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**EAST AND SOUTH ASIAN WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIES FOR ACCELERATING
THE IMPROVEMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION
AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS
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**SRI LANKA : CURRENT STATUS OF VITAL STATISTICS AND
CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM**

by

**P. G. Swarna Neunhella
L. Padmini de Silva
T. H. J. Fernando**

**Department of Census and Statistics,
Ministry of Plan Implementation**

and

Department of Registrar General

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General Background

Sri Lanka is a small island of approximately 65,610 sq. kilometers of inland water and known for many countries as 'Ceylon'. Geographically, the island of Sri Lanka is situated off the southern coast of India between northern latitudes 5°55' and 9°50' and Eastern longitudes 79°42' and 81°52'. Due to its location in the center of the Indian Ocean and its proximity to the Indian Sub Continent had been an important factor determining its wide variation in climatological conditions as well as the different cultural and socio-economic situations of the present day.

The physical features of the island can be described by 3 distinct areas.

(a) mountain region covering the central part of the south-west parts of the island, where most of the tea and rubber plantations are situated.

(b) A coastal belt which extends along the northern and eastern part of the island, where most of the paddy is cultivated.

(c) An intermediate upland region between these two areas, surrounding the central hills.

Climatology, the island can thus be divided into dry and wet regions. The northern part of the island and the eastern to south-eastern coastal region can be regarded as dry and about 70% of the total land area of the island belongs to the dry zone, the rest of the other part belong to the wet zone. An average annual rainfall about 250 - 500 cms receives in the dry zone and wet zone has a rainfall of about 200 cms on average. Because the island being close to the equator, the mean temperature over the land ranging from 26 to 28 C.

The Economy

Since the 15th century the country experienced several foreign invasions and was ruled in succession by the Portuguese, the Dutch and finally the British until 1948, when the independence was gained.

Sri Lanka economy is mainly based on agricultural and connected activities. It consisted of two sectors, the export oriented plantation sector - tea, rubber and coconut and the rural less developed sector which consisted of peasant subsistence of paddy and other minor food crops, mainly for domestic consumption.

Even though, the paddy is for only domestic consumption, the largest proportion of area cultivated, (33.4% of the agricultural land use) is under paddy.

For many decades, the major export crops, have been the chief source of foreign exchange earnings in the economy, through their relative importance has declined somewhat in the recent past. During last two decades, however, the performance of the major export commodities has not been entirely satisfactory. Although the performance of export crops was poor, their contribution to the Sri Lankan economy remained significant. For example, its contribution to total export earnings was 32.3% in 1990.

For purpose of administration, Sri Lanka is divided into 25 districts. Even though Sri Lanka is a small country, it is considerably difficult in cultural patterns and socio - economic situations among districts.

Colombo is the capital city and is highly populated and literate and engage in non agricultural occupations. It is the administrative, business and commercial center of the country.

Sri Lanka population consists of a combination of mix ethnic groups giving more weight to the Sinhalese which is about 75% of the total population. Secondly Sri Lankan Tamils (12%), Moors about (7%) and others constitute the rest. Most Sinhalese are Buddhists and most of the Tamils are Hindus. The rest are Muslims, and Christians. The Sinhalese are the majority in almost all districts except those in the Northern Province. Tamils live mainly in Northern Province and Moors are spread all over the country with concentration in the district of Hambantota, Moneragala, Ampara and Batticaloa.

Demographic and Basic Information of the Country

Sri Lanka is having reasonably reliable demographic data until last decade. The main source of information were the periodic censuses and the vital statistics collected by the Registrar Generals Department. Unfortunately recent census which was scheduled to do in 1991 were not done due to operational disturbances within the country. Therefore in recent years, sample surveys have become a major source of demographic data. The first census of population was taken in 1871 and since then census were taken mostly in decennial intervals. However, our last census was in 1981. The department of Census and Statistics and the Registrar General's Department collect and analysis of population data and vital statistics to meet the needs of policy makers and other usus.

The Department of Registrar General is responsible for supervising, registering, collection and compilation of births, deaths and marriages occurring in the island. According to the law, registration of births and deaths is compulsory.

Table : 1.1

Estimated Population and Growth Rates for Sri Lanka

Year	Mid Year Population ('000)	Birth Rate	Death Rate	Rate of Natural Inc. per 1,000	Net Migration Rate	Growth Rate
1975	13,496	27.8	8.5	19.3	-2.3	1.7
1976	13,717	27.8	7.8	20.0	-3.8	1.6
1977	13,942	27.9	7.4	20.5	-3.7	1.7
1978	14,190	28.5	6.6	21.9	-2.8	1.9
1979	14,472	28.9	6.5	22.4	-3.0	1.9
1980	14,747	28.4	6.2	22.2	-4.6	1.8
1981	15,011	28.2	5.9	22.2	-3.3	1.9
1982	15,195	26.9	6.1	20.8	-6.0	1.5
1983	15,417	26.3	6.2	20.1	-6.8	1.3
1984	15,603	25.1	6.5	18.6	-4.9	1.4
1985	15,842	24.6	6.2	18.4	-0.6	1.8
1986	16,127	22.4	6.0	16.4	-0.1	1.6
1987	16,373	21.8	6.0	15.8	-2.7	1.3
1988	16,599	20.7	5.8	14.9	-3.1	1.2
1989*	16,806	21.3	6.2	15.1	-1.2	1.4
1990*	16,993	20.1	5.7	14.4	1.2	1.5
1991*	17,247	21.0	5.6	15.4	-3.9	1.1*
1992*	17,405	20.1	5.6	14.5	-4.1	1.0*

* Provisional

As of mid 1992 Sri Lanka had an estimated total population of 17.4 million. Table 1.1 shows the yearly Birth, Death and Growth rates for the whole island and the data is obtained from the vital registration system.

