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**AFRICAN WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIES FOR ACCELERATING THE IMPROVEMENT  
OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS  
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 5 TO 9 DECEMBER 1994**

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**STATISTICAL DIVISION**

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION**

**UNITED NATIONS**

**FOR AFRICA**

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**REPORT OF THE AFRICAN WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIES FOR  
ACCELERATING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND  
VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS**

## A. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations Statistical Commission, at its twenty-sixth session held in 1991, after considering a report on the state of the civil registration and vital statistics systems that pointed out their stagnation in the past 40 years, particularly in developing countries, endorsed an International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of the Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems to assist countries in their efforts to strengthen their civil registration and vital statistics systems. The Statistical Commission also endorsed the proposed phased implementation of the International Programme and urged the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSTAT), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics (IIVRS), among others, to proceed with the implementation of the Programme. The International Programme, was jointly prepared by UNSTAT, UNFPA, WHO and IIVRS. The United Nations Statistical Division is Focal Point for the Programme.

2. The International Programme is expected to assist countries by providing technical support in their efforts to improve their systems, preparing manuals for use by countries in the efficient and effective operation of the civil registration and vital statistics systems, providing guidelines to assess the current status and formulate a master plan of action, operating a clearing house of information at the Focal Point for the Programme, conducting seminars and conferences to raise awareness of the civil registration and vital statistics systems. The Programme stresses the central role of national efforts and government commitment to the success of country programmes aimed at improving civil registration and vital statistics systems.

3. As part of its activities, a series of workshops is being organized by UNSTAT, with financial support from UNFPA, to promote the improvement of the systems. The first workshop was carried out in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 2 to 6 December 1991 for 11 selected countries of North, Central and South America. The second workshop was held in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, from 20 to 24 June 1993, for 12 selected countries of Western Asia. The third workshop in the series, the East and South Asian Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, was hosted by the State Statistical Bureau of the People's Republic of China in Beijing, China, from 29 November to 3 December 1993.

4. The African Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Implementation of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems is the fourth of the series. It is jointly organized by UNSTAT and the Economic Commission for Africa. The main purposes of the Workshop were: (a) to discuss ways and means of promoting the awareness of national vital statistics and civil registration systems in each participating country; (b) to assess the adequacy

of national registration and vital statistics processes, coverage and reliability; and (c) to suggest strategies for the improvement of vital statistics and civil registration systems in the participating countries.

5. In order to assist countries in the preparation of the national report, each invited country was provided five months in advance, the following guides which were prepared under the auspices of the International Programme: (a) Outline for preparing a country report on the current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems; and (b) Review and assessment of the national civil registration and vital statistics systems. Once completed, these two documents were to serve as fundamental reference materials to outline a national master plan of activities to strengthen the systems. Concerned developed countries from outside the region, international and regional organizations, were invited to contribute and present specific papers to the Workshop.

## B. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION

### Opening and duration of meeting

6. The African Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems was held at the Headquarters of ECA in Addis Ababa from, 5 to 9 December 1994. The meeting was organized jointly by the United Nations Statistical Division and the Economic Commission for Africa with the financial support of the United Nations Population Fund. It was opened by Mr. Layashi Yaker, United Nations Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA.

### Attendance

7. The Workshop was attended by 31 high-level officials from 15 English speaking countries whose major responsibilities of work were in connection with civil registration and vital statistics systems. The countries were Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

8. The following developed countries, sent representative to the Workshop: Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United States of America. The International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics (IIVRS) and the UNFPA Country Support Teams in Addis Ababa and Harare were also represented.

The list of participants is given in Annex 1.

Election of officers (Agenda item 2)

9. The following officers were elected:
- Mr. Ben Jarabi Obonyo (Kenya), Chairperson,
  - Ms. Beatrice Silanda Shongwe (Swaziland), Vice-chairperson,
  - Mr. Donasian Mwita (Tanzania) Chairman of the second plenary session on Mains uses of vital records and statistics,
  - Mr. Emmanuel Moses Silanda (Zambia), Chairman of the third plenary session on Applications of modern technology on civil registration and vital statistics systems.
  - Mrs. C.F. Adekunle (Nigeria), Chairperson of the fourth plenary session on Strategies for improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

**C. AGENDA**

10. The meeting adopted the following agenda:
1. Opening Session
  2. Election of Officers
  3. International Programme
  4. National report on current status of civil registration and vital statistics
  5. Main uses of vital records and statistics
  6. Applications of modern technology on civil registration and vital statistics systems
  7. Strategies for improvement of civil registration and vital statistics
  8. Working group on strategies for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems.
  9. Evaluation of the workshop
  10. Adoption of the report
  11. Closing session.

11. The time table and the list of documents of the workshop are reproduced in Annexes 2 and 3.

**D. ACCOUNT OF PROCEEDINGS**

In Memoriam

12. The Workshop observed one minute of silence in memory of the late Mr. Jacob B. Assie, former Registrar of Births and Deaths of Ghana and Mr. Joe H. Nowa, former Commissioner for Census and Statistics of Malawi, who made valuable contribution to the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa.

Opening statements (Agenda item 1)

13. In opening the Workshop the Executive Secretary recalled the main objective of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems which is to support and encourage developing countries to undertake reforms to accelerate the development and improvement of their vital statistics and civil registration systems. He referred to the nature and uses of the civil registration and the vital records and statistics and the resolutions of the United Nations which relate them to economic and social development, public administration and the human rights.

14. He stated that African countries are attaching a great importance to the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems but financial, technical and administrative problems have constrained the efforts. Concluding, the Executive Secretary emphasized the important task to be accomplished by the Workshop and expressed the hope that a solid foundation for enhanced and sustained strategy for accelerated development of civil registration and vital statistics systems will come out.

15. The Executive Director of the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, on behalf of the cosponsors of the International Programme, stressed the importance of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems to individuals, society and governments and welcomed the participants.

16. Finally the representative of the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSTAT), addressed the participants of the Workshop and provided background information about the International Programme.

International programme for accelerating the improvement of vital statistics and civil registration systems and related guidelines (Agenda item 3)

17. The representative of the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSTAT) presented the paper AW/CRVS/94/4 in which she highlighted the main features, both national and international, of the Programme. She first explain why a new International Programme in this field was needed. Then, she noted that the Programme broadly identified three groups of countries: (a) countries that have 80 per cent or more birth/death registration completeness; (b) countries having less than 80 per cent birth/death registration completeness; (c) countries having systems at an early stage of development or not having yet established a system. In the present phase of the implementation of the International Programme, the first group of countries had been the focus for accelerated improvement and it is moving now to the second and third group of improvement and it is moving now to the second and third group of countries. The first group

could attain quick progress should proper measures be implemented over the coming years on a self-sustained basis. The International Programme emphasizes the need for national efforts and commitment towards longstanding reforms.

18. At the International level, UNSTAT and its partners in the International Programme had been involved in the preparation of guidelines and handbooks to make in-depth assessment of the national system currently in operation in each country and in feasibility studies to undertake measures to improve rapidly the two systems. In this connection, the representative referred to two documents prepared by UNSTAT: "Review and assessment of the national civil registration and vital statistics systems" (AW/CRVS/94/6).

19. Among other activities proposed in the Programme, the representative mentioned: (a) the carrying out of conferences and workshops; (b) clearing house of information and materials of CR/VS systems operated by UNSTAT as the focal point for the Programme; and (c) short-term missions relating to specialized aspects of civil registration and vital statistics systems, (d) feasibility studies in selected countries.

20. The representative of UNSTAT emphasized that an efficient civil registration system yields timely, accurate and complete data and information on vital events on a continuous and permanent basis. It is free of omissions, onwards, delayed registrations and double registrations of the same event and it renders prompt service to the public and other end users. It is also less vulnerable to misuse, counterfeiting, forgery of vital records which are of legal and economic value to the individual, the society and the nation. The place of birth, name and other elements in the person's birth record are key elements in defining his/her nationality, parental relationship, citizenship. Therefore, weaknesses in civil registration have serious implications in the accuracy of vital records that provide the foundation on which human rights, a nation and policy making are built. For this fundamental principle no population group should be left ignored by the civil registration system, regardless of its size, distance to the registration centre, customs, rites, religion, language, level of education, ethnicity, etc. Similarly the importance of records of deaths, marriages and divorces, etc has been emphasized.

21. Finally, the UNSTAT representative highlighted the main activities carried out so far under the auspices of the International Programme since the first workshop was held in Buenos Aires in 1991.

First plenary session: National report on current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems (Agenda item 4)

22. The representative of countries presented and discussed the

country reports on the current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems and suggested strategies for their improvements.

### **Botswana**

23. The representative of Botswana presented the country report on "Current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Botswana" (AW/CRVS/94/7). She informed that the registration of births, deaths, and marriages are functions of the Civil Registration Division, which is in the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs. The head of the division is the Registrar who reports directly to the Deputy Permanent Secretary.

24. The representative indicates that there is close collaboration with other departments and other ministries that have facilities to carry out registration of the above mentioned events. For example, the Ministry of Local Lands and Housing, which is responsible for health facilities in the districts, the Ministry of Health responsible for hospitals, the Ministry of Finance responsible for funds as well as private hospitals.

25. Although the Civil Registration Division has manpower constraints, the Division heavily relies on the District Administration under the District Commissioner. There are some officers under the District Commissioners who carry out the functions of the Civil Registration Division. There are problems regarding facilities as they fully utilize the facilities of the District Administration.

26. The plan of action is very much on line with the implementation of the recommendation by Dr. Zand, the Consultant to the pilot project carried out in Botswana with the financial assistance of UNFPA and includes: (i) continuation of a course on population dynamics and civil registration; (ii) preparations for replication of the new system. It is hoped birth and death registration coverage will improve significantly in the coming years.

27. In reply to some questions, the representative of Botswana indicated: that (i) the period in between months and 1 year for the registration of birth is practically not being regarded as late registration. No fine has been enforced to registration after 3 months. This fact has been noted and amendments are being taken into consideration; (ii) the District Registrars are appointed by the Minister of Labour and Home Affairs and are paid as government employees. The appointment is made from government employees and not new recruits; (ii) there is no case of a fine which has been recorded to date, partly because of acute shortage of manpower to enforce the Act and delivery of the service.

### **Ghana**

28. The representative of Ghana presented the paper on the "Current status of civil registration and vital statistics

systems in Ghana" (AW/CRVS/94/9). He informed that the organizational structure is a decentralized one with the Registration Offices in towns with population of 5000 and above. They are supervised by the District Registrars who are answerable to the Regional Registrars. In turn, the latter are answerable to the Registrar of Births and Deaths at the Central Registry Office, 110 district offices and 10 Regional offices.

29. The Registration of Births and Deaths is to submit the completed registration forms A and B to the Government statistician's office which is to process the forms and publish the vital statistics from time to time. It is over eleven decades now when Civil Registration started in Ghana but the coverage is only 45% for birth 20% for deaths. This is a big concern to planners and users of vital statistics data.

30. The action that can be taken to improve coverage is that Government should pay more attention to the needs of the Births and Deaths Registry by providing sufficient funds for (1) printing of registration documents and forms, (2) recruiting and training additional personnel, (3) transportation for mobile registration and efficient field supervision, (4) office equipment, (5) storage facilities-, (6) publicity-, (7) office accommodation for district offices and registration officers and (8) furniture for the offices. The Government efforts could be supported by financial and technical assistance from donor agencies such as UNFPA, UNDP and WHO among others.

