REGIONAL GUIDELINES ON CIVIL REGISTRATION

African Center for Statistics
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
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1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

There has been, for many years, universal recognition of the need and importance of registration of vital events, namely live births, deaths, marriages and divorces. Virtually every country of the world has promulgated laws for the establishment of national civil registration system for documenting judicial facts about the vital events. Birth registration, being the first entry of a person in a legal record, provides an identity document for the individual. The registration records also provide important information about the vital events that are useful for planning and policy making as well as monitoring and evaluation.

Birth registration has also been recognized as a right of the child under Article 7 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* that has been endorsed by most countries. The article states,

1. *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.*

2. *States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.*

Thus, it has become obligatory on the part of the national governments, to ensure registration of births within the framework of national laws.

Many countries are embarking on setting up a national identity card system to provide identity cards to the citizens. Once the existing citizens are provided with identity cards, there would be a need to continuously update the underlying database of population for births and deaths. Depending on the information included in the population database it may also be necessary to update them for marriages, divorces, etc.. Instead of establishing new systems, it would be economic for countries to link the population data base with the Civil Registration database for updating the former.

While there are several sources of vital statistics in a country, including population census, demographic and health surveys, etc.., the position of vital statistics derived from civil registration is unenviable. It can provide continuous data down to the smallest geographic division of the country. It would not have any associated sampling error as it is based on all events. It is also not affected by errors and biases that affect indirect estimates as it is based on recorded events. Since it is a product of the civil registration system and is based on verified legal documents, it is more reliable than other sources in the long run.

Thus, there are several advantages for a country to establish a functional Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system. However, it has been the experience that in many developing countries in the world that these systems are either not properly established or are not functioning efficiently. This has resulted in large proportion of the vital events not being registered, and hence the statistics based on registration records being not reliable. This is true of countries in Africa also. The reasons for this include inadequate legal basis and lack of awareness at the government level of the importance of registration and the vital statistics derived from the registration records. Lack of

public awareness and demand for registration documents like birth/death/marriage certificates in day to day activities have also contributed to this situation.

1.2 Historical Perspective and Current Status of CRVS in Africa

1.2.1 Historical perspective

During the pre-Christian era, rulers of Egypt, Rome and Greece were taking counts of births and deaths for military and fiscal purposes. However, regular and continuous recording of vital events started in the churches of the middle Ages. The churches were responsible for baptism, burials and wedding rather than births, deaths and marriages. Although, the registration of baptism, burial and wedding were compulsory, it was deficient and incomplete for getting reliable statistics out of the same. The deficiencies arose due to the fact that the authorities, sometimes, recorded payments rather than the occurrence of the events. Secondly, such registrations were restricted to the members of the religious denominations of a given church and hence were incomplete from the point of view of the society. Registrations in the church have long been in use for legal purposes in England and in some European countries such as France.

In the African context, the registration of vital events in Senegal and Mauritius dates back to the 17th century. Modern vital registration was introduced into Africa by the colonial governments. The first general order requiring the clergy to keep a register of baptisms, marriages and burials was passed in 1667 in Mauritius under the French rule. Vital registration in Gold Coast (Ghana) began in 1888. However, it was mostly restricted to the registration of expatriate workers of the then colonial government who were mostly resident in the few commercial towns in the country. Most of the African countries followed similar development path for the Civil Registration System, mainly influenced by their colonial governments, though there are exceptions.

It was not until after the attainment of independence in the 1960s, that compulsory registration laws, applicable to all population groups, were passed in some of African countries. Hence, history and development of CRVS system pertaining to African population proper can only be traced from the sixties onward, that is, from the post-independence period.

1.2.2 Current Status

After independence, many African countries made amendments to the procedures, coverage and contents of registration forms. This did not bring major structural improvement in making the laws effective and more relevant to the realities of the countries. During the same period, some countries gained some success in birth registration. However, there were serious set backs as a result of political turmoil in the region. For example, birth registration was about 80% in 1973 in Rwanda, but is currently one of the countries with very low levels of birth registration. Similarly, in Sierra Leone, also affected by civil war, the vital registration infrastructure was became disorganized. Now, the only African countries having complete registration are Egypt and six small island nations or territories (Cape Verde; Mauritius, Reunion; Saint Helena; Sao Tome and Principe and Seychelles)[1].

Usually, the first step in the establishment of a civil registration system is the enactment of legal provisions that compel, direct and strengthen the activities relating to registration of vital events. One of the major properties of legislation is to set rules and regulations that compel the public to report the occurrence of vital events within a specified period of time. However, most African countries do not have such strong and functional legal provisions. Such weak legal framework coupled with lack of political will and understanding of the importance of civil

1 *Reference to be added*

registration has lead to the current state of affairs. In the absence of reliable vital statistics based on civil registration, there has been dependence on indirect methods applied to census/survey data as well as sample surveys that produced national and regional level estimates of fertility and child mortality. Considering the efforts required to establish a Civil Registration System and make it fully functional, use of such data was an easy way out. This contributed to the neglect of developing the CRVS system as a source of data and diverted the attention of the countries from improving vital registration and to invest more on censuses and sample surveys. Despite the attention given and the investments made, censuses and sample surveys have not provided the expected and requited information due to the fact that both sources are affected by memory lapse and have to rely on assumptions of the indirect methods without knowing the reliability of the assumptions on which the estimates are made. It is also important to note that such methods can not provide data for lower geographic divisions of the country or for all social and cultural groups. Other factors that significantly affect the civil registration process and the data in African setting are lack of public awareness, cultural and traditional beliefs.

1.3 Regional Initiatives for improving CRVS in Africa

There has been a growing concern about the lack of development of Civil Registration Systems (CRS) in Africa. It is generally understood that one major reasons for this state of affairs is the lack of appreciation, especially on the part of government officials, of the potential uses of vital events records for providing identity documents to citizens and use of vital statistics for policy making and national planning for social and economic development. There have been several workshops and conferences that focussed on Civil registration and Vital Statistics systems. These are indicated below.

1.3.1 Regional Statistical Forums

In Africa, during the seventies and eighties, a number of regional organizations and countries conducted various gatherings, seminars and workshops concerning on Civil Registration and Vital statistics. The main objectives of these seminars and workshops were to strengthen national capacities to build and develop ways and means to attain complete and universal coverage of Civil Registration system and pave the way to generate accurate Vital Statistics.

These forums are included:-

a) Conference on Vital Statistics (14-18 December 1964, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)

b) Conference on Review to Recommendations of Committee on Civil Registration

c) Conference on Continuous Observation and Civil Registration (1974, Libreville, Gabon)

d) Seminar on Organization of Personnel of Civil Registration System, Training of Trainers, (Benin, 1980)

e) Meeting of the Working Group on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa (Kenya, 1980)

f) Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (1995, Morocco)

g) United Nations Workshop on Improving Statistics on Fertility, Mortality and Disability (2004, Ghana)

h) Workshop on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (2007, Egypt)

i) Workshop on Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (2008, Malawi)

1.3.2 Regional Ministerial Forum on CRVS

As per the recommendations of the regional workshop held in Dar-es-Salaam(June 2009), the First Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration was convened during 13-14 August 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Conference culminated in a declaration addressing critical political issues that need to be addressed in reforming and improving CRVS systems in Africa. The conference was attended by over 40 ministers from the region, representatives of CRVS authorities, national statistics offices and regional and international organizations. Over 30 experts from national institutions a have also attended the expert meeting. The Conference also endorsed the recommendations of the meeting of experts that preceded the conference.

The next step as a follow-up to the conferences is to strategize on the implementation of the activities and action points enshrined in the resolutions of the Conference. A post-conference gathering of selected country experts and key partners in the field was convened with the objective of preparing a roadmap for the realization of the regional policy framework as presented in the declaration of the ministerial conference. The second Ministerial Conference was organized Cape Town in 2012.

A new initiative called African Programme for Accelerated Improvement of CRVS (APAI-CRVS) has been taken up. The APAI-CRVS emerged from the necessity of bringing together the various CRVS initiatives in the continent into a common and consolidated policy and advocacy framework. The overall objective of APAI-CRVS is to provide management and programme guidance to the regional agenda of reforming and improving CRVS systems. Specifically, APAI-CRVS has the following objectives.

a) Promoting country ownership and leadership
b) Promoting coordination and integration between Civil Registration Authorities and National Statistics Offices (NSOs)
c) Promoting systematic and coordinated approaches
d) Promoting phased, holistic and integrated approaches
e) Constituting strong regional policy and advocacy forum
f) Building capacities of national CRVS focal institutions
g) Promoting partnership at country and regional levels
h) Strengthening the regional CRVS Secretariat at the ECA.

APAI-CRVS delves on these strategic directives, work processes and monitoring mechanisms of the regional initiative and country level implementations. The programme leaves the routine operational issues and activity breakdowns to the medium-term plans. It focuses on policy directives, programmes and Regional Guidelines that enable policy makers and programme managers to take up visionary leadership roles at regional and country levels. The programme focuses on addressing major conceptual and programme issues and tries to harmonize different interests and programme interventions coming from various actors.

The frequency of the meetings, conferences, and workshops as well as the serious nature of the discussions held therein indicate the growing interest of the countries in developing CRVS and consequently improving vital statistics in Africa. In particular, following the ministerial meetings of 2010, attention was turned to the implementation of the activities and action points enshrined in the resolutions of the Conference.

1.4 Regional Guidelines for Improving National Civil Registration

Systems

Most of the countries in Africa have some set up for civil registration - Birth and Death registration in most countries and registration of marriages in some countries. However, their coverage in terms of geography of the country as well as proportion of events registered are not complete. In many countries, even the legal framework and organizational set up for the CRS lack necessary wherewithal to cope with the realities and take appropriate actions where required. The generation of vital statistics suffers from incompleteness of registration and other organizational drawbacks. Hence there is a lack of appreciation of the quality and use of data on vital events generated from CRVS.

The United Nations Manuals and Handbooks on Civil Registration[2] provide the basic background for setting up CRVS systems. However, given the present status of CRVS in African countries, a need was felt for preparing guidelines for improving the civil registration systems by addressing various aspects of the legal framework, organizational set up, business processes and generation of vital statistics. As the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems are handled by different organizations in many countries in Africa, it was felt useful to have two different sets of guidelines – one focusing on Civil Registration Systems and the other on Vital Statistics. This guideline deals with improving Civil Registration Systems and would supplement the UN manuals on the subject. Thus, this guideline is intended to assist national governments in general and CRVS organizations in particular for preparing national strategies and action plans for improving CRVS systems.

1.4.1 Organization of the Guidelines

The guidelines provides an overview of a CRVS system in chapter 2. It also provides an introduction to various issues in improving the CRVS systems and the steps involved in it.

Chapter 3 is devoted to issues relating the legal provisions for CRVS. Making changes in the legal provisions is a cumbersome and time consuming process in most countries. However, considering that the CRVS systems in most of the African countries are not based on comprehensive legislations, there is a need for countries to look at provisions that need to be changed. While in some cases such changes may be possible through regulations, in most countries comprehensive changes of the law are required.

Chapter 4 discusses the organizational setting of the CRVS systems. As the type of organization depends on the governance structure of the country, it is not possible that all countries have similar organizational set up. The legal provisions regarding organization of the work would also have a bearing on the way in which the organization is expected to function. These aspects are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Chapter 5 discusses the registration process or the 'business process'. It depends on the organizational setting, legal provisions and administrative decisions. The business process needs to be designed in a citizen friendly manner as it alone would be one of the important ingredients in ensuring citizen support and participation in the registration process. The chapter also discusses about certification of cause of death, issue of certificates, registration forms and registers, archiving of records and capacity building.

Promotion of use of civil registration documents and statistics derived there from are important. While the certificates provides legal documents to the public, the statistics are essential tools for socio-economic and health planning and policy formulation. Realization of their

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importance would go a long way in indirect promotion of CRVS itself. The issues related to use of the documents are discussed in chapter 6.

In all countries, Civil Registration is a multi agency function in the sense that several Ministries/Agencies of the national and regional governments are involved in the day to day operations and management of the system. It is also necessary to involve other agencies for the purpose of promoting CRVS. Hence inter sectoral coordination plays a vital role in improving the functioning of the CRVS system in a country. Issues relating to such coordination mechanisms are discussed in chapter 7.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation are important to ensure smooth functioning of any system. Involvement of multiple agencies make it more difficult in case of CRVS. Chapter 8 discusses various aspects of monitoring a CRVS system at national and regional level. It also discusses periodic evaluation of the functioning of the system that would help to identify the various issues and take remedial steps.

Chapter 9 is devoted to the use of Information technology in CRVS system. While there are several advantages in setting up computerized registration systems, all related issues need to be considered while deciding on the extent of computerization.

Chapter 10 discusses the issues relating to financing the CRVS.

Chapter 11 summarizes some of the important suggestions in the guidelines.

This guideline is not a substitute for the United Nations Manuals and Handbooks on the civil registration and vital statistics systems. Provides some elaboration of issues mentioned in the UN handbooks and manuals and supplements it.

As mentioned earlier, there would be a companion volume to these guidelines that would provide guidelines for Vital Statistics based on CRVS systems is being separately brought out.

2. NATIONAL CRVS SYSTEM AND ITS IMPROVEMENT

Civil registration is defined as the "*continuous, permanent, compulsory recording of occurrence and characteristics of vital events, as provided through decree of regulations in accordance with the legal requirements in each country*"[3]. 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. Essential features of a CRVS system are as below:

a) Compulsory: A civil registration system must be compulsory in order to assure the smooth running and effectiveness of the system in a country.

b) Universal: In order to assure maximum value of the registration system to both individuals and to users of vital records and statistics information, registration requirements must apply to the entire population of the country, regardless of geographical location or subdivision of the population.

c) Continuous and permanent: The continuity and permanence of the registration method requires the existence of an agency of sufficient administrative stability whose operation must not be limited by time. Permanence is contingent upon the authority given to the civil registration administration through the civil registration law.

d) **Confidential**: While some of the information relating vital events may be in public domain, individual information collected during the registration process may contain sensitive information relating to the individuals concerned. Confidentiality of such information needs to be guaranteed under the law so that public have no inhibition in giving such information.

As can be seen the above requirements can not be met without a proper legal framework. However, while having a legal framework is essential, it is not sufficient for the establishment of a functional CRVS system. The following sections provide an overview of the CRVS system and the steps required for bringing out improvements in the systems and processes. These are discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters.

2.1 National Policies

As indicated in chapter 1, registration of birth has been recognized as a right of the child under article 7 the UN Convention on Child Rights. In addition, article 24 talks about "right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health". Most of the countries have ratified this convention. To provide for the right to registration of birth, a civil registration function organized by the state is absolutely necessary. Registration documents would help ensuring that the children are not deprived of many of the other rights and also helps in establishing the identity.