According to the Census from 1871 to 1981 the rate of population growth was not uniform. Prior to the World War II it was fluctuated between 0.9 % and 1.7 %. After 1945, the rate of growth showed a sudden increase as 2.8 percent during the period 1946 to 1953. From 1953 to 1963, the average rate of growth continued to be the same and showed 2.7 percent but dropped to 2.3 percent from 1963 to 1971 and further to 1.7 percent during the period 1971 to 1981.

On the whole, it is apparent that the rate of population growth in Sri Lanka will continue to decline, and this is probably mainly due to the effect of out migration streams. As such, employment oriented migration mainly to the Middle East countries was the main reason, which is responsible for declining growth rate.

Sri Lanka's population shows a slight excess of males, and the sex ratio being 104 males to every 100 females according to the 1981 - Census.

As most of developing countries, Sri Lankan population is also generally described as youthful. Age composition of the population and the depending ratio at the Census of 1981 are shown in the Table 1.2. According to the 1981 - Census, the proportion of the population under age 15 is above 35.3 percent, age 15 - 64 about 60.4 percent and age 65 & above about 4.3 percent respectively. The depending ratio is 65.6 in 1981 - Census and this is generally computed as the number of children under 15 years and old people aged 65 and above.

Table : 1.2

Age Composition of the Population - 1981

	Number	%
All Ages	14,848,346	100.0
0 - 14	5,236,962	35.3
15 - 64	8,967,424	60.4
65 & above	643,974	4.3
Depending Ratio		65.6

Source : Dept of Census & Statistics,
Census of Population & Housing 1981
Preliminary Report No 2.

Since Independence, there has been a great emphasis on maintaining an acceptable standard of public health facilities through the provision of free medicine, and as a result, Sri Lanka able to bring down its crude death rate, infant mortality rate, under 5 mortality rate and maternal mortality rate.

Infant mortality at 34.4 thousand live births (see Table 1.3) in 1980 has fallen to 16.6 in 1991. Child mortality is also significantly low in Sri Lanka. In 1988 the child mortality rate under 5 was estimated to be 26.7 per 1,000 live births. During the period 1980 - 1988 the maternal death rate fell gradually from 64.5 per 100,000 live births to 38.6 per 100,000 live births. The fertility level in Sri Lanka have also shown a declining trend. The crude birth rate fell from 28.4 per 1,000 to 20.1 per 1,000 in 1992.

Table : 1.3

Birth Rates and Death Rates, 1980 -1992

Year	Infant Mortality Rate	Under 5 Child Mortality Rate	Maternal Mortality Rate **
1980	34.4	44.6	64.5
1981	29.5	38.8	58.8
1982	30.5	42.7	60.2
1983	28.4	39.8	58.3
1984	27.7	39.2	44.0
1985	24.2	32.7	50.6
1986	23.2	31.1	46.9
1987	22.6	30.4	37.2
1988	20.2	26.7	38.6
1989*	17.6	n.a	n.a
1990*	19.3	n.a	n.a
1991*	16.6	n.a	n.a
1992*	n.a	n.a	n.a

* Provisional

** Rate per 100,000 live births

SECTION I - CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

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1. Legal Frame of the System

(01) Historical Background

The Department of the Registration of Marriages, Births and Deaths in the Island of Sri Lanka was created in 1867 and the general control and superintendence of the department is vested in the Registrar General. Though the department was created 71 years after the British occupation of the maritime provinces, the registration scheme has a much earlier history and the laws passed are scattered over many years and many pages of the Statute Book.

Almost at the very beginning of British administration, it was recognized as a fundamental principle of good administration that the domestic occurrences of the people should be registered, and that more systematic measures should be taken for the purpose than had been taken hitherto.

Under the Dutch Government the scheme of registration of marriages, births and deaths is embodied in the so-called Dutch 'School Thomboes' of parish registers of the villages in the 'Colombo-Dissavony' and the 'Galle Commandment' approximately the present Western and Southern Provinces of the island, respectively. Church registers of marriages, births and deaths were also kept in the churches at Wolvendaal, Galle, Matara & Jaffna, chiefly of the Dutch themselves and other town residents. The Thombos were kept by the 'Palliya Gurunanse' or Village School Master, under the superior direction of the Schoolarchen or Dutch School Board. The particulars entered in the Thombos, which date back to the last decade of the 17th century, were the names of the parents including the 'wasagama' or 'ge-name', or patronymic of the father, only the patronymic usually of the mother, the date of marriage and the names of the children with their ages at baptism shown in years and months, and the dates of baptism. A separate column also showed any change of domicile and the date of death. The latest entries in the School Thombos date back to 1822 or nearly 25 years after the British occupation of the maritime districts, the period of transition from the old to the new system.

The earliest British enactment was the Regulation No. 07 of 1815 in which year the whole Island passed under the away of Britain, the Regulation related to the marriages of local Protestants. This was followed by the Regulation No. 09 of 1822, which provided for the registration of the marriages and births of locals and of non-European residents in the maritime districts. The Ordinance No. 06 of 1847 which followed was the first attempt to provide a general system of registration and applied to all births and deaths and to Muslims. This Ordinance was brought into operation by the Proclamation of December 07, 1849, only as regards Christian Marriages; and by proclamation of June 03, 1867, brought into force in regard to other marriages, as well as births and deaths. Provisions affecting births and deaths were replaced by

Ordinance No.18 of 1867, which came into operation in June 1868, but registration was optional. In 1897, registration of births & deaths was made compulsory. The procedure laid down in this law continues with modifications introduced from time to time. The present law governing the registration of births and deaths is titled the Births & Deaths Registration Act, (Cap. 110) of the Legislative Enactments of Ceylon (Now Sri Lanka).

The general marriage law contained in Ordinance No.02 of 1895 after having been subjected to amendment by the Ordinances Nos. 10 of 1896 and 19 of 1900 was finally replaced by Ordinance No. 19 of 1907 which came into operation on January 1, 1908. This law is still in force with modifications introduced from time to time. The law governing the registration of (general) Marriages is titled the Marriage Registration Ordinance (Cap. 112) of the Legislative Enactments of Ceylon (Now Sri Lanka).