31. For timely publication of vital statistics, the Statistical Service has to be strengthened by increasing staff level and also providing the staff there with training facilities. The Statistical Service should be well equipped with appropriate computers for fast processing and analysis of the registration forms from Births and Deaths Registry. There is an urgent need for greater coordination between the Births and Deaths Registry and the Statistical Service.

## Kenya

32. The representative of Kenya presented the paper on "Current status of civil registration and vital statistics in Kenya (AW/CRVS/94/10). He informed that, although registration has been compulsory in Kenya since 1971, and despite the various efforts put in the improvement of the system, over the last two decades, the present system is still far from adequate. There are a number of pockets with fairly good coverage rates as opposed to other districts whose registration coverage is far from complete. The differential rates of coverage are partly determined by the prevailing socio-economic conditions on one hand and the physical environment in these areas.

33. A number of contributory factors both from within and outside the registration system explain the low coverage rates at the national level. These constraints revolve around the low



priority given to civil registration and low funding levels by the Government.

34. In spite of the current low registration coverage, the Government has initiated some actions towards the improvement of the registration system. Among such actions are: (i) decentralization of registration services; (ii) increased community mobilization exercises; (iii) strengthening the monitoring of the systems.

35. In order that the registration system can accomplish its primary role of generating reliable vital statistics, due consideration be given to a number of areas such as creation of demand for registration records, enhancing the efficiency of the present monitoring mechanisms, increasing the capacity and capability of data processing systems.

36. In response to a number of questions, it was stated that registration itself is free of charge but every certificate obtained has to be bought; registration agents are either medical staff or assistant chiefs who are public servants; registration needs of nomads have not been addressed yet; the present free hold land tenure systems does not restrict where dead people are buried, hence does not affect death registration; the demonstration project approach is appropriate, and should be replicated in non-project areas.

#### Lesotho

37. The representative of Lesotho presented the "Current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Lesotho" (AW/CRVS/94/11). They informed that the country is divided into ten administrative districts and the registration of birth and deaths is by law compulsory whereas registration of marriages is only compulsory for civil marriages and much more discretionary for customary marriages.

38. The legislation for vital and civil registration is the primary responsibility of the Minister of Home Affairs. The office of the Registrar General serves as a central registration office in respect of birth, death and marriage, while the District Secretaries are local registrars in their respective districts. Registration of Births and Deaths is centralized at district level whereas the registration of marriages is more decentralized to the Ministers of religion at church missions throughout the country. In essence the vital registration records and the civil registration records are kept at the primary registration units and nationally at the office of the Registrar General.

39. The information leading to vital and civil registration is obtained by means of prescribed forms, from the informants at the place of occurrence. In this case the documents are made of a high quality paper and registers protected with durable covers.

However these records are not safely kept especially at primary registration units where space is a big problem. Data processing for statistical purposes has recently been computerized and this now makes it possible for retrieval of records for legal and protective advantage of individuals, administrative use, and statistical references. Though monitoring is done especially by the personnel of Bureau of Statistics at the level of the source of information, training and technical guidance for District Registrar is lacking. At present there is no coordinating machinery in the country among government institutions dealing with vital and civil registration.

40. Vital statistics still suffers a number of problems in terms of coverage at the administrative level. In order to overcome these problems it is necessary to come-up with some strategies to facilitate the smooth running of the system, and they suggested some actions as means to improve the systems of vital statistics and civil registration in Lesotho.

41. The questions were raised on how do the Church Ministers become marriage officers? and how do they handle birth and/or death acts as against coroner's act?

42. The representatives responded that the Church Ministers apply to the Minister of Home Affairs to become marriage officers. Every designation of a minister of religion as marriage officer is by notice in the Gazette and it is effective from the date of publication of that notice. Reports on death are made to the village chiefs, regardless of the place of burial, i.e. whether public or private ground Births are reported to the village chiefs at the place of occurrence.

#### Malawi

43. The representative of Malawi presented the report on current status of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in Malawi "(AW/CRVS/94/13). It was stated that the office of the Registrar General in the Ministry of Justice, has the legal responsibility for the registration system. Events are first registered at the 24 District Headquarters where District Commissioners act as district registration officers.

44. The inadequacies of the present system promoted Government to reform the system in order to make it compulsory nationwide and pave the way for a comprehensive civil registration system. To this end, an advisory mission was undertaken by a UNFPA expert in 1993, where a project proposal was formulated. It recommended the improvement and expansion of the system in Malawi. The project proposal was also to be used in soliciting donor funding. However no source of funding for the project has been identified yet and the issue of establishing a universal registration of births and deaths has been in a stalemate.

45. It was mentioned that the vital statistics system is the responsibility of the National Statistical Office (NSO), which

is empowered to collect, compile, analyze, abstract and publish statistical information in Malawi. The NSP through its Demographic and Social Statistics Division has been producing vital rates from censuses and demographic sample surveys as no further processing of the civil registration data is undertaken.

46. In summary, the Government of Malawi, in recognizing the importance of a universal civil registration system, has approved the review of the 1904 Births and Deaths registration law in Malawi. However, the Government will require external support both technical and financial in order to achieve this goal.

#### Namibia

47. The representative of Namibia presented the paper on "Current status of the civil registration and vital statistics systems" (AW/CRVS/94/14). They mentioned that civil registration in Namibia is carried out by the Department of Civil Affairs in the Ministry of Home Affairs while the vital statistics are compiled by the central Statistics Office (CSO) under the National Planning Commission. There exist legal mechanisms which empower the two institutions to undertake these responsibilities. However, the existing regulation for both institutions are currently under review.

48. The registration of vital events is neither complete nor timely. The extent of the coverage cannot be assessed at present. The registration of the events can take place any time within twelve months and even later, as late registrations. These registrations cover births, deaths and marriages. Divorces and annulments are not part of the current system.

49. The procedures of registration are rather cumbersome, involving a number of forms and bureaucratic redtape. Loopholes exist for duplications and registration of births as it is easier and faster to obtain a new birth certificate than to apply for a duplicate copy. This is partly because the whole system is manually operated.

50. Statistics on vital events are not well developed. These have to be extracted from the registration records which themselves suffer from a lot of limitations. However, these are compiled and published in the annual Statistical Abstract of the country.

51. In response to a number of questions the representatives indicated that still births are treated as live birth in accordance with the law governing the registration of births; the Civil Registration Office and the CSO have not really worked together the first time that cooperation has been in place was during the preparation of the country report for this workshop; there has not been any involvement of the CSO in the Civil Registration, however, it could be the case if the new system will even be introduced; information on place of occurrence is useful for some users, while place of usual residence serves

another group of users. The law on Registration says that police are used for certification of death in rural areas, but it is not enforced because most of the rural areas have no access to police.

## **Nigeria**

52. The representative of Nigeria presented the country report on "Current status of the civil registration and vital statistics system in Nigeria" (AW/CRVS/94/14). She informed that the civil registration and vital statistics systems were still at their infancy in terms of existence and coverage. The system is managed by the National Population Commission under the Presidency with the cooperation of other agencies such as the health institutions, local government offices, and other local institutions. The system, though governed by Decrees which are supposed to be compulsory and mandatory for all, are not yet enforced, hence no-one has been penalized for defaulting. This situation might be as a result of the non-existence of the complementary Rules and Regulations and the non-Legislation on the unacceptance of sworn affidavits/declarations of Age which is equally legal for some official transactions.

53. The Organizational structure of the system follows the set-up of the National Population Commission with the Chairman doubling-up as the Registrar General. A total of 1,470 centres have been established with at least 2 centres in each local Government Area. Although basic infrastructure in terms of logistics (transportation), storage facilities, unambiguous and machine readable forms are available to the Registrars, yet, the system is faced with a host problems (i) Insufficient funding, (ii) Lack of adequate publicity and public enlightenment, (iii) Timely processing of data, (iv) Apathy towards registrations (v) Career and promotional prospect for some of the Registrars, (vi) Inadequate training for all categories of operating staff, (vii) Insufficient monitoring of field activities to improve the quality of returns, (viii) Inadequate technical support by UNFPA/ECA to evaluate and give proper guidance for the project.

54. She concluded that if all those problems are looked into and positively tackled, the country will within the next few years boast of a more reliable and efficient system of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics adequate enough to meet the goals for which it is set-up.

## **Sierra Leone**

55. The representative of Sierra Leone presented the country paper on "Current status of civil registration and vital statistics in Sierra Leone" (AW/CRVS/94/16). They informed that Sierra Leone has had a long tradition of registering vital events in the country dating back to the mid 1800s. The nature of data collection, compilation and publication is not satisfactory. Moreover, there has been in existence two different registration systems in the country.

56. It was an attempt to redress this malaise and improve registration coverage and its completeness that a UNFPA funded project "Strengthening of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Sierra Leone" was requested by Government. A design for the development of a new system for civil registration and vital statistics and to test it in a model areas was effected. For a number of reasons the impact of the project was short-lived and limited.

57. The greatest achievement of the project was in effecting the area of legal provision for the registration process. In December, 1983 parliament passed the Births and Deaths Registration Act. The Act unifies the system, making registration of births and deaths compulsory in the entire country.

58. Use of civil and vital registration statistics as a basis for policy formulation, assessing population growth pattern and geographical distribution is greatly handicapped. This is based on the quality and untimeliness of statistics generated. However, for administrative purposes, significant use of the data has been made.

59. Concerning the weaknesses and constraints, the development of a viable civil and vital registration system in the country has been handicapped because of the:

- (i) financial constraints,
- (ii) administrative problems,
- (iii) status of Registrars,
- (iv) lack of motivation on the part of the public,
- (v) and logistic support.

60. The findings highlighted above have frustrated all attempts at improving the registration system. To regularize this scenario, the following factors should complement each other:

- (i) A significant level of Government commitment and increased funding
- (ii) A greater proportion of external donor assistance, especially in the areas of technical support and logistics/equipments.
- (iii) Design a proper organization for sensitizing the public about benefits of registration.

61. On the whole, the status of civil registration should be surveyed every year to assess the extent of geographic coverage, under registration, control and timeliness of receipts of returns, and under-reporting of events from chiefdoms to

headquarters.

#### Sudan

62. The representatives of Sudan presented the paper on "Current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Sudan" (AW/CRVS/94/18). They said that the report in general reviews the situation of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Sudan and seeks to explain the problems facing the system of civil registration. They gave a brief general background about the geographical and climatical situation of the country as well as of the ethnic and the cultural diversity.

63. Sudan had no civil registration system as yet. The legal frame covers only the vital events and there is further need to introduce legal reforms for civil registration.

64. In considering the national vital statistics system, they informed that the legal frame is the act of 1972 of births and deaths. The structure of the system was described with the function of the Central Bureau of Statistics as the General Registrar. The procedures for reporting and monitoring were referred to together with details of birth and death registration forms. Attention has been given to the uses of vital statistics in the demographic analysis, planning, and social development.

65. Aspects on coordination among the government institutions in the process of registering the vital events were discussed. Further, they mentioned the proposed new system for organizing the civil registration in Sudan along with conclusions and recommendations.

#### South Africa

66. The representatives of South Africa presented the report on "Current status of CR/VS systems in South Africa" (AW/CRVS/94/17). The Department of Home Affairs is responsible to keep a population register, therefore staff are properly trained and write tests. Administrative arrangements included 8 Regional Directors who control 28 Regional Representatives and 112 District Representatives.