Some countries have set time bound targets for reducing fertility and infant/child mortality. For programme formulation and monitoring in these areas, it is necessary to have information about fertility and infant/child mortality including cause of infant deaths. Currently they are based on periodic sample surveys that can not give estimates at low geographic levels. This again points to the need for a functional CRVS system as no other process can provide such information down to the lowest administrative unit of the country. Thus, it is necessary that the national policies should include development of the CRVS system.

3 United Nations (2014) - *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System,Rev 3.* Statistical Papers Series M, No 19. para 279.

National health policies aim at reducing mortality due to specific causes. Without basic information on how many people are dying due to such causes and their breakdown by geographic location and also by other characteristics of the persons who died of such diseases, it is almost impossible to plan for health interventions to reduce mortality. Similarly, child marriage is a serious issue in several countries of the region. Once registration of marriages are made compulsory, it may be possible to tackle this issue more efficiently.

Thus governments have a reason for framing policies to bring in accelerated improvement in civil registration systems. These policies may include an assessment of the current status of the CRVS system in the country, including the legal framework, formulation of strategies and action plans to achieve this objectives with short and long term goals clearly identified.

2.2 CRVS Organization

The structure of civil registration organization depends substantially on the governance system of the country. The organization may be centrally organized, in the sense that the everything is decided at the national level. It can also be regionally organized, where subject to national level control and standardization, the actual organization is managed by regional governments. In either case, there can also be involvement of multiple organizations. The civil registration and vital statistics related activities can be handled by same organization or there can be dual agencies.

At the operational level Depending on the availability of government functionaries at lower levels who can be given the responsibility of civil registration functions, there may be multiple levels in the hierarchy. These may include officials from different organizations.

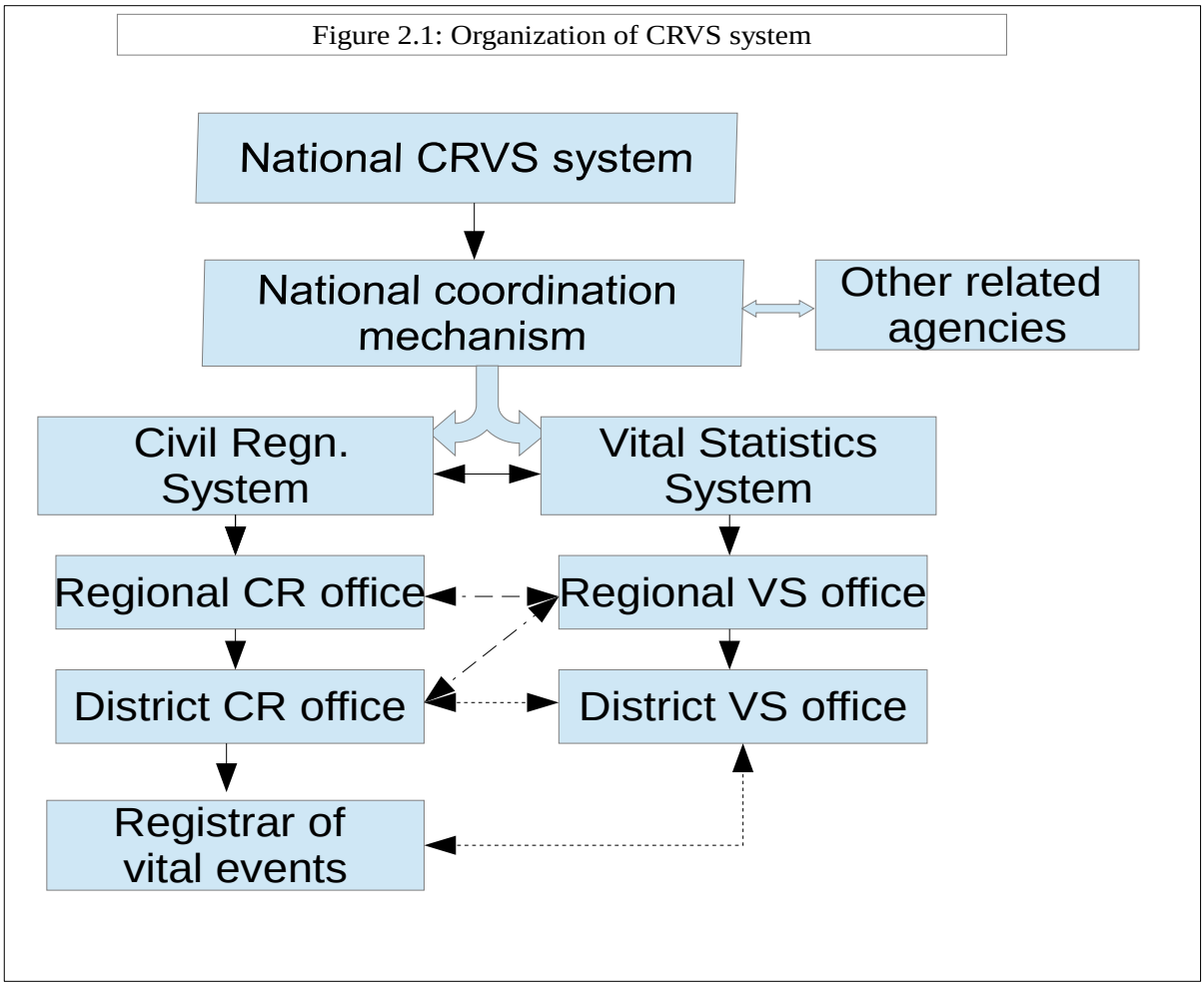
Equally important is the way in which the lower levels of the organization have been set up. As the registration functions involve dealing with the public on a day to day basis, the lowest level is as near and accessible to the people as possible.

In general a national CRVS system can be schematically shown as in chart 1. The national level coordination mechanism in the form of steering committee or coordination committee is required to ensure coordination with various agencies. The committee would have high level representation of the concerned Ministries and other agencies to ensure that its decisions are implemented. If the CRVS organization is a single entity that deals with both civil registration and vital statistics, then Vital statistics related functions may extend to lower levels and civil registration and vital statistics would function as two wings of the same organization. Alternatively, civil registration and vital statistics may be dealt by different organizations, with the vital statistics being handled by an independent body or the National Statistical Office (NSO). In this case, the relationship between CR and VS organizations would be with two objectives, (a) the compilation of vital statistics and (b) ensuring quality of information collected for statistical purposes. The levels at which data are transferred from CR organization to VS organization would be determined by the availability of functionaries in the VS organization corresponding to each level of CR hierarchy, infrastructure for data processing and legal requirements. The relationships at various levels between the CR and VS system needs to be well defined so that the entire organization functions like a single unit.

It may also be noted that in most countries, the lowest level functionaries (Registrar, assistant Registrar, etc.) may not be within the same administrative hierarchy of the national civil registration office. For example, while the national civil registration office may be under the Ministry of Home/Interior or Justice, the civil registration functions may be under the Ministry of Municipalities in urban areas and with Ministry of Health in Rural areas. Affairs. This sort of arrangement can not be avoided in most countries as the Ministry/organization that controls civil registration may not have offices at lower level. On the other hand the ministries/organizations with

offices at the lowest level may not be the most appropriate ones to handle the civil registration functions at the highest level.

Figure 2.1: Organization of CRVS system



2.3 Involvement of other government agencies and coordination

Though CRVS system appears to be a self sustaining one, it is not so in most circumstances. The field set up of the organization where actual registration of vital events takes place may include functionaries from various government agencies. This is because of the need for bringing registration machinery closer to public and the fact that work load may not justify having full time employees in the registration system at the lowest level. Another reason is that the agency handling civil registration function may not have lower level organizational set up. Thus, the field level functionaries of health, rural development, police or land revenue departments may be involved in registration process.

In countries where national identity card systems have been set up are are under implementation, there would be a close coordination between the CRVS system and the identity card system. This would help keeping the population database used for issuing identity cards up to date for each birth and death. Where both systems are fully computerized, such coordination can be built in so that transformation of information is automatic. In other cases there would be a need to have well laid out manual processes.

Coordination of the activities of all concerned departments of the government and other stakeholders is important. This may be achieved through coordination mechanism set up through the provisions of the law or administrative process. In some countries an apex committee or board is mandated by the law. Considering that organizations not directly involved in the registration process also have a stake in or can contribute to the the the development of CRVS , it is necessary that such coordination mechanism should be a broad based one. However, it is also necessary that it has decision making authority so that decisions made are binding on all the agencies concerned.

The coordination required with all stakeholders like ministries/departments of the government and NGOs that would use information from CRVS as well organizations involved in IEC activities for the government. While the first would help the organization understand the need and expectations of other organizations from CRVS system, the latter would benefit the system by helping it plan out IEC strategies.

2.4 Situational assessment and preparation of action plan

The first step for improving CRVS system is to have a situational assessment that takes into consideration the ground realities and analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the existing systems. The assessment may cover the legal framework, organizational structure, registration process, issue of certificates and sharing of information by the organization with other government organizations and compilation of statistics. It needs to specifically look into the legal provisions, organizational structure, flow of information, human resources deployed, capacity building, generation of vital statistics, inter sectoral coordination and IEC activities.

The legal provisions for registration in some of the countries are not very conducive to bringing in accelerated improvement in civil registration through peoples participation. There may especially be impediments in tackling the issue delayed registrations. In addition all vital events may not be covered by the law. The provisions for coordination mechanisms, either in the law or in the regulations orders may not be serving the purpose. Similarly, there may not be any provision for collecting statistical information and compilation of what is collected. Confidentiality of information is another area that are not addressed by several national laws. Amending legal statutes may be a cumbersome and long drawn out process and efforts for improvement in CRVS can not wait for them. Hence, while assessing these provisions clear distinction has to be made between the activities that can not be done without changing the law and those that can be done within the existing provisions of the law through regulations/rules (or subordinate legislations as they are called in some countries). The plan of action should, then, include changes in the law in the medium term plan, while changes that can be made through regulations etc. should be included in the short term pan.

Assessing the organizational structure needs to be done keeping the governmental set up and the need to bring registration machinery closer to people. These may include analysis of the following:

a) Accessibility: Distances people have to travel to report vital events or to get certificates. If these distances are high, then possible alternative solutions need to be explored.

b) Transfer of data to VS system: The bottlenecks in transfer of data for the purpose of generating vital statistics and for monitoring the registration process itself

c) Human resources: The availability of human resources for the registration related activities. While it may not be possible and necessary to have full time registration personnel at the lowest administrative levels, it would be necessary to have some persons working full time only on these activities at the region and national levels. Similarly in the VS organization

also there may be a need for some full time personnel to ensure the compilation of statistics in time.

d) Training and capacity building: Available programs need to be examined for content and coverage.

e) Coordination between CR and VS systems: In countries where the civil registration organization is not compiling vital statistics, apart from the flow of records, coordination between the two at the lowest level. This can be done through regional or district level coordination committees that meet periodically to review the work and sort out the issues.

f) Data quality: Involvement of VS system personnel in improving the quality of data collected

g) Inspections and monitoring: Instructions and practices of inspections and monitoring the registration process for coverage and completeness

The registration process is partly designed by the law in most countries. However, there are a number of aspects that are done through regulations and executive orders. The overall approach of the process of registration should be that is citizen friendly while keeping within the parameters of the law. The assessment should cover the following:

a) Informants: Whether the provisions ensure that someone is always responsible, whether there are difficulties in implementing the provisions

b) Notifiers: Whether there is a system of notifiers who may inform the registrar about the event so that he can take pro-active action to get them registered. If there is a provision whether the system is working or whether it can be streamlined to make it more effective

c) Time period for registration: Whether it is too short or too long, practical difficulties and possible alternatives, late and delayed registration processes

d) Forms used for reporting: Contents, design, quality of paper, number of copies to be made and how they are made, possibility of copying errors, concepts and definitions of items and explanations on the form, provisions for coding

e) Process of registration: Use of witnesses or procedure for verification of correctness, number of copies to be made by registrar and the process

f) Corrections and cancellation: procedures for making correction of errors and cancelling wrong entries

g) Registers: How they are kept, number of copies made, type of paper used and its size, type of ink used, number of copies made, its storage facility, etc.

h) Issue of certificates: Cost of obtaining certificates initially and later, the process of getting certificates, etc..

i) Use of certificates: Are they being insisted upon, any rights being denied as certificates could not be produced, possibles way out

j) Archiving – rules for archiving, the type of records that need to be archived, place for keeping records, procedures for making cancellations/corrections in archived records

The composition, functions and effectiveness of the steering/coordination committee is very important as multiple government agencies are involved. In some cases there may be more two committees. One that takes policy decisions is at a higher level, headed by the Minister while the other is to ensure coordination and follow up of the decisions taken by the high level committee and is headed by a civil servant. The second committee may may meet more frequently. The assessment should go into the type of discussions that took place in the committees, the frequency

of the meetings, the type of decisions taken by the committee and whether there is a scope for delegation of powers for similar decision to lower levels etc. The composition of the committee is important. The Minister of Interior, Justice, etc.. to whom the civil registration organization reports should normally chair the higher level committee. It should have ministerial or the next level of representation from other Ministries like Planning (in charge of National Statistical Office), Health, Municipal Administration (that handles registration functions in urban areas), Education, Local Administration for rural areas, Information and Public Relations, etc.. There should also be an effective coordination mechanism between the CR and VS organizations at all levels.

Training and capacity building is an important area. As the personnel manning the registration system at the lowest levels may change frequently in most countries, training for new recruits is a continuous process. Similarly there is a need for refresher training programs for people at all levels. It may be economical to integrate the training with other training programs at the time of recruitment. The existing provisions needs to be examined.

Infrastructure for the registration functions need to be assessed. In cases where an official is looking after registration work on a part time basis, office space may not be an issue. However, storage space for records and their safety can be an issue in many places. Similarly the facilities is for regular dispatch of forms to designated VS personnel needs examination.

Modernization of registration machinery using computers is being taken up in many places. It is possible that in the near future many other countries may like to modernize their systems. This gives rise to several issues like availability of power supply, facility for keeping computers and their safety, lowest level up to which computerization is possible, network connectivity, software, legal issues relating to computerized records and certificates, etc. Once computerization takes place, many activities like transfer of records for generating vital statistics, issue of certificates, archiving, etc., can be simplified. The assessment should cover these issues to some extent, even if there are no plans for computerization in the immediate future.