The Kandyan Law is the old national Sinhalese law and custom as modified by statute. Prior to 1859 the Kandyans had no written laws, and marriages were contracted according to customary rites and by public recognition of the unions. The practices of polygamy and polyandry were also prevalent. Ordinance No. 13 of 1859 which abolished polyandry and polygamy made registration essential to the validity of a Kandyan Marriage. This Ordinance was replaced by Ordinance No. 03 of 1870 which continues with modifications introduced from time to time. The law governing the registration of Kandyan Marriages is titled the Kandyan Marriage and Divorce Act (Cap.113) of the Legislative Enactments of Ceylon (Now Sri Lanka).

2. Administrative Arrangements of the System

(01) Administration

The subject of Civil Registration in Sri Lanka is handled by the Registrar General's Department. The Registrar General is the Head of the Department and he is assisted by three Deputy Registrars General and seven Assistant Registrars General in all statutory and administrative functions of the Department. There are nine provinces in the country and each province is identified as a separate administrative zone. Subject to the general control and superintendence of the Registrar General, a Deputy Registrar General or an Assistant Registrar General is appointed for each zone as a means of further decentralizing the work handled at the centre.

In the past, the regional representative of the Government was the Government Agent of the District, designated as the District Registrar for purposes of civil registration. In keeping with the 'decentralization' policy of the Government, the post of Government

Agent has since been abolished and each district hitherto administered a Government Agent has now been sub-divided into several smaller divisions, each of such divisions being placed under the control of a Divisional Secretary, designated as Additional District Registrar for purposes of civil registration. In all there are 267 Divisional Secretariats. Thus all administrative and statutory functions pertaining to civil registration which hitherto came under the preview of the Government Agents (District Registrars) have now been vested in the Divisional Secretaries (Addl. District Registrars).

(02) Recording System

Registrar General prints the books and other printed forms and supplies to the Civil Registrars through the Zonal Offices and Divisional Secretariat Offices. Registration books are in bound volumes and contains 100 folios numbered from 01 to 100. Durable paper of legal size is used for printing of Registration books. Civil Registrars are required to make the registration entries in indelible black or blue ink.

3. The Local Registrars

(01) Marriage, Birth & Death Registration Divisions

At present there are 25 Administrative districts in Sri Lanka. For purposes of registration of births & deaths each such district, is sub divided into 711 smaller units called 'Registration Divisions' comprising about eight to ten villages which are the smaller Administrative units in the country. A marriage registration division is generally co-extensive with the Divisional Assistant Government Agents (now known as Divisional Secretaries) Divisions. Thus there can be several Registrars of births & deaths within a marriage registration division and all such registrars exercise concurrent jurisdiction as far as registration of marriages is concerned. There are 71 Urban Areas proclaimed from time to time by order of the Minister and a different category of registrars known as medical registrars who are medical personnel under part V of the act are appointed for such areas. In addition to the registration of births, deaths & still births these registrars should observe the other requirements specified in part V of the Births & Deaths Registration Act. Medical Registrar cannot function as registrars of marriages, births & deaths occurring in estates scheduled under the medical wants ordinance are registered in the offices of the Divisional Secretaries.

(02) Appointment of Registrars of Marriages, Births & Deaths

Registrar of marriages, births & deaths are appointed by the Registrar General. When a vacancy occurs in a district, the District Registrar (now Divisional Secretary) will call for applications from eligible persons and will make his recommendation to the Registrar General. The Registrar General will issue the Act of Appointment. No person shall be appointed as a Medical Registrar unless he is a registered Medical Practitioner or is an Ayurvedic Practitioner registered under the Ayurvedic Act or is a person holding a certificate of competency issued by the Director General of Health Services. Registrars hold their offices at their residences or in Central places of their divisions. The office hours of Registrars are from 10.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. on all week days except Sundays and Public Holidays. Registrars receive registration fees based on the number of events registered by them. In addition to that they are also paid an office, ink and stationary allowance approved by the Government.

(03) Duties and Responsibilities of a Registrar

- (i) Registering of all births and deaths occurring in the division.
- (ii) Registering of marriages at the request of parties living in the division.
- (iii) Furnishing of duplicates of marriages, births and deaths registered in each calendar month together with vital statistics returns on or before a date fixed by the Registrar General.
- (iv) Furnishing of returns of defaulters in registration of births and deaths.
- (v) Safe return of completed marriage, birth and death registers to the District Registrar (now Divisional Secretary).

4. Procedure for Registration

(01) Registration of Births

The father or mother of every child born alive is primarily responsible to give information to the Registrar of the division within 42 days for registration of the event. If they cannot do so by reason of their death, illness or other valid reason, the occupier of the house in which the birth took place, or each person present at birth or the person having charge of the child should give information. If a person required under the law to give information cannot conveniently attend the Registrar's Office, he may make a written declaration in the prescribed form. It is the responsibility of the Officer-in-charge of a Government Hospital to

give information in respect of all events occurring in his hospital. If the period of 42 days has lapsed, the birth can still be registered within three months from the date of occurrence. Where a birth is not registered within three months, any person required by law to give information or any other person interested may make a declaration in the prescribed form. If such declaration is made within twelve months, the Divisional Secretary shall authorize the registration of the event if he is satisfied as to the truth of the matters stated in the declaration. If such declaration is made after the expiry of twelve months, the Divisional Secretary shall transmit the declaration together with his recommendation after due inquiry to the Registrar General and the Registrar General shall authorize the registration of the event if he is satisfied as to the truth of the matters stated in the declaration.

