

Improving National Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa

Volume 1

Guidelines for Conducting Comprehensive Assessments of National Systems

Note:

These Guidelines have been prepared to assist countries in undertaking a comprehensive assessment of their Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems and in the development of a national CRVS strategic plan. The guidelines are organized into two volumes: The first volume (presented on this document) provides specific steps for assessing a national CRVS system, sets out the range of options for organizing the exercise, as well as specific issues for investigation. The second volume, (presented in a separate document) is designed to provide stepwise guidance on the development of a CRVS strategic plan and work programme, drawing from the results of the comprehensive assessment process.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------------|--|
| ACME | Automated Classification of Medical Entities |
| AfDB | African Development Bank |
| AIDS | Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome |
| APAI- CRVS | Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics |
| ASSD | African Symposium on Statistical Development |
| AUC | Africa Union Commission |
| CR | Civil Registration |
| CRVS | Civil Registration and Vital Statistics |
| DHS | Demographic and Health Survey |
| DOA | Dead on arrival |
| ECA | Economic Commission for Africa |
| FBO | Faith-Based Organization |
| HMN | Health Metrics Network |
| HR | Human Resources |
| ICD | International Classification of Diseases |
| ICD-10 | International statistical classification of diseases and related health problems, |
| INDEPTH | The International Network for the Demographic Evaluation of Population and Their Health in Developing Countries |
| IT | Information Technology |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| MICS | Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey |
| MoVE-IT | Monitoring of Vital Events Information Technology |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organisation |
| NSO | National Statistics Office |
| SWOT | Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats |
| TST | Technical Support Team |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNSD | United Nations Statistics Division |
| UQ | University of Queensland |
| VS | Vital Statistics |
| WHO | World Health Organization |
| WHOFIC | World Health Organization network of collaborating centres for the Family of International Classification |

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Live Birth- the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of conception, irrespective of the duration of pregnancy, which after such separation, breathes or shows any other evidence of life, such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord or definite movement of voluntary muscles, whether or not the umbilical cord has been cut or the placenta is attached; each product of such a birth is considered live born (all live-born infants should be registered and counted as such, irrespective of gestational age or whether alive or dead at the time of registration, and if they die at any time following birth they should also be registered and counted as deaths) (United Nations 2013, para 2).

Death-the permanent disappearance of all evidence of life at any time after live birth has taken place (postnatal cessation of vital functions without capability of resuscitation). This definition excludes foetal deaths, which are defined separately below (United Nations 2013, para 2).

Foetal Death- death prior to the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of conception, irrespective of the duration of pregnancy; the death is indicated by the fact that after such separation the foetus does not breathe or show any other evidence of life, such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord or definite movement of voluntary muscles (note that this definition broadly includes all terminations of pregnancy other than live births, as defined above).(United Nations 2013, para 2).

Cause of Death- all those diseases, morbid conditions or injuries which either resulted in or contributed to death and the circumstance of the accident or violence, which produced such injuries (WHO, 2011, p31).

Marriage– the act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of husband and wife is constituted.¹ The legality of the union may be established by civil, religious or other means as recognized by the laws of each country (United Nations 2001, para. 57).

¹ The reference document is currently under review, and in light with changes in what national governments and international systems consider as marriage, the definition may be adjusted to take account of the national specificities.

Divorce – a final legal dissolution of a marriage, that is separation of a husband and wife which confers on the parties the right to remarriage under civil, religious and/or other provisions according to the laws of each country (United Nations 2001, para. 57).

Civil registration–the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population as provided through decree or regulation in accordance with the legal requirements in each country. Civil registration is carried out primarily for the purpose of establishing the legal documents provided for by law. The usefulness of these records as the best source of vital statistics has been established (United Nations 2001, para. 14).

Vital statistics system– the total process of (a) collecting information by civil registration or enumeration on the frequency of occurrence of specified and defined vital events, as well as relevant characteristics of the events themselves and of the person or persons concerned, and (b) compiling, processing, analyzing, evaluating, presenting and disseminating these data in statistical form (United Nations 2001, para. 13).

Metadata (dictionary) – metadata is “data about data”. To relate data from multiple sources, it is essential to develop common definitions and understand the characteristics of each data element. The tool for achieving this is the metadata dictionary. It covers definitions of data elements/variables, their use in indicators, data-collection method, time period of data-collection, analysis techniques used, estimation methods and possible data biases.

Microdata – non-aggregated data about the units sampled. In the case of population and household censuses and surveys, microdata consists of records of the individuals and households interviewed.

Verbal autopsy – a structured interview with caregivers or family members of households after a death occurs; used to determine probable cause(s) of death where most deaths occur outside of health facilities, and where direct medical certification is rare.

Vital event – defined by the United Nations as: “the occurrence of a live birth, death, foetal death, marriage, divorce, adoption, legitimation, recognition of parenthood, annulment of marriage, or legal separation.”

PREFACE

The civil registration system in most countries in Africa falls short of the minimum standard set by the United Nations for the system to be considered reasonably complete. The weak system is a result of a combination of challenges on both the supply side— availability, accessibility and delivery of services—and the demand side—circumstances under which evidence of registration is required. Despite many intermittent attempts by a number of countries to increase the completeness of registration systems, these bottlenecks have persisted over several decades and impeded the success of programme interventions. Data gathering procedures, such as “population censuses”, “household sample surveys”, and “health and demographic surveillance” in sentinel sites have otherwise become the main sources for demographic and health indicators critically needed for planning and programming in key sectors.

Yet only vital statistics derived from civil registration records can meet some of the specific data requirements for population and social development planning, i.e., with respect to periodicity, consistency of estimates over time and across areas, coverage of the population, and the level of disaggregation. Non-statistical purposes served by a well-functioning civil registration system (evidentiary documents for various legal and administrative purposes), there are no acceptable substitutes or suitable proxy. The issues for which Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems are required in the context of the African integration agenda thus call for specific actions to improve all systems across Africa. To this end, improvement of CRVS is a major thrust in the programmes that the three Pan African institutions i.e. the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), and partner agencies constituting the Core Group² are implementing. The latter have, developed a continental programme (The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS)) that seeks to facilitate the adoption of country-initiated strategies and programmes for improving national CRVS systems.

The continental programme, which was endorsed by the second Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration³, will amongst other considerations, provide

² The members of the core group comprise the ECA, AUC, AfDB, HMN, UNHCR, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, and the ASSD Secretariat representing Africa member states

³ Held 3-7 September 2013 in Durban, South Africa. The first conference was held 10-14 August 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

technical support to countries by making available methodological materials and guidelines for improvement of the systems. Commitment to building efficient and reliable CRVS systems in Africa has also been expressed at the highest political level, by African Heads of States during their Summit held in Addis Ababa in February 2013. Preceding this high-level resolution, African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development had endorsed the institutionalization of the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration as a mechanism for monitoring progress on accelerating improvements in national CRVS systems. Further impetus to this programme is drawn from the decision of the second Conference of the Ministers, calling on all countries to conduct a comprehensive assessment of their national CRVS system, and adopt an action plan to revamp the system.

In advancing the realisation of this ministerial declaration, the 8th African Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD) convened in Cote d'Ivoire in November 2012 discussed on the modalities for conducting national CRVS assessments and planning. The meeting agreed on a common strategy, which included the development of a set of resource materials that would guide countries in conducting the assessments. Among the core resources identified for this purpose were experts for the region that would provide technical support to countries in undertaking the assessment and planning processes.

In accordance with the resolutions of the continental meetings, a regional pool of CRVS experts was developed through a thorough training programme held from 20th to 31st of May 2013 in Gaborone, Botswana. The training provided the experts with a rounded understanding of the CRVS systems and equipped them with the necessary tools and methodologies required to support countries to undertake such assessments and develop national CRVS Strategic plans. The experts were identified through a process of consultation with African countries and partners. The pool is composed of Senior Advisors and Advisors who are currently working or have formerly worked in senior positions in the field of civil registration and/or vital statistics, public administration or other related fields. A group of Young African professionals of the ISibalo capacity building programme were also trained.

The assessment aims at identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the current systems, drawing lessons from what has worked overtime, and in some areas discerning how improvements have been made and sustained. The logical outcome of the assessment would be to provide the necessary information that feeds into the next stage of the programme –

which is the development of an action plan for the revamping of the CRVS systems in the country.

These Guidelines are among the resource materials that have been prepared to assist countries in undertaking a comprehensive assessment of their systems. The guidelines are organized into two volumes: The first volume provides specific steps for assessing national CRVS systems, sets out the range of options for organizing this exercise, and outlines issues for investigation. It draws heavily from the regional assessment tools developed by UNECA, and the rapid and comprehensive assessment tools developed by the WHO/Health Metrics Network⁴

The second Volume is a guide to developing a national strategic plan for improvements of the systems, based on the results of the comprehensive assessment. The volume benefits substantially from the methodological framework propounded by Statistics South Africa and the University of Queensland publication on *Strategic planning*⁵

A preliminary draft of the Guidelines was used as a basis for orientation of the regional pool of experts at the regional CRVS training workshop held in Gaborone, Botswana. The Guidelines were revised based on the experiences and lessons from the training and finally published for use by countries in the conduct of the national comprehensive assessments, and in the formulation and costing of a strategic plan. Users are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience with the Guidelines, including suggestions for revisions and examples for case studies on various aspects.

⁴Users of these guidelines may consider making reference to the following documents developed by WHO/HMN and UQ.

- a) Rapid Assessment of National Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems
- b) Improving the Quality and Use of Birth, Death and Cause-of-death information: Guidance for a standard-based review of country practices.

The documents may serve to clarify issues on approaches, conceptual definitions, and additional questions on the births, deaths, marriage and divorce, and cause-of-death that can be used in the assessments

⁵ The document makes reference to the University of Queensland publication titled “*Strategic planning to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems: Guidance for using findings from a comprehensive assessment*”.⁵

CHAPTER ONE

PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE GUIDELINES

This volume deals with the guidelines for conducting national assessments of CRVS systems. The guidelines on strategic planning are presented in a separate document, as Volume II.

This chapter sets the context for the package of materials by describing what “civil registration and vital statistics” systems are and why they are needed. It also outlines the purpose, scope and audience for the materials. Finally, the chapter summarizes the benefits to be gained from effective CRVS systems. Users of these guidelines are advised to refer to various CRVS reference materials, including the United Nations handbooks and the different policy and operational materials developed in the past years as part of the African CRVS improvement initiative.

1.1 Background

While almost all African countries have had some system of registering its vital events, few meet the United Nations standard of “*the continuous, permanent, compulsory, and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events (live births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, and divorces*”⁶). In many African countries, civil registration is still incomplete, despite decades of being in existence, and is therefore not being used as the major source of legal identity records and documents as well as for compiling vital statistics.⁷ The gap created by the lack of proper functioning CRVS systems in Africa cannot be overstated. For instance, without reliable vital statistics derived from civil registration, it is difficult to prepare current and continuous population estimates and projections and also to objectively assess progress towards the fundamental goal of any health system, which is to keep people alive and healthy longer. Similarly, communities, governments and donors cannot effectively plan interventions, monitor and evaluate the impact of a whole range of

⁶Principles and recommendations for a vital statistics system, Series M, No. 19/Rev. 2. New York, United Nations Statistics Division, 2001. Sales No. 01.XVI.10. Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_19rev2E.pdf

⁷United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division. 2001. *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System (Revision 2)*. New York, United Nations. Retrieved 22 August 2012 from: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_19rev2E.pdf

social protection programmes, including grants, inheritance, child custody, various health services and education.

With many governments investing heavily in national identification, national security and other systems several attempts have been made to revitalize national CRVS systems. These interventions have not been based on a methodical assessment of the existing operations. Many have adopted the project approach, dealing with areas or operational elements for which there is funding. They are of well-defined duration, without regard for the outcomes. The proposed approach adopted by the African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, is to first conduct a comprehensive assessment that would lead into a plan of priority actions to be undertaken. The purpose of reviewing existing systems is to provide evidence that countries can use to guide the development of improvement plans. Such evidence can serve, for example, in discussions with donors, governments and development partners, when seeking funding for the strengthening of the national CRVS systems.

In order to devise a strategy that effectively revamps the system with all its components, the national assessment should take a completely fresh look at the system in place, its workings, and challenges. Such an assessment is necessary irrespective of the state of development of the national CRVS systems. Where coverage is not the biggest concern, efficiency may be an issue, as could also be the utilization of the information. For these countries, it is important to determine what the institutional arrangements are and whether greater efficiencies can be gained from leveraging stakeholder cooperation and advancement in technology.

1.2 The Benefits of Improved National Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems

CRVS systems that are of high quality, continuous and well maintained provide many benefits to individuals and their communities. For the individual, civil registration is the main avenue to securing the right to a legal identity, and the official documentation of important life events. The permanent records of each event derived from these civil registration systems provide for: legal documents required as proof of age; establishment of rights based on age (e.g. identity, school entry, driving privileges, the right to marry); proof of marriage, divorce; establishment of family relationships; evidence of death and inheritance rights, and also making it possible to enforce laws to address issues related to illegal practices such as recruitment of child soldiers, child labour, child trafficking, or a child being tried as an

adult.⁸ A birth certificate provides evidence of compliance with a person's human and civil rights in society, as prescribed in Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that: "the child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents".⁹

According to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (i) every child shall have the right from his/her birth to a name, (ii) Every child shall be registered immediately after birth (iii) Every child has the right to acquire a nationality (iv) State Parties to the present Charter shall undertake to ensure that their constitutional legislations recognize the principles according to which a child shall acquire the nationality of the State in the territory of which he/she has been born if, at the time of the child's birth, he/she is not granted nationality by any other State in accordance with its laws.¹⁰

For countries, the major benefit of effective CRVS systems is the role they play in supporting and informing effective planning for social and economic development. They are critical for a wide range of government operations, e.g. population register, national identification system, and other administrative registers, and for commercial enterprises (e.g. life insurance and marketing of products). At the subnational level, accurate population data are essential for planning the needs of the community, and for addressing and monitoring regional inequalities. If vital statistics are collected from a civil registration system that covers all events (for the whole country and not just a sample), they can provide a reliable basis for small-area information needed to design and implement policies on public health, maternal and child care, family planning, social security, education, housing and economic development.

Another advantage of effective CRVS systems for the countries is that the success of developmental efforts to control specific diseases is often measured in terms of the reduction in deaths that are due to programme interventions. For example, at least six of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) rely on accurate data on mortality and causes of

⁸Principles and recommendations for a vital statistics system, Series M, No. 19/Rev. 2. New York, United Nations Statistics Division, 2001. Sales No. 01.XVI.10. Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_19rev2E.pdf

⁹http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf Accessed 8 April 2013.

