOs the part relating to the Vital Statistics (Section 2), they were advised to do so in consultation with each other and finally submit one filled in combined set for the country to the secretariat. An instruction manual accompanied the questionnaire to serve as a guiding tool. The manual provided both technical guidelines for each question, including concepts and definitions and procedures for filling the questionnaire.

1.5 Response Rates and quality of response

5. Out of all the 54 African countries as many as 45 (83.3 per cent) submitted the filled in questionnaires. The initial responses received from the countries' although had been generally satisfactory; the scrutiny of the filled in questionnaires brought out a number of deficiencies in responses. These deficiencies that could be grouped under three categories namely; non-responses, incomplete or inconsistent responses were compiled and sent to the countries for correction and re-submission. Most of the countries have since re-submitted the questionnaires by appropriately addressing the scrutiny points identified by the secretariat. It would however, be important to recognize that there is further scope of improvement in the quality of the responses from the countries. The secretariat will continue with its effort of improving the country responses so as to ensure the assessment reflects the true situation on the ground. A web-based process is being put in place that will allow countries to correct and update the status from their respective sites. Moreover, the information obtained from this exercise will be used to develop the baseline information for the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System (APAI-CRVS) and is essential for monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

1.6 Structure of the Report

6. This report attempts to present an aggregated account of the status of CRVS system on the continent and does not delve on information obtained from individual countries. The idea is to bring to fore the common problems that plague CRVS systems in African countries and yet capture their diversities. The analysis mainly covers five vital events- live birth, foetal death, deaths, marriages and deaths.

7. The report has four sections. Section one provides background information and section two the results of the study under four sub-headings: legal framework; organizational, management and operational aspects; institutional and human infrastructure; and coverage and completeness of CRVS systems in countries. Section three presents the status of services and products of CRVS systems and their level of utilization and finally, section four provides conclusions and way forward.

II. Status of Civil Registration and Vital statistics Systems IN AFRICA

8. This section highlights major findings of the study with regard to the status of legal, organizational, operational, institutional and human infrastructure of CRVS systems on the continent. The findings are presented below in separate sub-sections for civil registration and vital statistics.

2.1 Legal Framework

2.1.1 Status of civil registration legislation

9. Continuous, permanent recording of vital events can best be ensured by means of proper legislation and the establishment of mechanisms to enforce it nationwide. The legal framework is an essential component for the efficient management, operation and maintenance of the registration system. All countries barring South Sudan have civil registration laws governing their civil registration systems. Ethiopia has promulgated the law on civil registration in June 2012 and South Sudan has initiated the process framing legislation.

10. Civil registration laws in countries do not necessarily cover all events and many countries have separate legislations for different events. However, live births, deaths and foetal deaths are generally covered under a single law and registration of marriages and divorces are dealt with under separate laws.

11. One of the essential features of a civil registration system is its universality in terms of the coverage of entire population, regardless of geographic location and/or subdivisions of populations. Except one country Civil Registration law of all countries provide for universal coverage. However, this does not mean that countries actually cover all geographical areas and all populations as will be seen later.

12. In order to reach continuity, permanence and universal coverage of vital events, the CRVS system must be made compulsory, backed by a legal framework for its administration, operation and maintenance. Table 1 shows the number of countries that have provisions under their law to compulsorily register vital events by type of vital event.

Table 1: Number of countries that have provision of compulsory registration of vital events in their civil registration law by type of event

Event	Compulsory	Not compulsory	Not reported
Live birth	43	0	0
Death	42	1	0
Foetal death	24	14	5
Marriage	36	6	1
Divorce	28	11	4

13. While live births and deaths are compulsorily registered practically in all countries only 24 out of 43 cover foetal death. Foetal deaths when registered on continuous basis are important source for measuring perinatal mortality and pregnancy outcomes, which are crucial indicators for measuring status of mother and child health.

