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and Vital Statistics Systems
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**Towards a regional programme for the improvement of civil registration and vital
statistics in Asia and the Pacific ¹**

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¹ The text is presented without formal editing.

I. Introduction

1. At its sixty-seventh session in May 2011, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) adopted a resolution on the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in the region. The resolution, among others, encourages all members and associate members to review and assess the current functioning of the civil registration systems and the quality of the vital statistics produced internally within each country, and recommends that the results of country assessments be utilized to develop and implement comprehensive and costed national strategies and plans to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems.

2. The resolution, furthermore, calls upon members and associate members to strengthen the capacities of relevant institutions to improve civil registration and vital statistics in their countries, and upon the organizations of the United Nations system, international financial institutions, other global, regional and subregional development partners and agencies, non-governmental organizations and private sector entities to increase their support to countries for the development and strengthening of civil registration and vital statistics systems.²

3. The adoption of this resolution followed the support extended by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics at its second session held in December 2010 for the development of a regional programme for improving civil registration and vital statistics in the Asian and Pacific region. Recognizing the importance of reliable civil registration and vital statistics systems for producing timely and accurate population estimates and other demographic and health statistics, including the Millennium Development Goals, the Committee also welcomed the offer of several delegations to submit a draft resolution on improving civil registration and vital statistics systems for the consideration of the ESCAP at its sixty-seventh session.

4. This paper summarizes the regional consultations and assessments from which consensus on the need for a regional programme for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific has emerged. It then outlines a proposal for such a regional programme, including guiding principles and strategy, as well as possible components and guiding principles. Finally, it describes ongoing work on the further development and some initial steps in the implementation of the regional programme.

II. Putting civil registration and vital statistics on the regional agenda

5. Reliable vital statistics are essential for producing timely and accurate population estimates and other demographic and health statistics, which are some of the most basic requirements for effective policy-making and evaluation and efficient resource allocation. Vital statistics, when of high quality and properly utilized, allow citizens and donors to hold policy-makers to account on their use of scarce resources. Vital statistics are most effectively derived, for the whole population and at local levels, from civil registration systems that record vital events such as births, deaths and marriages.

² This paper is based on document E/ESCAP/CST(2)/3, "Development of a regional programme for the improvement of vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific", submitted by the ESCAP Secretariat to the Committee on Statistics, which is available from <http://www.unescap.org/stat/cst/2/CST2-3E.pdf>.

6. A civil registration system³ allows for the compulsory, permanent, continuous and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events. Civil registration is carried out primarily for the purpose of establishing the legal documents provided for by law. As such, it safeguards human rights with respect to social identity of, and benefits for, every member of the population, as internationally agreed on, among others, in the United Nations Millennium Declaration⁴ and the Declaration on the Right to Development.⁵

7. A civil registration system is also critical for raising the visibility of and improving policy focus on the most vulnerable groups, including women and children in poverty, migrants and other marginalized groups. Birth certificates and other civil records issued to members of these groups provide a basis for designing social protection schemes that reduce risks and vulnerabilities.

8. At the same time, when functioning effectively, a civil registration system provides the ideal data source for the vital statistics system—the total process of collecting data on the occurrence and characteristics of vital events, and compiling, processing, analysing, evaluating, presenting and disseminating these data in statistical form.⁶

9. Civil registration systems in many countries of the Asia-Pacific region, however, suffer from various deficiencies. For example, registration coverage is often incomplete, vital events are not recorded properly and registration records do not reach the vital statistics system in a timely manner.

10. As a result, many countries have resorted to developing and/or using alternative sources of data on vital events, such as population censuses, household sample surveys and surveillance on sentinel sites or sample registration systems to generate vital statistics. Although these sources do provide important information on vital events, they cannot replace civil registration records as a source of data that is available on a continuous and universal basis and that is disaggregated to a level that enables decision makers to identify marginalized groups and vulnerable areas. Moreover, these sources do not bring the legal and human rights benefits of civil registration.

11. The ESCAP Committee on Statistics at its first session in February 2009 emphasized the importance of accurate and complete civil registration and vital statistics as the basis for producing reliable population estimates and other basic development indicators required for policy planning and progress assessment. It recognized the slow progress in the development of civil registration and vital statistics in many countries in the region and stressed the need for collaboration among health authorities, civil registrars and national statistical offices to improve civil registration and vital statistics.

