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Source of Vital Statistics in Ethiopia¹

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Introduction

1. The main source of vital statistics is records of vital events from civil registration, which involves the continuous gathering of information on all relevant vital events occurring within the boundaries of a country. Additional sources in a vital statistics system include specific questions on fertility and mortality added to population censuses, household sample surveys, vital records from sample registration and health records.
2. Vital statistics compiled from civil registration are the building block for establishing current and sustainable demographic and health statistics database that helps the measurement and monitoring of development results, including the MDGs. Civil registration is a conventional source of vital statistics in generating individual information that guides the implementation of health services and intervention at individual, household and community levels as per African context. National Statistics Offices in Africa are suffering greatly from the inadequate nature of civil registration system in generating routine population dynamics information.
3. As stated in the UN Principles and Recommendation Handbook, vital statistics are incidence—not prevalence—statistics, they are statistics which provide a measure of the occurrence of certain type of vital events to members of a specified population during a specified period of time, and provide this measure on a current basis. Experience of many developed countries has shown that civil registration method to be the only reliable one for obtaining a continuous and current record of events occurring throughout a period.
4. Types of data that could be generated from the civil registration mainly include number of birth, death, marital status of a specific place and time. If the system of civil registration could capture the events properly and continuously, the data obtained would be very useful to provide vital statistics where annual population statistics could be produced easily. Furthermore, population dynamics components could be more reliable in computing population projection of a country.

The Source of Vital Statistics in Ethiopia

5. Ethiopia is one of the few African countries that do not have a working conventional Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Systems. But this does not mean that no attempts were made at establishing these systems. Even though there were so many articles stating the necessity and existence of CRVS system in the country at different period of times, many of them remained on paper due to the absence of assigning the proper institutions and less emphasis was given to actualize this system. As a result, Ethiopia has not yet installed a system of civil registration and vital statistics that enables to produce of annual based population statistics data.
6. It is to be noted that institutional based statistical data generation in Ethiopia is only five decades old, which is very young, compared to other countries. Currently the country's major sources of vital statistics are censuses and surveys. By their very nature, these censuses and surveys provide population dynamics information for particular or specific time periods. Even

though the main source of vital statistics is records of vital events from civil registration, which involves the continuous gathering of information they are usually complemented by census information, which also has national coverage.

7. The Ethiopian Central Statistics Agency (CSA) has made numerous attempts to lay the foundation for the establishment of civil registration and vital statistics system in the country. In 1977, 1982, and 1983 the CSA initiated an experimental sample vital statistics registration. And continuous sample vital registration /dual-records/ system were also implemented in 1986 and 1998 in some selected urban and rural areas of the country. The main objectives of these initiatives were to test whether it would be possible to carry out civil registration and vital statistics by providing technical and material assistance to urban and rural dwellers associations.

Adoption of the UN Principles and Recommendation of Vital Statistics in Ethiopia

8. In 1999 the CSA conducted a technical review on the methodologies implemented earlier followed by the study of establishment and development of vital statistics system through civil registration method. After the review and extensive debate, the management of the then Authority decided to quit the experimental sample vital registration and household survey, which is categorized as dual recording data collection method. Therefore, all efforts were shifted to the principles and recommendations of the UN that provided guideline and methodologies for the establishment and development of CRVS system in developing countries.

9. After aborting sample and survey based exercises, the CSA fully devoted to the development of conventional civil registration and vital statistics systems, which included methodological research, development of registration and statistical instruments, piloting and other technical preparatory activities. The CSA had also shouldered technical aspects of the initiative and led the government towards conventional civil registration system and advised UN agencies and NGOs to align their interventions to the UN principles and recommendations of CRVS systems. With close communication, collaboration and involvement of regional states it was possible to establish national advocacy taskforce with the leadership role of high government officials. Technical debates on civil registration and vital statistics with the academics and professional associations were also conducted. By incorporating the past experiences learned from the previous countrywide Sample Vital Registration of late 1970s and 1980s, the 2005 UNICEF assisted Model Vital Registration that run in three Regional States showed positive and worthwhile outcomes.

