

**United Nations Workshop on the Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System,
Revision 3, for English-speaking African countries**

Addis Ababa, 2-5 December 2014

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The workshop was attended by civil registrars and official statisticians from seventeen English speaking countries, as follows: Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
2. The participants expressed their appreciation to both the United Nations Statistics Division and the African Centre for Statistics of ECA for a timely organization of this workshop as the latest revision of principles and recommendations for a vital statistics system was just issued by the United Nations Statistics Division and the proximity of the next African Ministerial Conference on civil registration and vital statistics, scheduled for February next year.
3. As comprehensive as they are, the workshop noted that peculiar circumstances in Africa might necessitate an addendum to the global principles and recommendations in order to reflect those realities. It was therefore concluded that the initiative to develop such an addendum within the overall frame and principles of the global recommendations need to be considered by the ECA, focusing on procedures for registering orphan hood, legal guardianship, storing and retrieval of registration records and ensuring confidentiality of individual information in African circumstances.
4. The workshop noted the list of recommended core topics for vital events that need to be collected in civil registration and processed in vital statistics. It concluded that each African country should make all the efforts to comply with the international standards as presented in the principles and recommendations and to implement them to the fullest extent possible.
5. Turning the attention to civil registration as elaborated in the principles and recommendations and the recent developments in Africa, the workshop noted with satisfaction that, since the inception of the African Ministerial Conferences in 2010 a visible progress has been achieved at both national and regional level and that the momentum generated then is going strong. Yet, as evidenced by the national presentations, the state of the art of civil registration and vital statistics is far from homogenous across the region – while in a number of countries the civil registration shows significant improvement, in certain countries it is still on unstable foundations. Consequently, efforts need to be intensified at all different technical and operational planes, primarily through political settings at the highest possible level.
6. The workshop discussed at length the role of civil registration in the process of certification of the causes of death. It noted the international recommendation that this role consists of ensuring that the certification of the cause of death by a trained medical practitioner is part of the death registration record and as such is transmitted to the statistical office for further processing. Acknowledging that national practices in Africa somewhat differ, the workshop concluded that these practices need to be re-visited and possibly adjusted to comply with the international standards.
7. Similarly, the workshop also noted international recommendations as well as resolution of the First African Ministerial Conference on CRVS regarding the cost of registration – registration should always be free of charge and issuance of the first certificate as well. Acknowledging that national practices vary quite significantly, the workshop concluded that this issue needs to be presented to the national stakeholders and all efforts should be made to comply with international recommendations and African Ministerial Conference resolutions.

8. The participants emphasized the importance of complying with international recommendations in terms of the government obligation to finance civil registration while noting at the same time that this is not the case by far. They concluded that this issue regarding the commitment of the African governments to provide regular, continuous and sufficient financing for civil registration needs to be submitted to the Third Ministerial Conference through appropriate mechanisms.
9. Coordination between institutions responsible for civil registration, vital statistics, public health institutions, home affairs, social services, development partners and a host of other stakeholders remains a contentious issue in a number of African countries. This coordination requires considerable investments in terms of time and all other resources and is thus necessary to bring this issue to the Ministerial Conference through proper channels. This is particularly necessary in terms of synchronizing relevant legislation frameworks – civil registration and official statistics.
10. The workshop concluded that the technical cooperation between countries in the region significantly increased. It also concluded that in order to avoiding pitfalls previously experienced by other countries, this practice should be strengthened and expanded. At the same time, and especially from the point of view of implementing the revised international principles and recommendations, regional institutions, such as ECA, need to consider establishing a pool of experts on different themes that can assist countries.
11. Participants discussed at length the implementation of CRVS assessment tool developed by ECA and implemented in a number of countries participating at this workshop. The tool has been recognized as appropriate and timely, albeit complicated and sometimes repetitive. The workshop concluded that the tool represents a step in the right direction; that it might be improved along the lines of the discussion; and that it needs to be customized for national purposes as “one size does not fill all”.
12. Following the presentation outlining considerable gaps in the availability of even the basic demographic statistics for international purposes, the workshop concluded that there needs to be a thorough review of circumstances that result in statistics submitted to the United Nations being limited to the point of non-existing – whether this is due to the lack of national capacity to produce requested statistics or the lack of capacity to report it to the United Nations.
13. Recognizing the critical impact the use of contemporary information and communication technology has in the functioning of civil registration and producing vital statistics, the workshop noted with satisfaction the efforts of ECA and UNSD in the development of the updated guidelines and handbook for the use of ICT in CRVS and encouraged their release as early as possible. Simultaneously, the workshop noted with concern that across the continent a number of projects are underway in the use of mobile devices for civil registration that might not necessarily follow the international recommendations in terms of registration procedures and collection of topics. In that context, the workshop expressed its expectation that these issues are raised through appropriate channels at the next ministerial conference.
14. The workshop debated, time and again, the issue of accessibility of civil registration offices and functions in Africa, emphasizing it as a crucial and most critical impediment to the improvement of coverage and effectiveness of civil registration and, consequently, quality and coverage of vital statistics. Acknowledging that accessibility is not an isolated issue, but rather a function of many of the dimensions of civil registration, such as the number and location of local registrars, costs of registration and travel, awareness of the need to register and so forth, the workshop nevertheless pointed to accessibility as one of the major topics for the forthcoming ministerial conference.