Technical Papers

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REGIONAL CONFERENCES

AND SEMINARS ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND

VITAL STATISTICS: AN UPDATE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

* * * * * *

FOREWORD

   Since the publication of Recommendations from Regional Conferences
and Seminars on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (IIVRS Technical
Papers No. 18, September 1982), four more regional conferences and seminars
have been held. The recommendations from these meetings are included in this
report to update the information presented in Technical Papers No. 18.

   There are no restrictions on the use of material published by IIVRS.
Material from this publication may be quoted or duplicated without permission.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REGIONAL CONFERENCES
AND SEMINARS ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS:
AN UPDATE

Over the years, a number of regional meetings on civil registration and vital statistics has been held. The first of these was in 1954 for the Latin American region. Since then, some 14 regional conferences and seminars have been convened in various regions of the world. The time, place and sponsors of these meetings are given below:

A. First Inter-American Conference on Civil Registration, Santiago, Chile, 1954. Organized by the Civil Registration and Identification Office, Chile, the Statistical Office of the United Nations, the United Nations Technical Assistance Administration, the World Health Organization and the Institute of Inter-American Affairs.

B.   African Seminar on Vital statistics, Addis Ababa, 14-18 December 1964. Organized by the United Nations Economic Comission for Africa, Bureau of Technical Assistance Operations, and Statistical Office of the United Nations.

C. Second Inter-American Conference on Civil Registration, Lima, Peru, 1964. Sponsored by the Government of Peru, the United Nations Bureau of Technical Assistance Operations, the Statistical Office of the United Nations, the United Nations Economic Commission for Lating America, the United Nations Regional Center for Demographic Training and Research in Latin America, the Pan American Health Organization, the Inter-American Statistical Institute, the Inter-American Children's Institute and the Inter-American Civil Registration Association.

D.   Seminar on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics for Asia and the Far East, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1968. Organized by the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East in cooperation with the Government of Denmark, the Statistical Office of the United Nations and the United Nations Office of Technical Cooperation.

E. United Nations Working Group on Current Demographic Statistics, Bangkok, Thailand, 9-14 June 1975. Organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Statistical Office of the United Nations.

F.   Meeting on Strategies for Improving Civil Registration, Montevideo, Uruguay, 1977. Sponsored by the Inter-American Children's Institute, the Pan American Health Organization, the Statistical Office of the United Nations, the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

G. UDEAC Ad Hoc Commission on Civil Status, Libreville, Gabon, 1978. Sponsored by the Regional Center for Study of Population.

H.   OCAM Seminar on the Improvement of Civil Registration, St. Louis, Mauritius, 1979. Sponsored by the Organisation Commune Africaine et Mauricienne and the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics.

I.   OCAM Seminar on Organisation of Organizers of Personnel Systems for Civil Registration. Cotonou, Benin, 26 May to 4 June, 1980. Organized by the Organisations Commune Africaine et Mauricienne.

J.   Meeting of the Working Group on Civil Registration Systems and Vital Statistics Collection in Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, 1980. Organized by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and the Economic Commission for Africa.

K.   Iberoamerican Conference on Strategies for Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, Lima, Peru, 1980. Organized by the National Office of Statistics of Peru and the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics.

L.   Pacific Seminar on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, 30 April to 6 May 1985, Apia, Western Guam, sponsored by Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific.

M.   Working Group on the Development of Civil Registration Systems and Vital Statistics Collection in Africa 21-16 October 1985 in Addis Ababa sponsored by the Economic Commission for Africa.

N.   Asian Seminar on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics 10 to 16 December 1985 in Bangkok, Thailand sponsored by Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific.

O.   Workshop on Registration of Births and Deaths and Vital Statistics in the English-speaking Caribbean Countries, 13-15 October 1987, St. George, Grenada, sponsored by the Pan American Health Organization and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

After a discussion of the problems and obstacles in the registration process, various recommendations were made for the improvement of national civil registration and vital statistics in the region. These recommendations constitute an important feature of the regional conference proceedings.