12. In response to the Committee's recommendations, the ESCAP secretariat, under the guidance of the Bureau of the Committee, pursued a series of activities to identify the main challenges and explore concrete ways to accelerate the development of civil registration and

³ A system of civil registration includes all institutional, legal and technical settings needed to perform the civil registration functions in a technically sound, coordinated and standardized manner throughout the country, taking into account cultural and social circumstances particular to the country *Source: Handbook on Training in Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 02.XVII.10).

⁴ See General Assembly resolution 55/2.

⁵ General Assembly resolution 41/128, annex.

⁶ Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 2 (United Nations publication, Sales No. 01.XVI.10). Available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_19rev2E.pdf.

vital statistics systems in the region. These activities, which all took place in Bangkok included:

- A meeting, organized by ESCAP, with development partners to set the scope of and plan the work on 28-29 May 2009, with the participation of senior statisticians and health experts from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the West Pacific Regional Office of WHO (WHO-WPRO) and the University of Queensland Health Information Systems Knowledge Hub (UQ HISHub)
- A meeting, jointly convened by ESCAP and WHO-WPRO, of the Regional Task Force—established at the recommendation of the partners meeting—to develop a road map on 15-16 September 2009, with the participation of health, civil registration and vital statistics experts from Australia, Cambodia, China, Mongolia, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, WHO-WPRO, the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (WHO-SEARO) and UQ HISHub⁷
- A regional forum,⁸ organized by ESCAP and WHO in collaboration with ADB and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on 23-25 June 2010, to build consensus on the outline for a regional programme. The forum brought together, from 17 countries in the region, key institutions involved in national civil registration and vital statistics systems, including ministries of health, national statistical offices and offices of the civil registrar with experts, advocates and development partners from academia, international agencies and civil society⁹

13. In addition to facilitating these regional consultations, the ESCAP secretariat sent a request to all national statistical offices in the region in February 2010, inviting them to carry out a self-assessment of their respective civil registration and vital statistics systems through an assessment tool developed by WHO and UQ HISHub.¹⁰ The national statistical offices were encouraged to engage other national stakeholders, including ministries of health and civil registrars, when filling out the assessment.

14. The rapid assessment tool scores 25 aspects of a civil registration and vital statistics system.¹¹ Based on the overall score, the level of development of such a system can be classified into three categories: (a) dysfunctional or weak systems (type I); (b) functional systems with many inadequate aspects (type II); and (c) “satisfactory” systems that register more than 90 per cent of births and deaths but for which further improvement, such as in data quality, is required (type III). Dysfunctional and weak systems require substantial improvement of a large number of aspects; functional but inadequate systems work, but some aspects function poorly; and most aspects of satisfactory systems function well, but the systems require relatively minor improvements.

⁷ See “Report on the ESCAP/WHO Meeting on the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Vital Registration in Asia-Pacific”, 15-16 September 2009, Bangkok. Available from www.unescap.org/stat/meet/vs-Sep09/VS-meeting-report.pdf

⁸ The forum was organized as part of the ESCAP/UNDP/ADB Programme on Supporting the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific (Phase III).

⁹ The report of the forum is available from www.unescap.org/stat/meet/vs-Jun2010/forum-report.pdf. The forum concluded with an outcome statement (E/ESCAP/CST(2)/3/Add.1), which is available from <http://www.unescap.org/stat/cst/2/CST2-3EA1.pdf>.

¹⁰ Rapid assessment of national civil registration and vital statistics systems, WHO/IER/HIS/STM/2010.1, in World Health Organization and the University of Queensland, Improving the quality and use of birth, death and cause-of-death information: guidance for a standards based review of country practices, (Geneva, 2010).

¹¹ The assessment is mainly concerned with births, deaths and causes of death and does not cover foetal deaths, marriages or divorces.

15. According to the 29 civil registration and vital statistics assessments submitted to ESCAP, five countries had an overall score that places them in the “satisfactory” category, meaning systems that register more than 90 per cent of births and deaths;¹² in the functional but inadequate category, and an additional 12 in the dysfunctional or weak category.