2.1.2 Status of legislation on vital statistics

14. The civil registration laws need to provide for collection/transcription of data from the legal registers maintained by civil registration office and their transmission to office/agency responsible for compilation, analysis and dissemination of vital statistics, which mostly is the national statistics office. The national statistics act or any other relevant act should also have the necessary provision for above mentioned statistical activities. The legislation on vital statistics should clearly define the concepts and elaborate the procedures of compilation, processing, tabulation, reporting, and dissemination of the collected data. It should also specify the coordination arrangement between civil registration and vital statistics offices. Table 2 gives the number of countries that have provisions on vital statistics in the civil registration law as well as national statistics law. However, it would be important to note that the study did not assess the adequacy of the provisions of the law encompassing the elements discussed above.

Table 2: Countries with provisions on vital statistics in the civil registration and national statistics law

	Provision available	Provision not available	Not reported
Civil registration law	31	11	1
National statistics law	34	8	1

15. Civil registration laws need to align to the administrative, social and cultural setting existing in the countries. In majority of the African countries, the civil registration laws were enacted during the colonial era and have not been suitably reviewed and revised to keep in tune with changing times and the socio-cultural milieu of the local populace. There are at least 12 countries that have not revised their birth and death registration laws in more than two decades. The recent advancements in information technology are opening new opportunities for countries to modernize and improve efficiency their public administration. The civil registration and Statistics laws also have to keep pace with these radical changes by way of creating and maintaining public records, efficiently delivering service to general public and providing quality and timely statistics for socio-economic planning and tracking development. The multi-disciplinary nature of civil registration system also calls for making provisions in these laws to accommodate such linkages that could lead to accelerated improvement in CRVS systems in African countries. It may be noted that it was beyond the scope of the assessment to delve into such details, and leaves it to the assessment to be done by countries. Therefore, countries have to revisit their current set of laws and make necessary adjustments/amendments and even overhaul if necessary, the existing provisions to align them with the specific conditions and settings in their respective countries. This process of revision should be evidenced based and has to be undertaken through a process of consultation with all departments and stakeholders. The process should be based on international principles and recommendations and guided by the existing manuals and tools.

2.2 Organization Management and Operations

2.2.1 Status of civil registration organization management and operations

2.2.1.1 Organization

16. Civil registration system in every country is governed or coordinated at a national level by an office designated in the civil registration law in that country. The Ministry or Department that houses this office varies from one country to another. In many countries registration of marriages and divorces are under ministries which are different from the ministries that deal with registration of births and deaths. Table 3 gives the number of countries by the type of ministry which houses the civil registration office by type of events.

Table 3: Number of countries by type of ministries housing the civil registration office by type of event

Type of event/ Ministries	Ministry of Interior	Ministry of territorial administration	Ministry of Justice	Ministry of health	Others	No response
Live birth	14	6	8	4	6	1
Death	15	5	8	4	6	1
Marriage	11	5	14	-	6	2
Divorce	7	1	21	-	3	7

17. It can be seen from the above table that at the national level, registration of births and deaths in majority of the countries are administered by Ministry of Interior followed by the Ministry of Justice. In case of marriages and divorces, it is the Ministry of Justice that coordinates the registration of marriage and divorce in a large majority of the countries, largely because of the judicial nature of the process, especially in case of divorce. It is not so much the choice of Ministry that a country makes in housing the registration office at the national level that matters in efficient operations of civil registration. It is the organizational arrangement and structure below the national level for actual implementation of provisions of the registration law(s) that is crucial in smooth functioning of the registration system. Civil registration system can be organized and operated through a centralized or a decentralized system. The centralized administration refers to a system in which the local civil registration offices are directly controlled and administered by a central authority responsible for administration of civil registration. On the other hand, a decentralized administration refers to a system in which civil registration operations are managed at the level of major civil divisions such as the state and province. In such an arrangement, civil registration offices at major civil divisions administer the civil registration operations at local civil registration offices. Out of the 44 countries 25 countries reported to have a decentralized system with separate registration offices in major administrative divisions with a central office primarily responsible for oversight and coordination at the national level.

