Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is among the countries that have not installed national as well as regional civil registration and vital statistics systems. One of the prior requirements for the establishment of civil registration system in any country is the installation of compulsory civil registration law. Alongside the law it is necessary to setup the civil registration and vital statistics administration or organization. With respect to the registration law, even though the country has not made adequate attempts to devise an independent civil registration law in the past, however in the 1960 Ethiopian Civil Code, several articles on the procedures for reporting of the occurrence of vital events, organizational structure, storage, and similar other components of the registration activity were incorporated.

The vital events that were referred in the Civil Code were birth, death and marriage. Although, the Civil Code has incorporated articles on the registration of vital events, however, the articles that refer to the registration were stated to remain inapplicable [refer Article no. 3361(1) of the law], until such time that it is proclaimed in the Negarit Gazetta. Since then, the Ethiopian Civil Code was left dormant and idle with respect to its section on civil registration.

Nevertheless, there were uncoordinated and unorganized administrative attempts even before the 1960 civil code that were targeted on the issuance of marriage, birth and death certificates by municipalities. Accordingly, the issuance of marriage certificates by the Addis Ababa municipality dated back to 1942, and the issuance of birth certificates dated back to 1953. On similar basis issuance of death certificates was started in 1970. However, all these attempts do not follow the conventional procedures of civil registration. The registration and certificate issuing that are currently being exercised in major cities and regional capitals are a continuation of this administrative exercise. They are administrative services primarily driven by the interest or request of individuals for purposes of administrative and legal support documents.

Following the past trend, a proclamation that necessities the Provisional Military Government of Ethiopia in 1976 proclaimed the record keeping of birth, death and marriage events by the smallest administrative unit. In the "Urban Dwellers' Associations (UDAs) Consolidation and Municipalities Proclamation No. 104" of 1976, the office of the Association, among other

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1 The Central Statistical Authority of Ethiopia has reviewed the report with the above title prepared by Violeta Gonzales Diaz, United Nations Statistics Division UNSD) with information of various sources (see file: EthiopiacRVS2001R2.doc, which is now superseded). CSA was grateful for UNSD having such understanding. Based on the request of Violeta Gonzales, CSA has updated the information on the current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Ethiopia. Moreover, as it is mentioned in the report (Gonzales Diaz), CSA is aware that there are records of baptisms among Christians, while there is no information on how births are recorded among the Muslim population.

In this updated document, CSA has added some additional information on the activities of CSA and some elaboration in relation to the current efforts in the establishment of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Ethiopia.
things, have been designated to keep proper register of the number of residents, births, deaths
and marriages occurring in the households under their responsibilities. The then Ministry of
Urban Development and Housing was expected to coordinate the registration activities (Report
on Experimental Sample Vital Registration System in Rural Ethiopia - 1986/87,
CSA, 1995: 3).

Besides, the attempts by the various government administrative bodies, hospitals and
health centers were issuing birth and death certificates. Similarly religious institutions are also
providing certificates of birth and marriage that serve as support document for various
administrative and legal purposes. However, none of the above registration and certificate
issuing administrative exercises has resulted in providing vital statistics data alongside the
registration activities.

In accordance to the powers and responsibilities stated in the establishment of the Central
Statistical Office (Order and Proclamation No. 79 and 303 "of 1972), the registration of births,
deaths, marriages and divorces in a population and the collection of the basic sources of
information on its dynamics was designated to the Office. Referring to duties stated in the
proclamation, the Office has been consistently attempting to draw the attention of high-level
government officials to provide adequate support for the establishment of civil registration
system and the production of vital statistics in the country.

The proclamation clearly designated the Authority for the collection of vital statistics data
through registration and enumeration of statistical data. Along this line, the CSA initiated an
Experimental Sample Vital Statistics Registration in some selected Urban Dwellers' Associations
(UDAs) and Farmers' Association Areas (FAAs), in 1977. The objective of this initiative was to
test whether it would be feasible to carry out civil/vital registration by providing technical and
material assistance to the associations. Furthermore, it was designed to learn about some
expected fundamental problems that would be involved in the methodological, administrative,
legal and financial aspects of the registration activities. However, comparison of the results of
the registration (that was done by the permanent clerical staff of the Kebeles) and the survey
(that was done by the CSA) indicated a gross under registration of the events due to
various factors.