In 1982, the IIVRS brought together all the recommendations made at the various regional meetings and published them in a Technical Report[1]. Since the issuance of the Technical Report, 4 more regional conferences on civil registration and vital statistics have been held. These were for the South Pacific Islands, Africa, Asia, and the English-speaking Caribbean Islands.

This report is an update of Technical Paper No. 18 and presents the recommendations from the recent meetings in the same format as that in the previous compendium of recommendations. These recommendations are essentially unedited. In many cases, reference to the original report will provide a fuller understanding of the issues and problems at hand. As in the first report, the recommendations have been classified under the following subject headings:

    1. Legal provisions
    2. National and public interest
    3. Administrative organization
    4. Coordination
    5. Registration methods and procedures
    6. Personnel
    7. Training
    8. Facilities and equipment
    9. Needed research and study
    10. Evaluation
    11. Needed improvements
    12. Priorities
    13. Technical assistance
    14. Other recommendations

There are regional differences in civil registration problems and practices. On the other hand, there are many common elements, the differences being a matter of degree. Therefore, the recommendations from one region may also have application to others. It is hoped that this update together with Technical Paper No. 18 will be useful to those concerned or interested in the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in the developing countries.

---

[1] IIVRS Recommendations from Regional Conferences and Seminars on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, Technical Papers No. 18, September 1982

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REGIONAL CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS
ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: AN UPDATE

1. Legal Provisions

ESCAP Pacific Seminar

There is need for clear laws and regulations setting out the civil status of all persons and establishing compulsory registration of all live births, marriages, deaths and other vital events prescribed under the law. Failure to register the event after the lapse of a period fixed by law would result in a penalty being imposed on the person responsible for registration.

ECA African Workshop

Civil registration laws whose content can only be changed by legislative amendments should contain only those major elements of the civil registration process which are fairly immutable. Rules and regulations which can be changed by simple administrative processes should cover those elements of the registration process which are expected to respond to changing circumstances.

The inflexible nature of some civil registration laws tends to frustrate the operation of the civil registration system since any innovation needed to improve the system would require a new legislation. It was stressed that the law needs to be as flexible as possible, particularly at the initial stages of a civil registration system.

Civil registration laws should cover only core elements which tend to be relatively permanent; and provision made for the preparation of rules and regulations, which can be changed through administrative processes, to cover other elements which are subject to change over short periods in response to changing circumstances.

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

A comprehensive review of the vital registration legislation should be carried out with a view to revising and updating it in the interest of achieving the desired improvements in vital registration and vital statistics in the subregion. This action must be taken at the national level for each country. It is recommended that a National Committee be set up by each government to study and discuss the legislation and make recommendations for the revision of the laws to the relevant authority through the Registrar General. Technical assistance in the form of expertise from within the Region might be of great assistance to those countries needing it.

2. National and Public Interest

ESCAP Pacific Seminar

A crucial factor in improving registration is for governments to institutionalize the need to produce an appropriate certificate as a necessary condition for receiving social and welfare benefits or privileges such as welfare payments, school enrollment, passports, insurance policies, approval for burial, and determination of land rights or inheritance.

Registration authorities sometimes fail to convince the general public of the need to register vital events. It is suggested that more information should be made available to the public through explanatory booklets, the media, schools, and wherever feasible, through personal visits to villages and homes. It is also important that government officials, religious and other local or traditional leaders should be encouraged to support the civil registration program.

ESCAP Asian Seminar

The ultimate success of the civil registration system depends on public interest and steps to be taken to generate that interest. Public awareness of the civil registration system could be increased through sustained publicity and use of mass media. The system could be further strengthened by making the use of vital records compulsory for obtaining certain entitlements or benefits. That would ensure, in the long run, public attention to and interest in the system.

The establishment of a civil registration system and its efficient maintenance need support at the highest decision-making levels of government. It was, therefore, suggested that a high-level

national committee be set up charged with the responsibility for monitoring the civil registration system, supported where necessary by subcommittees at the operational levels. The national committee would be useful in co-ordinating the activities of the various official agencies involved in the system, and of ensuring that sufficient support, both budgetary and administrative, was available for civil registration.