2.2.1.2 Management and operations

18. The management and operations of a civil registration system entails a number of elements. Given the limited scope of the assessment study, this report deals only a few of them, namely coordination and planning, budget, service delivery, public awareness and monitoring mechanism.

Coordination and planning

19. A civil registration system being a holistic and multi-sectoral endeavour demands a coordination mechanism at the national and sub national levels to ensure its smooth and efficient functioning. Only 24 out of 45 countries have reported the existence of a coordinating body at the national level. Vital statistics is an integral part of the system and is largely handled by the national statistics offices based on data flowing from the registration offices. Therefore, institutionalized interface between the civil registration offices and national statistics offices at national and even sub-national level is a bare minimum requirement for smooth functioning of conventional CRVS systems.

20. Although CRVS is a routine government function, every country notwithstanding its level of development, needs to have a concrete and time-bound action plan for its improvement keeping in view its specific priorities and needs. According to the assessment study national action plan for improvement of civil registration system exists in 28 countries out of 45 countries. It may be noted that the assessment did not review the plans for their adequacy and quality

Budget

21. CRVS system in a country is implemented under a law and it is fundamental that a country makes sure that adequate budget is made available to implement the provisions of the law. Each country needs to allocate regular and adequate resources as a part of their recurrent budget to run the system which by its very nature is permanent and continuous. The assessment study reveals that as many as 10 countries have no recurrent budget allocated by their governments for running their civil registration systems. Out of the rest of the countries that have regular budgets six consider the budget to be adequate.

Service delivery

22. One of the primary purposes of civil registration is to provide legal and administrative services to the public. These services, which include in the main the registration of events and issuance of certificates, are recommended to be free. The UN recommends that at least the first copy of the certificate be issued free of charge. Table 4 provides information on the number of countries that charge fees for current registration and the number that charge fees for first copy of certificate by type of event.

Table 4: Number of countries charging fees for registering vital events and first copy of certificate by type of event

Vital events	Current registration	First copy of certificate
Live birth	8	19
Deaths	11	22
Marriages	20	24
Divorces	11	21

23. One of the main factors identified to be responsible for low levels of registration in many countries is the high cost of registration. The cost of obtaining registration services not only comes from the fees

charged for the same but also added to it is the cost of travel (quite often more than once) to the nearest registration points. It is the people living in rural areas who have to bear relatively higher price for registration and ironically have the lowest level of registration.

Public awareness

24. As many as 33 countries have reported to have public awareness programme to inform and educate the public on the importance and benefit of registration and the procedure thereof. The various media and channels used for these public awareness programmes include Radio (32), Television (28), Meetings (31), Public gathering (25) and Brochures and leaflets (24). It is not clear from the assessments as to the number of countries that have these public awareness programmes on a sustained basis especially in rural areas. The study did not assess the content and relevance of the messages in these awareness campaigns.

Monitoring

25. Any programme and especially those which are permanent and continuous in nature such as the CRVS systems are expected to have a monitoring system built as an integral part of it. The monitoring system should not only entail keeping a continuous tab on the functioning of various components of the programme but also continuously measure progress in terms of completeness of registration that can help in identifying weak registration areas. The countries were asked if they have anytime in the past ten years measured the completeness of registration. As many as 14 countries out of the 42 who responded to this question answered in negative. It is also evident that almost all countries have used various surveys to measure their completeness and therefore, available at not so frequent intervals let alone annually. Such measurements of completeness at infrequent intervals do not meet the requirement of monitoring and can at best be used as quantitative evaluations.

2.2.2 Organization and management of vital statistics based on civil registration

26. As per the recommendations of the United Nations, compilation of national vital statistics should be the responsibility of national governments. In the majority of African countries, the NSO is designated as the responsible organ for the compilation of national vital statistics from the civil registration system. It may be noted that depending on national organizational and operational arrangements, health ministries have big role in the compilation and dissemination of death and causes of death statistics.