Civil registration being a permanent and continuous activity, national and regional governments need to allocate sufficient funds for carrying out this activity. Like many regular activities of the government, this should also be funded from the internal resources, though assistance available can be used for specific activities aimed at improving the system and there should be a plan for reducing the dependence on external support as early as possible. The availability and utilization of the budget for various activities under the CRVS system needs careful examination.

2.5 Preparation of an Action Plan for Improvement

Based on the assessment, an action plan for improving the civil registration needs to be drawn with clear cut priorities. It should address the shortcomings identified in the assessment and find out ways to address them. The plan has to set targets and time frames that are realistic and achievable. Considering that reaching 100 per cent registration of vital events would require people's interest and participation, the initial phase would require substantial inputs for mass awareness generation.

It would be useful to divide the plan into activities to be taken up in short (1-3 years), medium(4-7 years) and long term. Changes in the legal framework and organizational structure, if required, are time consuming and hence may targeted to be completed in the medium term. It may be noted that activities targeted to be completed in medium and long term may have to be initiated much earlier. There would be lead time between the situational assessment and the start of implementation of the action plan. This is required for preparation of the action plan and arranging for funding and other requirements like training and preparation/procurement of IEC material, computers, etc.. and may easily take about a year. This lead time may vary from country to country

and has to be factored in to the plans and time lines. In larger countries it may be advisable to implement changes in a phased manner. This would also help creating a pool of trained and experienced personnel who can be used for training staff in other areas.

The action plan for improvement in CRVS can not be viewed in isolation. It has to be integrated into the overall government activities by giving appropriate priority. This may require substantial amount of advocacy at various levels of the government as the senior people who are in charge of resources as well as overall planning may not be aware of its importance and its ability provide useful data to pursue other objectives. Hence, after the preparation of the action plan, it needs to be discussed with all key government departments/ agencies that are involved in its implementation. This is required to make them aware of the need to be proactive and take necessary actions to include the elements of the action plan in their of sectoral plans. Similarly, discussion with Ministry of Finance is required to ensure that sufficient funds are made available over the years as required under the plan.

Monitoring and evaluation should form an integral part of the action plan. Monitoring is different standard inspections to ensure quality of work. Monitoring can be done concurrently and also periodically. There has to be procedures established to get every month the number of registrations of various types of events. This would form part of the MIS required for effective management of the system. These numbers can be compared with the expected number of events in each geographical area to get an idea of the coverage of events by the system. Similarly, number of events for which the information have been received at the VS office when compared with the number of registrations done on a monthly basis would give an idea of the flow of records. Evaluation of the content and quality of registrations needs to be done periodically. This would hep identifying issues and taking corrective steps. These are discussed in more detail in chapter 8.

2.6 Use of Information Technology

There are several aspects of the CRVS system that can benefit from the use of information technology. These include;

a) processing of data for generating vital statistics and for an MIS;

b) having a database of vital events that help in faster searches for specific events;

c) issuing certificates without the public having to go to a specific office;

d) online collection of information and doing registrations; and

e) generating information for MIS.

How much of the processes can be doe using computers would depend on several aspects including the extent of use of IT in day to day government administration, availability of computer services in the country, infrastructure in terms of national networks, electricity supply, etc.. The extent to which computerized registration and issue of certificates can be taken to the lower levels of government administration would depend on the level of computerization in the government functioning. Computerization of civil registration can not be viewed in isolation. Issues relating to use of IT and the various options available to CRVS organizations are discussed in chapter 9.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As noted in the previous chapter, the definition of civil registration itself makes it necessary to have a law. The permanency, continuity and compulsory nature of registration can be implemented only with suitable legal framework. Most of the countries in the region have some legal provisions relating to registration of vital events. While in most cases these relate to registration of births and deaths, there are some countries where registration of foetal deaths and marriages are also included. Generally, the law provides for,

a) organization of the registration machinery;

b) definition of events to be registered;

c) method of registration including late and delayed registration;

d) fix responsibilities for providing information for registrations;

e) penalties for violation of the law;

f) inter departmental coordination; and

g) statistical reports.

While some of the essential features may be part of the law, the others can be governed by regulations issued from time to time. This would give some flexibility to the system as simple changes in the procedures would be easy to make without affecting the fundamental features of the law. It is also to be ensured that the law is consistent with other legal provisions relating to vital statistics, child rights, etc.. It is seen that the legal provisions of some of the countries do not have all the above provisions or there is lack of clarity in some of the provisions. The basic principles involved in the preparation of a legal frame work for a CRVS system are discussed in detail in the UN Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics – Preparation of a Legal Framework[4]. This chapter would discuss the important issues that needs to be considered while reviewing the national law as part of the situation assessment so as to prepare a plan for changes to be made.

3.1 Legal status of the organization and its functions

The law on civil registration in many countries provides for the appointment of a national level head of the organization. However, this is not always the case as in some countries only the district or similar level functionary only is mentioned in the law. This can create hurdles as normally someone charged with a legal function should be supervised or directed only by someone with backing of the same law. Hence it is strongly recommended that there should be a national level set up mandated by the law.

The head of the national level organization should have enough powers to control the registration related activities and give directions for this purpose. In some of the laws, the responsibility of the head of the organization has been defined as “custodian of all notices of births and deaths and of all returns, registers and records of any birth or death”. This does not provide him with any powers under the law. There may be powers granted to him under the regulations or executive orders issued by the competent authority. These can not substitute powers granted by the law.

4 United Nations (1998): Studies in Methods -Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, Preparation of legal framework, Series F. No . 71, Sales No. E.98 XVII.7

The law can specify the form of the sub-national level organization or can enable the government to set up sub-national level organization to be under the control of the national organization. In large countries, if regional level organizations are given the responsibilities for day to day functions then the national organization can be in charge of standardization of rules and procedures, coordination, etc.. As registration of vital events is a government function, the registration personnel at lower levels who may be discharging their duties on a part time basis, have to be government servants, either that of the national government, regional government or local administration in rural areas or municipalities.

The compilation of vital statistics is not specifically mentioned in many laws. Since generation of useful statistics depends on collection of more information than those required for registration of the event, it is better that the law has an enabling provision to collect additional information. When compilation of vital statistics is done by a different organization the issue of transfer of records and their confidentiality becomes more pronounced. The law may outline the process so that regulations can be made based on the law for actual operations. The law may specifically mention about bringing out statistical reports and their frequency.

The law can provide flexibility regarding the persons who can be assigned functions under it. In such a case it may be possible to designate persons from other ministries who has functions under the law with specific designations identifying them with the CRVS organization. For example, if the head of the CR organization is Registrar General, a senior officer of the VS organization can be designated as Deputy Registrar General for the functions under the law. The law only need to give an enabling provision like, "*the Government may appoint any official of any department connected with the functions of the registration of vital events to discharge responsibilities that may be assigned to him by the CRVS organization and give him an appropriate designation*".

3.2 Vital Events and related information

The law should clearly specify the events that are to be registered, like live births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages, divorces, etc.. These have also to defined in the law so that there is no ambiguity as to whether a particular event has to be registered.

The definition of events to be registered should be consistent with international recommendations as detailed in the UN manuals so that the statistics derived are comparable. In general, the events to be included in registrations are;

a) live births

b) deaths

c) foetal deaths (to be distinguished from abortions)

d) marriages

e) divorces

Judicial separation, annulment of marriage, adoption, legitimation of children out of wedlock and recognition of fatherhood of children born out of wedlock are related events that are of importance when registration processes are designed and they should have legal backing.

Recommended definitions of vital events are given in annex 1.

While collecting information for registration of vital events it is useful to collect some additional information that have relevance in statistical/demographic analysis of vital statistics. These include information about social and cultural background of the persons involved and some demographic information like birth order, interval since previous birth, etc.. The law should enable

collection of such information. The list of items on which data are to be collected can be specified through regulations so that the list can be changed when necessary without having to go to the law making body in the country. Annex 2 provides a suggested list of items to be included in the reporting forms and the register.

The form and contents of the registers may be specified in the law to some extent while the regulations can be more specific. The items from the reporting form that are to be included in the register has to be mentioned. How many copies of the reporting forms and registers are to be prepared have to be indicated in the law. In case of multiple copies, who will be the custodian of the additional copies and when the copies have to be sent to the concerned are important. If multiple copies are to be made through transcription, there are chances of transcription errors making them different from one another. The law or regulations should specify how to resolve such issues.

3.3 Informants and notifiers and place of registration

There has to be clear cut responsibilities fixed for reporting of events to the registrar for registration. As there would be penalties for non reporting, if the responsibilities are not clear, it would not be possible to identify persons on whom penalties can be imposed. The persons responsible for reporting an event as per the provisions of the law are called "*informants"*. The term *"notifier"*is used for persons who are required to notify the registrar of the occurrence of an event so that if it has not been reported by the responsible person, the registrar can take proactive action to call for information and register the event. Though desirable, it is not necessary that the *notifier* is defined in the law. They can be identified and responsibilities given through regulations or executive orders. When registration levels are low, the notifiers have an important role to play. Once the system stabilizes and almost all events are reported by the informants, the role of notifiers comes down.

In most countries the law makes a distinction between events that occur in the house and those which occur at the medical facilities and other institutions with regard to the responsibility for reporting. In case of events that occur at home normally the head of the household or the senior most member of the household or nearest relative present are given responsibility in a prioritized order. In case of events that occur in medical institutions the head of the institution or a person nominated by him is given the responsibility. In some countries, however, the institution's responsibility is only to issue a certificate of the occurrence of the event and related particulars to the household so that informant can present it along with the reporting form to the registrar. In some countries the law does not prioritize the persons who has the responsibility to act as informant. Terms like, *"it shall be the duty of every relative present at the death of or in attendance during the last illness of such person",* exist in law and these make it difficult to pinpoint the responsibility. It is better to mention that the parents, spouse or the eldest living child of the deceased or the head of the household where the death occurred is responsible.

The law should also have provisions for reporting and registration of births of abandoned new born children and death of unidentified dead bodies found. In some countries there are clear provisions in the law on registration of vital events that take place outside the country. In many countries all vital events, irrespective of the nationality of the persons concerned, are to be registered while in some countries only events relating to citizens are registered. The former is more desirable from the point of view of providing registration certificates at the place of occurrence. However, it is not a necessary provision to be included in the law as most countries have some provisions relating to vital events that take place outside the country.

The responsibility of the notifiers is to inform the registrar of the occurrence of the event. If the event has not been registered, the registrar is expected to ask the informant to give the

required information for registration. The act may empower the government or the CRVS organization to declare certain persons like birth attendants, health and family planning workers, keepers of burial places, persons who conduct marriages, etc., as notifiers.

In almost all countries the events are to be reported to the registrar in whose jurisdiction the event has occurred, irrespective of the place of residence of the concerned person or family. There are registration laws where the place of registration is not clearly mentioned and this can very easily lead to non registration and duplicate registration of events. In one case the it is indicated that births have to be registered at the nearest registrar's office. This is confusing as 'nearest' can be interpreted differently. Hence the place where the event is to be registered has to be clearly stated in the law.

3.4 Time period for registration, delayed and late registrations

Timeliness of registration is important to ensure that backlog does not build up and also to provide useful statistics including all events for the given time period. It is unrealistic to expect all people to report all events in a very short time span like one day for deaths as provided in some national laws. The time period should be long enough to take care of personal and communication difficulties while short enough to be able to generate useful statistics. Another important reason for the interval to be short is that people would tend to forget the registration requirement as time goes by. In case of an infant death, it may result in non registration of both the birth and death as families may not find any reason for registering the death of an infant when the birth itself has not been registered. They may also be afraid of the questions about non registration of birth from the registrar's office. Such non registration would have serious impact on infant mortality rates derived from civil registration records. Where it is possible for the notifiers to transmit the forms to the registrar, for the purpose of reckoning the time elapsed between the occurrence and reporting of the event, the handing over of the required forms to the notifier can be deemed to be equivalent to reporting to the registrar. However, such provisions needs to be included in the law/regulations.

There are also cultural factors that needs to be considered while fixing the period for reporting events. In some cases, a person is considered as dead only when all or a part of the death related ceremonies, which may take weeks, are complete. If the time given to register deaths is shorter than such period, almost all deaths would be in late or delayed reporting category leading to avoidable inconvenience to public. Within the same country, there can be different periods. For different types of events as well as for different areas. In many countries the periods are mentioned in the law. This makes it less flexible depending on the need of the country. An alternative is to provide in the law that the period can be prescribed in the regulations. In such cases, however, there has to be mechanism to ensure that there are no frequent changes.

The period for birth registration in the laws of region are, in general, in the range of one to three months. It appears that three months is too long a period. If infant mortality is high, then a good proportion of infant deaths would occur even before birth registration takes place resulting in a situation as discussed earlier. It appears that periods in the range of 2-4 weeks would be more realistic and practical. Longer periods should be given only where access to registration centres is difficult due to longer distances and where notifiers can not be involved in transmitting the forms to the registrars.

In case of death registration, the periods are shorter than that for birth registration in many countries. It ranges from 48 hours to 3 months. Very short reporting period for deaths would have helped identifying areas affected by epidemics, in the near absence of epidemics in most parts of the country, it may not be necessary and practicable to have very short reporting periods. There are countries that are trying to link issue of burial permits to death registration. In such cases, reports would be made to the registrar early periods as people have to bury their dead within the periods

mandated by the customs and traditions of the society. However, this may not be practical in all rural areas where burial permits may not be necessary, except when there is doubt as to whether it is an unnatural death.

The law has to recognize the fact that all events may not be reported within the time set by the law or the regulations. In many cases, the informant may not have realized that the time period is ending on a specific day or may have inadvertently allowed himself to cross the time period. Another possibility is that the informant may have thought that someone else have reported the event before he realizes that he was supposed to do so. Such errors is not to be confused with not reporting the event even after a long period. When the period for reporting has just been crossed, registration may be allowed with a late fee or some simpler formalities. The original informant may be available in most of such cases. However, long after the event, the particulars relating to the event may not be known to many people and hence it may be necessary to have a thorough scrutiny of the facts before allowing registrations. It is also possible that the informant is either dead or is not available to vouch for the correctness of the information. In view of the forgoing discussion, it is suggested that there should be provisions for '*late*' as well as '*delayed*' registration, with the former referring to the events that were reported late but within some specified period. The procedure for late registration may be simple compared to the verification procedure that the delayed registration process envisages.