67. All information for the population register concerning births, marriages and deaths are gathered by means of a form. The information are entered by the Departments District/Regional officers in the computerized population-register by means of a terminal. The terminal is connected with the mainframe in Pretoria, therefore an identity number is allocated printed and handed over to a customer. A fargo-printer then print a bar-code on the application form which is send to Pretoria for microfilming. Deaths and marriages are also registered and certificate issued locally but bar-codes are done in head offices because of big quantities of old forms on hand.

68. Information on births and deaths are received on a monthly

basis from the Department of Home Affairs on magnetic tape for statistical processing, while death register forms are received for coding and are captured by means of mainframe terminals for processing. Information in respect of divorces is received on specially designed forms completed by the various registrars of the Supreme Court, and are coded and keyed-in by means of mainframe computer terminals.

69. Amongst the three non-African groups of the population the registration of births and deaths is almost complete while for the African part of the population the coverage is 13% and 37% respectively.

### Swaziland

70. The representatives of Swaziland presented the report on "Current Status of CR/VS Systems in Swaziland "(AW/CRVS/94/19). They mentioned that in the Kingdom of Swaziland, the civil registration was first introduced in 1927 and was mandatory to European and Coloured races. In 1971 it was further extended to all the races, however, its compulsory nature was neither realized nor enforced.

71. The legal basis of the current civil registration in Swaziland rests on the births, marriages and deaths Registration Act of 1983, which replaces Act of 1927.

72. The Office of the Registrar General is located in the Ministry of Justice and is responsible for all matters related to the registration of the births, marriages and deaths. The registration of vital events is decentralized into the four regions which themselves have been further split into sub-regions (7 in total). Beyond the regions there is the primary registration units called Tinkhundla Centres which are 55 in total, plus hospitals and Health Centres, company offices and some government offices designated as registration centres. Registered vital events are collected from these centres by District Registered once a month to the Regional Office for the purposes of typing of certificates and keeping.

73. The archives of all Civil Registration records are kept both at Regional and National levels. Regions only keep their own regional records. Records are retrieved both manually and through micro computers. A crude evaluation of the system points to about 20 percent coverage of births and 7 percent of deaths in 1987.

74. The vital statistics data collected by the Civil Registration System is handed over to the Central Statistical Office for processing and dissemination. The Statistical office tallies the births and deaths by area and region of registration and recording to whether the registration was current or late.

75. The main problems of the system are general apathy by

government institutions and general ignorance of the public. To name but a few there is general lack of cooperation between government institutions leading to for example, delays in disbursement of funds; and with the public there is lack of understanding of the need for registering.

76. In order to remedy the situation there is a need to form a Civil Registration and Vital Statistical Committee which would bring some government departments, professional and the public together; and mass media campaigns should be employed to educate the public on the importance of registration and the benefits that accrues to them and the society.

#### **Tanzania (United Republic)**

77. The representative presented the paper that gives an account of the "Current status of CR/VS systems in Tanzania" (AW/CRVS/94/20). They informed the participants that registration of vital events in Tanzania Mainland started during the colonial days in the 1880s and that it is still neither effective nor complete. The main problem stems from the fact that registration was optional for the Africans who constitute over 90% of the population and registration facilities were situated far from most of the people. There was only one registration centre in each district located at the District Commissioner's Office.

78. In 1981, with UNFPA financial assistance, the Government embarked upon the re-organization and expansion of the civil registration system with the objective of establishing an efficient and effective civil registration system. This entailed making registration compulsory and taking registration facilities nearer the people. In the pilot districts health institutions as well as villages were made registration centres, Experience has shown that registration in health institution is satisfactory but registration in villages was not encouraging. It was therefore decided that in the districts to which the project was extended subsequently only health institutions were made registration centres. The new registration system has been extended to 54 districts out of 90 districts.

#### **Zambia**

79. The representatives of Zambia highlighted the current status of CR/VS in his country (AW/CRVS/94/21). They mentioned that in 1973 a comprehensive legislation was spelt out to empower the Department of National Registration to register every live birth or still birth as well as every death occurring in the country. The act makes it compulsory for every citizen to register live birth/still birth and death.

80. The Department of National Registration has 1,772 sub-centres registration offices. Also all district centres are registration points and the Town clerks (District Secretary) is a responsible local government officer for registration of births, deaths and marriages. In addition churches register



marriages. All the registered vital events (i.e births, deaths and marriages) forms are sent to the office of the Registrar General. However the flow of forms from the registration centres is very slow and the coverage is also low.

81. There is a stipulated fee for registration and a penalty for late registration (i.e. after 30 days). The information on the registration forms is fairly detailed to allow for the calculation of most vital rates.

82. The Central Statistical Office collects the forms from the Office of Registrar General for coding and eventual computer processing. The current computer software in use is the IMPS with error detection being done by the use of the CONCOR programme. Seven major tables are produced and stored in the Central Statistical Office computer. Because the coverage is very low, compilation and publication of the report was discontinued in 1983.

83. The low coverage in the registration of the vital events is mainly attributed to inadequate publicity especially in rural areas. In addition inadequate staff who have little incentive could have contributed significantly to low coverage.

#### **Zimbabwe**

84. The representative of Zimbabwe presented the paper on "Current status of civil registration and vital statistics system in Zimbabwe" (AW/CRVS/94/22). They informed that the Department of the Registrar General is charged with the responsibility of managing Civil Registration in the country.

85. At present Zimbabwe is divided into 10 Provinces and 58 District Administration Areas. The Headquarters of the Registrar General is at the Central Registry in Harare. The Central Registry is therefore, the depository of all National records, All Civil registrations taking place at either District or Provincial level must be copied for registration and indexing at the Central Registry.

86. At every province, there is Provincial Registry, which office is responsible for supervising and coordinating Civil registration activities taking place at district or Sub-districts levels, as might be the case.

87. As will be obvious in an arrangement devoid of complete computerisation, each civil registration activity is complete in itself. This will of course lead to repetitive recording of data, as the completion of each registration form entails recording of personal and parental particulars repetitively.

88. Concerning the vital statistics system, the government department responsible for the production and publication of vital statistics is the Central Statistical office (CSO). Given

the incompleteness of vital statistics, the CSO utilizes indirect techniques of estimation to calculate mortality and fertility rates.

89. At the moment, the areas of vital statistics and civil registration operate separately, each being complete in itself. There is therefore need for a functional integration of the two so as to achieve a certain level of interface. For this to succeed however, the civil registration process will need to be fully computerized.

90. The processes connected with the registration of vital events in terms of organisation and implementation are considered fairly comparable within world standards. In terms of coverage the vital statistics system has a sound infrastructural set up.

Second plenary session: Main uses of vital records and statistics (Agenda item 5)

1. Uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis

91. A member of the ECA secretariat in introducing the agenda item, referred to the background document, "Uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis", (AW/CRVS/94/24). After briefly reviewing the non-statistical uses, he examined the demographic uses of vital statistics. These he enumerated as follows: policy making and population projections; administrative and monitoring; and studies on the interrelationship between demographic trends and development planning.

92. With reference to the uses for policy making and projects, he stated that data from civil registration/vital statistics (CR/VS) systems could be utilized to update benchmark data on population projections. He further added that the data could also be used for making decisions on the establishment and monitoring of projects on population, for example, on family planning, immunization and vaccination programmes. On studies on the interrelationship between population trends and development and as well as environmental factors he pointed out that records from CR/VS systems could be used, enumerating the classes of topics pertaining to this subject.

93. In the discussion that followed, questions were raised concerning the coverage implications of the statistical and non-statistical uses of CR/VS records; the status of event and spatial coverage in Africa; and improvement of CR/VS systems from the perspectives of uses.

94. the secretariat in response noted that the demographic uses of the system depended on its attainment of high coverage for specific geographical areas. Given this requirement, attempts should be made to achieve adequate coverage for either geographical sub areas and eventually for the whole country.

Concerning the coverage of current CR/VS systems, it was noted that coverage for births and deaths was fairly complete in a handful of countries: Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Mauritius, Reunion, Sao Tome and Principe and Seychelles.

2. Uses of vital registration records and vital statistics in development programmes

95. A member of the IIVRS introduced the background document "Uses of vital registration records and vital statistics in development programmes" (AW/CRVS/94/27). He mentioned briefly the uses of vital records and statistics and the role they play in the lives of individuals citizens and in the social and economic development of countries.

96. With reference to the uses of the record of live births, deaths, marriages and divorces for the individuals, he stated that these documents constitute proof of the fact, the time and the place of occurrence of the event. Also they contain other information required for establishing certain relationships such as parentage, legitimacy and dependency.

97. The planning for the economic development of a country is inextricably bound up with the future size and distribution of the population, and frequently with the age composition of the population. The construction of public utilities for a community such as water supply, sewage disposal and power supply require reasonably accurate population projections in order that the facilities will have sufficient capacity to serve future populations. There are other problems such as providing needed community services such as hospitals and health centres. The planning for the construction of schools and training of teachers for these schools requires projections of the birth rate in order to estimate the number of children at various grade levels expected in future years. For most of these purposes, data at the community level are needed rather than national or provincial statistics.

98. The IIVRS representative further added that to a large extent, the rate of development of the civil registration and vital statistics systems will be determined by the uses made of vital records and statistics. Without the awareness on the part of the public of the importance of these needs, there will be little incentive on their part to register vital events. Without the demographic, public health and other programme uses of vital records and statistics, there would be little justification for the establishment and maintenance of a civil registration system. The uses of vital record for updating population registers should be given needed support for the civil registration programme. Vital records and statistics are not ends in themselves, but are administrative, juridical and research tools to be uses. The uses to which they are put, or can be put, must justify them as government functions. The value of these tools will depend greatly upon the completeness of registration and the quality of

the statistical information. This will pose a serious problem for countries where registration of vital events is incomplete. Accurate estimates and projections are difficult to make without an adequate data base. On the other hand, there is much that can be done now to promote the uses of individual records of vital events for juridical and administrative purposes.

99. The representative concluded that the International Programme for the Accelerated Improvement of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems recognizes the importance of the uses of vital records and statistics and calls for the participation of the major uses and potential consumers in the reform and development of the civil registration and vital statistics systems. The representatives of official agencies such as public health, economic planning, population registers, including personal identification and electoral commissions, and family planning programmes should be brought in to assist in the drafting of plans for improving the civil registration and vital statistics systems.

### 3. Data collection methods and technique providing vital statistics and rates.

100. A representative of UNSTAT presented the paper entitled "Civil Registration vs other data collection methods and techniques providing vital statistics and rates" (ESAW/CRVS/93/27). In referring to the various methods and techniques available, she said that those were supplementary rather than alternative methods. She first gave an overview of collecting vital statistics and rates through the civil registration method as defined by the United Nations: "the continuous, permanent, compulsory recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events (i.e. live births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages, divorces, judicial separations, annulment of marriages, adoptions, legitimation and recognitions regulation), in accordance with the legal requirements in each country". She pointed out that civil registration was carried primarily for the value of the legal documents as provided by law and had legal and protective advantages to individuals. The safeguarding of human rights with respect to social status and benefits required that each vital event be registered. Among its multiple applications; civil registration records were a source of continuous vital statistics.

101. She, then presented the differences with respect to the population registration system which contained basic data such as name address, date of birth, sex and family relationships of the citizens in the country. It updated its files by using the sub-files on the above-listed vital events, plus a subsystem on changes of addresses of the members of the population. A unique personal identification number is a key element in the linkage of data pertaining to a person and is given to each person a

his/her death. She pointed out that the most advanced population registration systems might link other data files on changes on education, occupation, industry etc. While the population registration included the population at risk, the civil registration, as defined by the United Nations, did not. The latter depended heavily on population census data or population estimates to calculate most of the vital rates.