III. Moving towards a regional programme to improve civil registration and vital statistics

A. Main challenges to be addressed

16. Through regional consultations, analysis of region-wide self-assessments and discussions at the regional forum, it has become clear that the regional programme should address the following challenges that affect the availability and quality of vital statistics.

1. Improving the legal framework and increasing political commitment and public awareness

17. In many developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems has been hampered by the lack of a supporting environment, particularly the lack of a strong legal framework to underpin the system, public awareness of the need for and benefits of registration, and the absence of high-level political commitment.

18. No civil registration system can function well without a legal basis that makes registration compulsory, determines the functions, duties and responsibilities of local registrars and of citizens, and issues details on, among other things, the registration procedures, fees, time limits and penalties for failure to register or provide evidentiary requirements.

19. The lack of a strong legal framework is characteristic of dysfunctional and weak systems. These systems need to progressively develop and improve, which requires real political commitment to strengthen the legal framework and provide adequate resources on a sustained basis.

20. Even where laws exist, they may have deficient provisions, such as a failure to make registration compulsory, or the laws may be poorly implemented. Sometimes changes are made in the procedures for registration but the public may not know of these changes. When citizens are aware of the purpose and benefits of registration, they will not only comply with the laws but will also demand that the registration processes be efficient.

2. Strengthening national coordination and collaboration

21. In most countries, the system for registering vital events and issuing birth and death certificates is administered by a civil registration office,¹² while the processing of data and the production of statistics is mostly done by the national statistical office. Registration also involves the participation of many other agents, such as doctors, birth attendants and local government officials, and the relevant health ministry, which processes and compiles statistics for health information systems. Clearly, the production of vital statistics is a collaborative work involving several parties that requires good coordination and cooperation.

¹² The civil registration office is usually attached to a Government ministry, such as the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Justice. A unique case is the Philippines, where the head of the national statistical office is also the national civil-registrar general.

22. The rapid assessment results indicate that, regardless of the level of development of the civil registration and vital statistics system, a prerequisite for a sound, efficient and effective vital statistics system is that there be close collaboration among all the agencies involved; they should function as a system with little or no duplication of functions across different areas of government and facilitate the effective use of registration records for statistical purposes.

23. In the absence of effective coordination mechanisms, problems often arise in the exchange of information on vital events, for example, among hospitals, ministries of health and statistical offices. Thus, good management at each functional level within each part of the system is not enough; good coordination among the different institutions is crucial. Setting up mechanisms to strengthen coordination and facilitate collaboration in the production of vital statistics is a major challenge for many countries.

3. Improving completeness of registration of vital events

24. To produce reliable vital statistics from civil registration records, all events must be registered. This is difficult, however, for many reasons. In some countries where a high proportion of births and deaths take place at home, these vital events do not reach the registration system. Newborn infants who die within the first month are the most likely to be missed by the system. The problem of under-registration differs in rural and urban areas and may be worse in remote areas or underserved areas. The problem is worse in weak and dysfunctional systems but is also an aspect of concern even for functional systems.

25. The health sector can play an important role in encouraging increased registration of births and deaths, especially when these events occur in health facilities and in settings where the availability of health workers at community level is better than that of civil registration officials. The health sector has, of course, also specific responsibilities in determining causes of death and identifying very early perinatal deaths and foetal deaths.

26. Incomplete registration may also be due to a lack of awareness of the need to register, the lack of incentives to register or the existence of barriers to registration. For example, the costs to individuals of making an effort to register a vital event may outweigh the perceived benefits of registration. In some subpopulations, language, beliefs and practices may also be reasons for not accurately reporting vital events. Hence, even where registration facilities sufficiently cover the entire population, registration will remain incomplete.

4. Improving the availability and quality of civil registration and vital statistics

27. As with all data collection methods, the practices and procedures used in registration offices are the foundation of a good civil registration system, and it is there that a lack of standards and checking procedures will irreversibly corrupt the value of the data. Regular training of registrars and monitoring of the quality of the procedures used for data collection and transmission to the next administrative level in the system is needed but is not done as often as needed.