27. It is recommended that the civil registration law should have clear provisions for collection and reporting of vital statistics and similarly the national statistics law needs to provide for collection, compilation and dissemination of vital statistics obtained from civil registration. Table 5 provides the number of countries that have the above mentioned provisions in their civil registration and statistics laws.

Table 5: Number of countries that have provisions on vital statistics in their civil registration and statistics laws

	Provision available	Provision not available	Not responded	No law
Countries which have provisions for collection and reporting of vital statistics in their civil registration law	31	11	1	2
Countries which have provisions for collection, compilation and dissemination of vital statistics from the civil registration system in their statistics law	34	8	1	-

28. It will be seen from the above table that as many as 11 countries have reported that their civil registration law does not have any provisions for collection and reporting of vital statistics. In fact further analysis of the responses to these two questions shows that there are four countries that do not have provisions relating to vital statistics in either of the two laws.

29. The vital statistics information collected through the civil registration system is expected to be compiled and disseminated to users on a regular basis. The Assessment Study collected information on whether the countries collect and compile vital statistics from the civil registration system. Out of the 44 countries that responded to this question, 36 reported to be collecting data on vital events, out of which 34 were actually compiling the statistics based on this data.

Table 6 shows the number of countries that publish vital statistics based on civil registration and the number actually use the data obtained from the civil registration for calculating official vital rates. This table is presented by type of vital events and based on the information from countries that responded to these questions.

Table 6: Number of countries publishing vital statistics and calculating vital rates based on civil registration for official use by type of vital events

	Live births	Deaths	Marriage	Divorce
Countries publishing vital statistics based on civil registration	22	23	15	8
Countries calculating vital rates based on civil registration for official use	10	14	11	7

30. As will be seen from above that only about 22-23 countries publish birth and death statistics based on civil registration and only a few actually are able to calculate vital rates for official use. There can be several reasons why countries are not able to compile vital statistics or even if they compile do not publish them. Firstly, in most countries the registration levels are very low which dissuade national statistics offices in compiling or publishing these statistics. The other challenge is that of transfer or flow of information from the registration centres to the national statistics offices which are in many instances are not regular.

31. Cause of death is one of the key information that is recommended for collection as one of the variables of the death registration form. Mostly, the causes of death are assigned by medical practitioners and therefore, it is more than likely the information will be available only for deaths occurring in medical institutions. According to the study 24 out of the 44 countries that responded to this question, collect and transmit data on causes of death. However, only 18 of them use the WHO standard form or forms based on the same standard and 8 countries publish data on cause of death obtained from civil registration system in formats developed by them selves.

32. The National Statistics Office should compile and disseminate civil registration based vital statistics on a regular basis even if the registration levels are not complete. They should publish reports on vital statistics obtained from the civil registration system at least on an annual basis. Complete registration areas within the countries should be identified (say a city or town) and vital statistics for these areas should be compiled and its use be promoted. Such demonstrative use of vital statistics helps in advocacy with the policymakers about the importance of civil registration in providing the much needed data for planning purposes, especially at state or province level.

33. The study collected information on type of the structural arrangements of vital statistics in National Statistics Offices. In the majority of countries (24 countries), compilation of vital statistics is done in a unit under a department or its equivalent. Only 4 countries have full fledged departments handling vital statistics and on the other extreme there are 3 countries in which only one focal person is responsible for compiling vital statistics. In 8 countries there are other arrangements for compilation of vital statistics.

34. As is the case for civil registration, a country may adopt a centralized or decentralized system of administration of vital statistics. A centralized system is one in which the vital statistics both for the country as a whole and individual provinces or states is compiled and disseminated centrally. On the other hand, decentralized vital statistics system refers to the compilation and dissemination of vital statistics at different administration levels. In more than half of the countries compilation of vital statistics is done at the national level and 11 countries have reported that in their countries vital statistics is compiled at the state, province or at the level of major geographical level.

35. The day to day CRVS work demands regular interaction between civil registration offices and the statistics offices at various levels of administration but most certainly at the national level. It is extremely crucial that countries have a coordination mechanism at the national level and depending on the organization and process of the collection and compilation of vital statistics based on civil registration. Only 6 countries have inter-agency coordinating committee established on permanent basis and 15 countries have established ad-hoc inter-agency committees.