¹⁰African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

death in monitoring progress¹¹. A report from the World Bank suggests that a major stumbling block to determining the achievement of MDG health goals in the majority of the developing world is that infant and maternal mortality data are incomplete¹².

The careful monitoring of vital statistics estimates can identify populations with excessive mortality rates, or those that urgently require specific programmes for disease control or health promotion. Vital statistics are the *only* empirical basis upon which annual progress can be monitored in a variety of public health programmes at subnational, national and global levels. In countries with well-developed systems, vital statistics have guided policy and intervention programmes, and have been used to support critical epidemiological research.

1.3 Rationale for the Guidelines

The main objective of the guidelines is to provide guidance for a standards-based review of country practices in civil registration and vital statistics. The assessment helps countries to evaluate the state of CRVS systems, and point to possible directions for improvement.

- These guidelines will help countries to obtain a good understanding of current approaches and practices to provide evidence for corrective action. These guidelines are based on guidance drawn from best practices around the world, from the extensive experience of continental and international agencies in helping countries to develop health and statistical systems;

The principal objectives of using the guidelines include:

- Systematically reviewing the methods, processes and infrastructure of registration of vital events at all levels of administration and operation and provide evidence on challenges of supply and demand under different circumstances;
- Increased insights into the quality of data collected routinely on births, deaths, cause-of death, marriages and divorces;

¹¹Setel PW, Macfarlane SB, Szreter S et al. A scandal of invisibility: making everyone count by counting everyone. *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9598):1569–1577. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query>.

¹²Danel I, Bortman M. *An assessment of LAC's vital statistics system: the foundation of infant and maternal mortality*. World Bank, 2008. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/HEALTHNUTRITIONANDPOPULATION/Resources/281627-1095698140167/LACVitalStat.pdf>

- A means of obtaining the evidence needed to systematically improve vital statistics and related outputs produced by civil registration system;
- Use of a review process that engages and builds consensus among key “stakeholders” around identified priority needs.
- Facilitate the realization of international standards, principles and recommendations on CRVS on the continent

The guidelines are intended for the assessment of organisational and operational issues and different work processes of CRVS systems in a country. The guidelines also promote the realisation of international standards, principles and recommendations on CRVS on the continent. Although registration of foetal deaths is clearly important in measuring “perinatal mortality”, pregnancy outcome and quality of prenatal health services, foetal deaths are not included in these guidelines because few countries are currently able to satisfactorily collect the necessary data.

It is desirable that all countries adopt these guidelines as a basis for conducting their assessment in order to ensure comparability and coherence across the assessments.

1.4 Target Users of the Guidelines

The Guidelines are developed primarily to respond to the Ministers’ resolution that all countries conduct a comprehensive assessment of their CRVS systems with a view to evolving viable strategies to improve systems and raise the value of the systems in both national and continental applications. The Guidelines are therefore aimed at two broad targets (i) governments and (ii) functionaries within the countries that are responsible for conducting the assessments and adoption of strategies for strengthening their national CRVS systems.

According to the Ministers’ resolution, it is expected that all countries will be conducting a comprehensive assessment, and therefore all would require the Guidelines. For those with well-functioning systems, an assessment following these Guidelines will indicate areas in which greater efficiencies could be gained, either in the registration and service delivery in respect of specific events, or at various geographical levels. For some the issue may be in the effectiveness in generating vital statistics from the event records. For most other countries where registration is persistently incomplete, the Guidelines should serve as a basis for

determining what interventions are needed and what priorities would need to be set for the resources that are made available for the improvements.

The Guidelines are therefore targeted for the various levels of decision-making and operations of CRVS systems. It is first intended at the decision making level to the highest substantive functionaries who would constitute the Steering Committee that oversees the entire process, covering the assessment, the planning and the implementation of the proposed strategy.

At the second level, are the functionaries responsible for the management of CRVS programmes in the respective countries. In the context of the assessment and strategic planning exercise, these officials are mainly responsible for the technical supervision of the process, with responsibilities that include setting up the teams to undertake the exercise, supporting advocacy and orientation training for those who will be involved in the assessment, and developing the national action plan for system improvement.

The third group, and the major target, is those who are expected to undertake the day-to-day activities of the assessments. The Assessment Tool elaborated in chapter 3, is the instrument that forms the basis of the review. This group comprises of three main categories of people:

- (i) Those responsible for recording vital events and providing the requisite services for the administration and various customers;
- (ii) Those responsible for the compilation, and dissemination of vital statistics from the Civil Registration system and
- (iii) Those who benefit and use CRVS records, documentations and statistics

There is a fourth group who may use the Guidelines for other purposes. These include stakeholders who will support the comprehensive assessments in the countries both technically and financially. These guidelines will help them to shape their views and understand the entire process.

Overall, countries can use these guidelines to periodically assess the functioning of their systems and the quality of the data they produce. Countries that have little or no civil registration may find that several sections of the assessment tool cannot be completed

because there is too little information to assess. However, they may use those parts of the Guidelines that are relevant to their specific context in initiating the improvement process.

1.5 Organisation of the Guidelines

There are three broad phases to the CRVS improvement initiative. The first phase covers the entire process of conducting the assessment, including the preparation, coordination and production of the report. The second entails the formulation of the strategic plan for strengthening the system, including the costing and prioritizing of the recommended actions. The third phase involves the implementation. This first volume of the Guidelines corresponds to Phase I. The guidelines for phase II are presented in a separate Volume (Vol II). This first volume is divided into four chapters.

The first chapter has set the context for the specific guidance that is provided in this volume. It sets out the rationale for countries to expect more out of their CRVS systems, and provides support for all countries to align with the ministers' resolution and commit to devising a strategic plan for strengthening their systems. The chapter also suggests what purposes the Guidelines might serve and who would be the users.

The second chapter outlines the strategies and processes for reviewing current CRVS systems. It is divided into four main sections. The first section reviews the general principles and key considerations that have guided the suggested roadmap. Second section elaborates on the stages comprising the assessment and the envisaged output, namely the drafting of the strategic action plan. The third section provides a step-by-step orientation to the processes, covering the required set of actions and the key actors. The fourth section organizes the proposed activities with respect to some illustrative time allocations, and suggests areas in which the regional advisory services can be utilized where deemed appropriate.

The third chapter presents the framework for the comprehensive assessment. The first section of the chapter proposes an organizational setup for the assessment exercise, describing the multi-disciplinary team approach to conducting the review. The second section explains the various components of the Assessment Framework, including the general purpose and expected outcomes of the proposed review issues and questions. The third section contains the assessment schedules with the main issues for investigation, some proposed line of questioning, investigative actions and suggested range of methods to be used.

The final chapter in this volume is a lead to the next volume. It discusses the concluding part of the assessment exercise. This includes a description of the intermediate output from the assessment process – the matrix relating the findings to possible actions to be taken. The second section in the chapter explains the main requirements for formulating the strategic plan. It then presents the next steps to completing the second phase of the CRVS system review and improvement planning exercise.

CHAPTER TWO

OUTLINE OF THE PROCESS FOR CONDUCTING COUNTRY ASSESSMENTS

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter outlines the steps needed to devise a strategy for revamping a national CRVS system. It provides a roadmap for using the Guidelines to review and strengthen CRVS systems. While there are countless ways of arriving at the desired outcomes, the principal aim of the proposed approach is to have countries leading the process. Government ownership is critical for the acceptance of the output and commitment of the key actors to ensure implementation of the resulting strategic plan. The degree of involvement of external advisors and the actual process to be followed are purely at the discretion of the national authorities and functionaries responsible for the exercise.

2.2 General Considerations

The assessment framework that is being proposed has been derived from cross-country reviews, country experiences shared at the various expert groups at the African and global levels, as well as methodologies drawn from the work of different regional and international organisations. All these documentation and other forms of evidence point to the store of knowledge available in various countries, and collectively in Africa. A set of considerations have further guided the approach being proposed as a possible roadmap for the assessment exercise. The considerations relate to the following:

- (a) Scope of the exercise
- (b) Country Leadership
- (c) Multi-disciplinary dimensions and team approach
- (d) Participatory approach
- (e) Regional Technical Support

a) Scope of the exercise

The U.N Principles and Recommendations on Vital Statistics enumerate several events that can be considered within the civil registration systems. Within Africa, countries have covered several combinations of events in their system, with varying degrees of success in the registration of each of the events. While some have their systems set up to register only births and deaths, some also cover marriages and divorce, and a few others extend to including stillbirths, foetal deaths, etc. The Ministers responsible for Civil Registration have set for the current exercise on system improvements, four major vital events – live births, deaths, marriages and divorces. The Guidelines including the proposed assessment tool are therefore limited to these four events. However, a national government may decide to include any of the other events that are currently in their registration system or that they may wish to introduce. The event specific sections of the Framework can equally be applied to the other events following some adjustments. Further, the strategic plan, and therefore the assessment tool and Guidelines address both the civil registration and the vital statistics components of the registration operations.

b) Country leadership

The development of an efficient and viable CRVS system should be a permanent function of the governance mechanism of every country, and cannot be confined to a specific project-defined time period. It therefore requires commitment of all stakeholders, especially government, to provide the necessary resources, including institutional and legal frameworks, human and financial resources, as well as a deliberate policy of interagency collaboration. Such an understanding is the driving force behind a successfully conducted assessment and the development of a strategic plan with costing. The commitment is reflected in the extent of pre-assessment preparation, mobilization of institutional support, and high-level declaration on the need for revamping the CRVS system.

The process should be monitored at the highest level possible, given the bearing the CRVS operations and service outcomes have on other government functions. This high level involvement of government shall ensure that the necessary fundraising activities, advocacy and budgetary allocations can be secured to support the whole process of assessment, development of a national strategic plan and its implementation. If technical advisory services would be required, it is the government that determines this need and takes the

necessary steps to obtain the assistance. A pool of Regional CRVS experts has been prepared by the regional CRVS Secretariat for this purpose. The acquisition of these services requires financial commitment on the part of government and therefore adequate budgetary allocation would be required. The government could also seek funding from development partners that have programmes to support CRVS.

c) Multi-disciplinary dimensions and team approach

CRVS is a multi-sectoral system, with different players, on one hand covering civil registration and on the other, dealing with vital statistics. The assessment should involve a wider range of sectors and partners, to bring their expertise and experience to the assessment. The various agencies responsible for the different components of the CRVS operations would need to be involved as initiators, assessors, planners and implementers. In this regard, the Ministry or agency responsible for Civil Registration is expected to coordinate and lead the civil registration reform sub-component; the ministry or agency responsible for statistics to lead the vital statistics reform sub-component, and the ministry or agency responsible for health to lead the causes of death operations reform sub-component. With respect to the overall national leadership, the agency responsible for civil registration is expected to lead and coordinate the whole process and operation of the national CRVS improvement programme. The above proposal should be reviewed and the varying national context adopted considerably. The different actors of the assessment operation are expected to be organized in task teams and specific responsibilities will be assigned to the different teams.

d) Participatory approach

There are many stakeholders in the CRVS systems operations. They are those who are directly responsible for the various components of the system, as well as those whose functions, mandates or operations require the CRVS services and outputs as an input for example health, education, national identification, immigration and naturalization services, etc. Another group of stakeholders are rights-based advocates, and programme officers, as well as those who support or require the services of the CRVS system. These stakeholders may have unique experiences with the systems and bring to the review some additional perspective. The stakeholders would need to be involved at different stages of the reform programme; i.e. at the start or pre-assessment preparatory work; information gathering, analysis and report preparation, the dissemination of the assessment study results; the

launching of the implementation of the reform action plan; and at the conclusion of the reform programme. Also, various communication channels, including available IT channels might be used.

As recommended above, a team of experts and managers from the diverse CRVS stakeholder institutions should be constituted to follow the process through. Depending on country context, the stakeholders may include, the Ministries or agencies responsible for registration of vital events; the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Home Affairs (Local Government, Interior), Ministry of Finance, the National Statistics office (NSO), National Identification and other relevant government departments/ Ministries. The team also needs to include development partners including relevant UN agencies and Non Governmental Organisations. It is also important to include relevant national research and training institutions from different disciplines that are relevant to CRVS. Programme Officers of any special projects on CRVS and some officials from the provinces and districts should also participate in the consultation processes.¹³

e) Regional Technical Support

Although countries have had long experience managing CRVS systems, the scope of the experiences vary in view of the level of functionality that they have achieved with their systems. In anticipation of the additional guidance that countries may need, and to give the CRVS systems review and strengthening a fair chance of success, countries are advised to consider the assistance of a special team of experienced advisors trained in the Assessment and Planning tools, and their application in the review exercise. The advisors are to facilitate the process with various specialized technical inputs, including adaptation of the tools to national circumstances, support capacity building in the use of the tools, help raise awareness and advocate for the CRVS programme, etc. The experts' services may be extended to include mentoring, and reviewing outputs at key stages of the assessment and strategy development. There may be the need to have external facilitators to guide the process, and offer unbiased opinion on contentious issues. Engagement of the external advisors in the national exercise has the added advantage of bringing objectivity, diversifying the range of

¹³ The list may vary from country to country and could be more extensive for some stages of the consultation relative to others.

options that will constitute the actions for the gaps and weaknesses identified from the assessment, and will also bring some element of standardization into the exercise.

There are various ways in which technical inputs from an external or internal team may be secured. There is currently a pool of regional CRVS experts who have received intensive orientation training to support the process¹⁴ upon request. If national governments deem it useful to have such inputs from external experts, it is recommended that a Technical Support Team (TST) comprising both regional experts and national focal persons be constituted to guide the initial stages of the process. The advantage of having a local expert team up with the regional expert, is primarily to transfer knowledge and expertise from the outside, both regional and international practices. The TST will negotiate common agreement in a multi-stakeholder discussion forum and share experiences from other places in situations that may be similar to those elsewhere. The team may also provide the required support to the national stakeholder team that is conducting the assessment and generating the strategy document.

Each country is free to adapt the suggested processes to their specific situation, bearing in mind the benefits to be derived from a continent-wide sharing of experiences from common approaches to the conducting the assessment and development of the strategic plan.