ECA African Workshop

The public needs to know the advantages to be derived by the individual, family and community. Hence, in addition to the general national uses of registration records the benefits to the individual, family and community need to be stressed.

The objective of a civil registration enlightenment program is to change any public attitude and behavior which are not conducive to the registration of vital events and make the public aware of their obligation to register vital events. In such a program, three elements may be distinguished. The first element is the development of the appropriate message which will emphasize the benefit which the individual will derive from the registration system and the diffusion of the message. The second element is the identification of the audience to whom the message will be addressed. It was stressed that the identification of the audience would ensure an organized campaign and thus make it possible to exercise the necessary control on the program and thus maximize its effect. The third element in the enlightenment program is the selection of the media. In addition to the coventional mass media, it was essential to select also the type of media which will ensure that the target audience was being reached.

A civil registration enlightenment program needs to be continuous hence such program should include plans for the follow-up of the initial campaign. In the Kenya program, follow-up activities were suggested by the field staff. Divisional Coordinating Committees were then formed for such purposes but this aspect of the program was not been successful. Participants also shared country experiences concerning programs to motivate the public to register events.

The inducements to register events was also raised to include the compulsory production of birth/death certificate for various public services including enrollment of children at school. Great care should be exercised in the use of such inducements; otherwise, innocent parties such as children may be unnecessarily punished for the non-registration of events.

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

An important obstacle to the improvement of vital registration in the countries is that the top government officials who must approve of changes in procedures and/or provide the necessary funds for such improvements are not aware of the importance of vital registration and the problems involved in ensuring an efficient system. They tend, therefore, to give low priority to vital registration and vital records.

At the national level, officials involved in vital registration and vital statistics should take every opportunity to ensure that these senior government officials (and particularly the ministers responsible) are made aware of the importance of vital registration and the maintenance of vital records. To this end, at any national or regional seminars or workshops in this area held in the country, Government ministers should be invited to deliver an address and other means should be found to keep the topic in the minds of these ministers and senior officials.

National and Regional organizations (including institutional arrangements for collaboration between governments) should embark on a well-planned, sustained program aimed at informing the public of the importance of vital registration and winning their support. This program should include: (a) the making of video and audio cassettes for broadcast in all countries; (b) the preparation of posters, pamphlets and leaflets for widespread distribution. Governments should be asked to institute a Vital Registration and Vital Statistics Month in which great publicity is given to the importance, problems and issues of vital registration.

3. Administrative Organization

ESCAP Pacific Seminar

It is necessary to establish a clear authority with responsibility for administering the civil registration act and, separately, for compiling vital statistics. The ambiguities that exist are a

4

consequence of past history, or reflect the low priority given to civil registration systems. For further development or strengthening to occur, it is imperative that proper institutional arrangements be made to permit the legal, civil and statistical functions of the civil registration system to be properly performed. At the same time, there is need to co-ordinate those various functions through the establishment of a high-level steering committee to oversee or direct program activity.

ESCAP Asian Seminar

One way in which improvement could be achieved is through local involvement in the running of the system. The Seminar noted that could be done by involving village bodies or local councils in the supervision of the system in their areas. Such involvement would help to increase public awareness as well as raise the status of the local registrar in the community.

ECA African Workshop

Although it is desirable to assign responsibility for the administration of civil registration to the agency with the necessary infrastructure down to the lowest administrative unit of a country, it did not imply that countries should transfer responsibility from agencies currently responsible for the system. If, however, a country is initiating a new program for a civil registration system, then due consideration should be given to assigning the administrative responsibility for the exercise to the agency whose organizational structure goes down to the lowest administrative unit.

The existing administrative subdivision should be used as the primary registration unit since there might be confusion, and it would also be costly, if special units were created only for the registration system.