3.5 Reporting and registration

The process of reporting may depends on the informant. If the informant is an individual, then even oral reporting may be allowed with necessary safeguards, like witnesses for the correctness of the information. In such a situation after the particulars are entered to the relevant forms/register, the signature of the informant (and witnesses) are necessary as the registration documents have legal validity. In case of institutions, etc., when the reporting is by an official in his official capacity, then witnesses may be dispensed with, as long as he is responsible for ensuring the correctness of the information being provided. In such cases also the basic information relating personal particulars of the parents in case of birth, deceased in case of death and couple in case of marriage may be obtained through signed declarations by the informant. The requirements for registration of various events like births, deaths, marriages and divorces can be different. In case of divorces there may be a judicial process that has been gone through and a decree of divorce available. This decree alone should be sufficient for the registration of a divorce.

The format and contents of the register may be prescribed through the regulations than the law. It is not necessary that all information collected during the registration process are included in the registers. The information that have only statistical or demographic interest may not form part of the register while the identity of the concerned persons, their age and sex should be part of the register. A suggested list of items that may be included in the register are given in the annex.

In many societies the child is not named immediately after birth. To take care of such situations, a provision may be included in the law that registration of birth can be done without the name of the child. Procedure for inclusion of the name of the child in the register has to be provided through the law or regulations. Similarly, in many cases of death, including medico-legal cases, the cause of death may not be immediately available. In such cases, registration of death should not be put on hold for want of this information. Provision may be made to include it later.

The registrar on receipt of the particulars are expected to register the event by filling up the particulars in the relevant register. However, he should have the authority to inquire into the correctness of particulars in case he has doubt and ask for additional documentation to satisfy himself of the correctness. The law, preferably through the regulations, may give indicative list of documents or other material that may be relied upon by the registrar.

The items of essential information to be included in the registers can be given in the law. However, it is better left to the regulations to prescribe the complete list. This will make it easy to add topics of current interest or removing items that have become irrelevant.

Correction/cancellation of erroneous entries or registration may become necessary. Provisions for this is required in the law. Any correction or cancellation in the register has to be done in such a manner that the original entries can still be identified and are legible and it is better that this requirement is mentioned in the law.

Registrations done within the prescribed time limits should be done without any fee. The fact that registration is free itself is an incentive to register the event. Issuance of a certificate of registration immediately after registration free of cost may also be an incentive for registration. If the law provides for issue of additional certificates on demand, the format and content of such certificates can be different from the one issues earlier.

The language in which reporting and registrations are done should be specified in the law. This is more important in countries that have more than one official language in the regions. Law should also be clear as the language in which certificates would be issued. Normally it should be the official language of the country or the region. Provisions can be made through regulations to issue certificates other languages of the country if someone requires them.

3.6 Corrections and Cancellations

The possibility of errors in the reporting form or the entries in the register can not be ruled out. Similarly there may be registrations made by mistake (for example, at the wrong registration centre) and registrations made fraudulently. So the law should provide for corrections and cancellations of entries in the register. In some countries the law/regulations provide the procedure to make corrections/ cancellations. Where such provisions do not exist in the law, they have to be included in the law at the earliest possible opportunity as any correction/cancellation done without legal sanction may be interpreted as illegal.

The law can provide for the correction or cancellations to be done by the registrar or a higher level officer. It would be convenient that corrections and cancellations are carried by the registrar as long as he has the custody of the register. This would obviate the need to send the register to other offices. However, it can provided that the register makes the corrections/ cancellations only with the approval of a higher authority. Even in this case simple corrections like spelling mistakes or copying errors should be left to the registrar so as to avoid the procedures becoming too cumbersome and unfriendly to the citizen.

In countries where more than one copy of the register is kept, it is necessary that the corrections/cancellations are carried out in all copies of the register. The procedures prescribed should include this aspect. Similarly, the law in some countries provide that corrections in substance and cancellations can only be done on the orders of the court. In such cases the procedure for approaching the court should be provided through the regulations.

In some cases cancellations and any new registration in its place would have to be done in such a way that they can not be linked. A typical example is the registration birth of adopted children. As the law in most countries require that the names of the original parents should not be revealed to the adopted child at any time, it is necessary to cancel the original birth registration an register the name of the child again. This is to be done in such a manner that it is not possible to link both the entries at any time. The legal provisions for registration of birth of the adopted child in the country has to be consistent with the adoption laws and the confidentiality clauses in that law.

3.6 Confidentiality

Protecting information that are personal to the individuals is a key requirement in all cases that involves collection of data for statistical purposes. Protecting the confidentiality of vital records has three purposes:

a) Protecting the privacy of individuals;

b) Improving the accuracy and completeness of data;

c) Enhancing research based on civil registration document

Public would be reluctant to part with personal information if they are not convinced that the information provided them would not be misused or fall into wrong hands. Thus to improve accuracy and completeness of information collected during registration process it is necessary that the public is convinced about the organization's ability and the processes to keep confidentiality of the information. The position of civil registration as a legal system to establish facts about the vital events should not be lost sight in the quest for collection additional information for statistical and research purposes. In the absence of clearly understood confidentiality clauses in the law, public cooperation would be limited resulting in under-registration and missing information.

The confidentiality of vital registration data involve the legal requirements, responsibilities of the employees, assurances of confidentiality to public, physical protection of records, treatment by users in government who have direct access to the data, treatment of requests for data, sharing of vital statistics records for research, etc.. The confidentiality provisions should apply to all officials of the CRVS system who handle the information. Similarly, not only the original documents, but the copies and extracts are also to be handles keeping in view the fact that they contain private information. A detailed discussion on confidentiality issues may be seen in the Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems - Policies and Protocols for the Release and Archiving of Individual Records[5].

The civil registration law should recognize the need for maintaining confidentiality of individual information and provide for penalties for violation of confidentiality. The law should be clear enough to identify the persons responsible for breach of confidentiality clauses so that all concerned can be sensitized about their responsibilities.

3.7 Issue of certificates

Certificates of registration serves several purposes apart from proving that the event has been registered. Birth registration certificate containing identity of the parents is the first documentary evidence of the identity of a child. Certificates of marriage and death are evidence of marriage/ death of the concerned. In many countries the certificate is issued free of cost at the first instance. The registrar himself or an official authorised by the civil registration or any other law governing issue of such extracts from government records can be authorised to issue the certificates as long as the civil registration law is clear on the subject.

There are countries where a birth certificate is issued only once while in many countries certified extracts from the registers can be obtained when required of payment of requisite fee. Both the systems have their advantages. Loss of the original makes it difficult for getting a new certificate as there may be a cumbersome procedure to go through. On the other hand, provision for

5 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division(1998) : Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems - Policies and Protocols for the Release and Archiving of Individual Records, Studies in Methods Series F, No. 70; Sales No. ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/70

giving certified extracts from the register on demand creates a situation where people may be asked to produce original certificates for every requirement. This unnecessarily adds to the workload of the registrar or the official authorised to issue certificates. Whichever procedure is followed, the law has to be clear on the issue.

In some countries the death certificate issued by the registrar of deaths would not have the cause of death. This is because the cause of death is considered as a private information known only to the medical personnel and the concerned family, whereas the death and the identity of the person and his general particulars are considered as public information.

3.7 Penalties

Penalties for violations are necessary for enforcement of law. As civil registration system is still in the nascent stage of its development, Th public should not feel that unjustified penalties are being imposed for violation of the law. On the other hand there should be some penalty for not carrying out the duties imposed by the law, be it by the public or by the officials of the registration system.

Penalties for specific offences need to be specified in the law. There can be penalties for failing to report events, failing to notify events, for not providing information to the registrar when called to do so, the registrar not carrying out his duties, etc.. The law can also provide for compounding of offences where in the individual pay a certain compounding fee to be freed from the litigation process. This would help avoiding unnecessary litigations.

3.8 Use of Information technology

Information technology helps in systematising the civil registration work. It also helps in providing citizen services in a more efficient manner without having to go through the records manually. With centralized databases, it is possible to provide citizen services like issue of certificates and checking validity of certificates from anywhere. However, some of these activities would require legal backing. For example, to treat computer generated certificates as equal to manually prepared certificates, it is necessary to recognize the data in computer database as exact replica of the data in the registers. Similarly, for a registrar or an authorized officer to certify the particulars of the events that are in the register located outside his jurisdiction would require some legal backing. In some countries specific laws have been made regarding the status of computerized databases and there may not be any requirement for a new provision. Where such legal backing does not exist, it may be necessary to provide adequate legal backing for the use of computerized records.

3.9 Linkages with Population database

Many countries are setting up population databases which would be used for several purposes including provisions of identity cards to the individuals. In most countries where such an exercise has started, these activities are carried out by a different organization. These databases compiles using data collected from the field need to be updated periodically for births and deaths. If marital status is also part of the information stored in such databases, then they need to be updated for changes in marital status also. Civil registration records should be the basic source documents for such updating. This would mean linking the data base of vital events with that of population.

While the process of linking may not be dealt by the law, it would be better to provide for such linking and sharing of information. It is also necessary to provide for confidentiality of the shared information that goes into another organization.

3.10 Compilation of Vital Statistics

Though the civil registration and vital statistics system is considered together, in many countries, they are handled by different organizations, with vital statistics being part of the National Statistical Organization (NSO). It is better that the law provides for preparation of vital statistics reports and give the responsibility either to civil registration organization or NSO as the case may be for the country. Providing for preparation of vital statistics in the law has its distinct advantages as,

a) If civil registration and vital statistics are handled by the same organization, it would compel the organization to ensure compilation of vital statistics

b) If both are with different organizations, it would compel the civil registration organization to cooperate with the vital statistics organization to and provide necessary support for compilation of vital statistics.

When the civil registration organization is under a ministry other than planing or statistics, this may be crucial as such ministries (Interior, Justice, etc.) may have very little appreciation of the importance of vital statistics, notwithstanding all efforts of sensitization.

The regulations may also indicate the structure of the report and even a minimum list of tables. The contents and structure of the tables are restricted by the information collected at the time of registration. This would help the data users to expect the type of data and also the government to assess whether the compilation are being done as required. Time limits for preparation of vital statistics and their release for use may also be indicated in the law.

3.11 Inter Departmental Coordination

As indicated in chapter 2, interdepartmental coordination is of vital importance in improving the CRVS system. Though it may be possible in many national governments to bring in coordination through executive orders, having a legal backing for a coordination mechanism would be very useful. This mechanism can be an apex level committee or board that has decision making powers on the way in which the CRVS system should work. The law can provide for the chairmanship and broad membership structure of the committee/board, its functions and minimum periodicity of meetings. This would make it binding on the member organizations to be part of the system and functions as per decisions of the committee/board. The committee/board should include senior level members from Ministries of Interior/Home, Justice, Health, Planning, Municipal Administration, Education, etc., and IEC organ of the government. It may be chaired by either Minister overseeing the CRVS organization.

3.12 Archiving

As civil registration records are permanent in nature they have to be preserved well. The law should mention the need for archiving and the regulations can specify the method and place of archiving. Before the advent of technology, the registers and forms used to be stored in placed where they are not affected by weather, pests etc. Now there are various options available. The organization should be able to take advantage of the improvements in technology and select the best method. Hence the method of archiving should not be part of the law.

In some countries there may be some general laws relating to archiving of government records. In such cases those laws can be resorted to when the civil registration law does not specify anything about archiving of the records.

4. Organizational Structure

The civil registration law may provide the legal background for the CRVS organization. It is for the national governments to build the organization within the framework provided by the law. Most of the countries in the region have some sort of organizational set up for civil registration and vital statistics. However, for improving the CRVS systems, it is necessary to have a critical appraisal of the existing organizational structure and if necessary bring out some structural changes. Such changes have to be made within the existing legal framework. This chapter details the important elements of the organization and would help in planning out changes to streamline the civil registration activities.

4.1 Type of organizations

Depending on the administrative set up of the country, the CRVS organization can be centralized or decentralized. Similarly, the civil registration and vital statistics functions may be handled by the same organization or different organizations. Decentralized or regionally organized civil registration structures are more prevalent in countries with a *federal* governing structure. With regional governments having functional autonomy in many areas, the civil registration is carried out by regional government organs.

In a centrally organized structure, the national civil registration organization controls all activities of the system down to the lowest level[6]. This would help in promoting national standards and uniform procedures for registration of all vital events occurring in the country and among various population groups. The national agency has the dual role of administration and technical control over the civil registration network. It has the coordinating role whereby it coordinates with other government agencies involved, including health services that certifies births and deaths, legal system that certifies marriages and divorces, statistical agency that deals with compilation of vital statistics and National Statistical Office that sets statistical standards. It is possible that that the statistical agency that compiles vital statistics is part of the same organization or is a separate organization. In the latter, vital statistics compilation may be handled by an arm of the NSO.

In a decentralized structure, the national civil registration agency does not control the activities down to the lowest level. In many countries with *federal* system of government, the law provides that the regional governments would be organizing the civil registration machinery in the regions. In some cases there may be multiple levels of decentralization. In decentralized systems, the role of the national level organization would be to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the law, laying down standards and procedures, ensuring compilation of vital statistics, etc.. Compared to a nationally organized system, the decentralized system results in more challenges to the national level organization. Since the regional governments have functional autonomy, getting them to conduct civil registration in uniform manner across the regions need cooperation of all regions and a lot of energy of the national agencies would be spent on ensuring that all regions are on board for every initiative made at the national level.

In many countries the national level Civil Registration organization is under the control of Ministry of Interior, Law/Justice or Health. The VS organization, if it is separate, is controlled by the Planning or Statistics Ministry. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show the relationships between various agencies in a centralized set up. Figure 4.3 provide the structures with a decentralized set up.