2.3 Main Stages of the Assessment and Planning

The entire process of review leading up to the development of a national strategic plan for strengthening the national CRVS systems can be organized in four distinct phases. The first being the preparatory stage, the second covers the assessment exercise; the third entails the planning, and the fourth is the dissemination of the approved improvement plan, as a prelude to its implementation.

a) Preparatory Phase

This initial phase involves mobilizing support, both financial and technical, from government and the major stakeholder institutions. It is at this stage that the institutional arrangements are determined and organized. The main actors are identified with clearly delineated responsibilities and reporting lines, and coordination and communication channels, are also defined. Other essential preparatory activities include advocacy to solicit firm commitment

¹⁴ Administered by the UNECA in collaboration with several United Nations Agencies, including UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO and HMN.

from government to follow through with the exercise. It would be necessary that the advocacy extend beyond the immediate exercise of the assessment and preparation of the strategy and to make a case to government of the need to improve the management and operations of the systems and achieve well-functioning CRVS systems as a long-term underlying goal.

b) Conducting the assessment

This phase involves conducting the assessment and generating the report on the outcome. Some of the essential activities include assembling as much documentation and materials as possible as input into the desk review. The Guidelines should also be studied and the tools adapted to national specificities. The assessment team would need to be trained and assigned to conduct the assessment. There may be need for further advocacy during this phase, as challenges come to light and the magnitude of the potential reforms becomes clearer. The final set of activities involves the preparation of the assessment report, which should include suggestions of some required actions.

c) Priority setting and planning

The third phase in the exercise is to translate the assessment results into a costed strategic action plan for improving the CRVS. Based on the template from the assessment that would also indicate the proposed actions, some objective criteria are used to define the order of priority. The costed draft prioritized set of actions are translated with the guidance of the facilitator into strategic CRVS improvement plan. A review of the proposal by stakeholders is also necessary at this stage before it is finalized for submission to the appropriate government body.

d) Approval and dissemination

The final phase of the improvement planning involves advocacy at the highest level of government. The Strategic Plan is presented to the relevant decision making government body for approval, printed for dissemination and a formal launch of the Improvement Plan is conducted.

2.4 Role of Advocacy and Communication

Often, when a CRVS system is incomplete or ineffective, this has, at least in part, come about because there is a general lack of appreciation of the significance of CRVS, and a lack of understanding of the potential benefits of improving the system. Advocacy is therefore required for all who are involved in these systems in one way or another, at all levels and over the course of the exercise.

The planning for system improvements should begin and end with advocacy, although there are some stages identified in the Roadmap, when advocacy has been identified as an essential activity. There are different categories of stakeholders, namely, the government, responsible institutions, individuals who have the functional responsibility to implement systems, the institutions and their functionaries who need the services of the CRVS system as input to their own operations, the development partners and other institutions who provide programme support for these systems, and the individuals and families who experience the events and have the responsibility of having them registered; as well as community members who have the role of informants or report on events within their communities.

Every opportunity should be used to discern the perspectives and perceptions of all stakeholders that potentially influence the effectiveness of the systems and devise the means to bring about the necessary changes.

2.5 Major steps in evolving a Strategy for CRVS System Improvement

There are several ways in which an exercise of the nature proposed in these Guidelines can be achieved. The suggested steps and roadmap are a guide on one such approach that can be taken to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the CRVS system and to evolve a plan to improve the system. The Roadmap may be considered as a starting point to developing a full-fledged work plan for the exercise (Refer Table 2.1). It would be necessary for the tasks to be adjusted or further elaborated to provide details and a means to monitor how progress is being made. Further, the ordering of tasks could be changed as appropriate. As indicated earlier, advocacy could be undertaken at various stages of the exercise depending on progress made or challenges encountered.

Another issue to be decided upon is the use of teams, their composition and roles. The Guidelines propose the team approach across the exercise. It is important to take note that the proposal should be adapted to different country context. The following teams are proposed:

- (i) Steering committee – involves heads of institutions responsible for registration of vital events, selected stakeholder institutions, and representatives of the United Nations and donor agencies, who have oversight on the exercise.
- (ii) Stakeholder group – comprising representatives of the institutions earlier identified and other stakeholder institutions, including civil society organisations, sub-national level officials, community leaders and representatives, is a larger group that should from time to time be consulted.
- (iii) Task Teams – The Task teams comprise of the multi-disciplinary arrangement of experts into teams to work and tackle specific aspects of the assessments. The members of the different teams are expected to be composed of experts drawn from government and Non-government organisations, including the different development partners.
- (iv) Technical Support Team – comprises both external and local experts to facilitate the process
- (v) Plan Drafting Team – Is a specialized and multi-disciplinary group of experts that takes responsibility of converting the assessment findings into the plan and development of the planning document. The team should comprise subject matter specialists and planning experts drawn from the task teams.

The country decides on the mechanism for organizing and distributing the work, managing and overseeing its implementation. The size of the Task teams, planning drafting Teams and the steering committee is to be decided. The composition of the TST, the functions and responsibilities and conditions of work are also at the discretion of each individual country.

2.6 Setting the Phases and Processes

In the following section, the four phases of preparations and activities of the assessment and planning are presented.

Phase 1 - Defining the Management Setup and Advocacy

a) Identify a lead agency

The process begins with the assigning of a lead agency. This is the institution that will serve as the secretariat for the exercise and provide staffing including a coordinator to manage the work. There are a number of institutions that are involved in CRVS. Depending on the way the CRVS responsibilities have been defined within the country, there could be up to five agencies to consider. The criteria for nomination could include scope of functions (whether registering one or more of the events), level of responsibility, interconnections with other institutions, etc. It is also important to consider the degree of influence the agency bears and the level of commitment, as well as prior experience with coordinating interagency programme of similar magnitude.

Table 2. 1: Roadmap of Actions and Expected Outcomes

| Steps | Actions | Expected Outcomes |
|---|--|---|
| A. Management setup and Advocacy | | |
| A1 | ★ Assign a lead agency to initiate the process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead agency assigned and Coordinator designated |
| A2 | ★ Constitute a Stakeholder group of focal points from institutions involved with civil registration and vital statistics operations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focal points designated and briefed on the assignment |
| A3 | ★ Make a case to government of the need to improve the CRVS system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy document produced • Government commitment expressed |
| A4 | ★ Determine needs and secure necessary budgetary support for assessment and improvement plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project document and budget adopted |
| A5 | ★ Establish a steering committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of Reference and schedule of meetings adopted |
| A6 | ★ Constitute a Technical Support Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisors and local facilitators engaged |
| B. Conduct of Review | | |
| B1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Compile available information from previous assessment, legal documents, reports, etc. ★ Adapt assessment tools to national specificities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available information on the system assembled • Tools suited to country specificities |
| B2 | ★ Form the Task Teams by the various thematic areas of the assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable functionaries assembled to conduct the review |
| B3 | ★ Organize a launch meeting to set up the CRVS assessment process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness raised among stakeholders of the need to improve vital statistics • Assessment framework and review process introduced to participants |
| B4 | ★ Conduct Orientation training and special sessions with each Task Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Task Teams constituted • Schedule of work, Guidelines and report template adopted |
| B5 | ★ Undertake assessment and prepare report following the proposed format/template | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Teams reports with recommendations produced |
| C. Priority setting and planning | | |
| C1 | ★ Conduct a results meeting with task Teams and Plan drafting team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant programme activities identified and catalogued • Recommendations for remedial action prioritized |
| C2 | ★ Conduct a meeting or meetings to develop strategic plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic plan for improving the current civil registration and vital statistics system prioritized and costed |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| C3 | ★ Conduct a broad stakeholder meeting to present improvement plan | • Plan to strengthen the CRVS endorsed by wider stakeholder group |
| D. Approval and Dissemination | | |
| D1 | ★ Prepare relevant memoranda for high level governmental approval | • Case made to government • Resources allocated and finances mobilized Implementation commenced |
| D2 | ★ Arrange for printing of the Plan | • Improvement Plan published |
| D3 | ★ Organize a launch and dissemination workshop | • Stakeholders and media briefed on planned improvements |

Adapted from Box 2.1 of University of Queensland and WHO (2010)

(b) Make a case to government on improving the CRVS system

The Government's commitment should be secured at the onset to assure of the needed financial and administrative backing not only for the immediate exercise but also for the implementation of the plan that is to be adopted as an outcome of the exercise. It is necessary to undertake some advocacy and sensitization of key government officials, in particular the Ministry of Finance, and the Presidency, for commitment to embark on this exercise. The advocacy should extend beyond the immediate exercise of the assessment and preparation of the strategy and to make a case to government of the need to improve the CRVS system overall, and achieve a well-functioning system as a long-term underlying goal.

The advocacy that the group undertakes should create awareness among senior government policy-makers, on the need for CRVS, the value, and the cost of not having an effective system. The initial advocacy may need to continue throughout the process and especially at the end also when the cost of the proposed improvements would have been worked out. At various stages of the exercise there is need to continue building the understanding of key officials to gain their support. In view of changes that may occur in key positions of government from time to time, the newly appointed would need to be kept informed. The target functionaries should include those sector institutions with which linkages with CRVS system would be both beneficial and desirable, such as health, education, national identification, etc. The Group should seek champions who can sustain the advocacy, and may solicit the assistance of civil society groups in drawing attention to the important human and civil rights aspects of civil registration.

(c) Secure financial support for the assessment and strategy development

Several of the activities may require supplementary budget support, if they are considered outside the regular programme of activity of the institutions responsible. The Steering Committee, under the direction of the Coordinator would need to prepare a proposal covering the envisaged activities and outputs and the cost of achieving them. Some of the major items to be covered in the budget are: fees and travel of the facilitator, advocacy materials, reproduction of materials for the assessment, photography equipment, meetings of the Task teams, printing of the strategic plan, publicity, dissemination workshop, and any other inputs that may be required. Whether the three months' timeframe proposed for the completion of the exercise will suffice depends substantially on whether the necessary financing is made

available, staff time fully dedicated to this work, and the programmed activities can continue without interruptions until the conclusion with the dissemination of the strategy.

If it is determined that additional funding would be required, it is advisable that sufficient funds or the necessary financial commitment is secured as the exercise begins, to avert delays or interruptions in the exercise. This is also a good time to consider the potential sources of funding for the improvement plan when it will be completed. It is helpful to keep potential partners informed at various stages of the exercise. In some cases bilateral meetings, may be necessary for advocacy and sustaining their interest.

(d) Establish a steering committee

Success with advocacy will raise expectations about the quality, timeliness and completion of the exercise to the satisfaction of all the parties concerned. It is therefore necessary to have high level oversight of the process. Representation on the Steering Committee should ideally be targeted at highest substantive designation from key CRVS institutions (heads of institution, chief directors/permanent secretaries), given the decision-making role of the Committee. Membership of the Steering Committee should also include representation from different categories of stakeholders, i.e., government, civil society organisations, development partners, including the United Nations.

In addition to the support that the Steering Committee secretariat shall offer, it is important that there is a management team comprising managers (directors) of the CRVS institutions. These serve as focal points for their institutions, ensure follow-up within their respective institutions on decisions and required inputs. The Coordinator should request the relevant institutions to designate focal points to join the Stakeholder Group. The involvement of these focal points in the management of the exercise should ensure that the interest of their respective institutions is sustained as their concerns are being fairly considered. The Stakeholder Group is led by the coordinator.

The alternative is to establish a secretariat with the required staffing at the various operational and managerial levels in the Lead Agency and dispense of the Stakeholder Group. There may still be the need to have focal or contact persons within the relevant institutions for the necessary follow-ups, but without them having specific management responsibilities in the exercise.

(e)Constitute a Technical Support Team

Some countries would need some technical support to conduct the exercise. It is proposed that the team comprise of a senior advisor and an advisor who may be international or national experts who have received orientation training to prepare them to give specialized assistance to countries for this work¹⁵. Another member of the TST is a facilitator engaged at the local level to provide backup support. The international and local support team is to work directly with the Stakeholder Group and/or the CRVS secretariat to plan, conduct, and prepare the reports from the exercise, and would provide support in the following areas:

- help launch the review process;
- explain the work to be carried out;
- meet with the people who will carry out the review;
- ensure that the review questions are fully understood.
- review the results of the assessment proposed actions.

The facilitation is also to actively engage all the main stakeholders, and in building consensus around priority needs for improvement.

Phase 2 - Conducting the Review

(a)Adapt assessment tools to national specificities

The process for conducting the assessment begins with the core team assembling the materials available about the setup and operations of the system. These should include the legal frameworks of institutions involved in CRVS, and of those whose functions impact on or whose performance can be influenced by the existence of an efficient CRVS system. Reports on previous reviews or assessments, strategic documents and position papers that relate to any aspect of the CRVS system are also relevant documentation available at hand. If it is decided that the TST should be engaged to facilitate the orientation training and guide the Task Teams in the use of the tools, a set of the assembled materials should be sent to them for their desk review. Meanwhile, the CRVS Assessment Tools made available by UNECA

¹⁵ The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) will provide a list of experts that can be engaged by countries for the proposed support.

should also be reviewed by the Stakeholder Group and adapted to national specificities. The TST would already have copies of these and can propose suggestions based on their review of the country materials, as required. The local facilitator could support the Stakeholder Group in ensuring that there is clarity about the exercise and the expectations on the outcomes.

(b) Form Task Teams

At this stage, steps need to be taken towards constituting the Task Teams. The Coordinator initiates the process by requesting the stakeholder institutions, i.e., ministries, departments and agencies, involved in Civil Registration and the collection, production and use of vital statistics, to nominate representatives to serve on the teams. The required qualification and experience, as well as the terms of reference for the assignment should be clearly spelt out to guide the institution in nominating the most suitable representatives. The communication should also be clear on expectations of commitment and time investments entailed. Every effort should be made to ensure that all key stakeholders are included and that there is strong and balanced representation in terms of their functional responsibilities. Where an intergovernmental committee of stakeholders already exists for the coordination of the civil registration, or the production of vital statistics, the membership might form the core and other members invited to join. The composition of the teams will vary from country to country depending on the mandates and responsibilities of the institutions. The following institutions may however be considered based on the designated functions in the country:

- Civil registration office
- Ministry of health
- National statistics office
- Office of the “registrar general” or similar office
- Ministry of local government
- Ministry of interior/internal affairs
- Ministry of justice
- Ministry of finance/planning
- Ministry of social welfare/social development

- Any other government departments responsible for collecting or using vital statistics
- Other important stakeholders and users of the data (e.g. hospitals, public health institutions, medical associations and academia)
- Local representatives from UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNDP and WHO; NGOs active in civil rights and birth registration (e.g. Plan International, World Vision and Save the Children), and other interested development partners.
- National Identity offices
- Passport issuance office
- Academic institutions

Each country would need to decide what the level of representation should be. It would however be useful for those responsible for recording, compiling and analysing the data at national and sub-national levels to conduct the actual process of evaluation, while the senior officers of the stakeholder institutions whose support is deemed crucial for the success of the review, are brought in during the stakeholder consultations on the outcome of the assessments. Medical doctors should also form part of the team that will assess the cause-of-death processes and information.