28. In the case of cause-of-death statistics, the three most important factors to ensure good data quality are (a) the use of the international form of medical certificates for cause-of-death reporting, (b) the availability, capability and willingness of physicians to correctly certify the cause of death, and (c) the appropriate statistical coding of deaths according to the rules and principles of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD). As the rapid assessments indicate, regardless of the level of development of the civil registration and vital statistics systems, lack of proper training among physicians and

coders often contributes to the poor quality of data on cause of death. Newly developed methods for determining cause when deaths occur outside health care facilities, such as verbal autopsy, also represent an important strategic approach for improving data availability and quality.

5. Increasing the use and dissemination of vital statistics

29. The United Nations Principles and Recommendations for Vital Statistics states that the compilation of vital statistics should have as its ultimate minimum goal (a) the provision of total monthly or quarterly summary counts of live births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages and divorces on a time schedule prompt enough to provide information for health intervention and population estimation programmes, administrative uses or other needs, and (b) the production of detailed annual tabulations of each type of vital event cross-classified by its demographic and socio-economic characteristics.¹³

30. The recommendations further stress the importance of ensuring that resources are available to complete the tabulations on a “regularly established basis and on a time schedule that will ensure the effective use of the analysis of the interrelationship between demographic, economic and social factors to plan, operate and evaluate public health programmes, and for the purposes of the formulation and evaluation of economic and social plans.”¹⁴

31. For many countries in the region, this ultimate minimum goal is far from being achieved. Thus, they continue to face major challenges in assessing progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular those related to health and reductions in child and maternal mortality, as well as indicators of progress that are dependent on accurate population estimates, such as those for education and gender equality.

32. Where systems are already functioning, the challenge is to increase the timeliness in making the data available for analysis and dissemination. In many cases, the potential of information and communications technology (ICT) to improve the efficiency of the collection, compilation, sharing, dissemination and analysis of data on vital events has yet to be realized.

B. The case for taking action

33. In recent years, the heightened commitment of a wide range of partners has made an array of resources and targeted initiatives available that promote the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in the Asian and Pacific region.

34. First, the global commitment to the Millennium Development Goals has highlighted the critical role of reliable, continuous and comparable vital statistics and created momentum to improve these data. It has become clear that the long neglect of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in many countries has had a detrimental impact on their ability to develop and monitor targeted development policies, particularly in the area of health.

35. Second, the process of improving civil registration is now even more technically feasible due to the availability of tools and methods and a better understanding of their applications. For example, UNICEF and PLAN International, a child-centred community development (CCCD) organization, have been working with national partners in the Asia-

¹³ *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*, Revision 2, (United Nations publication, Sales No. 01.XVI.10), para. 62. Available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_19rev2E.pdf.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Pacific region to develop, implement and replicate good practices to increase the registration of births. Moreover, information technologies have the potential to facilitate the collection (through the use of mobile phones, for example), transmission, storage as well as dissemination of data.

36. Third, international support for health statistics is expanding rapidly. Partners such as WHO are offering more resources, training and technical assistance related to the collection and coding of vital statistics. For example, since 2000, the WHO Family of International Classifications and the International Federation of Health Records have collaborated to provide training and resources aimed at helping countries to properly certify deaths using ICD, train new in-country coders and correctly analyse cause-of-death data. The overall goals of this collaborative programme are to improve the quality of mortality and morbidity data and the capacity of ICD coders.

37. The Health Metrics Network (HMN), launched in 2005, is a global partnership of countries, development agencies and the private sector¹⁵ focused on strengthening health information systems. In 2007, HMN successfully coordinated a multi-partner effort called MoVE (Monitoring of Vital Events), which led to a series of papers in *The Lancet*,¹⁶ to diagnose the situation, identify obstacles and set out a strategy for strengthening civil registration systems in countries. HMN is currently implementing a threefold strategy focusing on the development of standards and tools, support to policy advocacy, and the generation of evidence about what works through support to country activities for enhanced civil registration and vital statistics. HMN has been requested to support an Asia-Pacific regional approach to accelerate the high-quality and effective strengthening of civil registration and vital statistics through a jointly-developed proposal by WHO-WPRO, WHO-SEARO, ESCAP, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and UQ HISHub support.