Initiatives of Drafting a New Civil Registration Law in Ethiopia

10. As indicated in the UN principles and recommendations of Vital Statistics, legal framework is an essential component for efficient management, operation and maintenance of the registration system. Countries should ensure that legal framework provide the rules and regulations needed to continuously and permanently register events that affect the civil status of individuals. The civil registration law should specifically provide clear guidelines including the type of organizational structure adopted for the civil registration system in the country. The roles of different agencies, the rights and obligations of all parties in carrying out the collection of information, the production of vital statistics and the use of information should be incorporated in the legal framework.

11. Hence, Ethiopia has been engaged in drafting a new Civil Registration Law since 2009. In collaboration with other stakeholders, the CSA has been striving to incorporate necessary inputs for the drafting of the Civil Registration Law. Following the enactment of the new law, it is expected the federal civil registration organization and structure as per the provisions of the new law will be operational and regional civil registration bodies will continue accordingly.

12. The drafted civil registration law was presented to the Council of Ministers in 2010 to be endorsed prior to its enactment by the Parliament. On the other hand, another law was also drafted for National Identification System by concerned bodies and presented to the Council of Ministers. Thus, the Council of Ministers decided and gave direction to investigate the linkage of these two separate laws which in turn delayed the enactment of the Civil Registration Law by one more year. Hence, a task force was organized comprising different professionals, which is expected to come up with one unified law if it is feasible in the country's context.

13. Even though the CSA is not a member of the above mentioned task force, but it is represented in the high level ministerial committee where it had a chance to review the new re-drafted law. Accordingly, the CSA has recommended that the legislation should be in line with the UN Principles and Recommendation for Vital Statistics System. The law should articulate the need of coordination and communication between the authorities responsible for civil registration and national identification and that of vital statistics in the new re-drafted law. Experiences show that countries like Norway have population register, civil registration and vital statistics operations performed by one agency, but in the Ethiopian context the information of vital events should be transferred to the CSA and its role need to be properly defined in the redrafted law.

The Leadership Role of the CSA on the Technical Aspect

14. The CSA has incorporated CRVS in its National Strategy for Statistical Development (NSDS) and formulated a framework strategy and a work program for strengthening statistical capacity across the entire National Statistical System of the country in the next five years (2009/10- 2013/14). This NSDS has been endorsed by the Statistical Council. In this NSDS document, one of the major statistical strategic themes that has been given due emphasis is the establishment of sound Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems. Currently high momentum is created in data demand for vital statistics by regional governments and the justice system. This is an opportunity for the CSA to continue playing its leadership role by responding proactively in the technical aspects. However, lack of adequate, qualified and experienced persons would be expected challenges in the implementation of new redrafted law. The federal civil registration organization and structure as per the provisions of the new law will be expected to be enacted by 2011 and regional civil registration bodies will continue accordingly.

15. In the rural area of the country, registering vital events as they occur will take some time. The existence of over thirty thousand Health Extension Agents at the lowest administrative levels would help in facilitating the implementation of the law. They could be informant to the registrars in their area of work until individuals realize the importance of registering the events and getting certificates. These extension agents could be a very instrumental in the implementation of the new law in educating the citizens the importance of registering the events as they happen. In many African countries the limitation of vital statistics is its coverage when it

come to its completeness, but the existence of these agents in each kebele would be an advantage in the Ethiopian context.

Way Forward

16. The CSA and the forthcoming Civil Registration and National Identification Agency will continue collaborating in addressing the challenges. The draft proclamation establishes a central office, at the federal level, for the registration of vital events, which also coordinates and facilitates the registration of vital events throughout the country. It is also entrusted to create the necessary conditions for exchange of information using appropriate modern technology. This proclamation is expected to provide a compulsory, universal, permanent and continuous system of civil registration to be in place. Advocacies through organizing national and regional workshops as well as working in partnership with civil society are expected to pave a way to success in establishing the CRVS system in Ethiopia.