In recognition of the importance of continuous studies or research on the establishment of vital
statistics registration, the CSA decided to conduct Experimental Sample Vital Event Registration
as part of its ongoing statistical program. Accordingly, an Experimental Sample Vital Event
Registration was initiated in rural Ethiopia in September 1982, in the 500 selected sample
Farmers' Associations that were selected for the Rural Integrated Household Survey Programme
(RIHSP). The survey was designed to generate data on birth, death, marriage and divorce events
through continuous registration and also data on internal migration and the age and sex
composition of the population through baseline and follow-up household surveys. The CSA field
staff carried out both the registration and the household surveys.

The registration and household survey exercise was carried out for only one year from
September 1982 to September 1983 and was disrupted due to shortages of finance, registration
personnel and other related problems. On the basis of the experience gained from the 1982/83
Experimental Sample Vital Registration System (ESRVS), a new scheme of ESRVS was launched in rural Ethiopia from September 1986 to September 1987. This exercise was again disrupted for about 10 years for various reasons and again initiated in 1998, in a way that it would cover the urban and rural areas using the dual methods of data collection, that is, the registration and the household surveys.

From the above description of major efforts made by various organs using varied approaches, one would observe the lack of coordination and integration of activities among the institutions involved in civil registration and statistics data collection exercises. One of the major reasons for such uncoordinated effort is the lack of adequate human and financial resources that hinder to do a coordinated and sustainable pilot studies that would enable to create national and regional permanent experimental areas of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

However, in the past few years' major diversion in the thinking and practice of civil registration and statistics systems was observed among the judicial bodies as well as policy makers and planners. Concerning the lawmakers it was reflected during the drafting of the family law that was abstracted from the Civil Code of the country. In the various forums organized to discuss on the draft family law, where technical and administrative study papers were presented, the CSA has made a contribution by presenting a technical paper on the status and importance of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Ethiopia. In this paper the historical evolution and conventional practices of civil registration in relation to the situation in Ethiopia were presented.

Along this line, major achievements in terms of awareness and redirection of current and future registration and vital statistics activities of concerned agencies were made. Accordingly, in the revised family law [Proclamation No. 213/2000] an article (Article 321(1)] in relation to the implementation strategy of the law was stated that required the immediate release of registration law. These measures are indicators of the degree of awareness on the part of the Executive Body of the Federal Government that encourages all those agencies that have interest in the establishment of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Ethiopia.

Likewise, in the area of vital statistics the government's attention and effort was not limited to vital statistics, but it encompasses the improvement of the availability and quality of population and social statistics at macro and micro levels. Along this line the government has issued a proclamation to establish "Census Commission" that is, accountable to the highest level of government administration, that is, the House of Peoples' Representatives. In the proclamation the objectives of the commission were stated under two major activities. The first objective is related to the census activity while the second to registration where it is stated as "to undertake basic studies aimed at developing ways and means for the organization and realization of records of population and housing registration". The personnel and structural foundation for the creation of the Commission is believed to be the Population Analysis and Studies Centre of the CSA.

Besides, during the restructuring of CSA in 1998, the vital statistics unit was upgraded to a department level where two units were created that enabled the expansion of its technical staff. Currently, with a new initiative the Authority is working on the preparatory activities to conduct
the first phase pilot study on civil registration and vital statistics on a limited number of urban and rural *kebeles*. In the first phase pilot study it is planned to test the different registration instruments, that is, vital event registration and statistics instruction manuals, registration book, vital statistics forms, structural organization of the registration and statistics systems, and education and enlightenment manual, … etc.

(SOURCE: Dr. Abdulahi Hassen, General Manager, Central Statistics Authority, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as of 26/07/2001. The report is available on request at the United Nations Statistics Division files on civil registration and vital statistics systems)

**File:** ethiopiaCRVS2001R3.doc