(02) Issue of Certificates of Probable Age

It is in the public interest that records of the Registrar General's Department should be completely reliable and the courts and the public should continue to have confidence in the accuracy and reliability of the facts recorded in the registers of the Department. However, sympathetic the attitude taken by the Department may be, registration cannot be made many years after the event without adequate documentary and oral evidence to prove the facts.

Registration becomes more difficult as evidence required to establish the particulars essential for registration will be more difficult to procure with the passage of time. Therefore, if the registration of a past birth cannot be effected due to the inadequacy of evidence adduced, the applicant will be issued a certificate of probable age which will be valid for all education and employment purposes. This is an administrative arrangement.

(03) Registration of Deaths

Information of death should be given to the Registrar of the division within 05 days of its occurrence. According to the law, the obligation for giving information rests on the nearest relative present at death. In the absence of such relative, every other relative of the deceased dwelling of being in the same registrar's division as the deceased and in the absence of such other relative, each person present at death and occupier of the house in which the death took place should give information to the Registrar of the division. If information of a death is not given within the stipulated period of 5 days, the persons who are bound by law to give information are liable to prosecution. However, a death can still be registered free of charge within three months of its occurrence. If a death has escaped registration within three

months the same steps as in the case of registration of past births should be followed. In the case of sudden deaths, registration is effected upon a certificate issued by an inquirer into sudden deaths.

(04) Registration of Estate Births & Deaths

An 'Estate' means any land of which 100 or more acres are under cultivation and which is situated in a district declared under the Medical Wants Ordinance to be an Estate Medical District. Births & deaths that occur in estates scheduled under the medical Wants Ordinance are registered by the District Registrar (Divisional Secretary) of the Division in which such estates are situated. The Superintendent of the estate is required by law to furnish reports of births & deaths to the appropriate District Registrar (Divisional Secretary) through the Estate Medical Officer.

(05) Birth & Death Registration Procedure at a Glance

All births & deaths occurring in private hospitals, non Government Institutions, Nursing Homes, Private Houses, should be registered upon information given by qualified informants. It is the duty of every Gramaseva Niladhari to inform himself of all births & deaths occurring in his division and to furnish a report in the prescribed form direct to the appropriate registrars.

These steps are taken to ensure that no event escapes registration :

(a) It is the responsibility of the Medical Officer in charge of a Government Hospital or Institution to give information regarding events occurring in such hospital or institution.

(b) As regards births & deaths occurring in scheduled estates the qualified party should inform the Superintendent of the estate who is required by law to ensure that a report relating to each event is sent to the Divisional Secretary who will take steps to register such events in the manner laid down by law.

(c) Spouses adopting a child by order of court can make an application to the Registrar General to get the child's birth re-registered with their names as natural parents.

(d) Provisions exist in the Consular Functions Act, for registration of births, deaths & marriages of Sri Lankans living abroad.

(06) Adoption of Children

Adoption of children is governed by the Adoption of Children Ordinance (Cap. 61) as amended by the Adoption of Children (amendment) Law no. 06 of 1977. Any person desirous of adopting a child can make an application to the appropriate court. A child means a person under the age of 14 years. Upon the court making an order of adoption it is registered in the register maintained at the Registrar General's Office. Certified copies thereof can be obtained on making an application. Where the adoption order authorizes two spouses jointly to adopt a child it is open to such spouses to make application to the Registrar General, in the prescribed form, for re-registration of the birth of that child by insertion of the names of such spouses as the natural parents of that child. Every such declaration should bear a stamp to the prescribed value and can be made before the Registrar General, an Assistant Registrar General or a Justice of the Peace.

(07) Registration of Marriages

There are three laws governing the registration of marriages in Sri Lanka.

- (a) The Marriage Registration Ordinance (Cap.112)
- (b) The Kandyan Marriage & Divorce Act (Cap.113)
- (c) The Muslim Marriage & Divorce Act (Cap.115)

(08) Marriages (General)

It is open to parties of any race or creed, other than those professing the Islamic faith (Muslims), to marry under the Marriages (General) Ordinance. Under this law, a marriage is not valid if contracted between a male party under 16 years of age or a female party under 12 years of age or if of a daughter or European or Burgher parents, under 14 years of age. Marriage between parties of prohibited degrees of relationship is also not valid. No person who has not completed 21 years of age other than a widower or widow or a divorced person is permitted to marry without the consent of a parent or guardian. The preliminary step to be taken with regard to the registration of a marriage under the law is to give notice of the intended marriage to the Registrar of the division by either of the parties if both have the necessary residential qualification within the same division.

If both parties are not resident in the same division, each party should give notice to the Registrar of the respective divisions in which they reside. After the lapse of 12 clear days the Registrar or, if parties dwell in two different divisions, the

Registrars of both divisions will issue a certificate called the 'Registrar's Certificate'. Marriage cannot be solemnized without the aforesaid 'Registrar's Certificate'. The prescribed period for the issue of the 'Registrar's Certificate' can be dispensed with on a special license. Marriages are solemnized and registered either by Registrars or solemnized by Ministers of Christian religion in Churches registered under the law as places of public christian worship. If a marriage is solemnized in a church, the Minister solemnizing the marriage writes down (in duplicate) the necessary particulars touching that marriage and sends the duplicate statement to the District Registrar (now Divisional Secretary). The District Registrar will register the particulars mentioned in that statement in his marriage register book. No marriage shall be solemnized in any place other than that prescribed by the ordinance unless a 'House License' is obtained beforehand. A marriage contracted under the General Marriage law can be dissolved only on a order of a competent court. Similarly an application should be made to court for any correction in a marriage register.

(09) Marriages (Kandyan)

A marriage between persons subject to Kandyan Law may be solemnized and registered under the Kandyan Marriage & Divorce Act or under the Marriage Registration Ordinance. Any such marriage which is not so solemnized and registered shall not be valid. No Kandyan Marriage shall be valid if, at the time of marriage, the male party is under 16 years and of age and the female party is under 12 years of age. No male under 18 years and a female under 16 years can get married without the consent of the parents or guardian.