2.3 Institutional and Human Infrastructure

36. The regional assessment reveals that there are variations of institutional arrangements that exist in African countries for administering civil registration at various levels. The countries in their wisdom have organized their registration structures in line with their political and administrative arrangements. Whatever may be the structure that a country adopts, the key is to ensure easy accessibility of registration points to the public. In urban areas, the compactness and contiguity of area in some way ensures accessibility, which is certainly not the case in rural areas. The assessment brings out the fact that in many of the countries the registration hierarchy is unilineal in nature, which essentially means

that it is the same department of the government that coordinates and implements registration functions both at the national and province level and in few cases, one level below the province (say district). In such a situation, given that most of the countries have either Ministry of Interior or Justice responsible for coordination of civil registration at the national level; it is most likely that these ministries have offices only up to the province levels. These being the lowest points from where registration services are provided to people residing in rural areas in the province, seriously limits accessibility.

37. The study collected information on number of functional registration centres in rural areas and useable data was available from 30 countries. A simple analysis was done to estimate the average number of people served by each registration centre in these 30 countries. The estimated number varies from 440,000 to 4,000. There were 8 countries where each registration centre on the average caters to a population of more than 70 thousand. Given the sparse settlement pattern of rural population it is quite certain that this seriously hinders accessibility in terms of distance in such countries.

38. The principles of universality and permanency that characterizes a civil registration system would require the government to provide access to registration services in proximity of the residence of individuals and households in both urban and rural areas, by either establishing local civil registration offices or creating service points. The local registration offices and service points at all levels of the administrative hierarchy should also be established as permanent government structures. While it is not practical to set up registration sites in every single village to meet this requirement, it may be necessary to bring in other departments such as local administration or health (especially health outreach services) to provide registration services.

39. A number of countries have indicated in their responses that the local administration and health sector have been involved at sub-national level in registration activities, but there is no clear information as to their nature of involvement at the local level in facilitating and promoting registration of events particularly births and deaths occurring outside health institutions.

40. Civil registration institutions should have qualified and trained registrars and support staff at each level of the administration. Capacity building programmes and incentivized schemes for staff maintenance should be an integral part of the whole CRVS improvement initiative. The questionnaire did not have enough questions that could help make an overall assessment of the strengths and weakness of human infrastructures in the countries. The inadequate and incomplete responses from the countries also in a way limited this analysis. Efforts will be made to gather more information in future to fill in this information gap.

2.4 Coverage and Completeness

41. For a civil registration system, coverage would generally refer to registration of events occurring to specific population groups and/or in all geographical areas. This will also have to include to the citizens staying abroad. On the other hand completeness would mean registration of every event that occurs in the country or to the citizens living outside the country. Therefore, in a stricter sense a complete registration system would automatically imply current complete coverage. On the other hand a vital statistics system can be said to be complete, not only when each vital event occurring within the country is registered but also reported for compilation of the statistics.

2.4.1 Status of civil registration coverage and completeness

42. A civil registration system is required to register all the vital events that occur within the territory of a country to all the population groups and to those residing abroad. The analysis of the responses shows that in some countries civil registration systems do not geographically cover the entire country and/or all categories of populations. In response to the question regarding coverage of civil registration system as many as 30 countries have reported saying that they cover all segments of population in their respective countries and 11 do not. Table 7 shows the number of countries by categories of population not covered for registration of live births and deaths.

Table 7: Number of countries by categories of population not covered for registration of live births and deaths

Population category not covered	Live births	Deaths
All rural population	2	3
Some residents of rural population	7	7
Nomads	6	6
Internally displaced persons	4	4
Refugees and asylum seekers	5	5
Some residents of urban population	6	5
Non-citizens residing in the country	6	4
Citizens residing abroad	6	7

43. As stated earlier most countries do not have a regular monitoring mechanism for measuring completeness of the civil registration system. In last ten years only 28 countries had estimated their completeness of registration. Table 8 gives number of countries classified by their levels of completeness for different events. The table includes only those countries which estimated their completeness in past ten years and provided information on the level of completeness.