(c) Organize a launch meeting

The Coordinator, with the Steering Committee, should organize a launch meeting that brings together the relevant stakeholders who are to engage in the actual assessment operations. The launch signals the formal start of the CRVS assessment process and to formalize the Task Teams. It should serve as an opportunity to raise awareness among this group and the population at large. To increase public awareness the launch can be organized as a media event or the media invited to the opening. It would be useful to have advocacy materials or information about the assessment and the state of CRVS, and the issues the exercise is seeking to address, available for the press. Other stakeholders may also be invited to the launch for initial consultations and dialogue about the proposed exercise. The same group would also form part of the audience at the end of the assessment for the stakeholders' validation of the outcome. The stakeholder consultations may also generate information about the state of the civil registration system, including some of the information that are to be collected from individuals about their experience with the civil registration system and reasons why events are registered or not.

(d) Conduct orientation training of the Task Teams

Following the launch meeting, the Task Teams would need to meet to agree on an overall work plan and a schedule of the work of each team, review the guidelines and mode of operation of the Teams, familiarize themselves with the assessment tools and results template outlining what the expected content of the Task teams' reports would be.

(e) Conduct work sessions with Task Teams

Each task team is expected to carry out detailed reviews of specific aspects of the CRVS systems, using the assessment framework provided in Chapter 3. Following the general orientation to the exercise and the tools to be used, there should be in-depth presentation and explanation of their part of the tool as required. The deliberations of each Task Team should be guided by someone with sufficient expertise in the subject matter being covered, and who has been sufficiently acquainted with both the subject of investigation and the assessment framework. The leaders of the teams should be supported by technical staff from the civil registration office, the NSO or the ministry of health. Experts with specific technical knowledge from universities or specialized institutions may also be brought in to support the process. The Teams may, at the start of their sessions prepare a revised schedule of work, devote additional time to study the review questions, and where necessary adjust or expand the questions suggested for assessing the specific area. The Task Teams should at the end of these encounters, be in a position to undertake the assessment.

(f) Undertake comprehensive assessment

The purpose of the assessment is to highlight areas of weakness or concern. The assessment framework described in Chapter 3 outlines questions/issues for investigation, covering legal provisions, requirements for the CRVS, and the scope and challenges of its operations, including service delivery. There is a mix of questions, some requiring sketching, some descriptions, analysis, document review, etc. The Task Teams are expected to meet as many times as required to complete the assigned tasks, and then prepare a report on their findings. There should be detailed record keeping of all sessions.

The information required is expected to be obtained through various approaches; desk review; analysis of available survey results, e.g., Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) and the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), and field visits to obtain information

through, interviews with officials and recipients of services; exit interviews with those presenting themselves at a CRVS service point to register an event or request a service; direct observation, group interviews; photography; and whatever the team deems useful.

Although some questions are framed for a yes or no answer, it is generally expected that the responses will be analytical with descriptions, probes into why the observed situation. At the end of the questions the Team is expected to come up with proposals on how the weaknesses or concerns can be addressed through some intervention actions or programme activities.

There should be periodic review sessions (perhaps fortnightly) to ensure that all teams are at pace and meeting the schedule. Each team is expected to prepare a report on its findings and recommendations, which would be in two parts: (i) the completed templates, and (ii) a brief write-up with the necessary observations. The report will be presented to the Stakeholder Group.

Phase 3 - Planning and Prioritizing Improvement Strategy

(a) Conduct a results meeting

When all the Task teams have completed their work and the reports on their findings, a meeting is organized for the Teams to present their findings and recommendations for improvement to the Steering Committee and larger Stakeholder Group. The primary goal of the meeting is to agree on priority activities for improving the entire CRVS systems. The process of arriving at the prioritized set of activities is presented in detail in Chapter 4. The main elements are to thoroughly discuss the merits of each recommended action and compile a list of accepted actions. In the next stage of the deliberations each action is scored on the basis of a set of criteria, i.e., the urgency, feasibility, cost, time required, etc. The output of the meeting is a list of priority actions.

(b) Prepare a draft of the strategic plan

Following the Stakeholder Group's adoption of the prioritized list of actions, the Steering Committee should convene a Plan drafting Team to complete the details of the suggestions for improvement agreed on at the results meeting with the Task Teams. The aim is to draft a detailed strategic plan for improving the CRVS systems, with cost estimates, a time schedule and clear responsibilities assigned to each stakeholder for implementing the actions; as well

as a monitoring and evaluation framework. The Steering committee should also discuss whether there is a need for technical assistance for specific tasks, and what the sources of funding would be, what is likely to be available from Government and what can be required from external. Depending on the performance of the various teams, the Drafting Team may comprise members of the Steering Committee, the leaders of the Task teams, and few others who have special skills and depth of knowledge about any of the action areas, moderated by the local facilitator, if necessary.

(c) Conduct a final stakeholder meeting

It will be necessary when the Plan Drafting Team has prepared the strategic improvement plan, that stakeholders are invited to review and give their comments. The participation of stakeholders in the consultation can be extended to a broad range of stakeholders that have been involved in the process, and others, including international organizations and donors. The aim of this meeting should be to gain approval and support for the strategic plan by a wide cross-section of the CRVS community. This step is in many countries a requirement for Cabinet approval. It is also a means to reflect the benefit of others' experience and knowledge of the field.

Phase 4 - Disseminating the Approved Strategy

(a) Prepare relevant memoranda for high level governmental approval

The Strategy will require government to allocate additional funds to implement the programme. Countries may differ with respect to the required procedures for new items to be considered within the budget. In some systems, the first step is to obtain cabinet approval before it can be implemented. The procedures include preparing a Cabinet Memorandum and for submission by the sponsoring minister(s). The Strategy should be finalised and submitted with the Memorandum for consideration. The Steering Committee should agree on which Minister is to sponsor the Memorandum that is to be submitted to the Cabinet.

(b) Arrange for printing of the Plan

Once Cabinet approval has been obtained, the document has to be printed in sufficient quantities for dissemination.

(c) Organize a launch and dissemination workshop

The Strategy should be disseminated to stakeholders at all levels of CRVS operations. Depending on the availability of funds, the dissemination workshop can be organized at both national and sub-national level. Representatives of CRVS institutions at various operational levels should be assisted to participate in these workshops.

2.7 Milestone and Activity Timelines

It is estimated that the entire process beginning with the preparation to the completion of the assessment, formulating a costed plan and its submission for approval, should take up to three months provided that the entire assessment team is fully dedicated to the process. The length of time required could be reduced depending on the organization of work, division of roles, the level of dedication of staff time, and availability of resources when and as needed.

On the other hand, timelines could prolong if staff is not allowed the required dedicated time for this work; funds are not readily made available; there is limited cooperation among team members, and other stakeholders. A country may also by deliberate decision extend the time lines to allow for greater stakeholder consultation, wider involvement of stakeholders at various levels, and more ingrained lessons.

The timelines provided for the involvement of the TST is indicative and are only to help in developing terms and cost component of the experts engaged in the process. Countries may consider different time lines according to their specific needs and adjust the duration of the exercise accordingly.

The allocation of time across the phases and activities are as follows:

The preparatory phase involving advocacy with senior government officials and policy makers, and setting up the institutional mechanisms to set the exercise in motion, should take about six weeks. Within this period, the TST would need to be constituted if the country wishes.

The 15 days following the preparatory phase will be required to assemble the necessary documentation and begin the desk review. If the involvement of the external advisors is required, the documents should be sent to the team at the beginning of the period and time allocated to the TST to also conduct the desk review. Five working days should be allowed

for the TST’s preparations and desk review. A parallel review should also be undertaken by the national Stakeholder Group. This review may lead to uncovering of more documentation that can be used for the assessment.

Activities associated with the launch of the CRVS assessment process and the orientation training and detailed briefing of the Task Teams are also expected to take place between days 16 and 30. The TST should arrive in country in advance of the launch to conduct field visits and acquaint him/herself with the situation on the ground. The activities of the TST in the country will also include, assisting with the advocacy and sensitization of senior officials as needed, conduct of the launch, the orientation training and special sessions, with the Country Assessment Teams. The TST should programme a debriefing session with the Project Team, and selected senior officials identified to be champions of the CRVS programme.

Figure 2.1 Schematic Presentation of Standard Set of Activities and timelines



The remaining set of activities of Phase 2, which is to conduct the assessment and prepare the Task Team's reports on the findings, is expected to take thirty days from days 31 to 60. Phase three activities, i.e. the development of the costed plan, which is conducted with the assistance of the facilitator, is estimated at 15 days from day 61 to day 76. A one-week country visit by the TST is programmed, during which time the Team with the local facilitator participates in meetings with the Plan drafting team, as well as a few key partners. The draft Plan will be reviewed by stakeholders and finalized for submission to the appropriate government body.

The final 15 days are programmed for the submission of the memo for approval by cabinet and a launch of the Plan.

2. 8 Involvement of Technical Support Team

The TST comprises a Senior Advisor and an Advisor, who have the responsibility of providing advisory services to the country throughout the process of the assessment and leading to the drafting, costing and adoption of the plan by the highest body of government, for implementation. The international team may be joined by a Young African Expert (YAE), who is under training to build capacity within the continent. The ISIBalo capacity building programme office of Statistics South Africa should identify a YAE in consultation with the CRVS secretariat and country office. The YAE is expected to undergo training by assisting governments throughout the implementation of the CRVS improvement strategy, until such time that capacity has been developed in countries.

The YAE may be from the country undertaking CRVS assessment or from other African countries. It would be useful if countries were to identify a YAE who can be trained through hands on experience on the process, to support that and other countries in some years hence. The TST shall have as one of its counterparts within the country a locally recruited facilitator who will help train and guide in the stakeholder management processes, facilitate during meeting and sessions for the drafting of the assessment reports, and of the Strategic Plan for CRVS improvement. The stages of involvement of up to 30 days of the TST are as depicted below:

Figure 2.2: Standard Set of Activities and timelines for engagement of the Technical Support Team

Please note that the standard set of timelines for engagement of the TST (as presented in Figure 2.2) are provided against the standard timelines for the assessment provided in Figure 2.1.

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| <p>Preparatory phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five days for review of CRVS documents and assessment tools and reports |
| <p>Days 0-15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrival on day 1, and field visits on days 2-4; day 5 launch of the CRVS assessment and plan development |
| <p>Days 15-30</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day 1-3 Orientation training of Review Group, Days 4-5 special sessions with the Task Teams |
| <p>Days 31-60</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to three days for TST input and advice |
| <p>Days 61-76</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five days of meeting with Task Teams, key partners and steering group members, to review strategic plan; and hold stakeholder consultations |
| <p>Days 77-92</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TST support final dissemination of the Strategic Plan |

CHAPTER THREE

MODALITIES FOR CONDUCTING THE ASSESSMENT

Chapter 2 outlined the process of conducting a comprehensive assessment of the CRVS system, leading up to producing an approved improvement plan. This Chapter focuses on how the comprehensive assessment is to be conducted; the organizational setup and the tools that could be used for the assessment. It discusses the purpose of the Assessment Tool, its structure and how it is to be used.

3.1 Why an assessment?

One of the major activities agreed on by the Ministers responsible for Civil Registration is for every country to conduct a comprehensive assessment. No significant and sustained improvement in CRVS systems can be achieved without a thorough understanding of what the issues are and the explanations for the decades of stagnation of many national systems. A comprehensive assessment is the primary means of obtaining the necessary information about the systems and how they are currently operating. The assessment should generally cover the entire system, comprising the legal framework by which the various responsible entities were setup and are functioning; the operations of these institutions at all levels; the operational environment; the organizational and management arrangements; the processes and practices; outputs and services generated; the available resources, and the outcomes. Although the quality of outputs and services is dealt with, the performance of the system is not assessed in any depth in the proposed assessment framework.

The tools are intended for self-assessment, but through joint participation the major stakeholders team up to contribute to the assessment. The assessment is in-country by the officers themselves, and with the involvement of a few externals. The immediate beneficiaries are the stakeholders in the country. However, the results of the national assessments, the resulting plan and any lessons related to what has worked well, any experimentation that can be proposed as a good practice shall be shared with those from neighboring countries. These results will be reported to the ministers' conference.

The primary goal of the assessment is to provide the evidence required to prioritise interventions for strengthening national CRVS systems. The results should also guide policy

development, planning and resource allocation for this purpose. Specific objectives that can be considered include:

1. To inform stakeholders of priority concerns, and aspects of the CRVS systems with which they may not be familiar.
2. To build consensus around priority areas for CRVS system strengthening; and mobilize technical and financial support for the implementation of a national strategic plan.
3. To elicit information that will enhance overall performance of the CRVS system and influence the direction of development of the system.
4. To assist government and partners to distinguish the key issues, and increase the use of CRVS records
5. To establish an objective baseline that forms the basis for follow-up evaluations¹⁶
6. To present exceptional learning from peers and facility users from the self-assessment process.

3.2 Where is the assessment conducted?

A fundamental goal of the operations of the CR system is to reach the lowest geographical level where the service point is within reasonable reach of the households and individuals who have experienced events that need to be registered. Accessibility may be in terms of physical location or other means by which the events can be reported and evidence of registration received. It is therefore necessary that the assessment be conducted at various administrative levels of government and at the community level.

While the main setup of the assessment team would be at the central level (national level), there should be field visits to the sub-national offices of the civil registration department or authority, and to the service points, if they are different, as well as to the communities that the system aims to reach. It is important that the selection of the communities and administrative

¹⁶Stakeholders may decide to repeat the comprehensive assessment exercise at appropriate intervals.

regions (provinces) and sub-regions (levels below the provincial) represent a variety of experiences at all levels of administration. If for example computerization has been introduced in some of the processes and in selected areas, some of these areas should be selected among the target locations to be visited. Other programme interventions that represent innovations or experimentations should be given special attention in the assessment. There should also be rural and urban representation in the places visited.

3.3 Who conducts the assessment?

The primary aim of the registration system is to have complete registration, with effective and efficient service delivery and the generation of records from which vital statistics can be produced. The assessment exercise should therefore yield lessons for improving not just the structures and supporting documentation but also the processes, service delivery and outcomes. The practitioners, in particular those in supervisory and management positions who direct the processes should have first-hand information about the way the system is functioning in practice, as compared with the intended.

One of the decisions to be considered at the early stage of the planning of the assessment is the question of who should be involved. As indicated in Chapter 2 all major stakeholders should participate in assessing the CRVS system and determining the range of possible actions to address the problem, and prioritize among these what should be tackled in planning for its strengthening. Stakeholders will include the registration officers, producers and users of vital statistics, and development partners who have CRVS related programme activities, at various national and sub-national levels. Researchers, with recognized experience in these areas should also be considered.