4. Coordination

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

A National Committee (which may be informal) should be formed in each country, comprised of key officials plus some of the key users of vital and related statistics. The aim of this committee should be to agree upon targets in the completeness, accuracy and timeliness of vital registration and efficient collation, analysis and dissemination of vital statistics and to ensure that each responsible unit, with such assistance and coordination as may be necessary, plays its part to ensure the achievment of these objectives. The Committee may also be very helpful in raising the priority given to vital registration and vital statistics by senior government officials, and thereby assisting the relevant agencies to obtain needed additional resources.

5. Registration Methods and Procedures

ECA African Workshop

There is need to consolidate the documentation used in civil registration. Too many documents act as an impediment to smooth implementation, and urgent steps should be taken to keep such documentation to a minimum consistent with the objectives of the registration process.

In particular, it should be noted that the list of topics recommended to be included in registration forms by both the United Nations and ECA are indicative. In the initial phase of a country project, the items should be kept to a minimum, account being taken of the country's human and technical resources.

6. Personnel

ESCAP Pacific Seminar

The need for appointed registrars and fieldworkers to be vigilant in their work and dedicated to the principle of full coverage was stressed without which under-registration is inevitable. To achieve and maintain a high level of motivation of the staff it is necessary to ensure that remuneration and working conditions are satisfactory, and that offices are adequately staffed. Visits by senior government and other officials are also important in raising the status and self-esteem of local registrars.

ESCAP Asian Seminar

The position of the registrar is vital to the whole system. Quite often, however, the duties of local registrars are performed in addition to other work, and, as a consequence, they tended to get less attention than they merited. Administrative procedures could be devised to correct that situation. Monetary incentives might be effective in improving the performance of the registrar. In any event, constant supervision and public acknowledgement of the importance of the registrar's role by high-level officials would improve efficiency.

ECA African Workshop

In developing a new registration system, it would be desirable to recruit new professionals and give on the job training for about two years. The rationale is that such professionals would come to the job with a relatively open mind.

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

The important and critical role of District Registrars should be recognized by the governments of the Region, and, where necessary, early arrangements made for a significant upward revision of their remuneration commensurate with their duties. While this is a matter for each government, there may be some benefit in having a review of the remuneration and conditions of work of these officials for a number of countries.

7. Training

ECA African Workshop

Provision should be made for the training of trainers. In addition, briefing sessions should be organised for personnel involved in the public enlightenment campaigns in connection with civil registration.

There is need for the training of other specialists, especially the computer staff in the use of micro-computers and its associated software. Such training can be given abroad if no local facilities for this exist.

Four levels of training are recognised: first, for policymakers which should usually take the form of a two-week study tour of an African country with a fairly satisfactory civil registration system. The second type of training should be for high level technicians and should last for three months. This should be held in the same type of country described in the preceding part of this paragraph and should consist of both lectures and job attachment. The third should be for district registrars for a period of fourteen days. The fourth level of training should be for registration assistants and should last for two to seven days. It should have a well prepared timetable and the content of training should be geared towards the actual functions the registration assistants are expected to perform. Such training should be held in each country in different locations at different times.

Training outside Africa should be given a lower priority and should take place after the initial training within the region.

All training should also take place before each level of personnel actually starts performing its functions. Thus, for projects partly funded from external sources the training programme could constitute either a pre-project activity or the first phase of the implementation of the project.

Study tours of short duration would be suitable for the top-level personnel, but much longer-term training would be necessary for district registrars.

In the training of field staff, it was noted that district registrars would require only briefings and no special courses need be organized. It was stressed that discussions should be held with district registrars to share ideas before finalization of a training manual.

Assistant district registrars, however, should be given thorough training, and the training period would be fourteen days. It was also stressed that the assistant registrars would require quarterly briefings discussion sessions at the head registration office. Such sessions should be conducted by the professional staff of the head office and should not be delegated to district registrars.

The need to conduct training for the lowest level of the registration personnel in the local language was noted and it was stressed that the training should consist of lectures and practical exercises. Questions and answers sessions should also be organized and following that a "Points to Remember" pamphlet may be prepared for use by the registration assistants.