102. The representative also referred to the various approaches to collecting fertility, nuptiality and mortality data through population censuses and emphasized that the proper wording of the questions was relevant to the completeness and quality of the data collection. She also noted that population censuses collected various socio-economic data that were useful in calculating basic demographic parameters. However, a census was taken only periodically at about 10-years intervals and therefore continuous measures of fertility and mortality were not possible to obtain. Under these circumstances, other methods of data collection could be sought to measure recent changes in fertility and mortality and evaluate a number of population programmes.

103. For example, household sample surveys provided an important vehicle for the collection of fertility, nuptiality and mortality data, offering more flexibility for asking a series of questions and combining different techniques for in-depth interview by a few well-trained staff. In this regard. She highlighted the various methods devised to collect birth, death, civil status and other relevant data, e.g. (i) single-round retrospective survey, (ii) prospective survey (follow-up or multi-round surveys), and (iii) dual-record system.

104. Next, she briefed the Workshop on indirect techniques for estimating vital statistics and rates. However, she noted that the application of these techniques depended much on the purposes to be served by the various estimates, taking into account the limitations of the different methods. For monitoring changes in birth and death patterns, the various measurements of fertility, mortality and other vital rates must be sensitive to changes if they were to be useful but estimates from indirect methods were averages centred on a period in some distant past and could not be greatly useful for evaluation purposes. However, countries without any information on the fertility and mortality level might find the results from indirect methods to be approximate indicators of the demographic situation.

105. Finally, she underscored the importance of having a flow of natality, mortality and nuptiality data on a continuous basis from civil registration.

Third plenary session: Applications of modern technology on civil registration and vital statistics systems (Agenda item 6)

1. Modern technology for civil registration and vital statistics

106. The representative of the National Center for Health Statistics of U.S.A. presented a paper prepared by Vito Logrillo entitled "Modern technology for storage and retrieval of civil registration records and processing of vital statistics: the case of the United States of America(AW/CRVS/94/30). He noted that use and application of modern technology in the areas of civil registration and vital statistics had had major impacts in the systems of various countries. Movement toward automated civil registration functions as well as the processing and analysis of vital statistics through computerized methods were producing significant improvements in these areas.

107. Technological advances in computer software and hardware, optical disk systems, and microfilm systems allowed for mass storage and rapid access and retrieval of information. Subsequent processing of transactions against the established database, the preparation of record copies and reports, and the compilation of related statistics had become much more efficient and economical than in manual systems. Automated registration applications also provide for auto-coding of reported data, on-line record updating capabilities, automated indexes for record search and retrieval, administrative report preparation, tracking of records and requests for services from the public with maximum security of the data.

108. In the United States, the need for data and information to conduct monitoring and surveillance of national, state, and local health objectives had become a major issue. The national vital statistics system, which relied on the reporting of vital events from each state to the national vital statistics office, the National Centre for Health Statistics (NCHS), currently had a lag in reporting of national vital statistics of up to 18 months. At the state level, reporting of events from the local registration offices to the state's central office for vital statistics was more timely, but the subsequent processing requirements- coding, data entry, corrections and amendments- combined with budget and staff reductions also caused significant delays in the preparation of vital statistics in some states. Time lags of up to three years had occurred. Those problems had direct impact on the national vital and health statistics programme.

109. To address those issues the NCHS had established a Committee of State and National Representatives, which had recognized that current processing methods in registration must be reconfigured to meet the stated objectives for future needs of vital statistics data and information. the availability of more

powerful personal computer technology, expansion of electronic communications nationwide, and the growth in data automation through various software developments had resulted in the promotion of automation of registration activities among the 50 states. It was planned to accomplish re-direction of state programmes in three phases of implementation during the present decade.

111. The application of computer technology to the administrative and operation activities of civil registration had in recent years received major attention in state programmes. In the past, computerization had focused primarily on vital and health statistics and research components of state vital registration systems, with registration functions continuing in a manual mode. Some developments in automation had occurred over the years, but most of those efforts had been directed to the solution of individual problem areas, such as record storage or indexing.

112. More recently, automation had been extended to encompass all of the operational functions of civil registration with the goal of developing a completely automated registration system. Several states in the United States were very close to realizing that goal, with many states now directing major resources to implement such systems. Over the next five years, most states would have significant portions of their registration activities fully automated, with several approaching a "paperless" system.

113. The national goal, developed in conjunction with the individual state registration programmes, was to have an electronic birth and death recording system in place in all states with electronic transmission of vital statistics data to the National Center for Health Statistics, by the year 2000.

## 2. Population registration system and vital statistics in Finland

114. The representative of Finland, presented his paper on "Population registration and Vital Statistics in Finland" (AW/CRVS/94/31). He mentioned that the Finnish population information system operates subordinate to the Ministry of Interior and is a basic administrative register and technically advanced. The high quality is guaranteed by technical solutions and long traditions. Because of advanced data processing technology, it offers a flexible data system service to the whole public sector.

115. The development and control of the system is duty of the Population Register Centre and at the local level there are the District Register Offices which are in charge of the practical registration tasks. The information registered is obtained from private citizens and several authorities and organizations such as municipalities, hospitals and courts of laws.

116. The population information system contains the official

information for the whole country on Finnish citizens and aliens residing permanently in Finland such as name and personal identity code, municipality of residence and postal address, citizenship, mother tongue and information on marriages, children and parents and on buildings and dwellings as well as office and business premises and their holders.

117. The Workshop tried to find the answers to the key questions of African countries Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: (i) Cooperation with Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems Authorities; (ii) Cooperation with CR-Authorities and others such as medical, schooling etc.; (iii) Motivating decision makers and other authorities private citizens; (iv) Use of modern technology, but the computers will not solve the problems, there are due to problems in organisation, lack of money, coverage.

### 3. Population registration system and vital statistics in Norway

118. The representative of Norway presented the paper on "Population registration system and vital statistics in Norway (Aw/CRVS/94/32). He informed that in Norway the registration of vital events is very satisfactory. Nordic countries have a long traditions on registration of vital events. The present system is a result of development during several centuries along with the steadily increasing infrastructure. It is now an integrated part of the Central Population Register System.

119. Norway has a population register-based statistics system providing vital statistics of a very satisfactory quality, more than sufficient for most purposes. This is firstly due to a close integration with a well organized civil registration system. Secondly, it is a result of a compilation within a developed population statistics system, with possibilities to check and supplement the information against other sources (medical records, stock data etc.)

120. The population registration system consists of a local population registry in every municipality (435) and a central agency belonging to the Directorate of taxes keeping a central population register (CPR). Local registries were introduced in 1946. The CPR was built up in 1964-66 along with the introduction of the national identification number assigned to each resident. The local population registries were manual until 1993. Now each local population registry consist of a terminal with on line connection to the CPR data base. The local population registries get all notifications on vital events (and migration) from the primary source (maternity clinic, public courts etc.). The CPR data base is mostly updated from the terminals.

121. In addition to the basis for most current demographic statistics several governmental agencies and private companies have direct access to information from the CPR data base. The



access is strictly regulated. The population statistics system in Statistics Norway get input data from the CPR. Vital statistics are compiled and released quarterly and annually within the frame of population accounts. The quality of the statistics is very good with 100.0 per cent coverage. Final figures are based on notifications of events received within 2 months after the statistical period. Such data for more than 25 years represent a rich source for cohort analyses, life course analyses etc.

122. Basic conditions for the very satisfactory situation in Norway are also introduction of the national identity number, appropriate legislation, loyalty to the authorities, many "surveyable" municipalities and international (Nordic) collaboration. Although the systems now are fully computerized, modern data processing facilities have proved to be no condition for a satisfactory situation.

#### 4. Population registration system and vital statistics in Sweden

123. The representative of Sweden presented the paper entitled "Population registration system and vital statistics in Sweden" (AW/CRVS/94/33). She explained the scope of the population registration in the country, which was the general registration of the Swedish population. She said that the population registration is working well in Sweden and the coverage of births, deaths and marriages which occur in Sweden is about 100%. There are however problems with registration of residence, More time should be spend to ensure that registration of residence is correct.

124. The responsibility of the National Tax Board covered administrative and material issues related to population registration. Its task was to ensure that the work and operations involved in population registration at the tax offices was carried out correctly, efficiently and uniformly. a major task for the National Tax Board was to present, process and prioritize proposals aimed at developing and amending the EDP system, official forms and so on. The Board was also responsible for the provision of information and advice to the tax offices with regard to more substantial population registration issues and the EDP system used.

125. The transfer to a new EDP system had resulted in a considerable reduction in costs. Each person, whose name was in the population register, must have a personal identity number as an identification code. The PIN had become widely used as an identification code not only for population registration but also in other areas of administration.

126. The representative further briefed the Workshop on particulars included in the population register. Certain basic information was recorded for every person, i.e. name, date of

birth (included in the PIN), place of birth, citizenship and marital status. There were also details of the parents, spouse and children and the person's place of residence. In the case of children, there were also details of who had legal custody and whether the child was adopted. Following death, details were also recorded of where the deceased person was buried.

5. Different approaches for evaluating civil registration coverage.

127. A representative of the UNFPA CST-Addis Ababa introduced this agenda item on the basis of the document AW/CRVS/94/34 of the same title. It was indicated that the vital events covered in civil registration systems include: live birth, death, foetal death, marriage, divorce, annulment of marriage, judicial separation, adoption, legitimation and recognition of parenthood. However, in view of the known difficulties associated with the registration of each of the vital events and resources constraints, it was suggested that priority be given to registration of live births and deaths in any programme for the establishment or improvement of a civil registration system in the African region. Thus, the presentation was restricted to issues relating to those two vital events.

128. It was noted that civil registration systems like other major data collection systems such as censuses and sample surveys are affected by errors of various types which may be classified into two major groups, namely, coverage and content errors. The need to determine the extent, types and sources of errors in any data collection system was therefore stressed. In this respect it was pointed out that an evaluation programme should be instituted as an integral aspect of a civil registration system.

129. It was pointed out that there are two major approaches for the evaluation of coverage error in a civil registration system. These are the direct and indirect methods. The attention of the meeting was called to the different techniques which have been developed over the years on the two approaches. The advantages and limitations as well as the assumptions and types of data needed in respect of the different techniques and their applications were also noted.

130. Finally, it was stressed that responsibility of coverage evaluation of a registration system should be properly assigned. In this regard, it was suggested that the responsibility could be shared between the civil registration agency and the national statistical authority.

131. In the discussion following the presentation, problems particularly those relating to matching of records in the application of the dual record system for evaluation purposes, were stressed. It was also noted that the background document had indicated various options of techniques for coverage error evaluation. It was pointed out that the single round retrospective survey had been rejected as a reliable source of

vital statistics.

132. There was also a query regarding the use of census returns for evaluation of civil registration coverage through matching of records since the two systems have different units of data collection. There was also a question regarding the use of data from a single census for evaluation purposes.

133. Also, in reference to the use of sex ratio at birth of 105 to 106 as standard pattern for evaluation purposes, as indicated in the background document, it was observed that in at least one country, the sex ratio at birth did not fall within the range indicated above.

134. In response to some of the queries, it was indicated that despite the known difficulties regarding matching of records, with adequate planning and adoption of appropriate strategies, the problems could be minimized to permit the use of the direct method for coverage evaluation.