The Teams may be predominantly constituted at the national level. But steps should be taken to involve others at the various working levels, by including them in the team when their levels of operation are being visited. The civil registration activities aim to reach to the lowest levels, extending to scattered settlements to conglomerations at the national and regional capital towns/cities. Also at the administrative and operational levels there are various institutions, those responsible for registering any of the events, and those whose operations could provide linkages for extending service points, such as the ministry of health, and those whose activities provide avenues for expanding the use of the registration

certificate and therefore increase the motivation for individuals to register their events promptly, e.g., National Identification Authority; national health insurance; education; etc.

On the part of the vital statistics, the national statistics office, and producers of related data, including the ministry of health, population census and national household survey machinery, other ministries should be included in the consultations around the CRVS or in the actual assessment. The closer or more direct the operations are to the CRVS, the greater is the necessity to have the entity represented on the Task team.

The other category of stakeholders are those who are expected to provide information as input into the assessment; and the advisors and facilitators who are expected to provide technical guidance and facilitation during the process.

The engagement of stakeholders will vary according to the nature of their association with the CRVS processes, and the inputs expected from the entities, and the potential for them to benefit from the lessons. In chapter two the various types of groupings were outlined. The involvement of stakeholders in the assessment exercise, range from the actual planning and day-to-day execution of the activities of the assessment, the conduct of the assessments; the interpretation of the results and the preparation of the prioritized strategic plan, to providing comments and endorsements to the different sets of outputs, and dissemination of the final approved plan.

The medium of engagement varies depending on access and the nature of the task. This includes face-to-face interactions through meetings, conference calls, electronic communication, etc. Since stakeholders have varying degrees of exposure, and some potential champions of the CRVS may not have adequate arguments to effectively advocate for the process, it is necessary that the relationship between such are courted, if they are known, and every opportunity to meet stakeholders aim on increasing their understanding and appreciation of CRVS systems and the value of a well-functioning system, as well as what it would entail to have a functioning system.

Local stakeholders may be included as team members, during visits for the field assessments. This is in pursuant to the guiding principle stated earlier, that the assessment provides a foundation for the contributors to the system to learn about their operations and service delivery, and be involved in evolving solutions that would serve their local contexts. Local team members can contribute to the Task Teams' reflections on the observations, possible

solutions, especially immediate corrective measures with minimal financial inputs, and validation of the findings at their level before it is taken into the main document and the proposed plan. It may also be possible to involve sub-national level representatives as key stakeholders in the analysis.

An important mode of operation in the entire assessment process is the emphasis on consultation. In addition to the suggested grouping, some ad hoc working groups and/or forums may be established (through face-to-face communication, social networking, electronic mail, etc.) to maintain a dialogue around issues that a larger group of stakeholders need to contribute to, these mechanisms could also engage major stakeholder groups in prioritizing recommendations and proposing next steps toward strengthening the CRVS system in the country, when it is not possible to get all actors around the table for such discussions.

3.4 How is the assessment to be conducted?

In the steps outlined in the previous chapter, four broad phases were outlined. The first phase covered the preparations towards the assessment, including the arrangements for managing the process, and critically, the resources to get the work started and completed. This section focuses on the process of conducting the assessment, which corresponds to phase two of the proposed exercise. The chart below shows five stages in the process of conducting the assessment, namely: shaping the assessment, mobilizing the assessment team, collecting the data, analyzing the findings, and preparing the report.

a. *Shaping the Assessment:* The first stage in conducting the assessment, involves assembling the available materials and developing the required instruments. One of the instruments for collecting information throughout the process is the Assessment Tool described in the second part of this chapter (see also Annex 1). This tool has been developed based on international principles and recommendations on CRVS. The development of the tool borrowed largely from the 2010 regional CRVS assessment tool. The tool is also complimented by assessment tools produced by the WHO Health Metrics Network (HMN), and experiences from several African countries¹⁷, reflecting the state of development of civil registration and vital statistics on the continent. Some questions may apply to all countries, others to a few. The questions may be too general for some countries, while for some the

¹⁷ Document in the Regional Assessment study conducted by the Economic Commission for Africa.

questions may be specific to their situations. In general, the particularities of countries are not adequately captured, if at all. The tools would therefore need to be adapted to each country's particular situation before they can be used effectively for the assessment exercise.

Figure 3.1: Steps in conducting the CRVS country assessment



Adapted from Health Metrics Network. 2008. *Assessing the National Health Information System: An Assessment Tool*. Version 4.00.

As part of the process for adapting the questions in the tool to the country situation, it is important to take stock of the country's situation, review relevant documents including the various parts of this assessment tool, and make country specific adjustments or additions to reflect, for example, the local terminology used for institutions responsible for the CR, structures, job titles of functionaries, levels of administration and CRVS operations, etc.

Since different teams will be conducting the exercise from their respective vantage points, it is important that the adaptations be first at the national level to ensure standardization, consistency of the results and use by the various Task Teams assigned for the assessment. It will also ensure that there is comparability of results when the tools are applied at different levels of CRVS operations.

The review and adaptation should be done by the Steering Committee for the plan development, with the assistance of the Stakeholder group of CRVS institutions and allied institutions that are involved in managing some of the events, even if they are not directly responsible for registering vital events or compiling statistics on them, such as health. The Steering Committee is according to the proposed groupings, to be jointly responsible for managing the assessment and improvements planning. Some consideration may be given to involving regional and district level officers. It would be useful to subject the adapted tool to further review by the larger group that would conduct the assessment. This review can be programmed as part of the orientation training proposed in Chapter 2

In addition to adapting the tools to the country specific situation, the Steering Committee has to set the parameters for the assessment, namely: the scope of the assessment, time frame, dates, and how the assessment will be conducted. The composition of the Task Teams should also be determined and the Teams should be constituted, by the means available through the national processes. In most countries, it would be necessary to contact the institutions and invite them to designate their representatives, with specific backgrounds and professional characteristics. It is crucial that the nominating institution is clear on the nature of the commitment required, for example, if the individual is required for the entire duration of the assessment and plan development or for just the assessment, whether it is to be on a need basis, or full- or part-time. It may be necessary to make a case with these institutions about the importance of the exercise. Also, it would be preferable if the invitation for nominations were sent from the office of one of the ministers in charge of civil registration, to ensure that the request is given the high profile and accorded the necessary degree of importance.

The strategy for conducting the assessment should also be mapped out. This would have been done earlier in the process as part of the effort to solicit funds. But at this stage, the proposed numbers, schedule, proposed subgroups, places that are to be visited for the observation and field visits should be mapped out. Also the methods to be used, where and by whom, should be determined. This process should also lead to a more precise budget and

programme of activities that fits within the budget. Consideration should be given to involving some personnel at the local level who will support the process through the field visit and the final validation of the report and improvement plan.

b. Mobilising the Task Teams: The launch of the exercise, and the follow-up meeting and detailed briefing of the teams are all avenues for orienting the assessment personnel to the assignment and their responsibilities, including the procedures, methods, the requirements in administering the tools of data collections, expectation for the two interim outputs, the Task teams' report and the consolidated assessment report which feeds into the strategic planning component of the work. The orientation training should expose the group to all the proposed methods of data collection. In addition to the adaptation already undertaken, it may be necessary to adjust some of the items in the instruments based on the experiences of those invited to contribute to the assessment. Some practical exercises should be built into the training. For example, there could be field visits organized to communities close to the training venue, for an opportunity for participants to learn from applying the tools in actual situations (testing the instruments to uncover potential difficult questions or ambiguities) so that a common approach may be adopted. It is recommended that the teams read through all the guidelines and familiarize themselves with the tools for the assessment before embarking on the exercise. This should facilitate understanding of the requirements and help them make the appropriate planning and choices as required.

The teams' work is to begin at the central point at the national level, and then move to the sub-national level. A schedule of visits would be required and those offices to be visited should be briefed well in advance of the visits. The roles of the counterparts in the field offices should be well specified and guidelines to help their preparation for the visit and any prior arrangements for interviews. Some careful consideration should be given to the issue of giving advance notice of some of the office visits. The effect on the evidence may vary from country to country. If for the country circumstances advance notice is required, the information given should be in sufficient detail to help the receiving offices prepare for the visit, but details about what the team will be watching out for should not be provided so that the observation could bring out the usual situation in the offices. A checklist of what the teams will need on their visit should be provided, as well as the instruments for the field observation and interviews.

One component of the field visits is to interview at random ordinary residents to elicit information about whether they have registered any vital events that have occurred in their lives, and why they registered or did not register the events. This information could be available from past surveys. It may however still be useful to get sampled views from individuals who live close to the registration centres or service points visited.

Each Task Team should have their individual planning meeting to map out their visits according to the proposed schedule and confirm the arrangements with the contacts in the field.

c. Collecting the data: The data collection methods range from desk review to interviews of service recipients in the field offices of the civil registration system, as they come to request for the service and after their experience with the service delivery. The desk review can be undertaken at the onset of the start of the assessment process. Some review is required to make the necessary adjustment to the questionnaires. Reports as well as informants would also be needed to provide information about some of the cultural practices that affect the registration operations. Some sections of the tools should be completed as much as possible with the information obtained from the documentation available. Some reports on the operations of the CR and VS offices, including previous assessment reports, project documents, administrative instructions, etc. can also be reviewed to complete the instruments. The gaps will be filled from the interviews and observations. Key informants should be identified based on the information required and the gaps to be filled. There may be a need for focused meetings with some of the informants. Where necessary, focus group discussions should be conducted, especially around some of the cultural practices related to the specific events.

The recording of information is crucial for the final outcome of the exercise. Note taking and reporting is an important part of the evidence gathering. Therefore arrangements should be made for all meetings, small or big, to be reported on. All members should record the information being supplied so that there is some basis for comparing the findings to obtain accurate reflection of what was provided. When the observation method is used the team should find time to discuss what their individual impressions are while the team is still in the field so that when necessary, the team can revisit some places to confirm observations or obtain additional information.

d. Analysing the findings: The information collected by each member of the team should be assembled together and discussed so that the patterns and situation can be clearly discerned. The team should work together and draw out the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) from the information received. It is important to be able to identify underlying causes for the situations that persist. This desired outcome should shape the interviewing and the use of the Tool in the field. Some of the explanations can be deduced from the information provided, but in most cases there should be more probing for the interviews to yield the required information and corresponding explanations about associated factors. This line of analysis helps to generate explanations for the observed CRVS problems and how they relate to one another. It broadens the thinking about issues. The questions to consider are, among others: “Why does the weakness exist,” and then for each reason, “Why does that situation exist?”¹⁸

The teams should each come up with their findings, synthesized and recommendations deduced. The team reports will be presented to the larger group and synthesized into one report, with recommended actions. Representatives of the offices visited should attend the assessment reporting back meeting for any corrections about the impressions and supposed explanations for the situations.

E. Preparing the assessment report: The Task Teams are jointly responsible for producing the report of the Assessment. The teams can have a subgroup prepare the synthesized report that the larger group will review and accept.

The report should critically examine the issue or issues raised by the review question, and summarize the discussion for each question, as appropriate, rather than provide a simple response to the questions. For example, if the subgroup discussion reveals a problem or malfunction, the part of the report covering this question should contain:

- a concise statement of the problem, and suggestions for what needs to be improved or changed;
- specific benefits that could be expected from any improvements or changes;
- one or more specific recommendations for the changes required;

¹⁸ Health Metrics Network. 2008. *Assessing the National Health Information System: An Assessment Tool* VERSION 4.00. http://www.who.int/healthmetrics/tools/Version_4.00_Assessment_Tool3.pdf.

- specific suggestions for implementing the recommendations.

In other words, it is not sufficient to state that there is a problem – a potential solution for how to solve the problem also has to be provided. Having several subgroups working in parallel means that the groups can explore their specific areas in detail, without the process being too long or overbearing.¹⁹

3.5 How can the assessment be organized and facilitated?

In Chapter 2, the various possible groupings were outlined. In addition to the Steering Committee and the Stakeholder Group who are to provide ongoing oversight, direction and coordination of the process, there will be Task Teams, which are primarily responsible for carrying out the assessment. The lead agency is to carry out some of the communication, procurement and other administrative tasks required for conducting the assessment and ensure that the conditions are set for the work to be accomplished within the time frame and to the desired standard.

The Task Teams are the assembly of stakeholders who have sufficient knowledge of specific aspects and workings of the CRVS system in their areas of responsibility. The individual members of the group may also have some knowledge of other aspects of the system, by virtue of their previous experience or personal reading. Regardless of the extent of their exposure to the system, all must be brought to a common understanding of the system and the essential features that are to form the basis of the assessment.

The composition of the Task Teams is to be more extensive than that of the Steering Committee, which has the primary stakeholders (those institutions that have direct responsibility for administering the CRVS systems, for funding of the activities, and for promoting or advocating for its development or strengthening). The Task Teams, on the other hand, has representatives from these institutions, and in addition, stakeholders who can provide technical inputs into the assessment. The membership should be those at the operational level who can contribute to the discussions at the various stages of planning, formulation of the questions, adaptation of the Assessment Tools, the administration of the instruments, analysis of the findings and preparation of the report. Some of the members of the Task Team could be from the academic/research fields such as demography and

¹⁹*Ibid.*

sociology, who can provide some contextual information about the traditional systems linked to the four focus vital events, i.e., birth, death, marriage and divorce.

The Task Teams meet first in a workshop to get the necessary orientation to the exercise and understanding of the instruments already adapted to the country situation. In the process, the Teams should make further inputs to improve the instruments and make them appropriate and suitable for the specific national contexts. The workshop should have built in sessions for testing the instruments and the proposed methods to be used. The meeting should categorize the questions according to the most suitable methods to be used to elicit the expected kinds of responses. The Task Teams will each tackle a specific aspect of the Assessment. There should be enough Teams to make the task manageable, considering that the assessment is to be conducted at all levels of operations of the CRVS system. The Teams should not be too big, but should be large enough so that there can be further division of assignments within the teams. There may be six to eight members in a task team, with due consideration given to the scope of work, the ways in which the task can be subdivided, and the range of methods to be employed.