6 For a detailed discussion see United Nations(1998) Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems - Management operation and Maintenance (chapter 1), Studies in Methods Series F No. 72

Figure 4.1: Centralized system single agency

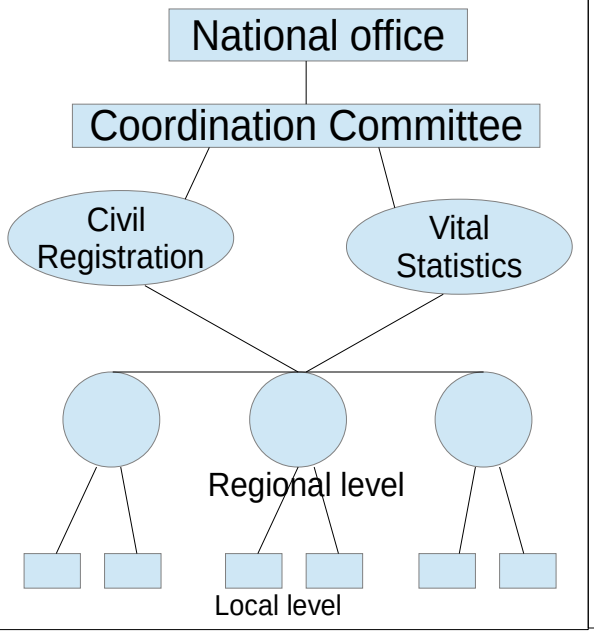
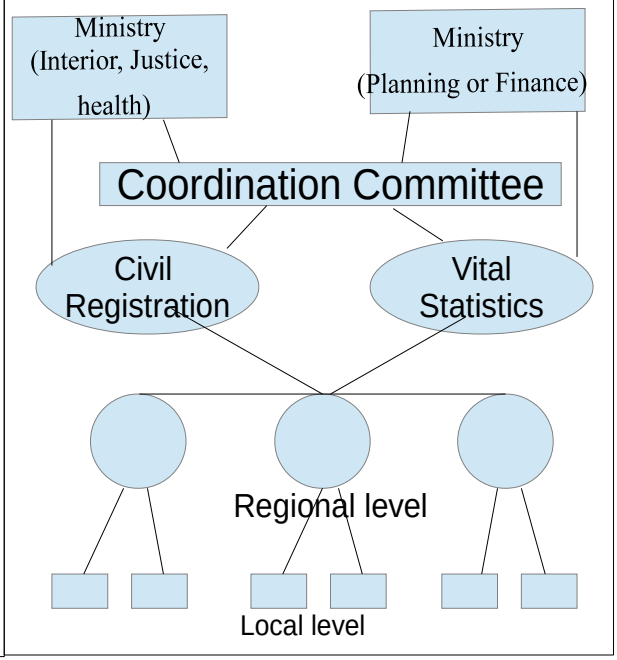


Figure 4.2: Centralized system dual agencies



In a decentralized set up, it is still possible that the vital statistics functions are centralized. This happens in countries where the statistical activities are centrally organized. In such a situation there would be need for coordination of the flow of records from civil registration organization in the control of the regional governments to the statistical organization under the national government. On the other hand, if statistical activities are also decentralized on the same lines as civil registration, then within each region, the CR and VS organizations functions similar to that of the centrally organized system with two separate organizations. This happens only when there are statistical set ups within the control of the regional governments. Decentralized structure of CRVS system gives rise to lot more issues of coordination than centralized ones as the national organization may not have administrative control over the regional organs. In some systems they may have only advisory roles making it all the more difficult to ensure uniformity of operation of the law. Hence coordination of all concerned is very important. If such coordination mechanism is not provided for in the legal provisions, it may be necessary for the national government to establish such a mechanism with the concurrence of all regional governments and other arms of the government. It would be helpful if such mechanism has oversight powers over the entire system.

Irrespective of whether the statistical system is centrally organized or decentralized, normally, it may not have organizational set up down to the lowest level while the civil registration system needs to function at the lowest possible level for the convenience of the citizens. Hence the transfer of records to the VS organ for statistics compilation normally takes place at a higher level – at region or district, depending on the organization structure of VS organization in the country and availability of resources to handle the work at that level.

The responsibility for providing material support for registration activities like printing and supply of registers and forms, providing facilities for transmission of records, etc.. should be clearly mandated. These functions can either be that of the national organization or the regional organization in a decentralized set up. It can also be entrusted to the ministry that controls the lower level registration functionaries. For example, if health functionaries are appointed as registrars, then the printing and supply of required stationery, arranging for transmission of the

records, etc.. can be handled by the same ministry. However, care has to be taken to ensure that they do not neglect these activities. The coordination committees need to ensure that such activities that are entrusted to various agencies are completed in time so that there is no shortage of stationery or other material with the registrars.

4.2 Institutional resources

For smooth running of a CRVS system, it is necessary to have proper institutional infrastructure that would provide for a smooth interface between citizen and government. It is necessary that the civil registration agency has its arm extending to the smallest possible local area as vital events take place regularly in every area and there is a need to ensure that all of them are registered. The position vital statistics compilation is different as the work is done in offices and no citizen interface is required.

4.2.1 Civil Registration organization

The national level headquarters should have people to deal with technical support, monitoring and evaluation, coordination with law department to take care of legal clarifications, coordination with IEC department to ensure that the IEC activities are well coordinated, etc.. As civil registration is basically an administrative activity, the person in charge of a national civil registration office should be well versed in the administrative system of the country. In countries with decentralized systems, he should also be well versed in the issues pertaining to relationship between the national and regional/sub regional governments. The head of the civil registration organization should also be senior enough in the government hierarchy to be able to ensure effective cooperation of all concerned.

In case of decentralized systems, the national organization will have very little role to play in the running of the system. In such cases, the regional office would be almost similar to the national office of centrally organized system. The major point of difference would be that it would have to go by the decisions taken by the national level coordination mechanism. On the other hand the national level office would be devoting more of its time to coordination.

At the intermediate level, the job of the personnel involved would be to act as a link between the national/regional civil registration office and the local registrar. They may be required to do inspections and ensure that the work is done properly. In many countries they may have some legal role, like permitting late/delayed registrations and corrections, issue of certificates, etc.. In some countries they may be the custodian of the registers and other documents that are transferred to them at the end of the year. Depending on the way in which the vital statistics compilation is to be taken up in the system, they may have to organize certain statistical compilations or to collect documents to be transferred to VS system and send them over to the VS office or to the higher level office. This aspect is discussed I more detail later.

The lowest level of the hierarchy is the '*Registrar*" or '*Civil Status Officer*' as they are called in some countries. The basic work of registration is done by them. They are the ones to who citizens approach for registrations as well as certification. As such they are the face of the organization to the citizen. Many of them may be handling the civil registration work as a part time activity. Except in large cities, it is unlikely that there is enough workload relating to registration work for a Registrar. The following should be taken into consideration while identifying the organization whose staff are to be given responsibility of registration work.

a) Geographic coverage - It should be possible to cover the entire country, excluding some special areas, like military areas, through the office network.

b) Accessibility - The officials should be located at comparatively easily accessible locations. The distances from various locations within the jurisdiction of of the registrar to his office should be as low as possible. It is recognised that in areas where population density is low, there may not be agencies that are easily accessible. In such areas supplementary arrangements can be made. These are discussed later.

c) Workload of Registrar – There should be sufficient workload for a registrar. Cases of high workload may arise only in large municipal areas. If there are too many registrars with too little workload, then monitoring their work would become difficult.

d) Office space - The field staff of many organizations may not have permanent office space for storing records. As civil registration is a legal process, the safety of records are of importance. Hence only organizations that can provide storage space for records should be considered for being given the responsibility of civil registration work. Or in other words, the lowest levels of CR organization should not go too low that office space is not available.

In some countries, the officials at lowest level, mostly clerical staff, are common to many departments and are prone to transfer to any of them. Such a system would need regular training and capacity building of the staff. In most countries the lowest administrative level is the most suitable for being given the charge of registration of vital events. In some countries the health department has personnel in the field who can be given the responsibility. They have the added advantage that births and deaths come to their knowledge at the earleist.

4.2.2 Vital Statistics Organization

The process of compiling vital statistics is no different from that of any other statistics once the basic unit records are available. The civil registration law in some countries provide an outline of the process till the records reach the VS organ. In some countries nothing is mentioned about vital statistics in the civil registration law. In a third group of countries, there is mention about statistical functions or reports without mentioning the organizational involvement. Irrespective of whether vital statistics is mentioned in the law or not generating vital statistics is important, not only to provide vital statistics, but also to evaluate the civil registration system and even for regular monitoring of the system. So it is advantageous for the countries to generate vital statistics from civil registration records.

As already mentioned there different systems in vogue when one considers vital statistics generation and civil registration systems. These are as below:

a) CR and VS are part of the same organization that is centrally organized

b) CR and VS are part of the same decentralized organization

c) CR and VS are different organizations and are centrally organized

d) CR is a decentralized organization while VS is centrally organized

e) CR and VS are different decentralized organizations both being independent

When CR and VS are part of the same organization, coordination between these two are easier as both are under the same command structure. The issue of coordination is most complex when CR and VS are part of two different decentralized organizations.

The civil registration law in some countries provide that multiple copies of the registration forms be made so that one copy can be sent to VS organization to be used for compiling vital statistics. When such provisions are not there, the coordination mechanism between CR and VS organizations should work out the best procedure suitable for the country. The options that can be considered are as below:

a) Make a copy of particulars required for generating vital statistics from the registration documents and sent them to VS organization. In the identity of the individuals concerned can be easily concealed to ensure confidentiality.

b) Get the registrar to prepare minimum required tables and sent them to the VS organization. In this case it will not be possible to generate any other table. This process also ensures confidentiality

c) The registrar makes a copy of the entire registration information for the use of VS organization. In this case confidentiality provisions have to be built into the VS organization's work

d) Design forms in such a way that a portion of it can be separated and sent to the VS organization for compiling statistics. While some information have to be common to both, personal identity can be concealed easily to ensure confidentiality

e) Computerize the information from the registers at convenient locations to give computerised databases of vital events as well as statistical databases. This would involve transferring, at least temporarily, the entire records to locations where computerization can be done.

The levels at which the interface between CR and VS organizations take place have also to be decided depending on the set up of both the organizations and facilities for processing data that are available.

For a detailed discussion on the compilation of vital statistics and all related issues the companion guidelines on Vital Statistics may be referred.

4.3 Registration functionaries and their responsibilities

The registrar functionaries who are the human interface between the registration system and the citizen are the most important element of the registration system for ensuring registration of all vital events. As discussed earlier the lowest level functionaries may belong to various departments depending on the country's administrative system.

4.3.1 Registrar of vital events

The registrar is an individual responsible for the registration of vital events and is appointed under the provisions of the CR law. He may be assisted by an Assistant Registrar or by a clerk. If there is an Assistant Registrar (or a person with some other designation to assist the Registrar), he should have been appointed by the Government or an authority as provided in the law. Normally, only some of the functions of the Registrar are delegated to the Assistant Registrar. The responsibilities of the Registrar should include,

a) Registration of events reported to him by the informant. He should have the authority to check the correctness of the facts reported, if he has doubts.

b) If he finds that events notified to him by the notifiers have not been registered, he should ask the informant recognized by the law to provide all facts so that he can register them.

c) In case he comes to know of events that are not reported or notified and are unregistered he should ask the informant recognized by the law to provide all facts so that he can register them.

d) In case of late and delayed reporting he should take necessary action as mandated by the law, i.e., either register them after completing the due process or initiate the due process for getting permission to register.

e) Either issue certificates or take steps for getting the certificates issued by the authorised functionary by sending the required information to him. In the latter case he may also have to collect the certificates and distribute them.

f) Maintain registers and all required forms and send them for archiving as per established procedure.

g) Prepare and send information required for compilation of vital statistics as required.

h) Ensure that enough blank forms and registers are available with him.

i) Ensure confidentiality of all personal information provided by the informants.

j) He should also participate in the IEC activities relating to CRVS.

k) As far as possible there should be fixed times for him to be in office looking after civil registration work. Such timings should be known to the public so that they know when they can go to the office as informants or for getting certificates.

l) Where events have not been reported for registration, if they qualify for prosecution under the law, he should initiate the proceedings as per established procedure.

The Assistant Registrars, wherever available may be performing all these duties for a prt of the registrar's jurisdiction or some of these duties for the entire jurisdiction. When they have been delegated all the functions of the registrar, the responsibility for supervision should rest with the registrar. Generally, the government employees have a duty chart describing the duties he has to perform. When the registrars do not belong to the hierarchy of the civil registration organization, it is necessary that their duty chart includes the registrar's duties also. This is necessary to ensure that they are aware of their duty as the registrar and also to ensure that their supervisors take these duties also into consideration while planning and monitoring their work.

4.3.2 Notifiers

As mentioned earlier, the function of the notifier is to provide information about vital events that occurred in their jurisdiction to the registrar of the area. They are not expected to perform any of the registration related functions that are assigned to the registrar. Normally persons like birth attendants (traditional as well as modern), keepers of burial places, priests who perform religious functions relating to births/deaths/marriages, etc.. who in their normal course of work come to know of the vital events are declared as notifiers. If there are no enabling provision in the law for doing so, it can be done through executive orders of the concerned Ministry. They are required to inform the particulars of the events that they are aware of to the registrar. However, as they are not the informants, registrar may need to get the required information from the informant, under his signature, for registration.

Services of the notifiers can be used effectively in remote areas from where people find it difficult to contact the registrar for reporting events. The notifier can get the reporting forms filled up by the informant and submit it to the registrar when he visits the location of the registrar's office. The notifier can be one of the witnesses in such cases to ensure authenticity of the information. Where the time available for registration is short, the law can provide that, in such areas where accessibility to registration centres is low, submission of the reporting forms to the notifier would be deemed as having submitted the forms to the registrar. This would avoid getting into the usually cumbersome late/delayed registration procedures.

In many countries events that occurred in medical and other institutions are to be reported to the registrar by the head of the institution. In case of deaths, the medical institution has the added responsibility of identifying and reporting the cause of death. The law in some countries provide

that deaths attended by medical practitioners before the death pf the person or immediately thereafter, should be certified by a medical officer as to the cause of death before being reported for registration. The purpose of medical certification f the cause in most countries is only to ensure that the death is due to natural causes.

4.4 Storage and Archiving

Irrespective of whether the law requires the archiving of civil registration records or not they have to be archived as they are permanent records. As the use of the records a particular year at the registration centres would come down due to passage of time, there is no need of keeping it at the registration centres for long. As registration centres in rural areas in many countries may not have proper storage facilities it is also necessary to store the records at a safer place.

One of the options that many countries follow is to transfer the records to the next higher level office where proper storage facilities are available. Normally the records are kept at the registration centre for year after the end of the year to which the register relates to. This is to take care of any requests for certificates or inclusion of the name of the child, etc.. If the registers are used for more tan one year then it may be kept for a year after latest year to which the last entry relates to. Once the registers have been transferred to the higher office, any request for certificate or corrections/cancellations or entry of name, etc., should be dealt with in that office rather than sending the register back. Provisions for these should be made through the law or regulations. This would help ensuring safety of the records.

The storage mentioned above is a temporary storage for a certain period when the records may still be in regular use. The registration records may still be required for some more time. In countries where certificates can be issued more than once and birth certificates are used at the time of school admission, there would be huge demand for certificates around school admission age. Thus birth records may be required for about 5-6 years after the year of registration. After that it can be transferred to archives where it is stored permanently.

At every office to which the records are transferred, there is a need to sort and classify the records relating to various events and store them with a proper index. This is necessary to ensure completeness of all records and also to facilitate locating a specific record when necessary.