38. The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) sponsored UQ HISHub, one of four hubs comprised of expert networks which work with other development partners strongly committed to supporting the Millennium Development Goals in the region. A key focus of the work is developing tools and expertise that can assist countries to strengthen their civil registration and vital statistics systems, including assessment tools, cause-of-death data and population statistics. UQ HISHub is an active member of the regional task force established in September 2009.

IV. Objective, strategy and components of the regional programme

A. Overall goal and programme outcomes

39. Through improved civil registration and the increased availability and use of reliable vital statistics derived from civil registration systems, the proposed regional programme aims to contribute to the improvement of evidence-based policymaking, efficiency in resource allocation and good governance, as well as the progressive realization of the basic rights of all citizens.

40. The expected outcomes of the regional programme are: (a) an increased number of countries in the region with sustained political commitment and enhanced public awareness to support the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems; (b) an increased number of countries in the region with strengthened legislation and

¹⁵ For a complete list of partners, see www.who.int/healthmetrics/partners/en.

¹⁶ See www.thelancet.com/series/who-counts.

established mechanisms for coordination among key stakeholders within civil registration and vital statistics systems for the effective production and dissemination of basic vital statistics; (c) an increased technical capacity of countries in the region to record and process information on vital events and associated characteristics for statistical purposes; and (d) an increased technical capacity of countries in the region to analyse, use and disseminate vital statistics.

B. Guiding principles and strategy

41. The following principles and strategies emerged from the preparatory discussions and consultations to guide the development of the proposed regional programme.

1. Supporting country commitments and plan

42. The proposed regional programme will focus on supporting country commitments and initiatives.

43. One critical lesson learned from past capacity-building programmes is that improving civil registration and vital statistics systems requires long-term, continuing efforts and that the country's own commitment and investment ultimately determines whether improvement is sustainable and long-lasting. Although costs are an important consideration, they are not necessarily a deciding factor: the results of the region-wide rapid assessments revealed that progress is possible even in low-income countries.

44. The regional programme will advocate sustained government commitment at the regional level and will support countries in the systematic assessment of the state of development of their civil registration and vital statistics systems, identify priorities, set goals and formulate a time-bound improvement plan. The programme will promote the integration of this national plan into the national strategy for statistics development.

2. Stepwise approach towards progress

45. The path to improved civil registration and vital statistics systems varies greatly across countries according to their current state of development. For many countries with a dysfunctional or weak system, or a system that is functional but inadequate, improving vital statistics requires investing in the improvement of the civil registration system itself—a long-term goal requiring sustained efforts. While the regional programme will advocate the improvement of civil registration systems, it aims to support these countries in developing and applying interim approaches to make use of alternative data sources in order to meet urgent data needs.

46. At the same time, the regional programme will also support these countries in progressively moving “up the ladder”. Through systematic assessment, the regional programme will support national efforts in defining a targeted, stepwise approach based on the needs and priorities of the country and will identify the appropriate tools and assistance required.

3. Targeting specific needs for support with a flexible mix of activities

47. With the wide regional variation in the current state of development, improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in different countries in the region requires a targeted approach with a flexible mix of support activities.

48. At each level of development, a country's needs for support could be broadly categorized into two technical areas: (a) improving the completeness and accuracy of birth

and death registration; and (b) improving the process of the production of vital statistics. Each of these two areas at a given level of development would require an appropriate intervention “package”, depending on the priority issues to be addressed.

49. The regional programme will support countries in designing the relevant intervention packages by making available a judicious mix of capacity-building activities, including organizing forums and developing tools for advocacy; using, building and sharing knowledge and good practices; providing technical assistance through training and advisory services; and researching and developing new approaches and tools.

4. Building on regional diversity

50. The diversity in the state of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the region provides a wealth of experience, expertise and knowledge that can be and should be drawn on for capacity development in the region.

51. The regional programme will support the establishment of a resource base for improving these systems by strengthening regional cooperation, including South-South cooperation. This would be achieved through regional forums and networking and by facilitating knowledge sharing. The programme will draw on the expertise available at the national, regional and global levels. The array of existing resources that are available and those that will be developed, including training materials, computer-based resource kits, assessment tools, analysis tools and good practices, will be systematically documented and dynamically shared.