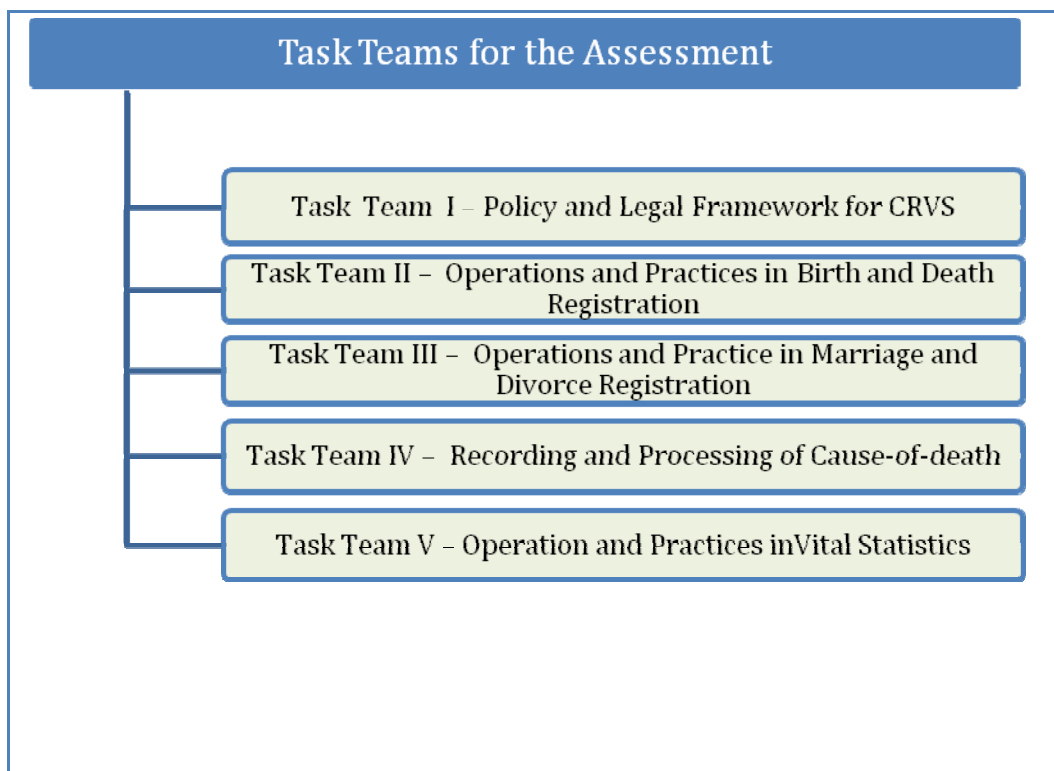
The assignments can be shared along events, along the sections/topics of the assessment, or a combination of the two. One form of distribution of teams, is as proposed by the University of Queensland, according to specific functional areas, namely: (i) legal basis and resources, (ii) forms used for birth and death registration,²⁰ (iii) coverage and completeness of registration, (iv) organization and functioning of the vital statistic system, (v) data storage and transmission, (vi) death certification and cause of death, (vii) ICD coding practices, data quality and plausibility, and (viii) data tabulation, access and dissemination. This division also follows the structure of the questionnaire. This configuration breaks down the processes into more specific details with the registration operations taking two task groups for birth and deaths, vital statistics taking three groups and cause-of-death taking two. Marriage and divorce, which are not covered would also conceivable take two additional groups.

In this Assessment tool, the proposal on the division of assignments is a combination of the events and the nature of the process. It is proposed that there be five Task Teams, one dealing with the Policy and Legal Framework, the second and third dealing with the operational aspects (for births and deaths on the one hand and for marriages and divorces on the other).

²⁰ Since University of Queensland tools focus on births and deaths, it would be necessary to assign the forms on marriage and divorce to this group.

The fourth group should deal with cause-of-death, and the fifth to deal with vital statistics on all the events. There are a number of ways in which the groupings and assignments may be varied:

Figure 3.2: Distribution of Assessment Tasks



- (a) It is assumed that same institutions are responsible for birth and death, and another for marriage and divorce registration. This may not be the situation in all countries. In some the institutional responsibility for registration may cover births, deaths and marriages, while another covers divorce registration. The grouping of events could therefore follow this line.
- (b) Some countries may find that it is more manageable to have separate groups to tackle the operational aspects of each event, or within the proposed Task teams, there could be further subdivision along these lines. –

Following the initial orientation-training workshop, the meetings could be organized at the task team level to carry out the assessment. The tool is primarily a self-assessment tool, meaning that those administering them are involved in the operations that they are assessing. It is essential that a combination of methods is used for the assessment so that the strengths of each of the approaches can be derived for the benefit of the whole exercise. Whatever

approach is employed it is most beneficial to have a pair or trio conduct the exercise so that there can be exchange of ideas and perceptions.

Individual interviews may also be used under some situations. The decision on what methods to choose for what sections and what combinations to adopt should be guided to some extent by the need to be effective and time-efficient in obtaining inputs from all key stakeholders. The need to work towards a consensus on the assessment is also paramount given that it is from these findings that actions are to be drawn up for the strengthening of the system.

3.6 Methods and approaches

There are varieties of approaches proposed in this section for collecting the required information in the Assessment exercise. These include: desk review of legal and policy documents, and previous survey results; field visits for observation and to conduct interviews, with service providers, receivers of the services, programme managers, and community, individual face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions. There are also interviews of potential and actual beneficiaries (in exit interviews) of the services, and analysis of data. Each team will need a combination of methods to complete the assigned issues for assessment. For the review of the policy and legal framework, a limited set of options may be needed, while for the operations and practices, the whole range of what is proposed would be needed. The assessment should also yield good case studies for specific innovations that can be shared with other institutions within the country, and other registration programmes in other countries.

The primary mode of data collection is by the assessment tool—a questionnaire that is to be administered by the task team members, to the target respondents. The details, content and structure of the Tool is presented in the next section.

a) Desk review

The Desk Review is one of the methods that all the Task Teams are to employ. The types of documentation to be consulted are: the acts/laws/legislative instruments, rules, regulations, directives, orders, notifications and related documents, governing the operations of the institutions responsible for registering vital events. The legislations of other agencies that have operations with a bearing on the vital events to be registered, such as health, and of those that require the evidence of registration as input for their operation, e.g., national

identification, immigration services; education²¹; and statistics. Some countries require registration certificates for other services, such as land registration, business registration, school enrolment, etc. The acts and legislative instruments governing these services should also be reviewed, for a better understanding of how these various activities could be leveraged for more successful outcomes.

The compilation and review of documents is a time consuming exercise as the documents may not all be readily available. Moreover, the review of one document will lead to another document that needs to be sought. It is best that this starts as early as possible when issues of the form of the assessment are being decided. It should also continue throughout the assessment. Documents and reports should be requested from the offices visited so that the information provided can be confirmed or further explanation and context obtained from the documents. Types of documents include operational guides, previous assessment reports, administrative instructions, etc.

Depending on the volume of materials compiled, it may be necessary to give each Task Team member assigned reading. Bibliography of all documents consulted should be kept up to date and should be done alongside the reading not after; else there is a risk that some will be missed.

b) Field visits

The second major approach in the review is the field visit, i.e., visiting the offices where the civil registration is managed, the facilities where the registration and related services take place, and other locations where information may be obtained about the registration services rendered and received. In the desk review, the legal provisions are assessed in terms of their adequacy, applicability and relevance. The remaining part of the assessment deals with the actual operations, with respect to the degree of compliance of the operations and practice with the legal provisions, and the effectiveness of the procedures. The field visits are to confirm the validity of the initial findings from the Desk review. The information is obtained through a survey.

Survey approach: The Assessment Tools have qualitative survey questions designed to get an open-ended answer. A few of the questions are of quantitative nature, referring to a yes or no

²¹ Some countries use the school enrolment as a way of getting children to be registered though not as a condition to enrolment.

answer, seeking years a law was enacted or reviewed; also the number of staff, etc. Much of the data to be collected in the assessment are however qualitative. Even when the initial response to the question is a yes or no, it is expected that more elaborate responses will be added and that illuminating insights to the simple responses would be provided. In all cases, it is expected that there shall be further probing to obtain explanations, reasoning or detailed descriptions, with the primary intention of identifying issues that may need to be looked at in greater depth.

Interviews: The interview method is one of the approaches used during the field visits. The tool comprises a set of questions to be used as a guide. The Assessment Tools should not be rigidly applied. The content of the interview should be transcribed and the transcript used for analysis. The interview involves asking the target audiences (a) functionaries in selected registration facilities, (b) individuals obtaining a service (c) a group of individuals whose views can shape the service provision, and (d) individuals or group of individuals who have no experience with any of the registration services. Responses are obtained in a face-to-face or person interviews. The qualitative interviews are to obtain in-depth information about the knowledge, and reasoning about the observed practices. Every effort should be made in the probing and follow-up questions to gain an understanding of perspectives of those responding to the questions.

The mode of interview is a cross between informal conversational interview, and the interview guide approach, with the Assessment Tool as the interview protocol. As an informal conversation, the plan is to explore specific topics raised in the assessment and to follow all leads that emerge during the discussion. The interview is complimented by the topics and open-ended questions provided. The Task Team has the flexibility to follow these topics and questions closely, or add some other questions, and to adjust the order of the questions as deemed appropriate.

In addition to the functionaries, the primary focus of the field interviews, beneficiaries or recipients of registration services are also to be asked about the services they received. By this their views on whether the system is working adequately for their specific needs and to their satisfaction is investigated. There are two categories of service recipients to be interviewed: (a) those who are waiting for the service, and (b) those who have just received a service (exit interviews).

Observation: It involves the Task Team watching the people and the scenes in certain situations to obtain information about the way registration, compiling and storing of data, and responding to requests are accomplished in a given day. Observation is an important way of collecting information about people because attitudes and behavior are not always congruent; i.e., people do not always do what they say they do. The other approach proposed is to have participant observation. This entails observing a substantial part of the workings of the registration process for which some information is required. There are several different styles in which participation by the Task team member assigned to observe the process. It is recommended that the passive participation or direct observation approach be used, which means that observers are not actively involved in the activities. There is however a potential situation that may cause some dilemma.

The Task team should anticipate that something could go wrong with the process during their observation. The decision to intervene should be weighed against the impact on what they are measuring. For example, if the objective is to assess how long it takes to register an event, then observers should not intervene in situations that could reduce the time. But if it would ease a mother to be helped with carrying her child, this can be done since it does not affect the time for the registration. The burden that the process places on the mother could nevertheless be noted. However, if exit interviews are planned, intervening with this help may affect the outcome of the interview and should not be undertaken. The Team should make every effort to take extensive field notes, which will be used later in the analysis. The use of photography and video (if available) is also recommended to help with observation.

Focus Group: Some of the interviews can be conducted in a group setting. The groups are used to clarify or confirm data that have been gathered through other qualitative research methods. For an effective focus group there should be 6 to 12 participants, who are purposively selected because they can provide the information of interest for the assessment. In addition, interview discussions may yield new SWOT points, especially around issues that are often not documented, such as informal payments, governance, and new or changing strategies.

c) Secondary data

Many recent surveys have included questions about individuals' compliance with registration requirements. The focus of these data collection exercises may have been on birth

registration, but they should provide insights into why people are not motivated to register their vital events. The surveys that have questions include: the national population census; and household surveys such as the DHS, Living Standard Measurement Study (LSMS) household surveys, and MICS. Some of these inquiries have asked whether a child born to the individual was registered and if not the reason why the birth was not registered. The survey reports should be consulted for details on the findings.

d) Pictorial presentation

There are various ways in which the information can be collected and presented. In some of the questions it is requested that the information be presented in a form of a diagram, or pictures taken to present the situation. There are situations that cannot adequately be captured with words, while there are those which are only convincing when represented visually. Pictures often capture attention more readily than printed words, and stimulate the interest and likely ideas for action.

e) Case Studies

Innovations in the adoption of technology, new approaches and other means of enhancing the efficiency of the registration operations are important lessons to capture. Special attention should be devoted to such case studies to help other countries in their identification of potential actions for their problem. Countries are encouraged to develop separate documentation on such experiments for sharing with the others.

3.7 What does the assessment tool cover?

CRVS strengthening must start with a broad-based assessment of the system’s own environment and organization, responsibilities, roles and relationships; and of the technical challenges of specific data requirements:

Table 3.1 Details of the CRVS assessment framework

| | |
|--------|--|
| Inputs | Legislative and regulatory frameworks supporting the existence and operation of CRVS systems, including cause-of- death operations as well as the financial, human and Technological resources required for proper functioning of CRVS systems |
|--------|--|

| | |
|-----------|--|
| | <p>Policy and legal frameworks and resources for civil registration and vital statistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy environments for civil registration and vital statistics ▪ National legal framework for civil registration and vital statistics systems, including cause-of-death ▪ Registration infrastructure ▪ Human resources ▪ Budget and finances |
| Processes | <p>Processes required for obtaining and compiling information such as registration and certification practices; forms, classifications and coding practices used in obtaining and compiling information; procedures for the management and transmission of data</p> <p>CRVS Operations – Processes and practices in registration, record transmission and data release</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management and organization; functioning of the civil registration and vital statistics systems ▪ Review of forms used for birth, death and cause-of –death, marriage and divorce registration ▪ Operations, process and practice of registration and processing of information ▪ Data base management ▪ Advocacy and communication |
| Outputs | <p>Type and quality of statistics produced, and methods for disseminating, accessing and using those statistics;</p> <p>Data access, use and quality checks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data compilation and analysis ▪ Products and services ▪ Data access and dissemination ▪ Monitoring and evaluation |

The Assessment Tools have been organized into three major components, as follows:

A1. Policy and legislative environment for Civil Registration

A2. Organisation and Planning for Civil Registration

B. Vital Statistics from Civil Registration

C. Cause –of -death

The major thematic areas covered by the three components (A, B&C) are presented in detail in the section below.

i) Policy and legislative environment for CRVS

The starting point for most national programmes is the legislation that governs the operations of the responsible institution, with the accompanying policy documents, guidelines and directives. Even when there is a reasonably good law in force, time and the era in which the operations are being managed may require some adjustments to the existing legal instruments. An in-depth review of the legal instruments and policies could suggest areas where performance of the system is being impeded by the weaknesses in the law, or that the legal provisions are not being closely adhered to, or that the current situation is so different from what pertained at the time of the enactment of the law, or the review of it, that some reviewed or new sections must be introduced to provide the appropriate legislative environment for strengthening the country's CRVS system.

This section of the assessment tool covers the following two subsections:

(i) Policy environment for civil registration and vital statistics systems

(ii) National legislations covering CRVS systems

Most countries have a national civil registration Act or similar legislation that has guided the operations of its CRVS system. The act may be a comprehensive one that contains issues pertinent to the registration of all vital events (for the current purpose birth, death, marriage and divorce) and the provision of related services, such as issuance of certificates, the maintenance of the events register and records, and the generation of statistical information. There may also be other acts, for example, a separate act for a single or pair of events. This

situation may apply when there are separate institutions responsible for the registration and the acts setting up the institutions have specific provisions for registration and maintenance of the records from the process. Several other documents reinforce the policy environment by providing complementary provisions for the management of processes associated with some events. For example, health facilities are predominantly responsible for managing births and deaths. The Ministry of Health would therefore have legislations that touch on these events. These other legislations should also be taken into account, as should policy statements and related documents.