135. The limitations of the single round retrospective surveys were also acknowledged but it was pointed out that, for various reasons, most of the surveys conducted in the region were of that type. It was contended though, that despite the limitations, such surveys could be used for evaluation purposes if the assumption of independence between the survey and the registration system is satisfied.

136. Finally, the attention of the Workshop was called to the use of data from a single census for coverage evaluation as noted in the documents as well as the reservation regarding the use of the standard pattern of sex ratio at birth.

Fourth plenary session: Strategies for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems (agenda item 7)

1. Improving the completeness and accuracy of the vital registration and vital statistics systems in the United States.

137. The representative of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS, USA) presented the document on "Improving completeness and accuracy of the vital registration and vital statistics system in the United States" (AW/CRVS/94/39). It provided information on the efforts that have been undertaken in the U.S.A. to improve the completeness and accuracy of the vital registration and vital statistics system.

138. The techniques that have been used fall into the following categories: involvement of persons outside the family in the registration of the vital event; use of informational materials to inform and promote; effective use of training programme; use

of staff to work in the "field" to work on problem solving and to provide guidance to those involved in registration; use of workshops to deal with specific problem areas, specifically cause of death; development of an exhibit on cause of death to educate and promote improvement; queering to obtain missing and correct inconsistent information; use of automation techniques to improve birth and death quality and timeliness; using publicity to show uses of data and to inform the public and others about the system; using surveys and other independent sources to check on the quality of vital statistics data. The importance of confidentiality issues was discussed to enable high quality data to be collected.

139. Emphasis was put on the importance of an "active" rather than a "passive" approach to achieving complete registration. It was also indicated that efforts to improve quality and completeness must be ongoing.

140. In the discussion following the presentation, a question was raised about how Africa could institute an "active" system of registration system when 50% of the births occur at home. The response was that while medical personnel should be used whenever possible, others may also be use to facilitate registration. These may include school teachers, religious officials, village chiefs, and other out-reach workers. It is important that the various countries identify those most appropriate for them.

141. Concerning question about paying the notifies, it was suggested that an attempt be made either to incorporate notification into their duties or to convince them that this a service they should provide for the mother or family. It is preferable not to pay although there are certain individuals who may serve as deputy registrars (village chiefs for example) who probably should be provided some small remuneration.

142. In response to a question about family involvement in civil registration in the U.S., the answer was that they have no responsibility other than to provide information to the hospital or other reporting authority whose responsibility is to register the event.

143. Concern was expressed about the lack of morturous services in Africa and the impact it had on death registration (traditional methods of disposition was also mentioned as a problem). It was suggested that the use of notifiers as mentioned above may be helpful in identifying these events. It was also suggested that permits for the disposition of the dead bodies might be useful in some areas, especially urban areas.

144. Identification and registration of traditional marriages is a problem throughout Africa. It was indicated that this is also a problem in some parts of the US. (common law marriages) and no adequate solution has been found. However, at least one state in the U.S> does allow the couple to report the marriage and to receive a special registration of the event. This would be

helpful for legal purposes but would not be timely enough for statistical purposes.

2. Draft plan of action for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the African region

145. A member of the ECA secretariat presented the "Draft plan of action for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the African region" (AW/CRVS/94/35/add.1). He informed that the document intended to propose strategies for accelerating the improvement of the civil registration and vital statistics system in the African region on the basis of the experiences of countries in the implementation of the basis of the experiences of countries in the implementation of relevant projects and the recommendations formulated by various working group meetings on the subject, particularly those held in Africa. The ECA Secretariat after reviewing the situation of civil registration and vital statistics systems in a number of African countries during the last ten years, has come to the conclusion that most of the recommendations made during those meetings are still valid but need to be updated and to take into account new developments. The proposed draft plan of action draws from the programme which was formulated by the 1985 Working Group on the Development of Civil Registration Systems and Vital Statistics Collection in Africa, a survey carried out by ECA in 1990 on the implementation of the above programme and the country reports prepared for the present Workshop.

146. A series of proposals were made in different spheres to solve problems due to administrative factors, budgetary constraints, legal framework, public ignorance factors, technical factors. The proposals were intended to initiate discussion on the Plan of Action for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa under agenda item 8.

3. Feasibility study on accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems of Botswana

147. The UNSTAT consultant presented a paper entitled "Feasibility Study to Accelerate the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Botswana" (AW/CRVS/94/37). He highlighted the results of the improved system implemented in 4 experimental areas of Botswana.

- i) The applied system is successful because it has reached 100% coverage of births and deaths. The reason is being the use of medical personnel as well as traditional leaders in registration of

vital events.

- ii) The system is giving public quick services birth and death certificates are issued within 2 weeks of the date of incidence.
- iii) The system is providing vital statistics at every 6 months interval in printed publication form.
- iv) Training in civil registration has been institutionalized since a certificate course on population dynamics and civil registration is established in the University of Botswana on a regular basis.
- v) The experimented system is in the process to be adopted by the government. In the preparation for the replication at national level, the Government of Botswana is asking international agencies as well as donor countries for assistance to have the advisor who designed and operated the experimental system to help civil registration to prepare the required regulations adaptable to the system and to take up massive training which is needed at large scale for replicated areas.

148. In responding to questions raised upon his presentation, he said a memorandum exhibiting implications of adopting the improved system is prepared and is ready to be submitted to the cabinet. When this is approved then the real work of C.R. Division starts which includes among others preparation of amendments of laws, writing up of regulation shaping administrative organization for the new system, and training of informants who belong to other ministries.

149. He states that in Botswana there is a good and favourable tradition in term of registration of deaths. Bodies are kept in mortuaries sometimes up to one week so that friends and relatives gather from various corners of the country to pay the last respect to the deceased. As such it is easy to pass law or regulation to request for the registration of such death prior to the moving out of the body.

150. He added that, in order to be able to carry out the new system the civil registration needs a strong, dynamic and well trained personnel and an organization at a proper level so that it could coordinate and supervise all the operations.

**Good management and self-reliance for improving civil registration and vital statistics system in countries of africa**

151. The secretariat introduced this agenda item on the basis of

document AW/CRVS/94/38 entitled "Good management and self-reliance for improving civil registration and vital statistics in countries of Africa". From the preceding reports presented by the delegates of this Workshop, it was to be concluded that, within countries, many governmental agencies are involved in the civil registration activities and there is a need for coordinating these agencies.

152. The setting up of a management system to administer these functions should be based on the existing infrastructure and procedures. The ideal structure for managing civil registration and vital statistics systems, was identified as one where the two responsible agencies are integrated into a single national office or agency headed by a director. This office would comprise of 2 branches one dealing with the registration activities and the other with vital statistics. Their responsibilities were detailed in the paper. The role and responsibilities of the management system would include among others intra-agency collaboration, planning and policy issues, public relations, etc. Management was advised to pay attention to the problem of low demand from the public for the recording of events, as well as manage conflicts of interest and engineer political support for their programmes. However, it was recognized that such an integrated system with one single national office may not be practicable in the context of most African countries due to resource constraints and possible conflict of interest with other agencies, particularly the Central Statistical Office.

153. The difficulties of self-reliance were also addressed in the context of the current african economic situation including the administrative and technical issues relations thereto. It was pointed out that a restructuring exercise would rely on the administrative structure and procedures in place, and the resources available.

154. The secretariat concluded that by setting up a good management system, African countries would get the desired results. It encouraged every country to work towards attainment of that goal despite resources constraints and also urged them to strive for an effective inter-agency collaboration.

155. In the ensuing discussion, the secretariat gave clarification regarding the management of conflicts of interest, especially between national institutions like the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and the National Registrar's. It was pointed out that the creation of a vital statistics branch in the national registration office could lead to conflict of interest concerns because of the division of duties such as processing or analysis of data.

5. Essential conditions for a satisfactory vital statistics and civil registration

156. A representative of IIVRS presented the paper on "Essential conditions for a Satisfactory VS/CR" (AW/CRVS/94/43). He said that over the years numerous conferences, workshops, etc. have offered their best ideas on what are the essential conditions for a nation to have a successful programme for CR/VS improvement. They are as follows:

- (i) Strong and continuing central government commitment to ensure:
  - (a) Sufficient and continuing budgetary support
  - (b) Cooperation of various ministries involved in CR/VS system
  - (c) Cooperation among center-state-and local units
  - (d) Appropriate legislation is enacted.
- (ii) Central registration authority to direct and coordinate registration activities
- (iii) Implement measures with high probability of success
- (iv) Responsiveness to needs of data users
- (v) Support of organisations which will benefit from improvements
- (vi) Active "notifier" system
- (vii) Comprehensive and continuing training at all levels
- (viii) Adequate transport and communications means and attitudes that foster communication among units involved in CR/VS
- (ix) Patience and time, which might be helped along by providing vital estimates based on selected geographical areas
- (x) Creation of a need for registration documents.

Fifth plenary session: Working Group on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (Agenda item 8)

157. The Workshop worked as a working group to address the "Strategies for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems". After considerable deliberations and discussions, the Group adopted the following Plan of Action for Accelerating the



Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa", including the goals and the strategies for its implementation.

**PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS IN AFRICA**

**I. GOALS**

The workshop adopted the following goals for the year 2000 on Civil Registration coverage of Births and Deaths and Vital Statistics:

**A. BIRTHS**

1. Those countries that have below 30 percent registration coverage should increase to at least 50 percent.
2. Those countries that have between 30 to 50 percent registration coverage should raise their coverage up to at least 70 percent.
3. Those countries that have between 50 to 70 percent should raise their coverage to at least 80 percent.

**B. DEATHS**

1. Those countries that have under 15 percent should raise death registration coverage to at least 30 percent.
2. Those countries that have between 15 and 30 percent should raise their coverage to at least 50 percent.
3. Those countries that have 30 to 50 percent coverage should raise to at least 70 percent coverage.
4. Those countries that have 50 to 70 percent coverage should raise to at least 80 percent.

**C VITAL STATISTICS**

The agency responsible for vital statistics should disseminate vital statistics on a regular and timely basis, including tabulations for areas in the country that have almost complete registration.

## II. STRATEGIES

In order to attain these goals, the governments of Africa should accord high priority and provide adequate budgetary support to the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics. To this end, the Workshop adopted the following strategies:

### 1. Steering Committees

The agencies responsible for civil registration and vital statistics should take action to set up interministerial steering committee to assist, advise and guide the responsible agencies to the efficient functioning of the civil registration and vital statistics systems. The responsible agencies together with the steering committee should seek cooperation and assistance from the international, regional, bilateral, non-governmental organizations, and all the private organizations within the country.

### 2. Registration laws

Countries should review existing laws concerning civil registration and related laws such as the vital statistics law, the health code, the family code, the municipal code, the civil code, etc. in order to make civil registration comprehensive, compulsory and effective nationwide and free of charge.

### 3. Registration officials

The civil registration system should move from a passive to an active system. Toward this purpose, local registrars should be civil servants not subject to political waves, be given periodical training, and opportunities for career development. In addition, health personnel, midwives, tribal chiefs, religious authorities and other local authorities may be appointed as notifiers to aid the local registrars to enhance registration coverage.

### 4. Public Awareness

The workshop attached great importance to increased public awareness of civil registration and vital statistics systems. For this purpose, each country may set up a special committee of local experts. Awareness creation should also be promoted by increasing the demand and use of vital records.