5. Relying on partnership and improving coordination

52. The success of the regional programme is dependent upon improved coordination among relevant development partners, both as a means of achieving the objectives of the programme and as an outcome of the programme itself. While a close partnership among key development partners in the region has been established through the preparatory work on the current proposal, the regional programme will rely on a regional coordination mechanism established at the First Meeting of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific held on 14 December 2010, to bring about stronger coordinated support in the implementation of regional capacity building initiatives, creating synergies among activities and resources of different development partners.¹⁷

53. Through advocacy and the promotion of good practices, the regional programme will also encourage the improvement of coordination and collaboration among the institutions comprising the national civil registration and vital statistics systems.

C. Key components and supporting activities

54. Following the proposed guiding principles and strategies, the proposed regional programme will focus on seven key components, as summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Main components of the proposed regional programme

Number	Components
1	Assessing national capacity and supporting the formulation of national improvement plans
2	Increasing public awareness and strengthening political support
3	Strengthening the legal framework

¹⁷ See <http://www.unescap.org/stat/partnership/>.

- 4 Improving coordination
 - 5 Improving the availability and quality of vital statistics
 - 6 Improving the analysis, dissemination and use of vital statistics
 - 7 Furthering research and development
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1. Assessing national capacity and supporting the formulation of national improvement plans

Objective:

To secure national commitment to the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems through the formulation of a results-oriented, nationally-owned improvement plan that is based on systematic assessments.

Supporting activities:

- Encourage and support all countries in the region in conducting a rapid self-assessment
- Support countries in the region in carrying out a comprehensive assessment of the civil registration and vital statistics system
- Support countries in the region in formulating results-oriented national action plans to accelerate the development of their civil registration and vital statistics systems

2. Increasing public awareness and strengthening political support

Objective:

To secure sustained commitment to invest in the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems on the part of national authorities, politicians, decision makers and national development partners.

Supporting activities:

- Develop an advocacy tool to make a “business case” for investing in the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems and assist countries in applying it for national advocacy
- Convene a ministerial-level regional forum of decision makers to raise the awareness and understanding of the importance of national civil registration and vital statistics systems and the main challenges and issues that need to be addressed to improve the systems and to advocate the provision of resources on a sustained basis
- Launch a regional advocacy campaign to heighten the visibility and importance of civil registration and vital statistics, such as through the declaration of a year/decade for civil registration/vital statistics and other similar region-wide advocacy channels and instruments

- Establish a regional platform aimed at promoting the exchange of experiences and information on strategies and plans to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems, report on accomplishments, compile lessons learned and foster South-South and peer-to-peer cooperation to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems
- Provide technical/advisory services to support country advocacy events
- Establish cross-regional linkages and share experiences with similar initiatives in other regions

3. Strengthening the legal framework

Objective:

To strengthen the legal basis for the functioning of civil registration and vital statistics systems as a means of increasing the registration of vital events and improving the production of vital statistics.

Supporting activities:

- Through the regional platform, facilitate the exchange of good practices in civil registration laws
- Provide technical advisory services to support country efforts in strengthening legislation

4. Improving coordination

Objective:

To increase the consistency and coherence of national capacity building programmes for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics and maximize the effectiveness of the available resources, through improved coordination of development activities, both among national institutions and stakeholders and among development partners.

Supporting activities:

- Promote the establishment of a national coordination structure or mechanism comprised of key institutions and stakeholders of the civil registration and vital statistics system
- Through the regional platform, identify, review and compile good practices in the coordination of civil registration and vital statistics functions, and facilitate the exchange of good practices in coordination mechanisms, documentation and online/offline dissemination
- Provide technical advisory services to support country efforts in strengthening coordination
- Through the Meetings of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific, actively coordinate and cooperate on

ongoing and planned activities among relevant development partners involved in the regional programme

- Through periodic reports of the work of the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific, ensure that countries are informed of and actively contribute to the coordination of capacity-building activities
- Establish a regional repository of assessments of civil registration and vital statistics systems and related national improvement plans to direct development partners in developing and implementing capacity development programmes that support national priorities, and to facilitate technical cooperation among countries in the region

5. Improving the availability and quality of vital statistics

Objective:

To improve the availability, relevance, timeliness, reliability and accuracy of vital statistics.