The primary interest in reviewing the legislations is to ascertain the rules and regulations directing:

- what information is to be collected, by whom, from whom and within what time frame
- who is responsible for compiling the information and transforming it into statistics
- who is tasked with management and dissemination of the data.²²

Although most countries have a civil registration Act or similar legislation, it is often outdated, does not cover key aspects, or not fully complied with because of poor enforcement.²³

The system that produces vital statistics from civil registration can be configured in many ways, varying from country to country. The configuration reflects organization of both the registration and the management of the derived information. The national civil registration system may be centralized and operated by a single agency responsible for issuing certificates and coordinating all registration efforts at the national level. Alternatively, the system may be decentralized, with individual states or administrative areas responsible for the registration of the vital events in their areas. A further differentiation may be from different institutions responsible for different sets of events; for example one ministry being responsible for the registration of births and deaths, and another responsible for the registration of marriages and divorces. On statistics production, the responsibility for collecting, processing and

²² HMN and WHO 2010. Improving the quality and use of birth, death and cause-of-death information: Guidance for a standards-based review of country practices.

²³This is confirmed by the Country health information system assessment reports posted on the HMN web site: <http://www.who.int/healthmetrics/support/en/>

maintaining the data may be vested in the registering institution, or in a separate entity, for example the NSO depending on structures and traditions in countries. The legal framework needs to reflect the national system in place for the registration of all events, births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and any others of national interest and concern; the local practices, the method by which the information is compiled into vital statistics, and who is responsible for disseminating them.

A common structure in many countries is that a registrar general or similar high-level official in the civil registration (located in the ministry of interior or another ministry with similar responsibilities) is responsible for the national registration of vital events. Whether the organizational structure is centralized or decentralized, marriage and divorce information is collected through a network of local area registration offices that are supported in their functions by other reporting units such as the police, courts, religious institutions; community leaders; etc. The compilation of the collected information and its transformation into vital statistics is often delegated to the NSO, which might receive technical support from other relevant ministries, for the compilation of the data. For example, the judicial system may undertake to extract the required information from the court records, or complete forms designed for that purpose by the NSO.

ii) Organisation and planning

This section of the assessment examines how the entire process of events registration and generation of records and statistics is organized, from the lowest levels of operation to the national level. It reviews the structures in place at each of the operational levels, how they are linked horizontally, i.e., between the various offices responsible for specific operations—registration, certification, transfer of records, processing of information, statistical operations, etc.; and vertically, i.e., from one level of operation to the next, both upstream and downstream. It also reviews how tasks are distributed between the civil registration authorities, the health system and the NSO (or any other institution involved), and how these parties cooperate.

The first step in the analysis is to map out the operations in a multi-layered flow diagram, showing the units responsible at all stages of the process. There are four subsections presented in this section of the assessment tool namely:

(i) Organisational structure and linkages

(ii) Planning

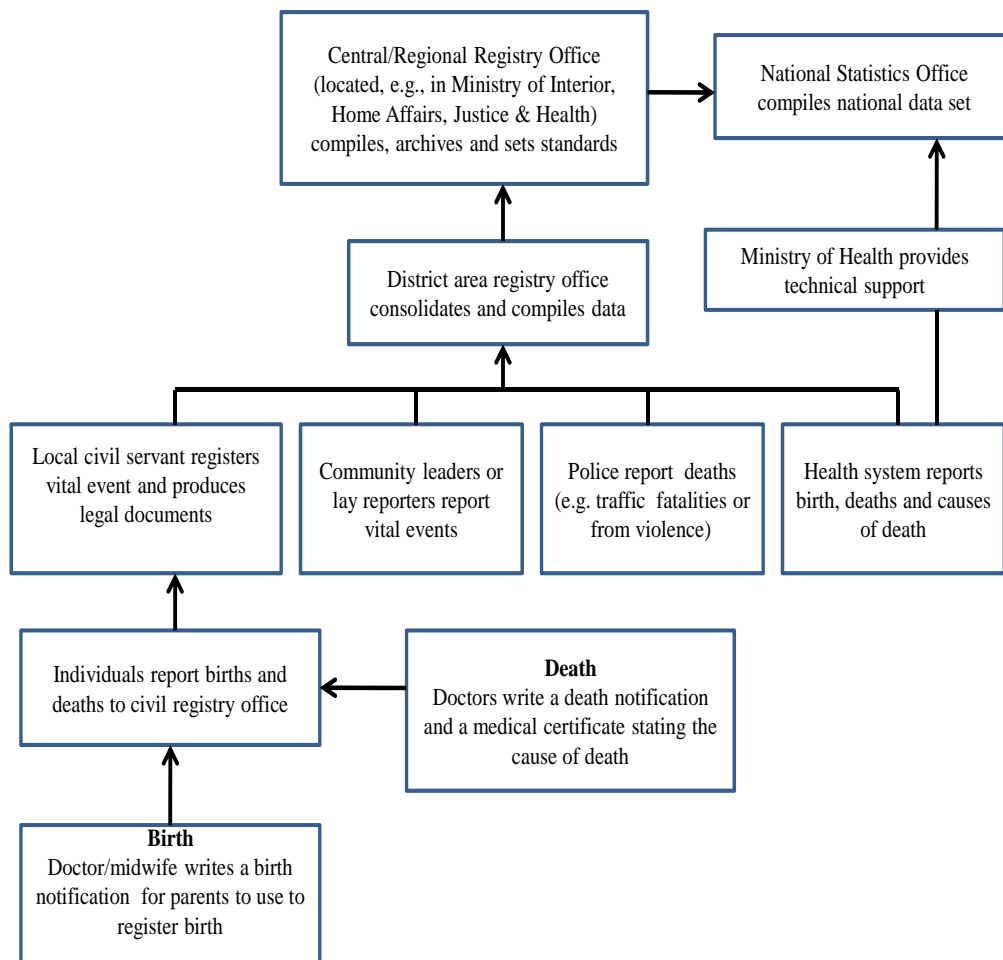
(iii) Coordination

(iv) User-producer consultations

The flows should not only be traced for each event, but should also distinguish the paths for births and deaths that occur within a health facility and those that occur outside a health facility. For marriages and divorces, it is also necessary to identify the different ways in which these events occur in the society, e.g., customary within the home, in a religious institution, in a designated government office, etc. and map out how the registration process is manifested throughout the system.

The schematic representation, shows forth linkages, areas of duplication, bottlenecks, and breaks in the flow. It helps address questions of effectiveness, communication and collaboration channels that are to be strengthened, and superfluity in the organizational structures at the different levels and within operations. The section also explores avenues for systematic planning of CRVS operations and the adoption of an integrated framework for managing CRVS system. The questions related to the existence of a plan, should be answered through more in-depth analysis of the type of plan that exists, what funding is available, and how the segments of the registration, certification and data generation are incorporated into the plan, and the extent to which all the four events are covered by the plan. Another tool of system management is the user-producer consultations, which should take place at all stages of the operations, to engender a user-sensitive system.

Figure 3.3: Schematic Representation of Births and Deaths Registration and the Vital Statistics System



Source: HMN and WHO 2010. *Improving the quality and use of birth, death and cause-of-death information: Guidance for a standards-based review of country practices.*

iii) Resources

The availability of resources for all operations required for the entire process and for all vital events is crucial for the legal compliance and for the effectiveness of the system. The three dimensions of the resource covered by the assessment are namely (i) Infrastructure, (iii) Human resources and (iii) Budget and finance

The set of questions related to infrastructure assess the level of provision of office and storage accommodation, furniture for making the registration process most conducive to the range of actors (the registration staff, those who are being serviced, and the children being

registered, if they are required to make an appearance). The uninterrupted supply of materials and the required stationery for all the operations is also of interest and concern. Where the minimum required provisions are enshrined in the legal or policy documents, the review seeks to determine the degree of compliance and how any deficit may potentially affect the operations of the CRVS systems.

The Human resource requirements are assessed from the point of view of the service provisions. The staffing levels, qualifications of those at post compared to what is required either by law or by the assigned responsibilities, and existing organizational chart are also assessed, for each event and at all levels of operations. The scheme of service defining entry qualifications for each functional position, conditions for progression and the career path are analyzed to determine any impediments to performance, motivation, recruitment and retention of staff. The training of staff in the registration and allied services is also examined, as this is critical for ensuring quality service, efficiency and innovation where needed. In particular, for the proper recording of cause-of-death, it is imperative that suitably qualified personnel are employed, and that these are adequately trained for the assignment. There are special tools to facilitate the operations of cause-of-death certifiers and coders, and these should be made available to all those assigned to these tasks. Funding is a critical input for the CRVS to function satisfactorily, and for the services to be extended to the communities where they are most needed. The issues at stake is how CRVS activities are budgeted and funded; whether there are separate budget lines for these activities within the ministries or agencies where the entities are located; whether the budgeted amounts are allocated; and whether the expenditures match the allocations, and can they be clearly identified and tracked.

iv) Forms and materials for CRVS

The registration of a vital event and the issuance of certificate associated with the event entail some legal processes, and therefore require special procedures and forms. The information collected through these forms also have substantial value in the statistical system of the country, and a wide range of applications, such as in the national identification system, national social security system, educational system, health insurance systems, etc. There are therefore international guidelines on what information should be collected for the legal part of the form and for the statistical part as well. Many national legislations dealing with CRVS would also have some prescribed information items to be included on the form and how the

forms are to be designed and managed. The questions in the Assessment tool review the content of the forms used for the registration of all the vital events, and relate them to the legal requirements and the international guidelines. Variations are analysed in terms of their benefits or limitations. For example, while for the national interest or practical considerations some countries may consider some items not essential, for their data needs some countries may choose to add some other items of information. Supplementary materials and tools such as ICD manuals, coding instructions, verbal autopsy toolkits, and other guidelines that facilitate the work of registration, accurate assignment of cause-of-death, and efficient compilation, storage and retrieval of records and statistical information should be available to all the relevant staff, to facilitate their work.

v) Operations of CRVS: Processes and practices

This section of the Assessment Tool traces the many steps between when an event such as a birth, death, marriage and divorce occurs and when it is included in a country's vital statistics. The underlying objective of the line of questioning is to assess the efficiency of the system, with respect to the delivery of the services of registration and issuance of certificates, including any legally permitted amendments and corrections, timeliness of the registration process, i.e., how quickly an event is registered, timeliness of the processing and release of the statistical information, i.e., how quickly the information is processed and forwarded to the vital statistics agency. This part of the tool is differentiated by the stages of the entire process. The first segment is the registration and certification (including storage and archiving), leading up to the transmission of records to the statistical agency. The second segment is the processing of statistical records leading to the dissemination of data, including storage and archiving. The third segment is the assigning, coding and processing of cause-of-death information as input to the death registration on the one hand, and health information and/or vital statistics system, on another. The operations covered by the assessment are namely: (i) registration procedures, (ii) corrections and amendments, (iii) data capturing and processing (iv) compilation and analysis (v) Records storage, archiving and retrieval/ Computerization (v) Information sharing and transmission and (vi) dissemination.

Understanding what data are collected from individuals, and how they are transcribed, compiled, transmitted, checked and stored in archives and databases before becoming vital statistics will help to identify potential problem areas in the system. To identify bottlenecks or loopholes, field visits to service points at all operational levels, with rural and urban

representation, should be undertaken to observe actual procedures and practices, interview those receiving the registration and related services, and possibly others who have never sought these services though they have experienced one of the vital events. Detailed discussions should also be conducted among the team members and with the service providers, to trace service delivery issues and practices, starting from the occurrence of the events – births, deaths, marriages and divorces (fetal deaths may also be included, if it is one of the countries recorded events), – through all the steps in the entire registration process. This should be done separately for events that take place outside of health facilities, for non-natural deaths, and for different types of marriages and related divorces.

The case of cause-of-death recording and processing is to be examined separately. It is important to review sampled records of all registrations to assess completeness of information collected using the prescribed forms, and the accuracy of the information recorded. The observations and interviews should seek to uncover situations that make the registration burdensome giving rise to individuals avoiding to register any event. The way in which notification of a death and certification of cause of death are being done, the assignment of responsibility in these functions, should also be studied and recommendations made to eliminate any confusion of roles or misunderstandings regarding differences between the notification form completed by the doctor and the legal registration paper.

Following the division of the segments, the civil registration operations end where the statistics functions begin, with the transmission and sharing of information and records. For the statistical information, the process is completed with the dissemination of data that have been compiled and analysed for suitable audiences. Data and analyses of vital events, especially for deaths and causes of death, should always be presented separately for males and females, to maximize their public health value. Marriages and divorces, and fertility indicators should also be analysed by age.

vi) Database management

A necessary step in the production of statistics from the civil registration system is the maintenance of a database of the micro data, as well as the processed statistics and indicators at various levels of disaggregation. It is important that all data on the individual has sex as a variable for all records. For the data compiled as statistics and indicators, they should all be compiled separately for girls, boys, women and men. The tabulations of the individual

records may follow international standards, which aim to guide countries on the most useful ways of aggregation. The available tables and stored data should be compared with the United Nations minimal list of recommended characteristics for tabulating vital statistics from civil registration. The ICD also provides useful guidance for cause-of-death tabulation lists, as well as recommended age groups on what tabulations to generate. The medium of storage and how it interfaces with other national databases needs to be assessed to ascertain its usefulness and versatility.

vii) Advocacy and communication

There is a significant amount of public education required to get civil registration and vital statistics on most national agenda and public discussion. On the one hand, government needs to have a good understanding of what the system entails, recognize its importance and linkages with many ongoing and emerging initiatives to leverage its funding and other resources efficiently. For example, too few systems of national identification are building the necessary linkages with civil registration to safeguard the integrity of these systems. Linkages with these other systems, including health, education, health insurance, social security, etc., could also create avenues for the public to see added value to the effort required to register their events. At present, the low appreciation by government systems and the lack of knowledge on the part of the public, even on the legal obligation for registering births, deaths, marriages and divorces, keep the systems from expanding in coverage and completeness.

This section of the assessment Tool is divided into two parts namely:

- (i) Advocacy and communication and
- (ii) Creation of demand (applies mainly to registration of vital events)

The advocacy refers to activities to sensitize and inform government on the value of CRVS, showing the linkages that could be established with other system for efficiency in the collective operations and raising the value for the expenditures on these systems. The goal is to increase government resources to CRVS with a view to extending links with other systems. Advocacy with government and the other stakeholders should also lead to increase resources to extend coverage, as well as interagency cooperation to bring registration services closer to the communities and settlements. Communication aspects cover the messages and how they are to be packaged and conveyed to stakeholders, government officials and public alike, so

that their patronage of the system will increase with the overall outcome of increased completeness.