Table 8: Number of countries by level of completeness of registration of vital events

Vital events	Level of completeness (percent)				
	Over 90 percent	70-89 percent	60-69 percent	50-59 percent	Below 50 percent
Live births	5	8	4	4	6
Deaths	5	2	3	2	7
Marriage	8	2	-	1	3
Divorce	3	-	3	1	2

44. It can be seen from the above that 13 countries out of 27 and 7 out of 19 have reported to have achieved registration levels of 70 per cent or more for live birth and death events respectively. Strangely enough, 8 out of 14 countries have reported that 90 per cent of the marriages in their

countries are registered. There is a need to seriously study the methodologies adopted by countries for estimating the level of completeness of registration of various vital events. It would be important to mention here that calculation of registration completeness should normally be based on events that occur within one calendar year and not include past events which have been registered through the process of delayed registration. The estimation of level of completeness of an event is also a function of annual number of events estimated from surveys and can often be error prone. There is a need to carefully study the methodology adopted by each country and provide guidance that will be in accordance to existing international standards.

2.4.2 Status of vital statistics completeness

45. As stated earlier there are two necessary conditions for a complete vital statistics system namely a) complete civil registration system and b) reporting of all the events that are registered. Although an attempt was made to collect information on the level of completeness of vital statistics the responses from the countries suggest that not many countries would have been clear about the concept and/or not have been able to calculate the completeness in absence of necessary information. One of the questions included in the questionnaire was about the status of transmission of information on registered vital events to the vital statistics compiling agencies last year and this information is presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Number of countries that have transmitted information on vital event registration to vital statistics agency last year by type of events

	Live births	Deaths	Marriage	Divorce
Transmitted	14	14	10	7
Not transmitted	27	28	29	24

46. The above table clearly suggests that the flow of information from civil registration office is not timely and this affects the compilation of vital statistics and even measuring the completeness of registration.

III. Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Services and their Utilization

47. One of the primary objectives of civil registration system is to provide service to individuals and also to government agencies (and even non-government agencies) which offer various legal, administrative and social services to the general public. The civil registration law grants each vital event registered under its provision the legal and administrative status. Individuals, families and communities use the records and extracts from the registration system to obtain various legal and administrative services. For instance, a birth record provides essential legal documentation of identity and civil status to the individual. The extract from the birth record, the birth certificate is a legal document for proof of age, individual's identity and provides family right and privileges including eligibility for economic and social rights. Similarly death records provide legal evidence of the fact and circumstance of death of the decedent. Marriage and divorce certificates certify the occurrence and status of marriages and divorces.

48. Civil registration also provides service to the statistics sector by way of generating data on births, deaths, marriages and divorces on regular and permanent basis. The vital statistics compiled from the

civil registration system enables the analysis of different facets of population dynamics and their correlates. Knowledge of the size and characteristics of the population on a timely basis depends on the availability of current and continuous vital statistics from the registration system.

49. In light of the above, the assessment study gathered relevant information on the status of the utilization of civil registration records, certificates and the compiled information from the system for different countries. Some of the findings are presented below.

3.1 Utilization in legal services

50. Courts are the primary users of vital event records and certificates in settling legal issues. As presented in Table 10 almost all countries utilize vital event registration records and/or certificates as primary legal evidences.