Archiving can be done in different forms. The physical registers can be stored as it is or modern technology can be used for archiving. Instead of keeping the records as its is, they can be stored in the form of microfiche, scanned images, etc.. This would save the space required for storage of the records. The storage in such form would also ensure that there is no deterioration of quality due to ageing unlike paper records. However, it should be noted that converting the records to these forms would mean that no more changes can be made in the records. Hence conversion to such forms should be done only after considerable amount of time, after which no changes/ corrections are expected in the records. Even after conversion they can be used for certification if need be. If records are stored in physical form then he condition under which records are kept is probably more important in the long run than the quality of the original paper, ink and binding, because it is the quality of storage that can guard against the external hazards to which records are subject. Storage conditions should provide proper protection from:

a) light, both natural and artificial;

b) excessive temperature and humidity;

c) acids, gases, dust and other impurities found in the air;

d) fungi and moulds;

e) insects and rodents;

f) fire, water, and theft.

The methods of achieving optimum conditions for preserving original records and guarding against deterioration from all of these various sources might include the installation of air conditioners to control temperature, moisture, and air pollution; fumigation to guard against damage by insects and rodents e and storage in fireproof vaults and in closed containers.

Of the methods of archiving mentioned above, scanning and storing in electronic media with an index has several advantages over the others. It would be easier to search for specific records using the index. Multiple copies can be easily made for storage at different locations to ensure safety. The technology is comparatively inexpensive. One important area where specific attention would be required is the media in which they are stored. The media also has a life, both physical and technological. Physical life may extend over several decades if they are stored properly. However, the technological advancement may make the media obsolete vary fast. Hence, the media should be carefully chosen and there should be a program to transfer the information to new media periodically.

5. REGISTRATION PROCESS

The registration process has an important role to play in ensuring coverage of all events. When the process is complex from the citizen's point of view, there may be reluctance to comply with the procedures. Complexity of the procedure may also affect the quality of work as many registrars may not be well versed on the procedures and make errors. On the other hand, if the procedure is too simple there are chances of errors and duplicate registrations as people may register at places where it is convenient to them rather than the place mandated by the law. Simple processes may also lead to laxity on the part of the registration officials.

The registration process can be seen as a business process from the point of view of the registration system. The citizen, as a customer, would be its focus. As such streamlining the registration process. The process involves the forms to be filled up; the documents, if required; witnesses, if required; method of payment of fees if any; procedure to get the certificates; the internal process within the organization to cater to the citizen's requirements. The internal processes within the organization to take care of citizen services as well as those of the organization.

Having a registration machinery in place does not guarantee that all events would get registered. Proactive action on the part of the system is a pre-requisite for improving the levels of registration. Such action may include taking the machinery to the people. This means that using the medium of notifiers, the registrars may approach the people to get the events registered by gentle persuasion. At this stage coercive approaches should not be thought of as it may become counter productive. After the level of registration, in terms of the proportion of events registered, reaches high levels like 50-60 per cent, the the system can slowly become passive on a selective basis. For example, it has been observed that birth registrations levels increase faster than death registration levels. This partly due to lower registration of infant deaths. So the system has to take action to ensure that all infant deaths are registered.

5.1 Registration requirements

There are certain pre-requisites for registration of vital events. These include information from an informant, filled up forms, witnesses, etc. Unless the registrar gets the reliable particulars of an event, he can not register it. Similarly, the forms to be filled up and the registers are all part of the registration process.

5.1.1 Reporting

The law in most countries have cast responsibility on certain persons to report the events with necessary details to registrar for registration. In most countries these particulars need to be filled in the reporting forms with signature/ thumb impression of the informant. In some countries, it is possible to make the report orally in person. In such a situation the registrar would fill up the details and the informant has to sign it. In some countries it is necessary that the informant appear in person before the registrar to make the report. While this has certain advantages, it may not always be practical. For example, of the persons who are responsible for declaring the birth as per the provisions, only the mother may be available and obviously she can not be expected to be travelling to the registrar's office soon after delivering the child. Countries need to provide alternate provisions in such case.

Reporting of marriage for registration needs to be viewed differently from those of births and deaths. As the couple who got married are both adult individuals (except in case of child marriages), the principal responsibility for reporting the event should rest with the couple only. Exceptions should be made only for the cases where the couple are, (a) physically challenged to

travel to the registration centre, (b) when they are not major (adult) according to the laws of the country, or (c) when one or both of the couple has died before the marriage has been reported for registration. The reports should have signature of witnesses who were present in the marriage with at least one of them being that of the priest who conducted the marriage if it was a traditional marriage. If the country has some law by which marriage can be conduced outside the traditional system through registered agreements, then copy of such agreement alone would be sufficient to register the marriage. In case of annulment of marriage and divorce the court decree sanctioning the same should form the basis for registration.

In some countries there is a need to have witnesses to the report who certify the correctness of the particulars relating to the event. While this would help ensuring the correctness of the information in the reports, it may not always be practical to have the informant and the witnesses travel to the registrar's office unless it is very near. In such cases it should be possible to have the events certified by the persons of the area who have been declared as notifiers. Reporting forms endorsed by satisfactory witnesses should be acceptable even if the informant does not appear in person.

5.1.2 Forms and Registers

The reporting forms, registers and their design are very important for ensuring the process does not result in errors. In some countries the reporting forms have provision to make necessary entries by the registrar and bind them together to make a register. Such forms have to seen separately as they would need certain additional characteristics. In general, the reporting forms should have the following characteristics.

a) The items of information should be easily understood. As far as possible explanations of items should be given in the form itself.

b) If the responsibility for reporting events taking place at institutions is that of the institution, it would better to have the forms designed in such a way that all personal information relating to the family members are filled up by the family under the signature of a responsible member of the family. This would avoid transcription errors at the institution.

c) If a certificate of cause of death is mandatory, then it may be made part of the death report form. If it is to be processed separately, then it should be easily detachable.

d) Wherever feasible coding should be used items that are exclusively meant for statistical purposes. Items like cause of death, that can not be coded by informant or registrar, should be left for coding in VS organization.

e) Several countries require multiple copies of the forms. Making copies by transcribing is an error prone process. Hence forms with provision for self carbon copies would be preferable. Even in such cases, there should not be too many copies being made as the third copy onwards would be progressively more illegible. If copies of the forms are made by transcription, then there has to be a legal provision as to which would be considered as the correct one in case of discrepancies due to transcription errors.

f) If the form is in two parts with one part containing information that goes into the register and the other containing statistical information, there should be provision for copying identification and some other details into the statistical part at the registrar's office.

g) If the forms are to be bound together as the register, then the quality of paper should be given due attention. Some type of paper would become brittle due to loss of moisture very fast and may break on use. Such types of paper should be avoided.

h) Quality of ink used is also important. As these documents are permanent and are to be preserved, ink used should be non-washable so that accidentally getting wet or high levels of moisture does not affect the writing.

i) Electronic methods of archiving are being increasingly used whereby scanned images of the documents are preserved. The quality of such scanned images would be better if good quality paper is used.

j) If issue of a certificate of registration immediately after registration is a requirement under the law, then reporting form can have a certificate form as a detachable part which can be filled up, signed and handed over to the concerned by the registrar.

Where bound registers are used, they should also to be carefully designed. Apart from the issues relating to paper and ink mentioned above, the following also needs to be taken care of.

a) Size (dimensions) of the register: Some countries use registers that even larger than A3 size. This makes the register very unwieldy to handle and such registers can get damaged very easily, even when they are hard bound.

b) Number of pages in the register: If there are too many pages in the register it will be too thick. As long lasting paper used for such registers are thicker, it also adds to the thickness of the register. It would be difficult to handle such registers and they tend to get damaged as the binding may come off.

c) Expected number of registers to be used in the registration centre: Normally there would be one separate register for each vital event. If the registers are too large and the number of events is small then there would be a lot of wastage as the registers are to be closed at the end of the year. On the other hand , if the registers are small, some large centres, especially those in urban areas, would require a number of registers in any given year. Either of this situation is not desirable. One solution is to have registers with varying number of pages – those with smaller number of pages can be given to registration centres with smaller expected number of vital events and the larger number of pages to be used for larger areas. It is to be noted that when the events are to be registered at the place of occurrence, then the number of births and deaths are likely to be higher at places with medical facilities.

The contents of the register is important to design the page layout of the register. Tough the reporting form may contain a number of items relating to the individuals involved in the event like parent, diseased or the couple, all such information need not go into the register as indicated in chapter 3. Only those information that are required to identify the event and the concerned individuals and the important items like age, sex, etc. are needed in the register.

If multiple copies of the register are required as per the provisions of the law, then it is better to prepare separate registers and send them to appropriate offices as soon as a register is filled up or at the end of the year. There are counties where the law require copies of the forms to be sent to regional and national offices every month. Having multiple copies of such loose leaf forms filled up and sending them to other offices is not a good practice. The receiving offices may not have sufficient facilities and infrastructure for keeping track of all the forms, putting together forms relating to each registration centre separately and binding them together at the end of the year. It may be noted that at national level there would be a large number of registration centres. The possibility of some forms getting lost or misplaced can not be ruled out.

5.1.3 Certificate of cause of death

In some countries, a certificate of cause of death is mandatory for the issue of a burial permit. In most countries the provision applies to deaths attended by medical practitioners.

However, in some countries a certificate stating that the death occurred due to natural causes may be required if a medical practitioner has attended the deceased even after his death, so that burial can be permitted. On the whole, the purpose of this medical certification is to ensure that the death did not occur due to any foul play. In cases where death is sue to unnatural causes and an autopsy is conducted on the corpse, the medical practitioner would be able to give a cause of death certificate. In such cases it may take some time for the autopsy and issue of the certificate.

However, medical certificate of cause of death has another important use with regard to public health planing. The cause of death certificates can provide the cause profile of mortality. However, since all deaths does not take with medical attendance, cause pattern of mortality obtained through such certificates would only give a partial picture. In addition, it is also to be noted that in most cases where a person was not under the care of a medical practitioner before death, only the *immediate cause of death* would be available. However, from public health point of view, it is not the immediate cause of death but the *underlying cause of death* defined as *the disease or injury that initiated the train of events leading directly to death, or the circumstances of the accident or violence which produced the fatal injury.* Only a medical practitioner who had occasion to have detailed examination of the diseased before his death or who had access to his medical history would be able to certify the underlying cause of death. In most of the developing countries there is no system of regular health check ups and medical history as persons go to which ever medical practitioner is available when they are not feeling well. Hence it is difficult to get a properly prepared medical certificate of the cause of death, unless the person had been in a hospital for sometime before his death.

Verbal autopsy techniques can be used to arrive at the probable cause of death. Under this technique the probable cause of death is arrived at using a systematic analysis of the symptoms before the death of the person. It is possible to get the broad cause of death using this technique. In some cases it may be possible to identify the cause of death more precisely than others.

5.1.4 Issue of registration certificate

One of the main uses of CRVS system is to provide citizens with documentary proof of the occurrence of vital events. This is done by providing a certificate of the particulars relating to the specific events in the register.

In some countries the civil registers are treated as public documents and anyone interested can obtain a certified extract relating to any event from the document. This system has the advantage that the civil registration authorities do not have to verify the authenticity of the person requesting for the certificate. However, it adds to the work load of the system as many people may ask for a fresh certificate for each use. On the other hand in some countries the registration certificate is issued only once. In this case there has to be clear directions regarding the person to whom the certificate can be issued. It may not necessarily be the informant. In this case the citizen is required to preserve the certificate for all times. In case it is lost the procedures for getting a duplicate certificate are cumbersome. When it is issued only once, it would also be necessary to keep a record of the issue of certificates and to whom it has been issued.

Whether the certificate can be issued only once or multiple number of times depend on the provisions of the law. If the civil registration law is silent on the issue, it is possible that some other law in the country may have provisions relating to government documents being treated as public documents and providing certified extracts. Such law may have to be followed. In countries where only one certificate can be provided under the law, it may be necessary to provide for the procedures to get a duplicate issued. It is possible that general procedures have been notified for similar documents elsewhere. If not, it is better to prescribe the procedures through regulations.

The contents of the certificate are also important. The purpose of the certificate is to provide a proof of registration of a particular event which in turn proves the occurrence of the events itself. It is enough to have the particulars entered in the register to be included in the certificate. A special case needs to be made about the cause of death. In many countries the cause of death is treated as a personal information that can not be disclosed to anyone but the family of the diseased. In such cases the cause of death can not be included in the certificates as they are prone to be shown to several people. In some countries the civil registration law clearly states that cause of death can not be included in the certificates.

If civil registration has to be accepted by the public, they should not be made to make several visits to the civil registration office for getting the certificate. As soon as the registration process is completed a certificate should be issued. In cases where the notifiers carry the filled up forms to the registrar, he should be able to get the certificates for those registrations immediately or in his subsequent visit so that he can give it to the concerned person.

In many countries the certificates may not be signed by the registrars, but by a higher functionary who has offices at a different location. In such cases, there should be a system by which the registrar prepares the certificates and sends them for signature. The signed certificates are then send back to the registration office from where they are issued to the concerned people. One problem in this system s that the officer who signs the certificates may require to see the original records. I such a case the original records would have to be sent to him and it may take several days for getting them back. This would mean that the records may not be available at the registration centres. Careful thought has to be given on how this problem can be overcome without resulting in inconvenience to the public. In countries where multiple copies of the register are prepared this may not be an issue as the second copy can be used for issuing certificates.

Another important issue relating to certificates is whether any fee should be charged. As civil registration is compulsory, the public has every right to have an acknowledgement to the effect that the event has been registered. Hence a certificate of registration has to be issued free of cost. In countries where certificates can be issued more than once, a suitable fee can be charged for additional certificates.

Where a fee is required for issuing a certificate or for any other payments under the law, the procedure should be simple. Since the amounts involved would be small in most cases, it may not be advisable to go through banks and other financial institutions. Cash payments should be acceptable and the registrars or another official in the registrar's office should be authorized to receive payments for this purpose.

5.2 The processes

Though the processes of birth, death and marriage registration appears similar at a higher level, there are differences when it comes to operational details. The following paragraphs gives an outline of the processes of registration of various vital events. There may be some differences depending on the country's laws and the procedures established though the regulations and administrative structures.

At the start of the specified period, normally at the beginning of each year, the registrar has to start a new register. It would be convenient to start the registration numbers afresh at the beginning of the year, separately in each register. At the end of the specified period, normally the end of the year, the registrar has to close the register for the year and start a new one for the next year. While closing the register the fact that it is the last page of the register for the year and the number of registrations done needs to be recorded so that any interpolation later would be easily detected.

Unlike births and deaths, the status of marriages can change either through annulment or divorce. Annulment takes place when the marriage is declared void. It is better to record the annulment in the marriage register against the entry of the particular marriage so that it is noted easily in future. Cross reference to the documents that declared the marriage as void may be indicated. In case of divorces, a separate register may be kept as there may be other particulars to be recorded, including the number of years since marriage, details of children, etc.. Separation of the couple, unless through a judicial process, should not be part of the registration process as they do not have any legal status. Judicial separation and divorce can be registered in the same register as the particulars would be similar.