The creation of demand is considered from the perspective of the population who have the legal obligation to report on their events and have them properly registered. There is, in large part, very little incentive or motivation for many to comply with this legal requirement since there is no pressing need for the certificates. There needs to be a serious effort to affect the demand of the population for the certificates, by increasing the different times at which the certificates would be required. The increase in demand should necessarily be balanced with increased proximity of service points in order not to make the registration anymore burdensome to the public than it already is.

viii) Monitoring and evaluation

The CRVS system should be closely monitored to assess progress, identify any bottlenecks in programme implementation and institute corrective measures. The national systems have for the most part been left over several decades in spite of their existence without such a comprehensive assessment having been undertaken. For many countries this may be the first assessment of its kind, since the system was first established. It is expected that the current assessment will set the framework and benchmark for future assessments and monitoring. Apart from such major undertaking, it is important that a system be in place to track various facets of the process, to assess compliance with legal provisions, policy framework, plan, etc.

The quality of information collected and processed should also be assessed and the level of completeness and coverage. Other aspects to be monitored are the use of the database, the publications and the reach to the audience. A user satisfaction survey should also help in determining if the system is achieving its desired goals. The practices, cultural and socio-economic that affect registration should also be assessed. Continuous use of the available data, for analysis to determine the characteristics of those who register and how they are changing can inform programming on the CRVS system. According to the WHO/HMN (2010; pp. 39-40), "In properly functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems, all births and deaths in the population are recorded. With regard to cause-of-death statistics, the gold standard (i.e. the ideal) is complete civil registration, where each death has the underlying cause assigned by a medically qualified doctor and coded by someone trained in the ICD rules and principles."

CHAPTER FOUR

BUILDING ON ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The aim of this chapter is to provide a preview to the assessment Tool. It explains how the findings of the assessment are to be used following endorsement by stakeholders. It outlines the University of Queensland approach “building consensus among stakeholders on the priority actions for improving the civil registration and vital statistics system”, based on the understanding of the current state of the system as derived from the assessment.

4.1 Outcome of the Assessment

As indicated earlier, the primary purpose of the comprehensive assessment called for by the Conference of Ministers responsible for civil registration, is to provide the basis for developing a strategic costed plan to improve national CRVS systems, increasing the completeness of registration of all targeted vital events (birth, death, marriage and divorce), and producing reliable vital statistics for planning and other purposes.

In chapter two the improvement planning was presented as a four-phased process and chapter three introducing the assessment tool that is to be adapted to national specificities and administered with the involvement of all the major stakeholders. At the end of the second phase, it is expected that the comprehensive assessment would be completed and the following outputs would be available to feed into the next phase of the process:

- (a) Reviewed set of tools for the comprehensive assessment
- (b) Completed questionnaires (assessment tools, with relevant documentation, including charts and photographs)
- (c) Reports by the various Task Teams on their assessment results
- (d) A consolidated report by the Task Teams on the comprehensive assessment
- (e) Catalogue of problems and weaknesses in the CRVS system with recommendations on the needed actions for improving the national CRVS systems.

- (f) A catalogue of proposals/ strategies for addressing each of the outlined problems/weaknesses

These outputs are to feed into subsequent activities of the exercise (i) first as immediate inputs for the development of the National CRVS Improvement Plan, and (ii) as benchmark for future assessments and component of the monitoring and evaluation framework for the Plan.

The approach of employing Task Teams constituted by the registration agencies and related service providers, as well as beneficiary institutions, at all levels of operation of the CRVS system, makes this a self-assessment exercise with substantial benefits. One of the fundamental benefits from this process is the buy-in from all the major stakeholders, which can be leveraged for the next phase of the process. The strategy of getting stakeholder institutions to collaborate in this national exercise, with each playing a specific set of roles in the review, employing various forms of communication to elicit their inputs, and establish the facts about the state of the CRVS system, and of building consensus among stakeholders at all operational levels and at each stage of the assessment, also ensures that there is a strong foundation laid for the preparation of the improvement plan. The development of a Plan requires both an appreciation of the urgency of the situation and willingness on the part of all stakeholders to agreeing on priorities and sequencing of the actions to be taken.

The added benefits from the process should show forth in the following outcomes from the months of review and assembling of information.

- At all levels of operation where the review or assessment was conducted, key stakeholders participating in the process would have an increased level of knowledge and understanding of the state of the system, the institutional responsibilities and how the respective stakeholders can support the planning process and commit to its implementation.
- Partners in the review having shared the burden and experience of conducting the assessment, would add to their own areas of familiarity the detailed knowledge of those who are well versed with the substantive topics they have covered in their Task Team, or in the larger stakeholder briefings.

- The stakeholders would become better acquainted with the system, from their specific vantage points, to ensure that each of the components is not only assessed in detail, but also that the recommendations are practical and suitable for the various social and cultural contexts within the country.
- The various teams would become intimately aware of the underlying causes of problems and weaknesses in the system, from the diverse complementary investigative tools—desk reviews, field visits, interviews, and survey results, with other relevant documentation.
- The recommended actions from assessments would reflect the lessons from innovations, explorations, what has worked well, as well as best practice examples from other countries.

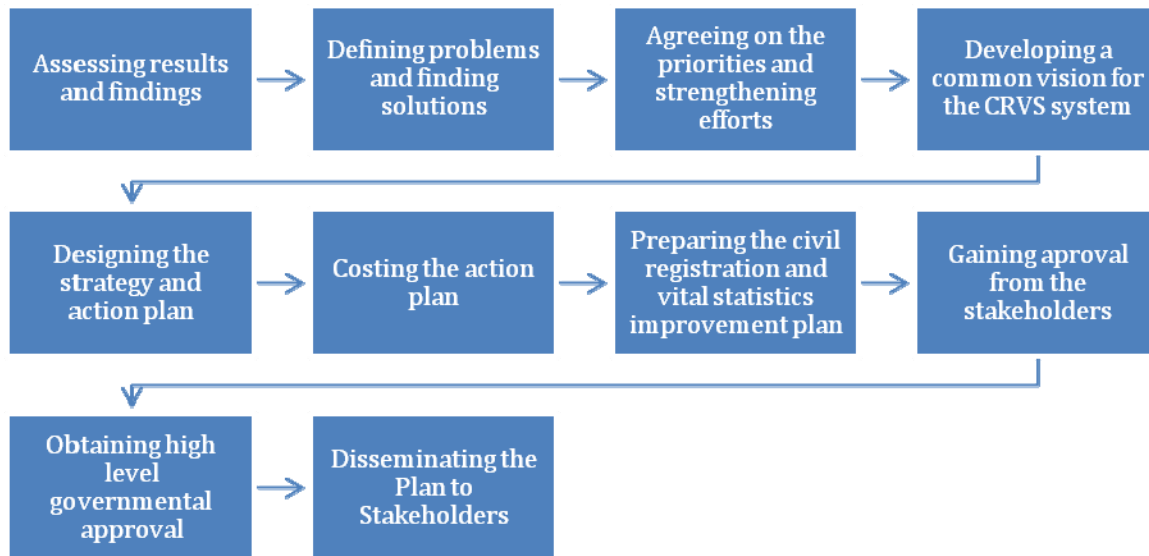
Although the main desired output for the assessment phase of the exercise is the set of reports, consideration would need also to be given to the value of this exercise for the future system that will be in place with the proposed improvements.

The results of the comprehensive assessment will also serve as the benchmark for future reviews and assessment once the improvement plan is embarked upon. Preservation of the information collected from the assessments is therefore crucial. The raw data would need to be processed and the summary indicators and other parameters drawn from the analysis and stored, manually or electronically. The creation of a database for the information collected from the facilities could facilitate the compilation and comparison of information from the various service points for the current exercise and analysis of changes over time. This can be incorporated in the benchmark set for follow-up assessments as part of the monitoring system for the improvement plan.

4.2 Overview of the Improvement Planning Process

The third phase of the planning process begins with a meeting of the Task Teams and involves building consensus around issues of priority setting for the proposed actions. The possible actions in the form of solutions to the identified problems emanating from Task Teams' deliberations would need to be agreed upon.

Figure 4.1: Process of developing an improvement strategy and plan for CRVS



Source: Lene Mikkelsen .*Strategic planning to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems: Guidance for using findings from a comprehensive assessment*. Working Paper Series; Number 23, September 2012.

The meeting of the Task teams is to present their findings and recommendations, and to agree on the actions to prioritize the recommendations for improvement of the CRVS system. The meeting provides a forum for the Teams to present their key findings and explain and defend their recommendations, including, bringing out the innovations and significant achievements. In the process, all members of the Task teams obtain an overview of the system and are able to contribute to the discussions and debate across different components of the systems.

The range of solutions for the specific problems that would be identified would vary from country to country, in view of the peculiarities of the problems and the priorities that stakeholders would agree to set among the proposed list. Depending on the level of development of the CRVS system there are a range of recommendations that can be proposed.

4.3 Reaching consensus on priority recommendations

Since different teams would have worked on the five components²⁴ of the assessment, i.e., legal framework; operations in birth and death registration; operations in marriage and divorce registration; cause-of-death; and vital statistics, the whole team should have a chance to review the assessment findings of others and agree on the range of actions to be undertaken for each weakness identified. The teams' suggestions could be enhanced by the different orientation of the members of the larger group. It would therefore be useful to devote the first part of the 'Results meeting' to the presentation and discussion of the assessment results and recommendations from the various teams. It should be expected that some of the recommendations would be amended, as would be agreed by the larger group.

The second part of the meeting would then deal with the prioritizing of the proposed actions. There are a number of ways by which a list of priority actions may be derived from those catalogued from the assessment and adopted by the meeting (in the first part of its deliberations). Yet prioritizing is often difficult because all actions may be deemed important. To arrive at a consensus, it is useful to devise an objective approach, by scoring or ranking the proposed actions based on some agreed criteria. An approach devised by University of Queensland²⁵ and tested in two countries as an integral part of the assessment exercise has been found to be quite effective and simple to apply. The advantage of the method was found to be its simplicity, which readily yields an agreed and prioritised list of goals even in a large group setting.

According to the University of Queensland methodology, the prioritization is accomplished in two stages. The first step is to have each Task Team score the reviewed recommendations pertaining to its area of responsibility in the assessment. The second step involves the Teams assessing the potential impact of any specific recommendation on the overall system in a country, if implemented, and agreeing on the priority actions.

The following set of four criteria is proposed for first stage of the Task Teams' ranking: urgency, feasibility, cost, and time line. These criteria are defined as follows:

²⁴ The number of Teams may vary according to the way national governments decide to share the responsibilities.

²⁵ Lene Mikkelsen. *Strategic planning to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems: Guidance for using findings from a comprehensive assessment*. Working Paper Series; Number 23, September 2012.

Urgency: the extent to which the recommendation is considered to be critical at this moment and needs to be implemented urgently;

Feasibility: the ease with which the recommendation could be implemented, given departmental roles and responsibilities in government, or cultural traditions;

Cost: the expected cost associated with implementing the recommendation and the likelihood of obtaining funding from different internal and external sources;

Timeline: the period required for the full implementation of the recommendation.

Table 4.2: Prioritisation method for recommended improvement goals

| Criteria | Scores | Scenarios |
|-------------------------|---------------|---|
| Urgency | 4 | Must start immediately |
| | 3 | Could be delayed for up to 6 months |
| | 2 | Could be delayed for up to 2 years |
| | 1 | Could be delayed until able to be done |
| Feasibility | 4 | Necessary action can be decided at the departmental level |
| | 3 | Require inter departmental agreement |
| | 2 | Requires legislation change |
| | 1 | Requires change in tradition/culture/policy |
| Cost | 4 | No cost implications |
| | 3 | Can be funded within current budget |
| | 2 | Need to apply for government funding |
| | 1 | Need to find external resources |
| Timeline for completion | 4 | <3 months |
| | 3 | 3 months to a year |
| | 2 | 1-5 years |
| | 1 | >More than 5 years |

Table 4.3: Example of two round scoring and ranking by Task teams and Plan drafting Team

| | Urgency | Feasibility | Cost | Timelines | Total | Impact | Responsible Agency |
|---|---------|-------------|------|-----------|-------|------------|--------------------|
| Legal framework | | | | | | | |
| Increase budget for civil registration at the local levels | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 7 | H= High | NSO, LGUs, DOH |
| Approval of the pending proposed bills on civil registration | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 12 | H= High | NSO, DOH, Congress |
| Coverage and completeness | | | | | | | |
| Advocacy for registration aimed at marginalised sectors and poor provinces | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 8 | L = Low | NSO |
| Impose free registration for timely registered documents | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 8 | M = Medium | NSO |
| Storage and dissemination | | | | | | | |
| Advocacy aimed at mayors to clearly define functions of local CR office | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 6 | H = High | NSO, LGUs |
| Timely publication of vital statistics report | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 7 | H = High | NSO |
| Intensive promotion of CR software to local offices, hospitals and other related institutions | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 8 | H = High | NSO, LGUs |

Source: **Lene Mikkelsen (2012)**

In the second round, the proposed actions are assessed for potential impact in achieving the agreed goal and vision. To account for such system-wide impacts, which are likely to transcend any of the specific aspects which have been assessed by the Task teams, it is recommended that the actions from the Task Teams with the scores and rankings is assigned a qualitative scoring system of HIGH, MEDIUM and LOW impact collectively. The group would then select the priorities based on the combined rankings from the first and second stages.

Using this simple methodology, it is possible for the stakeholder meeting to produce an agreed and prioritized list of improvement goals and actions to guide the team that will draft the final CRVS system improvement plan.

The scoring and mode of ranking could be modified as deemed fit. For example, in a review of the proposed methodology, some experts²⁶ were of the view that it would be better to incorporate impact into the first round scoring so that the Task Teams would have a set of five criteria rather than the proposed four. The reason was that the impact on the goal is critical for the choice of action and should therefore be considered upfront.

4.4 Developing the Costed Improvement Plan

With the larger group having reviewed the assessments and produced a prioritized set of actions, the Teams can then work to design the strategy and action plan for system improvement. The plan is costed and reviewed by the wider group of stakeholders for validation. The reviewed draft should then be taken through the required approval process and to secure the necessary funding. The plan should also consider the monitoring and evaluation framework. A detailed guide on the preparation of a strategy and action plan is provided in Volume II of this guide (presented in a separate document).

As part of the process for developing the Plan, considerations about implementation modalities should also be addressed. A national coordination committee if one does not already exist, should be considered. Chaired by a high ranking official, the committee may have as its main functions to coordinate the improvement process, ensure the full participation of key stakeholders, foster advocacy and high-level visibility, and generate political commitment and resources.

²⁶ APAI-CRVS Core Group meeting in Addis Ababa, 29-31 January 2013.

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