Supporting activities:

- Provide technical advisory services and training to assist countries with weak/dysfunctional or inadequate civil registration and vital statistics systems, as a first step along the road towards the development of comprehensive systems, in identifying and setting up appropriate interim methods, such as demographic surveillance systems and sample vital registration with verbal autopsy, to improve the availability of data for vital statistics
- Through the regional platform and South-South cooperation, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practices that ensure timeliness in the collection and compilation of civil registration records for statistical purposes
- Through the regional platform and South-South cooperation, facilitate the exchange of good practices in improving registration in remote areas and among poorly covered subpopulations, as well as the registration of specific types of vital events, including through the use of information and communications technology (for example, community birth and death reporting using mobile phones)
- Support the strengthening of capacity of national training institutions to deliver effective training on ICD-compliant certification, reporting and coding to improve the quality of cause-of-death data
- Develop training curricula and assist national training institutions in strengthening their capacity to deliver training on the skills and knowledge needed to improve the quality of vital statistics

6. Improving the analysis, dissemination and use of vital statistics

Objective:

To increase the capacity of national civil registration and vital statistics systems to effectively analyse, disseminate and use vital statistics.

Supporting activities:

- Provide training on guidelines and recommendations for the analysis, dissemination and use of vital statistics, as contained in the *United Nations Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 2*¹⁸
- Through the regional platform, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practices on how vital statistics have been used to guide policy, including through documentation and offline/online dissemination
- Provide technical advisory services to countries to support the implementation of principles and recommendations, including the development of an engagement strategy to regularly discuss data needs with the main data users, the preparation of analytical reports and the development of dissemination strategies and policy
- Develop training curricula and assist national training institutions in strengthening their capacity to deliver training on the skills and knowledge needed to improve the analysis of vital statistics data

7. Furthering research and development**Objective:**

To develop and test innovative methods and tools for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

Supporting activities:

- Develop a research and development programme on the basis of identified gaps in country assessments
- Conduct research and development studies in priority areas to be identified with pilot countries
- Through the regional platform, facilitate the sharing of research and study results and formulate guidelines on their potential application

V. Ongoing work and next steps

55. The ongoing work on the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific focuses on (a) the full development of the regional programme, (b) the organization of a ministerial-level regional forum of decision makers, (c) the coordination

¹⁸ *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 2*, (United Nations publication, Sales No. 01.XVI.10). Available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_19rev2E.pdf.

and cooperation on ongoing and planned activities among relevant development partners and (d) supporting selected countries in conducting detailed assessments of their civil registration and vital statistics systems and in developing related improvement plans.

56. The ESCAP secretariat is, with active support from relevant partners, currently finalizing the proposal for the regional programme. It is expected that the Bureau of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics will initiate consultations with members and associate members on this proposal, so that it then can be submitted for endorsement to a ministerial-level regional forum of decision makers from national statistical organizations, civil registration offices, ministries of health and other relevant stakeholders. This forum, to be organized by ESCAP and HMN, is scheduled to take place in February 2012, with the purpose to raise awareness and foster increased commitment to improving civil registration and vital statistics.

57. The second meeting of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific is scheduled to take place on 9 September 2011 in Luxembourg. It is expected that the partners will agree on a plan for their work, including the active coordination and cooperation on ongoing and planned activities aimed at accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in the region.

58. ESCAP is, in collaboration with UNDP, ADB and other partners, supporting selected countries in Asia and the Pacific in conducting detailed assessments of their civil registration and vital statistics systems and in developing related national strategies and plans for accelerated improvement. As a first step in this process, senior experts from health ministries, registrars-general offices and national statistical offices of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Thailand, Turkey and Viet Nam met on 28-31 March 2011 in Bangkok to discuss the state of these systems in their respective countries, identify related gaps in institutional capacity and resources, and share ideas on how to—and experiences in—closing these gaps, including related needs for support, as well as to familiarize themselves with available assessment, advocacy and planning tools.