Table 10: Number of countries in which courts use birth, death, marriage and divorce records/certificates as legal evidences by courts

Certificate as legal evidence	Birth certificate/ records	Death certificate/ records	Marriage certificate/ records	Divorce certificate/ records
As primary legal evidence	42	40	42	35
As secondary legal evidence	7	9	6	8
No response	--		1	6

51. In almost all countries certificates/records of vital events from civil registration system are used as primary legal evidence in courts. These certificates and records are used for various purposes by courts such as evidence for proving childhood or parenthood (birth); inheritance (death); marital status (marriage); and dissolution of marriage (divorce). However, because of the incomplete nature of civil registration systems in most countries, the large part of the population may not benefit from these services

3.2 Utilization in Administrative and Social Services

52. Civil registration records and certificates are extensively used to provide various administrative and social services. For example in case of health services, birth records/certificates can be used by community health workers to identify recent mothers for providing post natal services. Similarly, death records/certificates can be used by community health workers for identifying individuals or households affected by communicable or infectious diseases. In many countries health workers also request families to produce birth certificate to provide post natal or immunization services. The number of countries in which health sectors utilize registration records or provide service based on registration records by type of service is presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Number of countries in which health sector utilizes and provides services based on civil registration records or certificates

	Required	Not required	No outreach services or Not responded
Birth registration records or certificates used for post natal services	15	25	4
Death registration records or certificates identifying households affected by communicable or infectious diseases	7	32	5
Health workers request for certificates for providing post natal and immunization services	12	31	1

53. Several countries have National Identity Systems that provide identity documents to their citizens and in some cases also to non-citizens. These are in the form of cards or paper documents issued to individuals (mostly after a certain specified age) that contain certain particulars uniquely identifying the person including a unique identity number usually generated through a centralized database. The level of sophistication of the management and operations of the identity systems, vary from one country to another characterized by type of technology in data capture, use of biometrics, card type and use of registration database and/or card for various governance functions, including internal security. The efficiency of the system is largely dependent on the quality and security of the registration database, for which a country has to ensure that necessary processes and protocols are in place permitting a new entry and exit of a record into and out of the database. Ideally, the birth and death registration database need to be organically linked to the national identity registration database to ensure that same is complete and foolproof. According to the study, 38 out of 45 countries have stated to have national identity systems and 24 of them are linked to the CRVS system. More detailed information will be required to understand the nature of these linkages. However, in response to the specific question as to whether the birth certificate/records are used as a primary source of information for proving certain identity particulars of individuals authorizing their entry in the national identity database and obtaining identity document, the 35 countries replied in affirmative. In a number of countries other types of documents are also used as the feeder document. In 39 countries, birth certificates are used as the source documents for issuance of passport although this may not be the only document. However, because of the incomplete nature of civil registration systems in most countries, the large part of the population may not access these services

3.3 Utilization in compiling statistics

54. The importance and need for compiling statistics on a regular and permanent basis cannot be over emphasized. Births and deaths data obtained from civil registration is used for preparing population estimates on an annual basis. Death data obtained from civil registration is also used for preparing life tables for official use. It will be seen from Table 12 that only 10 countries compile official estimates of population and life tables based on civil registration data. More than half of the countries cannot compile any vital statistics because of inadequacy of data.

Table 12: Number of countries using civil registration data for preparation of population estimates and life tables for official use

	Use civil registration data	Do not use civil registration data	No adequate data for use	No response/not applicable
Population estimates	10	10	23	2
Life table	10	10	23	2

IV. Way Forward

55. This regional assessment which was based on responses to a survey questionnaire from the countries was meant to provide a snapshot of the overall situation of the CRVS systems on the continent. The information now available for most of the countries will serve as the baseline information for the regional initiative which is currently being implemented under the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS). The APAI-CRVS will follow a phased-based implementation approach where countries monitor their progress as they move from one phase to the other. APAI-CRVS proposes three layers of monitoring and accountability mechanisms that provides for tracking results at ministerial, regional and national levels. The regional assessment study is the main information source devised to generate continuous evidences for tracking progress at the continental level.

56. A CRVS system with its several functions and utility interacts with other sectors in the government and outside it at various levels. A questionnaire of this nature cannot capture all the complexities or identify all the bottlenecks and challenges of the systems in the countries. In any case, the objective of this assessment was limited to only informing the regional programme on the overall status of CRVS systems in countries. Each country has to conduct a comprehensive assessment of their CRVS system and only then it would be able to make a holistic plan for its improvement in a time bound manner.