In case the reports have been delayed beyond the prescribed period for registration, then the registrar has to follow the procedures for late/delayed registration. In some countries, in case of delayed registration that involve permission of the senior officials or magistrate for registration, the citizen is made to run around to get the permission. This is not a good practice. The procedure for late registration is simpler compared to delayed registration. In many countries where there is a distinction between late and delayed reporting, the requirements for registration of events that are reported just after the prescribed period involves only a late fee. In some countries the registration may require approval of a competent authority declared under the law even for late reporting. On the other hand, in case of delayed reporting there may be requirements for verification of the facts relating to the birth through administrative or judicial process and approval by the competent authority declared under the law and it may take time. Depending on the procedure being followed in the country the registrar may, on completion of the formalities for late registration, register the event or submit it for approval of the competent authority. In case of delayed reporting, the registrar has to, after getting the formalities completed by the informant, submit the case to the competent authority for orders. It is for the authority to decide on the type of inquiry within the parameters of the law before giving permission to register or reject the application.

5.2.1 Registration of live births

The process of registration of births starts with the birth of a live child. A live birth is defined as *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.* The process would be slightly different depending on whether the birth took place at home or at a medical facility as in the latter case the informant may be the medical institution in many countries. Registration foetal deaths or still births is discussed along with death registration.

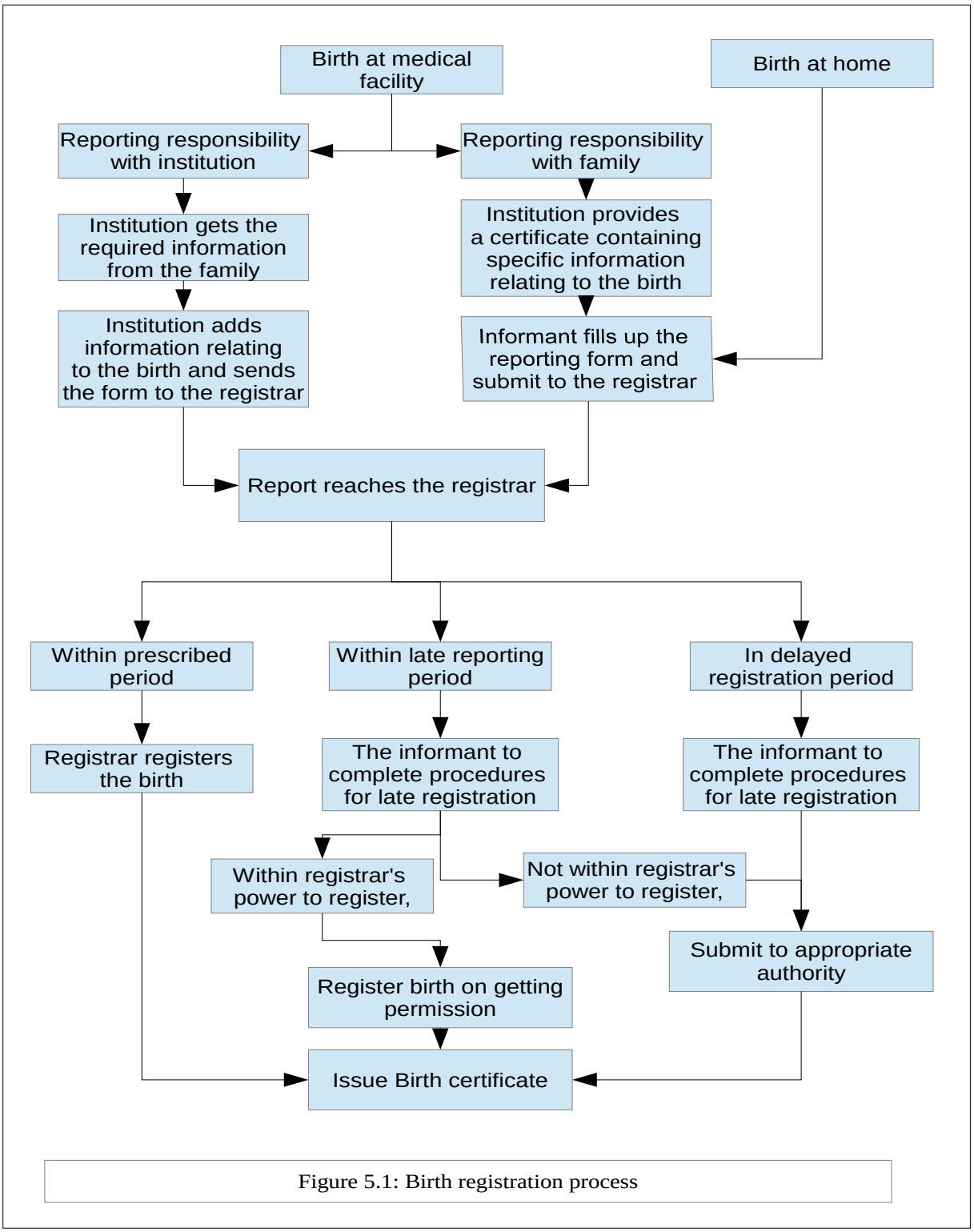


Figure 5.1: Birth registration process

The medical institution would have to collect all personal information relating to the parents for the purpose of filling up the birth report. To avoid errors of transcription committed at the institution, the forms can be so designed that the information can be filled up with details and signed by a responsible member of the family. The institution can then fill up other details and submit for registration under their signature. In countries where it is the responsibility of the household to report the birth to the registrar, the medical institution has to give a certificate having

details relating to the birth. The informant may then fill up the reporting form and submit it to the registrar along with this certificate. In case of events that take place at residences the forms would ave to be filled up by the informant. In case the event is being reported orally, the form will have to be filled up by the registrar and got signed by the informant. In some countries, there may not be any reporting forms if events are reported orally and the information may be directly entered into the register and the signature of the informant.

Registration involves the registrar entering the particulars into the register with appropriate registration number and date. If the register is made of loose leafs where the reporting forms are filed in a serial order to make up the register, then the registrar would enter the registration number, date and put his signature before filing the form. If he is expected to issue a certificate of registration then he should issue it forthwith. The certificate has to be given to the family either directly or through the institution that reported the event, the former being a better option as the woman, who gave birth, may have left the institution. If the report has been received by the registrar after the prescribed period he should take action depending on whether it is a case of late or delayed registration as indicated earlier.

Figure 5.1 gives a diagrammatic presentation of the process of registration of births occurring at medical institutions and home.

5.3.2 Registration of Death and foetal deaths

The process of death registration is similar to that of birth. The basic difference comes out of the need for information on cause of death and issue of burial permits for disposal of the dead body. The death of a person is defined as *Death is 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).* Any death of a foetus after a certain period of pregnancy (28 weeks in many countries) is termed as *foetal death* or *still birth* . In some countries the law does not require registration of the foetal deaths. If it is required, it follows almost the same procedure as the death registration. Some additional information, including *cause of foetal death*, may be required.

For the family of the diseased, when no foul play is suspected, the burial of the dead body is the primary concern compared to getting a detailed cause of death certificate or registering the death. Several days' time is available in many countries to register the death, whereas the disposal of the dead body is to be done in a few days depending on the cultural practices. Hence it is all the more important that burial permit gets primacy over other things in the death registration process. In many countries, it is the duty of the registrar to issue burial permits. He should, issue a burial permit on application and presentation of the cause of death certificate where available. It may be possible to direct the family to submit a death report form in case the informant is an individual. In case of institutional events, a death report should be expected within the prescribed period and if it does not come, treating the application for burial permit as a notification of the death, the registrar should initiate action to get the reports from the institution and register the event.

The cause of death, if available through a certificate, may be entered in the death reporting forms. If it is not available at that time and a process for ascertaining the cause of death through either autopsy (in case of unnatural deaths involving medic-legal cases) or verbal autopsy, then the cause of death may be left blank and be filled up when the information are available. This procedure would ensure that the death is registered in time and that death certificate can be issued, at least in countries where the cause of death is not included in the death certificate.

In many rural areas there may not be any system of giving a burial permit and most of the deaths are occurring without any medical attendance. However, in case of doubts about the cause of death the matter may be informed to the police and burial may not take place clearing up the matter or an autopsy where required. It is not possible to get medical certificate of cause of death in

such cases. It may be necessary to use verbal autopsy techniques to get the probable cause of death. In such cases, death registration should be gone through without the cause of death that can be entered. The fact that death occurred due to natural causes need to be recorded.

In case of foetal death, the cause of death may not be clearly available except when there the pregnant woman was attended to by a medical practitioner or at least a trained mid-wife. In all other aspects, the procedure for registration of foetal deaths are similar to that of deaths though the reporting forms and the type of information required may be different.

If the death report has been received after the prescribed period by the registrar, then he should initiate the procedure for late/delayed registration as the case may be.

Figure 5.2 and 5.3 present the death registration processes respectively deaths that take place in medical institutions and outside.