A marriage between parties of prohibited degrees of relationship is not valid. It is also an offence punishable under the law to contract such marriages. The preliminary steps to be taken before the solemnization and registration of Kandyan Marriages are almost the same as in the case of general marriages.

(10) Divorces (Kandyan)

Persons marrying under the Kandyan marriage and divorce act can have their marriages dissolved before the Divisional Secretary. The application for dissolution can be made only on the following grounds :

- (a) Adultery by the wife after marriage
- (b) Adultery by the husband coupled by with incest or gross cruelty
- (c) Complete and continued desertion by the wife for two years
- (d) Complete and continued desertion by the husband for two years

- (e) Inability to live happily together, of which actual separation from bed and board for a period of one year shall be the test
- (f) Mutual consent

It will be seen that a special feature in the Kandyan divorce law is the dissolution of marriage by 'Tutual consent' which is unknown to any other law. When a divorce is granted after inquiry the divorce is registered in the divorce register kept by the District Registrar (Now Divisional Secretary). The mode of rectifying errors in kandyan marriage registers is given in section 30 of the act where the Registrar General has the power to entertain and dispose of application for rectification. the powers conferred on the Registrar General may be exercised by any Divisional Secretary generally or specially authorized in that behalf by the Registrar General.

(11) Marriages (Muslim)

Parties professing the Islamic faith are subject to the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (Cap.115) in the matter of their matrimonial affairs. Registration of marriage is compulsory for muslims. As in the case of General Marriage and Kandyan Marriage Laws, notice of marriage is not necessary under the Muslim Marriage Law. The bridegroom and the Wali (guardian) of the bride have to make certain declarations before the marriage is registered. Where the 'wali' making the declaration is a person other than her father or paternal grand father, the bride have to make certain declarations before the marriage is registered. Where the 'wali' making the declaration is a person other than her father or paternal grand father, the bride also should sign the declaration made by the 'wali'. There are instances where the consent of a wali is not necessary according to the muslim law governing the sect to which the bride belongs. Registration is done by Registrar of Muslim Marriages and is always preceded by a religious ceremony known as 'Nikah' ceremony. The marriage register is signed by the following persons.

- (a) the bride groom
- (b) the 'wali'
- (c) the person who conducted the Nikah ceremony
- (d) two witnesses, being persons present at the 'Nikah' ceremony, and
- (e) the Registrar

The special feature in a Muslim Marriage is that the bride does not sign the marriage register as a contacting party.

(12) Divorces (Muslim)

Divorces of Muslims and their other matrimonial disputes are adjudicated by Muslim judges designated 'Quazis'. Divorces of Muslims are allowed by Quazis and registered by them in their Divorce Register.

(13) Registration of Marriages, births & deaths of Sri Lankans Living abroad

The Consular Functions Act. No.04 of 1981 operates in the registration of marriages, births & deaths of Sri Lankans living abroad. These events are required to be registered at the Sri Lankan Diplomatic Mission in the relevant country. Certain officers in such diplomatic missions are Ex-officio Additional District Registrars of marriages, births & deaths. The registration system is the same as operating in Sri Lanka. This system operates as a supplement to the system obtaining in a particular country under its own regulations.

5. Civil Registration Archives

(01) Preservation and Custody of Records

One of the principal functions of the Registrar General's Department is the preservation and custody of records. Every marriage, birth and death register is made in triplicate. The first copy is called the 'original' and the second copy is called the 'duplicate'. The third copy is delivered to the informant in the case of births and deaths and to the female party in the case of marriages free of charge. Every registrar shall at the end of each month send the duplicates of every registration entry made in the month to the Divisional Secretary to be transmitted to the Registrar General to be filed of record in the central record room and preserved. The register of originals which consists of 100 folios is sent when completed, to the Divisional Secretary to be filed of record in that office and for issue of certified copies. Duplicates of marriage, birth & death registers received in the central record room are bound into volumes of convenient size (about 250-300 folios) and these volumes are placed in the record presses arranged according to Administrative Districts and Divisions. Records in the central record room are mainly used for the preparation of re-copied entries to be substituted in place of the damaged original entries in the Divisional Secretaries' Offices, from which certified copies are issued to the public.

(02) Issue of Marriage, Birth & Death Certificates

When a person requires a marriage, birth or death certificate, he should first obtain an application form which can be had from any Divisional Secretary's Office or from any Registrar of marriages, births & deaths or Grama Niladhari in the island. The application form is issued free of charge. The form should then be correctly filled in and sent to the relevant Divisional Secretary's Office together with the prescribed stamps.

6. Assessment of the Civil Registration System

(01) Feasibilities for Further Improvement

Sri Lanka is one of the countries in Asia, with a high literary rate, and the majority of the population is aware of the importance of civil registration. The civil registration system in Sri Lanka has a long history behind it as mentioned in the opening paragraph of this report. The registration scheme now in operation has undergone many changes and past experience has shown that this system has stood the test of time; any further procedural changes where considered necessary will be implemented. In keeping with the government's steps have already been taken to establish 267 Divisional Secretariats and to decentralize the work hitherto handled by the centre. This decentralization of operational activities is showing salutary results.

One of the main problems facing the Department is the preservation of records. The paramount importance of the safety and preservation of records need hardly be emphasized. Most of the records in the central record room and the Divisional offices are damaged or in danger of becoming illegible due to frequent handling and various other reasons including time factor. It is, therefore, desirable that following steps be taken in order to arrest this situation.

(a) Prepare a list of all missing or damaged documents by examining the documents in serial order and substitute therefore copies obtained from the duplicate or original to which legal provision exists.

(b) In order to avoid the need to turn pages manually to trace entries, a computer data base should be evolved for speedier identification of records. A broader method of indexing can be developed in consultation with the other countries having direct interest in the civil registration system.