5. **Training**

The Workshop recognized the need for training of civil registration and vital statistics personnel at all levels (national, regional, local) as well as other personnel involved in civil registration and vital statistics activities. For these purposes, manuals and technical documentation should be prepared by the agency(ies) concerned with civil registration and vital statistics systems and disseminated widely.

6. **Logistic support**

The Workshop emphasized the need for government to provide the civil registration and vital statistics systems with an efficient logistic support including, transport, communications, printing, storage, archives and processing facilities.

7. **Registration records**

Countries should put in place an efficient system capable of conveniently storing and retrieving civil registration records and issuing certificates.

8. **Coordination and cooperation**

Countries should ensure close coordination and effective cooperation among all agencies involved in civil registration and vital statistics activities. To this end, it is recommended that the registration agency provide registration records to the vital statistics agency in a timely manner and that a National Committee on Civil Registration and Vital statistics be set up. The Committee should also be comprised of representatives of the main end-users of the data and information generated by the systems.

9. **Monitoring and evaluation**

Countries should put in place an effective mechanism for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the civil registration and vital statistics systems, including clear assignment of responsibilities.

10 **Technical and financial assistance**

The UNFPA and other multilateral and bilateral agencies are urged to lend technical and financial assistance to countries in the region, and to enhance the scope and implementation of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in collaboration with the United Nations Statistical Division and other concerned agencies, should prepare manuals for training of civil registration and vital statistics personnel and to guide the operation and maintenance of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

11. Vital statistics

Countries should increase the capability of data processing of the Agency responsible for vital statistics to ensure their timely production and dissemination.

12. Implementation of the Plan of Action

The Workshop recommended to ECA/UNSTAT to set up a monitoring mechanism to evaluate the attainment of goals of the present plan of action.

**EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP (Agenda item 9)**

158. Evaluation forms were distributed to all participants to be filled. This evaluation exercise is to enable UNECA to ascertain the view of participants on how to improve the organization and content of future meetings. The results of this evaluation are given in Annex 4.

**CLOSING OF THE WORKSHOP**

159. The chief of UNECA Statistics Division thanked all the participants for their active and fruitful participation during the arduous sessions of the Workshop. He added that the Workshop had given a great opportunity to exchange experiences and ideas on how to solve the many problems in Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems in the African region.

160. He also expressed his gratitude to the Chairman and the members of the Bureau for the able manner in which they had conducted the work of the Workshop, and to UNSTAT for its very active and efficient role as joint convener of the Workshop. He finally praised the valuable contributions made by the representatives of IIVRS, the UNFPA Country Support Teams (Addis Ababa and Harare, Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United States of America.

161. The two representatives of UNSTAT also thanked all the participants for their important contributions to the success of the fourth workshop under the auspices of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems. They expressed deep appreciation to both the ECA for its warm hospitality and for the excellent facilities made available to the Workshop, and to

UNFPA for providing financial support. The Workshop had brought together registrar and officials dealing with of vital statistics who were encouraged to work hand in hand to bring about significant improvements in their Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in the coming years.

162. The UNSTAT representatives praised the close collaboration between the United Nations Statistical Division and ECA for the planning, organization and implementation of this Workshop. They said that the implementation of the Plan of Action and recommendations adopted in the Workshop for countries of ECA region, to a great extent, would very much depend on the ECA leadership and commitment towards the CR/VS in the years ahead.

163. The Executive Director of IIVRS expressed the wish that the Plan of Action for Accelerated Improvements of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems will be successful and that the evaluation of attainment and goals around the year 2000 will show satisfactory results.

164. Finally, the Chairman of the Workshop, after thanking the participants for they cooperation and enriching discussions, declared closed the African Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems.

**ANNEXES:**

**ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**ANNEX 2: TIME TABLE**

**ANNEX 3: LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

**ANNEX 4: EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP.**

**ANNEX: 5 OPENING STATEMENT BY LAYASHI YAKER UNITED NATIONS UNDER-SECRETARY GENERAL, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**BOTSWANA**

Ms. T. Botana  
Senior Statistician  
Central Statistics Office  
Private Bag 0024  
Gaborone, Botswana  
Tel.: (267) 352200  
Fax: (267) 352201

Mrs. C.V. Seretse  
Acting Registrar-Civil Registrar  
Department of Registration &  
Social Welfare Matters  
Private Bag 002  
Gaborone, Botswana  
Tel.: (267) 3601102  
Fax: (267) 313584

**ETHIOPIA**

Mr. Behailu Gabre Medhin  
Expert Team Leader  
Central Statistical Authority  
P.O. Box 1143  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**GHANA**

Mr. Julius Kobla Kwakuvi-Zagbedeh  
Chief Registration Officer  
Births and Deaths Registry  
Ministry of Local Government  
P.O. Box M270  
Accra, Ghana

Ms. Edith K. Ameka  
Senior Statistician  
Head of Vital Statistics Section,  
Statistical Service  
Box 1098  
Accra, Ghana

**KENYA**

Mr. Francis M. Munene  
Principal Economist/Statistician-Demographer  
in-charge of Population Statistics  
Central Bureau of Statistics  
P.O. Box 30266  
Nairobi Kenya

Mr. Ben Jarabi Obonyo Statistician-Demographer  
Senior Planning Officer  
Department of Civil Registration  
Office of the President  
P.O. Box 49179  
Nairobi, Kenya  
tel. (254-2) 227461  
Telegraphic address; CIVREG, Nairobi

**LESOTHO**

Ms. Margareth Mann Africa  
Senior Statistician  
Social and Demographic Statistics  
Prisions, Tourism, Births and Deaths  
Bureau of Statistics  
P.O. Box 455  
Maseru. Lesotho  
Tel. (266) 323852

Mr. Lesole Alexis Putsoa  
Director, of Department of  
Chieftanship and Rural Development  
Ministry of Home Affairs  
P.O. Box 174  
Maseru 100. Lesotho  
Tel. (266) 325446

**MALAWI**

Mr. Jameson Simon Ndawala  
Principal Statistician, Head  
of Social Statistics Branch,  
Demography and Social Stat. Division  
National Statistical Office  
P.O. Box 333  
Zomba. Malawi  
Tel. (265) 522 377  
Fax: (265) 523 130

Mr. Vincent Jeremy Mzumara  
Senior Assistant Registrar General  
P.O. Box 100  
Blantyre. Malawi  
Tel.: (265) 650 251  
Fax: (265) 640 877

**NAMIBIA, REPUBLIC OF**

Ms. Panduleni C. Kali  
Statistician, Demographic &  
Social Statistics Division Central Statistics Office  
National Planning Commission Private bag 13356  
Windhoek. Republic Namibia  
Tel.: (264-61) 239360  
FAX.: (264-61) 239376

Mr. Dennis Collin Plaatjies  
Control Officer  
Subdivision of Births, Deaths & Marriages  
Ministry of Home Affairs  
Private bag 13200  
Windhoek. Republic Namibia

Mr. P. Namfua  
Advisor, Demographic and Social Statistics  
Central Statistics Office  
National Planning Commission  
Private Bag 13356  
Windhoek. Republic of Namibia  
Tel (264-61) 239360  
FAX (264-61) 239376

**NIGERIA**

Mrs. Hajiya Toma Ibrahim  
Commissioner  
National Population Commission  
Babs Animashaun Road  
Surulere, Lagos. Nigeria  
Tel. (234-1) 834 632 and 825 295  
Fax: (234-1) 836 987

Mrs. C.F. Adekunle  
Director Vital Registration  
National Population Commission  
Babs Animashaun Road  
Surulere, Lagos. Nigeria  
Tel. (234-1) 834 632 and 825 295  
Fax: (234-1) 836 987



**SIERRA LEONE**

Mrs. C.H. Lansana  
Deputy Director of Statistics &  
Head of Demographic and Social  
Statistics Division  
Central Statistics Office  
Tower Hill  
Freetown, Sierra Leone  
Tel.: (232-22)- 223287 or 223661

Mr. Mohamed Fofana  
Ag. Deputy Chief Registrar  
Births and Deaths  
Dept. of Health and Social Services  
Wilberforce Street  
Freetown, Sierra Leone  
Tel. (232-22) 224253

**SOUTH AFRICA**

Mr. Joseph Theophilus Smalberger  
Deputy Director  
Demographic Statistics Planning  
Private Bag X44  
Pretoria 0001  
Republic of South Africa  
Tel.: (27-012) 314 8266  
Fax.: (27-012) 310 8500 or 310 8501

Mr. Gustav August Keet  
Acting Deputy Director  
Births, Marriages and Deaths Records  
Department of Home Affairs  
Private Box X114  
Pretoria 0001  
Republic of South Africa  
Tel.: (27-012) 314 8266  
FAX.: (27-012) 314 8618

**SUDAN**

Mr. Sir El Khatim Wagialla El Hussein  
Director of Civil Registration &  
Vital Statistics  
Central Bureau of Statistics  
P.o. Box 700. Khartoum  
Sudan  
Tel: (873)-77698

Mr. Salah El Din Mohamed Abdel Halim  
Lieutenant Colonel  
Head of Finger Prints Dept.  
Police Headquarters  
Ministry of Interior  
P.O. Box 282. Khartoum  
Sudan  
Tel: (873)- 271 881

**SWAZILAND**

Mr. Amos M. Zwane  
Statistician  
Health Statistician  
Ministry of Health  
P.O. Box 5 Mbabane  
Tel.: + 268-4-2431 or  
Fax :+ 268-4-2092

Ms. Beatrice S. Shongwe  
Senior Assistant Registrar  
Ministry of Justice  
P.O. Box 460 Mbabane  
Tel.: + 268-4-3041 or 268-4-6010  
Fax : + 268-4-3531

Mr. Anthony Yudah Masilela  
Assistant Registrat General  
Registrar General's Office  
P.O.Box 460 Mbabane  
Tel.: + 268-4-3041 or 269-4-6010  
Fax: + 268-4-3531

**TANZANIA, UNITED REPUBLIC OF**

Mr. Donasian Marwa Mwita  
Administrator General  
& Head of Civil Registration,  
P.O. Box 9183 Dar es Salaam  
Tanzania  
Tel. (255-51) 23325  
Fax: (255-51) 44023  
Telex: 41576 TASTAT TZ

Mr. Sylvester Andrew M. Ngallaba  
Assistant Government Statistician  
Head of Population Statistics Section  
P.O. Box 796. Dar es Salaam  
Tel. (255-51) 35601  
Tanzania

**ZAMBIA**

Mr. Emmanuel Moses Silanda  
Assistant Director and in-charge of  
Social Statistics (includes Vital Statistics)  
Central Statistical Office  
Box 31908  
Lusaka. Zambia  
Tel. and FAX (260 1) 252 575:  
FAX : (260 1) 250 195 (Director'S Office)

Mr. Kambole Kambole  
Acting Registrar General  
Department of National Registration,  
Passport and Citizenship  
P.O. Box 32311  
Lusaka  
Tel.: (260 1) 228 196

**ZIMBABWE**

Mr. Henry Chikova  
Statistician,  
Health Statistics Section  
Central Statistical Office  
P.O.Box CY342  
Causeway, Harare. Zimbabwe  
TEL.:(263-4)-706681  
FAX: (263-4)-708854  
Telegraph: GOVSTAT

Mr. Hibu Batani  
Assistant Registrar General  
Acting Deputy Registrar General  
The Central Registry of  
Civil Registrations  
Private Bag 7734  
Causeway, Zimbabwe  
Tel.(263-4) 790428, 702295  
TELEX: 22199