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

There is little provision for any organized training or retraining of District Registrars. This means that the District Registrars are not fully aware of their duties; are not apprised of the importance of prompt and efficient action on their part; and generally are not motivated. There is inadequate (if any) training for the many other important persons involved in vital registration including: personnel in the central registry (Registrar General's Department); persons in the Ministry of Health, including Medical Records Officers, Midwives, etc.; Doctors (who must sign death certificates, etc.); and Coroners, the Police and Clerks of the Court.

A well rounded training program needs to be developed with appropriate training materials to ensure sound training of all the relevant staff now engaged in each country, with provision for continuous retraining.

There is a need to upgrade the skills of national statistical personnel to analyse data and thus strengthen the national analytical capabilities. In a number of countries none of the official statisticians or trained statistical officers have had in-depth training in demographic methods and demographic analysis with particular emphasis on vital statistics. Also, the awareness of the value of vital statistics and their utilization by policy makers and service managers need to be promoted with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of life of the nation.

A study should be undertaken to determine the situation as regards analysis and utilization of vital statistics and the training requirements in various countries. Financial and technical assistance should be sought to institute appropriate training programs within the subregion and/or to provide scholarships for selected statisticians (professional or sub-professional levels) to attend these or suitable courses in extra-regional institutions.

Appropriate fora (national and regional) should be held where policy makers and service managers could receive required orientation on using vital statistics.

8. Facilities and Equipment

Attention was called to the tendency to include a large fleet of vehicles in projects submitted for external assistance. It was stressed that efforts should be made to use existing public transportation wherever possible. Vehicles may only be purchased to supplement public transport in special areas where they are considered vital. Likewise, motor cycles and bicycles may be used for the collection of documents.

Other logistic support required in a civil registration system include a wide network of administrative infrastructure as well as printing and data processing facilities. The need for adequate office accommodation with the necessary storage facilities at the head office and the district registration offices was also recognized.

It is not essential for a main frame computer installation to be within the agency responsible for civil registration. What is required is the accessibility to the computer installation. Further, micro computers may be acquired for some of the data processing needs. Such micro computers may also be used to feed information into a main frame computer when-the need arises.

Finance and shortage of printing paper have proved to be major bottlenecks in civil registration programs. It was, however, pointed out that there was the need for countries to guard against over-dependence on external assistance.

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

Two serious shortcomings of the vital statistics systems in most countries of the Region are: (a) the long delays experienced in completing the basic vital statistics tabulations, and (b) the quite limited use that is made of the available vital registration related information in the preparation of these tabulations. Furthermore, there is now a great need for additional information to be collected. A number of factors contribute to the problems including inadequate and inadequately

trained staff and shortage of other resources. But a serious problem in most of the smaller countries is that tabulations must be prepared manually and, as indicated, the staff for this is very limited. For these countries the use of micro computers for data processing of vital statistics may be a great boon. Moreover, the use of standardized forms would facilitate the development of regional standard software which would result in greater cost efficiency and reduction of processing and training time. It would need to be associated, however, with a thorough investigation of all aspects of the two major problems above, and careful planning of the tabulations required and the procedures for their early completion.

For the countries concerned, technical and financial assistance is required to undertake the needed investigations and to make appropriate plans of operations. This investigation must include an assessment of the advantages and need for computers for this purpose, and, where appropriate, to recommend hardware and software. If the suggested standardized forms and procedures become feasible, technical assistance should be sought subregionally to develop appropriate standard software for use/adaptation nationally.

Governments should seek to make available to the vital statistics departments the necessary equipment and training so that once the tabulations are received the statistical reports can be quickly printed and disseminated to all users.

9. Needed Research and Study

ESCAP Pacific Seminar

In some countries of the Pacific either the system of civil registration was in its early stages of development or there were serious difficulties in achieving full coverage. Under those circumstances, one useful approach would be to test the registration system first in one or more small pilot areas. The use of the pilot areas would permit the testing of various forms and registration procedures, and the identification of training requirements, as well as the modifications required in the organizational structures of the registration and statistical services.

Once civil registration is fairly complete in those pilot areas, they would serve as models for extending the system to other parts of the country. They could also be used to obtain national estimates, if they had been selected as a representative sample of the entire country.