(c) There are millions of records stored in the central record room and the floor space is hardly sufficient to receive future records. Moreover, these records are exposed to various elements of nature such as heat and dust. It is, therefore, necessary to

explore the possibility of applying modern scientific methods of preservation of records of records such airconditioning and microfilming. The expenditure involved in such a project may be prohibitive for a developing country like Sri Lanka, but it is worthwhile examining the feasibility of such a procedure.

Steps may be taken to bring about and awareness among the public regarding the importance of civil registration. For this purpose, periodical seminars can be organized with the help of government and non-governmental organizations. At the same time special programmes should be organized at regular intervals to motivate the officers such as Registrars, Grama Niladharis, Public Health Midwives, etc., who are directly involved in the operation of the civil registration system.

(02) Uses of Registration Records

The need for registration of marriages, births & deaths is two fold, one as important as the other. In the first place a record is made of important particulars relating to the occurrence of marriages, births & deaths, three vital landmarks in a person's life. This record is primarily of interest to the individual or his kin. The state preserves this record to serve as evidence for the future, of the contract of a marriage or the occurrence of a birth or death.

It helps the individual as and when occasion arises such as school admissions, to obtain passports & identity cards to prove his parentage, race, date and place of birth, etc., and gives a certain degree of security in marriage. In the case of deaths, it provides facilities to the heirs of a deceased to secure legal rights devolving on them following the death of a near relative.

Secondly, a system of registration makes possible the compilation of vital statistics of a country. It provides the raw material from which vital statistics reports are prepared. No community expecting to develop its resources can dispense with these reports. Without them it would be difficult to assess birth or death rates, or the population growth of a country, etc. Besides, the work of the Health Department, Planning bodies and economists generally would be hampered if they did not have such reports.

It will thus be seen that the first objective is one of benefit to the individual and the second to the community at large and the nation. Registration of marriages, births & deaths thus serves both private, social and national purposes.

SECTION II - THE NATIONAL VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEM

1. Legal frame of the system

Sri Lanka has a vital registration system covering the registration of births, deaths and still births. The system operates under the ordinance to regulate the registration of births and deaths passed in 1947. The current law was passed in 1951 and came into operation in 1954. Illegitimate births are also covered by the law.

Before 1951 the Registrar General was responsible for compilation of vital statistics and it was published in his annual administration reports. But after 1951 the compilation of vital statistics was transferred from the Registrar Generals to the Department of Census and Statistics. Since then the Statistical work of the Registrar General's is supervised by the Department of Census and Statistics.

2. Administrative arrangements of the system

The recruitment of statistical staff to the RGO is also the responsibility of DCS. Therefore compilation, processing and tabulating of vital statistics is carried out by the statistical division of the RGO, headed by a Senior Statistician of DCS. The technical work of this work is supervised by the Demographic Division of the DCS. (See Fig. I)

3. Procedures of reporting and monitoring

As explained above Vital Statistics are compiled by the Statistical Staff of the Registrar General's Department. Each registrar is required to send a monthly summary statement regarding the births, deaths, still births in proclaimed areas and marriages to the District Registrar before the 10th of the following month, to be transmitted to the Statistical Unit before the 15th of the following month. This Statistical Returns are checked by the District Registrars before they are forwarded to the Statistical Unit.

Reporting System of the information on births, deaths and still births, general and Muslim marriages, statistical returns are the form of a list where one line is used to record information in respect of one event. Divorces are also received in list form. Statistical Report of Kandyan Marriages report through summary reports.

When returns are received in the Statistical Unit, a summary data on Vital Events are aggregated and the data on births, deaths, infant and maternal deaths are released in advance using these aggregates. Migration data are received from the Emigration and Immigration Department for the purpose of preparation of the Population Estimate.

All statistical returns are edited and coded manually by a team of coders under the direct supervision of the Statistician. Since there now exists a long delay in receiving returns any inconsistencies and errors detected in the entries are corrected, as far as possible, at the Statistical Unit without referring them to the respective registrars.

Items to be coded in the statistical returns in respect of birth and marriage statistics are minimal and confined only to assigned codes for the geographic area and the like. However, coding is somewhat complex in respect of the "death returns" where the coders are supposed to enter a detailed code of the ICD for each cause of death. The death return is completed by the Registrar either in Sinhala or in Tamil and the coders who have been given a training in ICD classification, assign the relevant detailed code using the English version of the coding manual. Missing values are imputed and assigned by the coders.

When editing and coding of schedules are completed, the schedules are sent to the computer division of the DCS for data entry. The data are further edited in the computer and error records are printed and sent to the statistical unit of the RGO for correction. Once the computer editing of data in respect of a whole year is completed data are tabulated.

In the case of deaths, almost all the information required for the statistical analysis, is copied to the statistical return with the exception of rank of the decease which is available in the registration schedules. Since 1977 the "death return" used to collect statistical data on deaths taking place in a registration area has been revised to include immediate cause. But in practice only a single cause is often reported. In the absence of the deceased name in the "death return" it is possible for transcribing errors to occur. For example, female deaths can be reported as male deaths or vice versa, such errors often cannot be detected at the statistical unit*.

In the statistical return used to compile statistics on still births information on data of occurrence, sex of the still born child; age of mother, nationality and pregnancy duration at the time of still birth are available.

* Gaminiratne K.H.W. (1984)

Trends in causes of death in Sri Lanka 1971 - 79 Population information Centre, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The registration forms used to record information on marriages, differ somewhat according to the type of marriage. However, basic information in respect of each party, such as, name, age, civil condition, place of residence, date of marriage is common in registration forms used in all marriage types. Rank or profession of the parties is found in the registration forms except in the Muslim marriage registration form. Information in respect of birth records, the age of mother was collected since 1952 while the collecting of birth order of the child was commenced in 1981.

Information in respect of the father such as date of birth, race and profession are available in the registration form but there is no provision to record them on the Statistical Return.