**2. OTHER COUNTRIES OUTSIDE AFRICA, NGO'S  
REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS****A. OTHER COUNTRIES OUTSIDE AFRICA****FINLAND**

Mr. Hannu Luntiala  
Department Chief  
Population Register Centre  
P.O. Box 7,00521  
Helsinki, Finland  
Tel. +358-0-1596 600  
TELEFAX: +358-0-1596 495

**NORWAY**

Mr. Halvard Skiri  
Adviser  
Division of Population, Education  
and Regional Conditions  
Statistics Norway  
Postboks 1260  
N-2201 Kongsvinger. Norway  
Tel.: +47- 62 88 52 63  
Fax: +47- 62 88 52 89

**SWEDEN**

Ms. Ingrid Svedberg  
Head, Department of  
Population Registration  
Swedish Tax Administration  
S-171 94 Solna. Sweden  
Tel.: (+ 46 8) 764 8000  
FAX.: (+ 46 8) 28 03 32  
29 37 44

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Mr. George A. Gay  
Chief, Registration Methods Branch  
Division of Vital Statistics  
Office of Vital and Health Statistics  
National Center for Health Statistics  
Presidential Building, Room 840  
6525 Belcrest Road  
Hyatsville, Maryland 20782  
Tel. 301- 436 8815  
Fax.: 301- 436 7066

Mr. George Chauncey Tolson  
Statistician  
Registration Methods Branch  
Division of Vital Statistics  
Office of Vital and Health Statistics  
National Center for Health Statistics  
Presidential Building, Room 840  
6525 Belcrest Road  
Hyatsville, Maryland 20782  
Tel. 301- 436 8815  
Fax.: 301- 436 7066

**USAID**

Ms. Celeste Carr  
Sr. Public Health Advisor  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
SA-18 Suite No. 1200  
Washington, DC. 20523-1817  
Fax: (703) 875 4686

**B. NGO'S, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

**INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR VITAL REGISTRATION  
AND STATISTICS (IIVRS)**

Dr. Iwao Moriyama  
Executive Director  
International Institute for Vital  
Registration and Statistics  
9650 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, Maryland 20782. U.S.A.  
FAX: (301) 571 1855  
Tel.: (301) 530 7131

Mr. Samuel Baum  
Deputy Executive Director  
International Institute for Vital  
Registration and Statistics  
9650 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, Maryland 20782. U.S.A.  
Fax: (301) 571 1855  
tel.: (301) 530 7131

**O.A.U**

Mr. Girmu Wole  
Population and Development IEC Officer  
OAU Secretariat  
P.O.Box 3243  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: (251-1) 51-77-00, ext.237

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA (ECA)**

Mr. Robin Andrianasolo  
Chief Statistics Division,  
P.O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.(251-1) 517200  
Fax:(251-1) 514416

Mr. Rene Rakotobe  
Chief, Demographic and  
Social Statistics,  
Statistics Division  
P.O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.(251-1) 517200/09, ext. 617  
Fax:(251-1) 514416

Ms. Anne-Marie Bakyono  
Demographic Statistician  
Statistics Division  
P.O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.(251-1) 517200/09, ext. 457  
Fax:(251-1) 514416

Mrs. Awa D. Fall,  
Economic Affairs Officer  
Industry and Human Settlements Division  
P.O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: (251-1) 51-72-00/09, ext.1556  
Fax: (251-1) 514416

Mr. Toma T. Makannah  
Chief, General Demographic Section  
Population Division  
P.O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.(251-1) 517200/09, ext. 395  
Fax:(251-1) 514416

Mr. K.A. Banda  
Demographer  
Population Division  
P.O.Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: (25-1) 51-72-00, ext.330  
Fax: (25-1) 514416

**UNFPA COUNTRY SUPPORT TEAMS (UNFPA/CST)**

**1. UNFPA/CST, ADDIS ABABA**

Mr. E. Colecraft  
Demographic Statistics Adviser  
P.O. Box 8714  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 513134, 511288  
FAX: 517133

Mr. J.M. Hie  
Data Processing/Data Base Management  
P.O. Box 8714  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: (251-1) 513134, 511288  
FAX: (215-1) 517133

Mr. J. Onsembe  
Sampling Adviser  
P.O. Box 8714  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: (251-1) 513134, 511288  
FAX: (251-1) 517133

**2. UNFPA/CST, HARARE**

Mr. Jacob Tayo  
Adviser in Demographic Statistics  
P.O. Box 4775. Harare  
Zimbabwe  
Tel.:(263 4)- 738793  
FAX :(263 4)- 738792  
Telex: 24668 ZW

**UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL DIVISION (UNSTAT)**

Mrs Alice Clague  
Officer-in-Charge of  
Demographic Statistics Section,  
Demographic and Social  
Statistics Branch, UNSTAT  
Two United Nations Plaza, Room 1514  
United Nations, New York, NY 10017  
Tel.: (212)- 963 4972  
FAX : (212)- 963 4116

Mrs. Violeta Gonzales-Diaz  
Statistician, Demographic and Social  
Statistics Branch, UNSTAT  
Two United Nations Plaza, Room 1518  
United Nations, New York, NY 10017  
Tel.: (212)- 963 4966  
FAX : (212)- 963 4116

Mr. Mahmoud Sotoudeh Zand  
Consultant, UNSTAT  
Private Bag 129  
C/O. UNDP Res Rep  
Gaborone, Botswana  
Tel.: (267)- 372 107  
FAX : (267) 356 093 UNDP/Gaborone or  
(267) 301 562 UNFPA/Gaborone



## TIME TABLE

**Monday:**  
5 December, 1994

### Morning Session

- 08:30 - 10:30 Registration of participants
- 10:30 - 11:15 Opening  
Break
- 11:30 - 11:45 Election of Officers
- 11:45 - 12:30 International Programme for Accelerating the  
Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil  
Registration Systems and Related Guidelines:  
UNSTAT

Discussion

### Afternoon Session

#### I. FIRST PLENARY SESSION: NATIONAL REPORT ON CURRENT STATUS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS.

- 14:30 - 16:00 Botswana  
Ethiopia  
Ghana
- Discussion
- 16:00 - 17:30 Kenya  
Lesotho  
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya  
Malawi

Discussion

**Tuesday:**

**6 December, 1994**

**Morning Session**

**I. FIRST PLENARY SESSION (continued)**

09:00 - 10:30 South Africa  
Sudan  
Swaziland

Discussion

**Afternoon Session**

14:30 - 16:00 Tanzania/Zanzibar  
Zambia  
Zimbabwe

Discussion

**II. SECOND PLENARY SESSION: MAIN USES OF VITAL RECORDS AND STATISTICS**

**GENERAL USES**

16:30 - 17:30 uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis: ECA/Population Division

Uses of vital registration records and vital statistics in development programmes: IIVRS

Data collection methods and techniques providing vital statistics and rates: UNSTAT

Discussion

**Wednesday:**

**7 December, 1994**

**Morning Session**

**III. THIRD PLENARY SESSION: APPLICATIONS OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS**

**09:00 - 12:30** Modern technology for civil registration and vital statistics systems: the case of the United States of America (Vito M. Logrillo)

Population registration and vital statistics in Finland: Hannu Luntiala, Finland

Population Registration System and Vital Statistics in Norway: Halvard Skiri, Norway

Population Registration System and Vital Statistics In Sweden: I. Svedberg

Different approaches for evaluating civil registration coverage: UNFPA CST-Addis Ababa/ECA

**Afternoon Session**

**IV. FOURTH PLENARY SESSION: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS**

**14:30 - 16:30** Improving the completeness and accuracy of the vital registration and vital statistics system in the United States: G. Gay, NCHS, U.S.A.

Draft plan of action for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the African region: ECA/Statistics Division

Feasibility study for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Botswana: M.S.Zand.

Good management and self-reliance for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in countries of Africa: ECA/Statistics Division

Discussion

**V. WORKING GROUPS ON NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR ACCELERATING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS**

16:45 - 17:30 Multilateral approach under the International Programme on vital statistics and Civil Registration Systems: UNSTAT

**Thursday:**

**8 December, 1994**

**Morning Session**

09:00 - 12:30 Working groups (first meeting)  
Conclusions and recommendations of the working groups

**Friday:**

**9 December, 1994**

**Morning Session**

Free for most participants  
Preparation of the draft report of conclusion and recommendations of the workshop

**Afternoon Session**

14:30 - 16:30 Adoption of the conclusions and recommendation of the workshop

16:30 - 17:00 Closing

**LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

- 1 General information for participants (AW/CRVS/94/INF.1)
- 2 Provisional List of participants (AW/CRVS/94/INF.2)
- 3 Letter to participants (AW/CRVS/94/INF.3)
- 4 Provisional Agenda of the Workshop (AW/CRVS/94/1)
- 5 Provisional Time Table ( AW/CRVS/94/2)
- 6 List of documents (AW/CRVS/94/3)
- 7 International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems (United Nations Statistical Division) (AW/CRVS/94/4)
- 8 Outline for preparing a country report on the current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems (United Nations Statistical Division) (AW/CRVS/94/5)
- 9 Review and assessment of the national civil registration and vital statistics systems (United Nations Statistical Division) (AW/CRVS/94/6)

**NATIONAL REPORTS ON CURRENT STATUS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIES FOR THEIR IMPROVEMENTS:**

10. Botswana (AW/CRVS/94/7)
11. Ethiopia (AW/CRVS/94/8)
12. Ghana (AW/CRVS/94/9)
13. Kenya (AW/CRVS/94/10)
14. Lesotho (AW/CRVS/94/11)
15. Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (AW/CRVS/94/12)
16. Malawi (AW/CRVS/94/13)
17. Namibia (AW/CRVS/94/14)
18. Nigeria (AW/CRVS/94/15)
19. Sierra Leone (AW/CRVS/94/16)
20. South Africa (AW/CRVS/94/17)
21. Sudan (AW/CRVS/94/18)
22. Swaziland (AW/CRVS/94/19)
23. Tanzania (AW/CRVS/94/20)
24. Zambia (AW/CRVS/94/21)
25. Zimbabwe (AW/CRVS/94/22)

## MAIN USES OF VITAL RECORDS AND STATISTICS

26. Uses of civil registration records and vital statistics in health programmes and services (Paper presented at Western Asia Workshop on Strategies for Acceleration the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems) (AW/CRVS/94/23). (Reference purpose only).
27. Uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis (ECA/Population Division) (AW/CRVS/94/24)
28. Use of vital statistics for educational planning with special reference to South Asian (Paper presented at Eastern and South Asian Workshop on Strategies Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems) (AW/CRVS/94/25. Reference purpose only)
29. Use of civil registration records and vital statistics in population policy making and evaluation (Paper presented at East and South Asian Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems) (AW/CRVS/94/26. Reference purpose only)
30. Uses of vital registration records and vital statistics in development programmes: (International Institute for Vital Registration and statistics) (AW/CRVS/94/27)
31. Automation of Civil of Civil Registration Hand out on a Demonstration of A PC-Based System to Register, Store and Retrieve Civil Registration: The Botswana CIVl Registration System (AW/CRVS/94/28)
32. Civil registration Vs. other data collection methods and techniques providing vital statistics and rates (United Nations Statistical Division) (AW/CRVS/94/29)

## APPLICATIONS OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS.

33. Modern technology for civil registration and vital statistics (Vito M. Logrillo) (AW/CRVS/94/30)
34. Population registration system and vital statistics in Finland (Population Registration Centre, Finland) (AW/CRVS/94/31)