ESCAP Asian Seminar

The problems of collecting fertility and mortality data in multi-round surveys were noted. The Indian experience showed that in order to reduce recall lapse it might be advantageous to utilize shorter periods of recall, namely, 25 weeks for births and 9 weeks for deaths. The method of enumeration and re-enumeration might also be useful in reducing recall lapse. The efficacy of such methods should be tested under different conditions before being generally accepted.

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

Over the past century, the Registrar General Departments have accumulated vast quantities of official records, much of it being the records of individuals that establish the civil status of citizens and residents. Because of scarce and inadequate storage, these precious records have been deteriorating and are at great risk of eventually disintegrating.

Technical assistance should be sought, where appropriate, for the introduction of modern technology in the form of micro computers and microcopying in order that vital records could be efficiently stored, controlled, and retrieved by the central registry, thereby greatly increasing the efficiency of the system.

As a first step, careful studies should be carried out in each country (possibly starting with one or two pilot studies) by qualified technical personnel, to determine the appropriateness of introducing such technology and, where appropriate, to assist by providing needed equipment and training.

10. Evaluation

ESCAP Pacific Seminar

The importance of producing high quality statistics from the registration system was stressed and the need to develop or utilize methods for evaluating the system for completeness of coverage and

estimating vital rates was highlighted. It suggested that, despite some serious theoretical and practical problems, the dual record approach might be useful, but should be used together with other techniques. Especially important was the need to compare the vital statistics obtained from civil registration with those derived from other sources.

The use of sampling was felt to have some application in the Pacific in the development of civil registration. It was recognized that, initially at least, it was not necessary to have complete coverage and that it might be desirable to start with a small registration area. Other areas could be added, either on a representative sampling basis or according to a set of purposive criteria such as ease of access or level of development. It was proposed that a group of countries might combine to work out a methodology suitable for such a small area approach.

ESCAP Asian Seminar

Evaluation is an essential instrument for use in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems. With the increasing use of indirect methods for estimating vital rates, several countries had attempted to use such methods to assess the accuracy of rates computed from registration data, censuses and sample surveys. In that regard their experience showed that because of wide disparities in the rates obtained using various techniques, the comparisons did not always prove useful. Indirect methods of estimation provide, at best, only a broad indication of the magnitude of the true vital rates even at the national level and hence had to be used with great caution. It is also important to explore carefully whether the assumptions underlying those methods were satisfied in any specific country or circumstance.

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

A comprehensive investigation should be undertaken in each country to determine the level of completeness and the quality of vital registration and vital statistics. For this purpose, technical and financial assistance is needed for special enquiries (possibly including some retrospective demographic surveys) and related research.

11. Needed Improvements

ECA African Workshop

The main elements in the new strategy for improvement of civil registration and vital statistics are (a) the establishment of a Steering Committee made up of the ministers and/or their permanent secretaries of the relevant organizations which have direct responsibility for any aspect of civil registration; (b) the establishment of two parallel but integrated programs, one to deal with actual registration and the other with public enlightenment; and (c) phased implementation of a nationwide system. Such a committee must be set up with Cabinet approval which will help to smooth over difficulties usually arising from inter-ministerial jealousies and lack of co-ordination.

With respect to (b), it is now generally recognised that persons who are skilled in registration are not necessarily those with the necessary expertise to enlighten the public in connection with the aims and procedures of the registration system.

A phased approach for the development of a civil registration system which will depend on available resources, both financial and technical, is recommended. The first phase is usually an experimental or pilot one in which the instruments of registration are tested. Progression from one phase to another should be dependent on the success achieved at the preceding stage, taking into account the human and financial resources available.

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

In those countries with outlying islands, difficult terrain or problems of transportation and communication, there is a special problem for residents who wish to register vital events or to obtain vital registration information from the central records. There is, of course, also a major problem for the central registry in its efforts to obtain full and timely records of vital registration in these remote areas.