Particulars in respect of mother's occupation (if any) level of education, attendant at birth, etc. which are useful for the statistical analysis are not collected at all.

4. The Compilation and Tabulation Plan

Statistics from the vital registration have customarily been tabulated according to the month or year of registration and not according to the time of occurrence. Similarly, data by geographic areas generally represent the area of registration and not the area of occurrence.

However, certain tabulations on births, infant deaths and maternal deaths were made available by usual residence, but they were confined to the data collected from the proclaimed towns.

Tabulations of data in respect of births, deaths, still births and marriages and the level by which the tabulations are currently available are shown in Table : 2.1. Main tables on the total deaths and births are available even at a low level as registration areas within but most of the detailed cross classifications are done only at district level.

Death statistics are classified by cause according to the International Classification of Diseases inclusive of some local diseases. Tabulation of death classified by cause, sex and age is available for the country as a whole, for proclaimed towns, AGA divisions and estate sectors. The classification of causes of death used in these tables is 9th revision of the International Classification of Deceases (ICD) which came into operation at the beginning of 1979.

Births classified by usual district of residence of the mother, and deaths according to usual district of residence of the deceased are tabulated for districts.

Since 1980, the birth order of the child is also collected and tabulations are available at district level.

Only limited information is tabulated using data collected on still births.

All marriage data are tabulated according to type of marriage and details are available for administrative districts. Information on civil conditions of the parties, their literacy and ethnic group are tabulated.

5. Publication of Vital Statistics

Vital Statistics in Sri Lanka are tabulated and published annually. Up to the year 1966 all detailed vital statistics with a brief analysis of trends were included in the Annual Administration Report of the Registrar General. However, only a brief statistical report continued to be published since then. The latest report published contains vital statistics up to 1986. Mortality statistics on infant, maternal and child is available upto 1988.

Some detailed tables on vital events are shown in the vital statistics Bulletin and for certain items data are presented for administrative districts.

Tables currently published in the Bulletin of vital statistics are listed in Table : 2.2.

6. Uses of Vital Statistics

Important use of the vital statistics is to serve as a continuous source of statistics on births, deaths, feodal and infant deaths, marriage, divorces etc. in order to monitor the natural growth and changes in structure and distribution of the population.

on the other hand, the birth, total death and infant and child death records provide the basis for public health programs for post natal care of mother and child and also for programs of vaccination and immunization etc.. Because records include the cause of deaths, they will be useful for epidemiological purposes as indicators of the existence of infections diseases requiring immediate control measures, as well as for the identification of health problems.

Other important uses of vital statistics is for planning for economic and social development. By giving the two components of natural growth of the population, births and deaths determine the population growth of the national level, district level and ethnic level. This will be useful to estimate the population size and also the population projections. Based on these estimate school

enrollment, child hearing women, elderly population, productive age population can be estimated and it will provide a useful basis for social and economic development planning and policies.

Statistics on causes of death have been particularly useful in identifying the diseases, and formality public health programmes the characteristics of persons dying from these diseases are particularly useful in planning, conducting and evaluating these prevention programmes. In Sri Lanka, Maternal and child health responsibility is coming under the Health Ministry and they use mostly the mortality rate and the causes of death information for monitoring and evaluating their programmes. On the basis of all vital statistics Policy planners, demographers, administrators, managers and also researchers evaluate their existing programmes and initiate new development plans.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although the country is having a well organised system for the registration and compilation of vital statistics, still there are certain drawbacks within it. These are explained below under three main categories namely (1) administrative (2) technical and (3) public.

(1) Administrative : One of the problems is the delay in getting the records from the field in time. This is partly due to lack of staff at the collecting centres. Further, the local registrars also not government staff receiving a monthly pay, and they engage in other activities. Therefore, their interest may not mainly concentrate on this work specially sending the statistical records. In addition to that they are not known about the importance of reporting the information. Another problem connected to this is the loss and delay in the post. Since they are being sent mostly by ordinary post from district offices which are the collecting centres to statistical branch at head office of the Registrar General's Department.

With the increase in population the number of events being registered has risen but the staff and the facilities were not increased to meet the demand.

Further, the data processing and printing is being done at a separate place. Thus, the statistical branch has no prompt control over the work including data entry and tabulation. Besides since it is a separate agency, priority is not given to the work. The staff has no knowledge about the work they do. These could hamper the quality as well as timeliness of work involved.

Increasing the number of staff, training of the registrars would help to overcome this situation sending of records can be done by Registrar Post which could be a safe way of sending documents. Besides if the processing of data and Printing of Reports could be done independently it could help much more to complete this work timely and with more quality as well.

(2) Technical : The registrar are not trained with regard to filling of statistical records and the use of them. The other staff mainly the coders are also lacking the necessary training.

Besides certain information which are useful for compiling of vital statistics are not in the registration form. Thus these information are missed because the registrars forget to get the information from this informant and record in the statistical record.

Due to lack of data processing facilities at this Statistical Branch the basic but urgent information are tabulated manually and released. This also delays releasing of the most needed information.

These problems could be overcome by providing the Statistical Branch with computers and also by giving the staff involved the necessary training.

(3) Public : The public may not understand completely the importance of the registration of events other than getting certificates for their personal life. Thus a campaign to make the public knowledgeable about the important use of these information collecting would help improving the coverage of registration and these by vital statistics.

With a view to overcome some of the above mentioned problem a project is being implemented to strengthen the Statistical Branch at the Registrar Generals Department under this project data processing will be handled by the Statistical Branch and the staff involved in the work including the local registrars would get the necessary training.

Future Plans

DCS feels that there should be regular surveys to evaluate the vital statistics and therefore, plan to do population survey on the basis of complete enumeration.