35. Population registration system and vital statistics in Norway (Statistics Norway) (AW/CRVS/94/32)
36. Population registration system and vital statistics in Sweden (Population Registration, Swedish Tax board Administration) (AW/CRVS/94/33)
37. Different approaches for evaluating civil registration coverage (UNFPA country Support Team II/ECA) (AW/CRVS/94/34)

#### **STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS**

38. Organization and Status of civil registration in Africa and recommendations for improvement (IIVRS technical paper N.31 April 1988) (AW/CRVS/94/35)
39. Draft plan of action for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems (ECA/ Statistics Division) (AW/CRVS/94/35/Add.1)
40. The new multilateral cooperation strategy approach under the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems vs past experiences (United Nations Statistical Division) (AW/CRVS/94/36)
41. A feasibility study on accelerating the improvement of civil registration on vital statistics systems of Botswana (M.S.Zand) (AW/CRVS/94/37).
42. Good management and self-reliance for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in countries of Africa (Economic Commission for Africa) (AW/CRVS/94/38)
43. Improving the completeness and accuracy of the vital registration and vital statistics system in the United States (G.Gay, NCHS, USA) (AW/CRVS/94/39)
44. Suggest issues and points for group discussion (AW/CRVS/94/40)
45. Evaluation form (AW/CRVS/94/41)
46. Report of the workshop (AW/CRVS/94/42)

**RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP**

1. 32 participants filled the evaluation forms. The participants were generally of the view that the overall administrative arrangements were either very good or good. The meeting was announced sufficiently in advance enough to enable them make adequate preparation for participation in the workshop and only one indicated that he received the formal invitation letter too late. Three persons were of the view that financial arrangements could be improved to avoid unnecessary time waste and also that the local organizing committee should provide stationery, pencils, tea and coffee for the workshop.

2. 75 percent of the participants thought that the duration of the workshop was just right, 22 percent were of the view that it was inadequate and two persons thought it was excessive. The time table was considered by 63 percent to be too demanding and 27 percent just right. They considered that there are too many papers for the time allowed and the working hours were too long and there should have more breaks.

3. With respect to the content and proceeding of the workshop, 81 percent thought the objective had been realized. The remaining 19 percent indicated that too many details were discussed and time could have been used more effectively for thorough discussion of strategies. All the participants were of the view that the documentation were sufficient (75 percent) more than required (25 percent), very clear (50 percent) and reasonable (50 percent). The participants also unanimously considered that the general level of presentation was clear throughout the topics discussed are relevant to the civil registration and vital statistics systems. However, most of the participants stated that some presentation should focussed directly to the main problems.

4. Concerning discussions of the topics to have been included in the workshop, 84 percent indicated that they are practically oriented. Four persons were of the view that it was too theoretical. Some of them felt that more fruitful discussion could have taken place if more time was allowed and if presenters kept to their allowed time.

5. All participants thought that the workshop was very relevant for their job. With regard to problems likely to be encountered in putting into practice the ideas pertaining to some selected topics discussed in the workshop, the participants indicated that the main problems were the lack of financial (66 percent) and human (34 percent) resources.



**UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION  
FOR AFRICA**



**NATIONS UNIES  
COMMISSION ECONOMIQUE  
POUR L'AFRIQUE**

**AFRICAN WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIES FOR ACCELERATING  
THE IMPROVEMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL  
STATISTICS SYSTEMS.**

**OPENING STATEMENT**

**BY**

**LAYASHI YAKER**

**UNITED NATIONS UNDER-SECRETARY GENERAL,**

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

**OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

**Distinguished participants,**

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the Headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and to this important workshop: "African Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems". The present workshop is being organized in cooperation with the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis (DESIPA), particularly through its Statistical Division (UNSTAT), and constitutes one of the activities proposed in the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems.

At its twenty-sixth session in February 1991, the United Nations Statistical Commission welcomed and gave its full support to the International Programme and urged the United Nations Statistical Division and the other international agencies sponsoring the Programme, i.e. the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics (IIVRS), to conduct specialized workshops in all regions (Latin America, Asia and Africa) in order to provide greater awareness of the importance and the need for effective Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems.

Two workshops have been planned for the African region: the present one for English-speaking participants and the next one in 1995 for French-speaking countries. Therefore, your meeting is among a world wide series of regional workshops which were held in Buenos Aires, Damascus and Beijing, following the recommendation of the Statistical Commission.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

There is a universal recognition of the need for national civil registration. Like other countries, African countries have adopted legislation and law establishing compulsory and continuous registration of vital events. It refers to the process of registering individual civil or vital events, such as births, deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, etc...; in short, all the events and changes in status that may occur during the person's lifetime.

As you know, the records of these facts serve two broad groups of purposes. Firstly, the Civil Registration System is intended to produce official documentary proofs, essential for individual administrative and judicial uses. Vital statistics, identification certificates and marriage records are examples of only some potential ministrative and judicial uses of the civil registration system.

Secondly, the registration records provide a continuous source of information needed for policy formulation in a broad range of areas of socio-economic concern. For example, population projections based on vital statistics are crucial in determining the needs in terms of housing, schools, teachers, labour, public health, etc. The most important use of vital statistics is in the field of health. Mortality statistics including data on causes of death are particularly useful in identifying the main diseases that threaten public health and the characteristics of the persons dying from these diseases. Vital statistics and vital records are indispensable tools for planning, administration and evaluation of various programmes such as family planning and health care. You will have the opportunity to review the overall situation during this workshop.

### Distinguished participants,

The value and uses of the civil registration system and the vital records and statistics that flow therefrom are evident. The United Nations had adopted a number of resolutions on the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, in addition to the technical recommendations made by various international commissions and committees. These resolutions relate civil registration and vital statistics to economic and social development and public administration. Furthermore, the Human Rights Covenants recognize civil registration as an essential process in establishing some of these rights. In the past several years, a number of major international and regional conferences related exclusively to Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems have been organized by the United Nations or bilateral agencies. All of these conferences were called to consider the status of Civil Registration System and the means of achieving its improvement.

In this context, during the last decade a growing number of African countries attached great importance to the development of their Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems. African Governments had shown interest and had implemented projects funded by UNFPA, with UNECA assistance. Also UNECA organized two Working Groups: the 1980 Working Group held in Nairobi made a number of recommendations for the development and improvement of civil registration. Five years later, the 1985 Working Group, held in Addis Ababa, noted that only limited progress had been made in initiating satisfactory systems in the region and adopted a Programme of Action. This Programme specified not only the general outlines of a new strategy, but also proposed measures to develop and improve the organization and administration of the Civil Registration System, with particular emphasis on rural areas.

It should be mentioned that some efforts have been made especially in the extension of basic infrastructure such as the establishment of a Steering Committee of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, the training of staff, the consolidation of registration documents as well as methodologies and coverage in limited areas. Unfortunately, financial, technical and administrative problems have

constrained the efforts. Therefore, for most African countries, it must be recognized that serious deficiencies in the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems still exist which reduce their utility. The importance of your Workshop is therefore evident. As national experts, you have a very challenging task to accomplish in providing a solid foundation for an enhanced and sustained strategy for accelerating the improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa. Let us hope that the 21st Century will be a period of consolidation and further development in this field in the region.

At this point, let me express my sincere thanks to UNFPA for its valuable assistance programme which is in operation for many years in the African countries and also for providing financial support for meetings, like this one, relating to the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics. I would like to urge UNFPA and other interested agencies to continue to provide necessary support to sustain these efforts.

#### **Distinguished participants,**

As I already indicated, your meeting is being organized within the framework of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems. The main objective of the International Programme is "To mobilize international and bilateral efforts both technical and financial, to promote, support and encourage the developing countries to undertake meaningful and sound reforms to accelerate the development and improvement of their Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems". The improved Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems constitute a sound component of socio-demographic data sources needed for population and development plans, policies and programmes. It is in the context of its mandate to assist member States in moving towards a sustainable path of development, and this includes the strengthening of national institutional capabilities in the statistical field, that UNECA attaches such great importance to this meeting.

I am pleased to note that the subject of your meeting is in line with the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s and the Strategy for its implementation.

The participants at this workshop comprise statisticians, registrars, and representatives of donors agencies, international institutions and developed countries. This serves as an excellent example of collaboration in statistical development. The involvement of national experts in the discussions right from the beginning is crucial for the success of technical co-operation in statistical programmes in developing countries. I have no doubt that this programme will meet the priority needs of the countries concerned.

I have also noted that a number of country reports on the current status of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems have been

prepared jointly by the registrar general office and the statistical office. Such cooperation at the national level is a move in the right direction for building up of sustainable statistical capacities in Africa.

One of the major tasks entrusted to this meeting is to discuss national strategies on the basis of the assessments undertaken by the respective countries in order to facilitate the formulation of a Plan of Action for the accelerated improvement of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems. In this regard, let me emphasize that African countries have to realize that the responsibility for building up and strengthening their statistical capacity and infrastructure is essentially theirs. They have to show their commitment to implement necessary reforms and to invest time and resources. The setting up of smaller and more homogeneous working groups to discuss these issues is a good approach which would ensure the right atmosphere for intensive discussions and practical recommendations.

Your agenda includes other topics which are equally important such as the main uses of vital registration records and vital statistics and application of modern technology for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems. I urge you to share your experience and expertise in this regard, thereby ensuring that you lay a sound foundation for accelerated development of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa.

#### **Distinguished participants,**

In view of the short duration of your meeting and the very important issues in your agenda, I will not take more of your time. However, before concluding my statement, I would like to express my gratitude to all the agencies, institutions and developed countries represented here for their cooperation and support in bringing us the benefits of their own experience and knowledge in this field. I would like to mention particularly the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics which is represented at this meeting by Dr. Iwao Moriyama and Mr. Samuel Baum, respectively Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director, UNSTAT which is a joint convenor of this Workshop together with UNECA, the United States of America, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Finally, I hope that you will enjoy your stay in Addis Ababa. I wish you every success in your deliberations.

I now declare open this African Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems.

Thank you.

REPORT OF THE AFRICAN WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIES FOR  
ACCELERATING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION  
AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 5-9 December 1994  
(Statistical Division United Nations and Economic Commission  
for Africa, AW/CRVS/94/42, 20 December 1994)

AMENDMENT

Amendment to page 21: Modern technology and vital statistics

Reference to the following presentation was omitted in the above-mentioned report:

Presentation of a PC-Based System

The representative of UNFPA/CST Addis Ababa made a presentation of a PC-based system to register, store, retrieve civil registration information and produce birth, still birth and death certificates. The system was developed in Botswana in August 1994 for pilot areas and was due for replication for the whole country. At that time 16, 000 notices of births and 3, 000 of deaths had been captured.

IMPS software was used for the various stages from the data entry through the creation of raw certificate files which were further to be reformatted for publication using wordperfect.

Vital statistics produced by the system are in a form of tables which are stored in a special application to facilitate access and dissemination.

It is envisaged that the rectangular file produced after data entry will be migrated to a data base package such as DBASEIV, to facilitate the access to individual particulars,

In response to some of the questions raised during the discussions, it was indicated that an on-the-job training was conducted in Gaborone so as to allow the project manager carry of the exploitation of the system.

Details were given about the detection of consistency errors and their correction. It was mentioned that data entry was supposed to be verified at a 100% rate. It was also agreed that at the current phase, the system does not deal with multiple civil registration notices for the individuals.

Statistical Division, United Nations  
and  
Economic Commission for Africa