There should be consultation between the Registrar General's Department, the Ministry of Health, the Vital Statistics Division and the Post Office with a view to working out procedures for overcoming these problems. Such action must be taken by the national government of each country.

The quality of certification of cause of death by medical practitioners in the Sub-region is suspect. In addition, the writing of doctors on the medical certification is often not sufficiently legible for the coders. Improved certification, reporting, coding and analysis of cause of death information is seen as critical for the improvement of the health situation in the countries at the present time. Training at all levels--medical officers, medical students, coding staff, statisticians, and other health personnel--is needed.

A seminar/workshop should be held in the near future at which key personnel in these areas from the various countries of the Region could study and discuss this important topic in depth and make recommendations for the appropriate training and other required action to achieve the needed improvements. This training could be carried out by experts from the Caribbean Countries with technical cooperation from regional and international agencies.

Many of the problems now experienced with District Registrars including the late submission of registration data to the central office are due to lack of supervision. The main obstacle at present is the absence of adequate provision for officers of the central office to travel on official business for this purpose.

The problem could be largely eliminated by proper arrangements for the district registrars to be visited from time to time by supervisory staff from the Registrar General's Department (and where applicable the Vital Statistics Division). These visits could be used to check on the work of the district registrars, to issue new or amended instructions to them and to retrain them as necessary, and also to deliver and receive material including the registration data for the central office which might otherwise be long delayed.

12. Priorities

ESCAP Pacific Seminar

Much improvement in the civil registration systems of the Pacific could be achieved through careful identification of appropriate strategies and the allocation of clear priorities. Countries should focus on priority problem areas rather than trying to solve all problems at once. In that regard, the simplification of registration forms and procedures could be among the priority areas. Also, there is agreement on the need for improving the status of the local registrar. Although the designation and functions varied from country to country, depending on the resources and administrative structure of individual countries, the need to improve the effectiveness of the local registrar was emphasized.

In outlining a strategy for improving civil registration and vital statistics, a complete review of each country's system is suggested. Such a review would cover the legal basis, organizational structure, relationship between the civil registration and vital statistics systems, qualifications of personnel, training, current procedures for registration, sources and contents of records, certification procedures and so on.

13. Technical Assistance

ESCAP Pacific Seminar

Developed countries should be approached to assist in the training of staff in both civil registration and vital statistics. Further, the idea of exchanging staff to observe practices in other countries is supported.

14. Other Recommendations

ESCAP Pacific Seminar

It is proposed that a work program should be started in which one or several countries could select for study specific problems of concern. At the conclusion of that study a report would be circulated to other countries in the Pacific so that they too could learn from the experience. To implement that proposal, it was suggested that a small committee of country representatives be formed to

ascertain the interests of countries in studying some of the problem areas that have been identified. It was reported during the Seminar that a steering committee had been formed to stimulate and promote the work on country-specific problems and to share their experience and knowledge. The committee would basically function through correspondence. The following had shown interest in serving on the committee: Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Niue, the Republic of Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The Registrar General of Fiji will serve as chairman of the steering committee.

It was recommended that a common approach for the Pacific which would assist in convincing governments of the importance of civil registration and the urgency in allocating resources to it. It noted that that approach had been adopted successfully in other regions, and hoped that the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific and/or the South Pacific Commission might take on the task of contacting governments.

One possible way of accelerating the process of improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in the Pacific is to organize activities on a multi-country basis. That approach would not only focus attention on common problems of the countries of the Pacific but could also lead to common strategies for resolving those problems.

ESCAP Asian Seminar

Despite the growing awareness of the need to improve civil registration systems, coverage in civil registration had not greatly improved in many Asian countries during the past few decades. However, even where registration coverage was poor, several countries had prepared tabulations, either for evaluation purposes or for obtaining limited but useful indicators. It was suggested that several approaches might be tried in such countries to enhance the usefulness of tabulations. Though overall registration was inadequate, registration might be of good quality in particular areas. Tabulations could be made separately for such areas which would, if interpreted with care, provide some useful information about those areas; serve as a model for other areas; and possibly, if available on a continuous basis, provide an indication of national trends. For the tabulations to have optimal impact, the upgrading of the registraion system was best achieved in stages over a period of time, bearing in mind the resources that could be made available.