Table : 2.1

**TABULATION IN RESPECT OF LIVE BIRTHS, DEATHS AND
MARRIAGES SHOWING THE GEOGRAPHIC AREAS FOR WHICH
THEY ARE AVAILABLE**

	Whole Country	Dis- trict	Sector	AGA Div.	Proc. Towns	Est. Towns	Reg. Div.
LIVE BIRTH							
Birth	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Birth by sex	x					x	
Birth by age of mother	x	x					x
Birth by month x sex x Race	x						
Birth by sex x race	x	x					
Birth by age of mother x race	x						
Birth by month of occurrence x sex	x						
Birth by usual res	x			x	x	x	
Birth by usual res. x age of mother	x	x				x	
Birth by age of mother x sex x legitimacy	x						
Birth by sex x legitimacy x hos- -pital births	x	x					
Birth by birth order x sex	x	x					
Plural births by sex	x	x					
STILL BIRTH							
Still birth x Sex	x					x	

Table : 2.1 (Contd.)

**TABULATION IN RESPECT OF LIVE BIRTHS, DEATHS AND
MARRIAGES SHOWING THE GEOGRAPHIC AREAS FOR WHICH
THEY ARE AVAILABLE**

	Whole Country	Dis- trict	Sector Div.	AGA Towns	Proc. Est.	Reg. Div
MARRIAGES						
Marriages regd. type	x	x				
Marriage regd. type x Civil con- -dition of parties	x	x				
Marriage regd. type x ethnic group of parties*	x	x				
Marriage regd. type x whether aged <21 or over	x	x				
Marriage regd. type x prop.of illiterate partie	x	x				
Lowest age at marriage x sex x type of marriage	x	x				
Highest age at marriage x sex x type of marriage	x	x				

* Where parties to marriage belong to different races, half the number of marriages is credited to one ethnic group and half to the other ethnic group. The term race is used in the Registrar General's report on vital statistics instead of ethnic group.

Table : 2.1 (Contd.)

**TABULATION IN RESPECT OF LIVE BIRTHS, DEATHS AND
MARRIAGES SHOWING THE GEOGRAPHIC AREAS FOR WHICH
THEY ARE AVAILABLE**

	Whole Country	Dis- trict	Sector	AGA Div.	Proc. Towns	Est. Towns	Reg. Div
DEATHS							
Deaths	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Deaths by sex	x	x		x	x	x	
Deaths by age	x	x		x	x	x	
Deaths by age x sex	x	x		x	x	x	
Deaths by race	x	x				x	
Deaths by age x sex x race	x	x				x	
Death by sex x race	x	x				x	
Death by usual residence	x	x		x	x		
Deaths by sex x usual residence	x	x		x	x		
Deaths by age x sex x cause(A List)	x	x					
Deaths by age x sex x cause(B List)	x	x	x				
Deaths by age x sex x cause(Detail List)	x		x				
Deaths by age x sex x race x cause	x						
Death by month x x race x sex	x						
Deaths by sex x cause(A List)	x	x					x
Deaths by sex x cause(B List)	x				x		
Death by month of occurance x sex	x	x					
Death by month of occurrence x sex x cause(A List)	x						
Deaths by sex x cause x usual residence(B List)	x				x		

Table : 2.1 (Contd.)

**TABULATION IN RESPECT OF LIVE BIRTHS, DEATHS AND
MARRIAGES SHOWING THE GEOGRAPHIC AREAS FOR WHICH
THEY ARE AVAILABLE**

	Whole Country	Dis- trict	Sector Div.	AGA Towns	Proc.Est. Div	Reg. Div
INFANT DEATHS						
Infant Deaths	x	x			x	x
Infant Deaths by sex x age x month	x	x				
Infant Deaths by race x sex	x	x				
Infant Deaths by age x sex	x	x				
Infant Deaths by sex	x	x				
MATERNAL DEATHS						
Maternal Deaths	x	x			x	x
Maternal Deaths by usual residence	x	x			x	
Maternal Deaths by cause	x	x			x	
Maternal Deaths by age	x	x			x	

Table : 2.2

INFORMATION CURRENTLY RECORDED IN RESPECT OF VITAL EVENTS

Topic	Registrar of Birth	Statistical Returns
BIRTHS		
Date and place of birth	X	X
Name	X	-
Sex	X	X
Father's Name	X	X
Date and place of birth	X	-
Race	X	-
Rank or Profession	X	-
Mother's Name	X	X
Date and place of birth	X	-
Race	X	-
Age	X	X
Usual Residence	X	X
Legitimacy status	X	X
If Grand Father Born in Sri Lanka	X	X
His name	X	-
Year and place of birth	X	-
If either not born in Sri Lanka and if Great Grand Father born in Sri Lanka		
His name	X	-
Year and place of birth	X	-
Informant's Full Name, His/Her Signature	X	-
Date of registration	X	X*
Whether hospitalized	-	X
Registrar's Signature	X	-
Registration Number	X	X
Live birth order	-	X**
Registration Division	X	X
Whether birth occurred outside registration division	-	X
Type of birth (twin/triplets etc.)	-	X
	X	X

* Month and Year of registration

** Not legally effected

Table : 2.2 (Contd.)

INFORMATION CURRENTLY RECORDED IN RESPECT OF VITAL EVENTS

Topic	Marriage Type			Statistical Returns
	General	Muslim	Kandyan	
MARRIAGE				
For both parties				
Name	X	X	X	-
Age	X	X	X	X
Civil Condition	X	X	X	X
Rank/Profession	X	-	X	-
Race	X	*	*	X
Residence	X	X	X	X
Father's Name/Grand				
Father's Name	X	X	X	-
Rank/Profession	X	-	X	-
Name of division of Registration who issued	-	-	-	X
Certificates	X	-	X	-
Place of Sole	X	X	X	X
If divorced evidence of				
divorce	-	X	-	X
Date and hour of marriage	-	X	X	X
Date of registration	-	X	-	X
Nature of marriage	-	-	X	-
Registration No.	X	X	X	X

* Race is not recorded but Kandyan are Sinhalese and Muslims are Moors/Malays.