Where coverage is low, it might also be appropriate to restrict or orient the tabulation program to a minimum list. Considering the current disparities among the countries in respect of resources, technical know-how, design and content of civil registration forms and vital statistics reports, and data needs, it might not always be possible to follow a standard tabulation program. Nonetheless, the list of recommended tables together with some additional tables covering marriage and divorce statistics would provide useful guidelines to countries. It would also be useful to include in the tabulation plan a cross-tabulation by date of occurrence and date of registration which could provide a basis for assessing and improving coverage. Depending on the general completeness of the registration system, the cross-tabulation might also provide correction factors for improving the estimates of current vital rates from date of registration data. However, ultimately it would be necessary to take specific steps to reduce delays in reporting.

One practical approach to improving civil registration would be to select model areas for intensive development of the system and thereafter, progressively increase their number or size with the eventual aim of covering the entire country. However, concentration of resources in model areas might create conflicts and generate negative reactions from other areas. The model area approach need not necessarily mean a diversion or concentration of resources since better monitoring and administrative tightening could serve the purpose while avoiding those problems. Model schemes could also serve other useful purposes such as the testing of methodology, procedures and forms.

Civil registration and vital statistics could be improved with the wider dissemination of materials, including forms, information on techniques and methodologies and reports, both within a country (for example, through seminars) and between countries. As part of this process, it is recommended that countries take steps to encourage such dissemination and that the Secretariat publish the proceedings of the Asian and Pacific seminars.

An effective method of training for civil registration and vital statistics is to observe practices in other countries, especially where both coverage and quality are high. The Secretariat was requested to co-ordinate arrangements for countries wishing to participate in exchange schemes or observation tours.

Registration promotional efforts would receive a considerable boost if the United Nations were to declare one year as the Year of Civil Registration.

ESCAP Asian Seminar

The establishment of a good civil registration system necessarily takes time, especially in a situation of competing priorities for funding. Nevertheless, considerable improvements can often be achieved even within a short time. Among the main tasks of the national committee would be to assign clear responsibilities and to draw up a well-defined plan of action within a definite time frame.

The problem of preservation of documents needs priority attention. Their value both to the individual and as a source of statistics would be enhanced if information were easily and quickly retrievable. For these reasons, it is felt that computerization of civil registration systems was worthwhile and deserved serious consideration.

ECA African Workshop

There is need for a concerted effort to make African Governments aware of the importance of civil registration and also to allocate adequate financial and technical resources to project implementation. The Economic Commission for Africa should try to bring up in appropriate inter-governmental meetings the importance of civil registration. The Government's share of the cost of implementing any project should also be clearly indicated and external donors should insist on a binding commitment to the provision of such counterpart funds by Governments before agreeing to fund projects.

In order to promote civil registration in the region, it is proposed that the Economic Commission for Africa explore the possibility of establishing an Association for African experts in the field of civil registration. ECA will prepare proposals on this and circulate them to interested persons for their comments. If a sufficient number of persons show interest in such an Association, a constitution would be drawn up for adoption by founder members.

PAHO/ECLAC Caribbean Workshop

Given the close association between the English-speaking Caribbean countries, it would clearly be to the advantage of the Sub-region's governments, regional and international organizations, and both local and foreign investors, administrators and researchers, if they could refer to a single source for socio-demographic statistics (particularly vital statistics) about all the countries. Urgent action is needed to compile and publish an annual digest of vital statistics, as well as population, health, migration and other related statistics. Analyses of the data should also be undertaken by the compilers. But the compilation of this digest cannot be achieved by placing additional burdens on the limited national vital statisics staff in each country.

As a first step, there should be consultation among the regional and international agencies concerned with publication of similar data as well as with the countries of the sub-region to determine how the objectives could be best achieved and without duplication of effort. Following the recommendation of this consultation, one or more of the regional institutions should undertake this most important task starting as soon as possible.