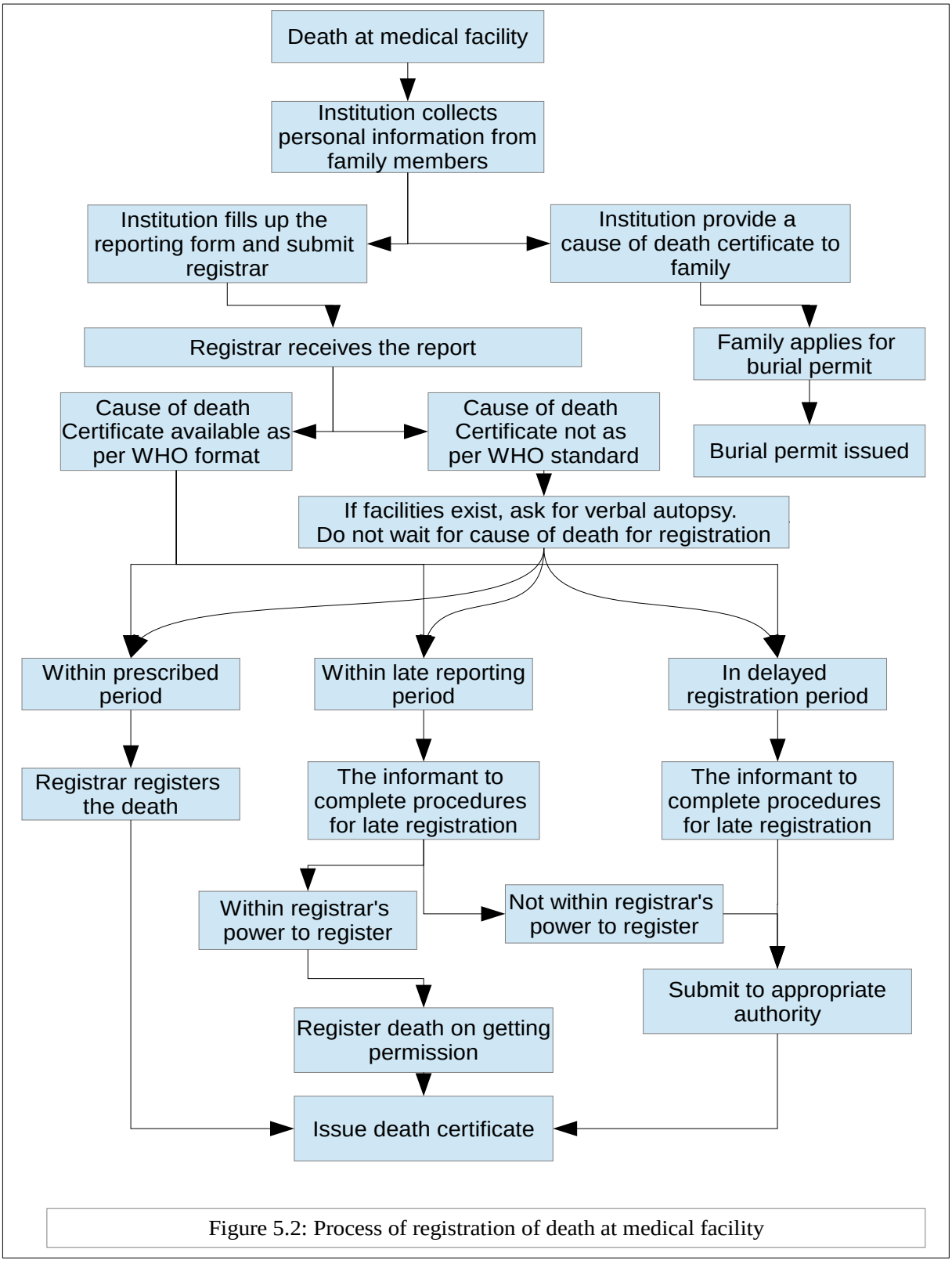


Figure 5.2: Process of registration of death at medical facility

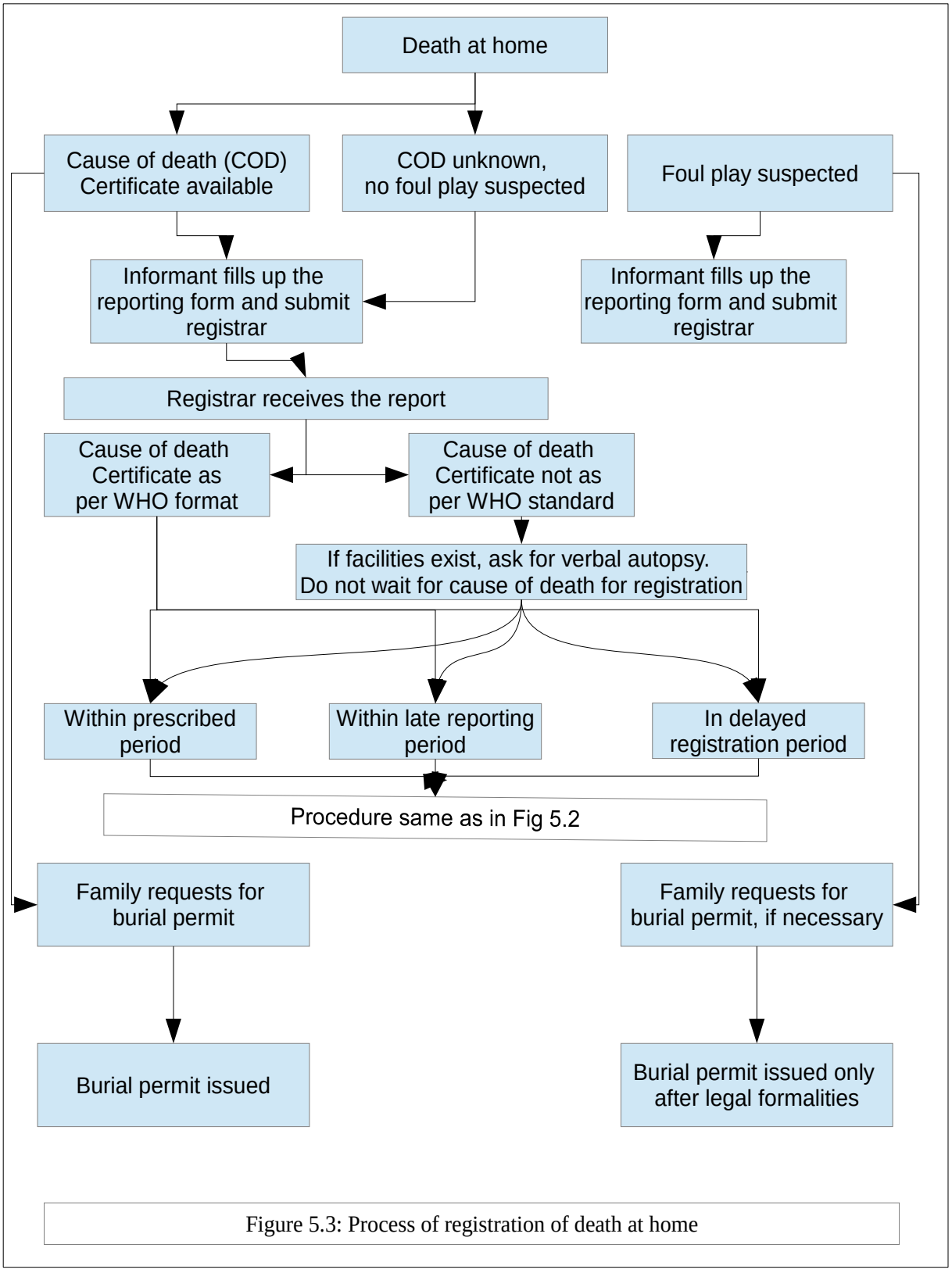


Figure 5.3: Process of registration of death at home

Efforts should be made to cross reference the entries relating to birth and death. This would have several advantages. If child has died and an entry has been made in the birth register to that effect, any subsequent certificate of birth for that child should state this fact also. This would

prevent fraudulent use of birth certificate of a dead child to get a new identity for another person. Such cross linking can also help several demographic studies.

However, linking of birth and death entries for individuals is not easy. In many cases birth and death would have occurred at different locations and the registrations would have been done by different registrars. He registrar who registered the death will have to send an information about the registration of death to the registrar who registered the death. It is likely that in some cases the informant may not be aware of the place of registration of the birth or even whether it has been registered. In countries where an identity card system for citizens is being implemented, there would be a unique identity number for each individual that can be made mandatory on very reporting form. However, unless the individuals are allotted a unique identity number at the time of birth itself and that is recorded in the birth register, it may not be easy to locate the birth entry. The problems would be somewhat less in case of infant deaths as only a short time has elapsed after birth and the concerned persons would be able to remember the facts about birth and its registration.

5.3.3 Registration of adoptions

Registration of adoptions are different from that of the births, deaths or marriages. Adoption is of an individual who has been born and already had the birth registered. When a couple adopt a child according to the law of the country, they would like to treat the child as their child for all purposes giving the child a new identity including a name. In countries where surname indicating the family or the father's name is an essential part of the name, even that would be changed to indicate that the child is now part of the new family.

In such a situation its birth certificate shall have the names of the new parents as part of changing the identity. This would mean changing the entries made for registering the birth. The process should be in such a way that the child should not be in a position to look at the birth register and know about the real parents at any time. Hence, the most practical way would be to cancel out the original birth registration and make a new one with the adoptive parents' names against those of the real parents once the adoption documents are final. There should not be any cross reference that would help identify the original entries in the birth register.

The parents who adopted a child should apply to the registrar for registration of birth with copies of the relevant documents including the birth certificate issued earlier (if birth has been registered) within the grace period for registration as if it is a new birth. The registrar would cancel the original birth registration as per the policy on cancellation and make a new entry. The fact that the grace period of birth registration is long over does not apply in this case as the new registration is in lieu of an original one and has a different purpose.

5.3.4 Registration of Marriage, Annulment and Divorce

The process of the registration of marriage has to be different from those of births and deaths. Unlike the newly born child or the diseased, the principal actors in this are the bride and the groom, both adults who can take care of the registration process themselves. Wherever possible the couple should personally appear before the registrar with required documents. In some countries the law requires such presence. In case of marriages conducted under some law such physical presence can be avoided provided the registration certificate is available.

The process of marriage registration starts when the informants designated by the law makes an application by filling up the reporting form and submits it with the required documents to prove the event. In the absence of certificate of marriage from any one, there may be requirement of witnesses. If the law requires physical presence of the couple it has to be complied with. The event is registered by the registrar and a certificate is issued.

Annulment of marriage takes place based on a legal process. In that case the marriage would become void. However, if annulment takes place some time after the marriage and there are children from the marriage, the couple would be recognized as the parents. Hence registration of annulment should not be treated in same was cancellation of the existing registration. However, to any one referring the marriage registration entry, it should be clear that it has been annulled at a later date. Hence the fact that marriage has been annulled should be recorded against the entry of marriage also. It is possible that the annulment has been ordered by a court located at a different region. Any couple desirous of registering the annulment of the marriage should apply to the registrar in whose jurisdiction the annulment order was issued, with duplicate copies of the reporting form, in case the marriage was registered at some other registration centre.

Divorce takes place on the orders of a competent authority. Unlike annulment the marriage does not become void in case of divorce. As in the case of annulment, it may take place outside the jurisdiction of the registrar who registered the marriage. In such a case, it would be necessary to inform that registrar who had registered the marriage also to make an entry in the marriage register to the effect that a divorce has taken place. Hence the informant has to give extra copies of the reporting form for this purpose. Once the reporting form is received by the registrar, he would register the event and give a certificate of registration to each.

5.3.5 Corrections and cancellations

It is possible that some errors occur while preparing registration documents. This may be due to clerical errors or misunderstanding of the instructions. In most countries the either the law or the regulations provides for such corrections. If such provisions do not exist, it is necessary to put in place some mechanism for corrections. Once an error is noticed by the informant or the family they can request the registrar to make such correction with sufficient proof as required by law/ regulations or to the satisfaction of the registrar. If the registrar is authorised to make such corrections then he makes the corrections in such a way that the older entries are still legible. If he is not authorised to make the corrections himself, he send the register and the documents to the appropriate authority for making the corrections. Once the corrections are carried out, a new certificate of registration is issued after taking back the certificate with errors.

In some countries corrections in substance and cancellations can only be done on the orders of judicial court. In such a situation, the procedure to approach the court may be given in the regulations. The registrar and the informant has to follow that process.

In many countries the law provides for keeping multiple copies of the registers. In such cases, once the correction has been entered in one copy of the register, information on the correction should be sent to the custodian of the other copies or the person authorised to make corrections in other copies. It is also necessary that a confirmation of the corrections having been carried out has to reach the registrar.

6. USE OF CIVIL REGISTRATION DOCUMENTS

The civil registration documents include the registers, certificates or certified extracts from the registers as well as list of events or a database of events. The use of these items would depend on circumstances and the purpose for which they are sought t be used as well as perception of the user about the reliability of the information contained therein. This chapter discusses some of the important uses of the documents and the prerequisites of putting the documents for such uses. While the certificates pertain to individuals, the lists may have uses for many administrative purposes.

6.1 Certificates

The legal acceptance of Civil registration documents as proof the particulars regarding the event is necessary for promoting their use. The CRVS law or the law on evidences in the country should recognize this fact. If such provisions are not present in either of the law, they should be included in the civil registration law as early as possible.

6.1.1 Birth Certificates

The primary use of birth certificates or the extracts of the entries relating to a particular birth is to prove the following particulars relating to the birth:

a) date of birth
b) names of parents
c) gender of the new born
d) address of the parents
e) place of birth
f) name of the child.

It may be seen that these particulars together uniquely establish the identity the child and this is the first use of the birth certificate. It is also proof of its date of birth which is required for getting benefits under many government programs. These include, school admission, immunization at correct time, etc. Birth certificate issued by the authority established under national CRVS law is recognized in many countries and have higher acceptance than other documents having same information.

6.1.2 Death Certificates

The death certificate is required in many situations. As the event relates to adult individual who may have acquired wealth or have had running transactions in his life time, proof the individuals death is important to decide on the future of his wealth or for the systems running the transactions to stop further transactions. A typical death certificate would include,

a) name of the diseased
b) address of the diseased
c) date of death
d) place of death

Though many agencies that use a death certificate may like to have the cause of death also in the death certificate, in most countries it is not included as it is considered a personal information of the individual that is not to be revealed to the public. The death certificate is used as proof of death of

the person and is a mandatory document to settle inheritance and insurance claims in many countries. These may also require a certificate of cause of death to ensure that death did occurred due natural causes, causes covered by the insurance policy, etc.. They are also used in many countries to stop financial transactions in the name of the deceased.

6.1.3 Marriage certificate

Marriage registration certificate is considered as the proof of marriage between the individuals concerned. A marriage certificate typically would have the following information

a) names of the bride and the groom

b) addresses of the bride and the groom

c) date of marriage

d) place of marriage

e) names of witnesses or the name of person/authority who conducted the marriage

Apart from proving marriage between the concerned, In many countries marriage certificates provide necessary documentation to establish right of the child to citizenship of the country.

6.2 Statistics and lists of individual events

While the use of certificates are for individuals, the use of collective information are for aiding government administration including development programs – both in their planning and implementation. However, in some cases there may be difficulties in using the information from local registers as all events pertaining to people living in the local area may not have been registered at the same place, but also at other place where they occurred. In a fully computerized system it would be possible to get a list of events pertaining to people living in a particular area. Even in a partially computerized system it would be possible to get such information with some delay. The statistics on births and deaths for any local area can help arriving at the natural growth rate of population.

6.2.1 Health

One of the important issues in most developing countries relate to infant and child health. Several health programs, including immunization, child nutrition, etc are implemented in this area. One of the main difficulties faced by the program managers is that they do not have any information on the number of children who should be targeted for these programs. If births and deaths are registered properly, then the number of children born in any period can be obtained and can give the size of the target population for most of the programs. If infant mortality is high in the country, then it would be appropriate to arrive at the children who are alive by reducing the number of births by the deaths of children of the same cohort within the period. As mentioned earlier, in a computerized system, it would be possible to provide detailed information at any local area level from a computerized database. It would even be possible for the health workers to plan their work properly, assess the demand for specific types of vaccines, etc..

As already mentioned cause profile of mortality is essential for public health planning. When it is available with geographic break up, it provides scope for planning specific interventions. The data from death registration can be used to provide such details. However, it should be noted that its effectiveness would depend on the quality of cause of death data. A fully operational CRVS system is the only source that can provide continuous statistics on cause of death with break up at geographic level as well as bey age and sex. For specific causes, like maternal mortality, it can also provide the distribution of incidences of maternal deaths by the type of medical attention at birth,

type of birth (single/multiple), type delivery, etc., that may help identifying the causes of maternal death.

6.2.2 Education

Education is a right of the child. In many developing countries, there is no way to identify the children who are eligible to get admitted to schools. There also not enough information to plan for location of schools or more importantly plan for the number of teachers required in specific schools. It is possible to use the civil registration data to get the number of children born in a local area in any particular year. Since the same children are expected to reach school going age in five-six years, it also gives an idea of the number of children in that area who are to be given schooling facilities. This number can be fine tuned after a year by accounting for the number of infant deaths and continue to be updated every year for child deaths. By comparing this number with the number of children who have been admitted to school, it can be checked whether all children are going to school.

It may however be noted that in the absence of complete registration of births and infant/child deaths the figures may be incorrect and result in incorrect conclusions.

6.2.3 Family planning

The data from birth registrations can be tabulated to provide distribution of births by birth order. This gives the seriousness of the issue for family planning planners and its geographic break up would help the planers to identify areas where substantial interventions are required.

The data on interval between the current and previous birth is also useful identifying areas where the birth interval are too short and may affect the health of the other and the new born. These are cases where spacing methods of family planning need to be popularized.

In both the above cases, the identity of the family with higher order birth or with low inter-birth interval may be useful to the program managers. However, whether such information can be made available to them from CRVS system would depend on the confidentiality provisions in CRVS law in particular and the privacy laws in general.

Refer to the United Nations publication "*Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System"* (Revision 3), for a more detailed discussion on the various uses that civil registration data can be put to use.

7. INTER SECTORAL COORDINATION

Civil registration work involves multiple ministries and agencies of the government. Their coordinated work is important to ensure that the work processes as planned and citizen services are provided in a seamless manner. This chapter discusses the various issues in coordination.

As indicated earlier, in most countries the national civil registration office would not have as structure that reaches the to grass root level of administration in the country. There are several issues that need to be sorted out through a coordination mechanism. These include,

a) The organizational structure – involvement of staff from multiple ministries and organizations, the command structures and communication channels. Forms of communication

b) Integrating civil registration with the normal government functions

c) Efforts to improve civil registration levels - many Government organizations can contribute. For example, making a birth certificate compulsory for school admission and various other purposes can increase demand for birth certificates and indirectly result in higher levels of registration. This would need cooperation of other ministries. It has also to be implemented in such a way that while trying to ensure the child's right to registration his other rights, like those for education, health care etc., are not trampled upon.

d) IEC activities - integration of the efforts of various ministries and organizations

e) Capacity building and training – at grass root level

Such coordination can be achieved through various means depending on the structure of the government and the ties between government organizations. This chapter discusses some of the practices, options and possible results that can be achieved.

7.1 High level Steering Committee/ Board, etc.

In some countries the law provides for the establishment of a high level steering committee or board that oversees and directs the CRVS organization. This committee or board draws its powers from the legal provisions. Normally the committee/board is headed by the Minister in charge of civil registration or by a senior civil servant who can influence all other ministries and organizations. The members of the organization would include the ministers or senior most civil servants in charge of health, general administration, law/justice, municipal administration, IEC, information technology, national identity card, etc.. In countries with federal system of government it may also include ministers/senior most civil servant from the regional governments. It would also have the power to include additional members, if necessary.

Even if the law does not provide for such a committee or board, the government can establish such committee/board through its executive powers as long as its does not go curtail any power given to the CRVS organization or its functionaries by the law.

As all ministries are represented at the highest possible level, its decisions become binding on the entire government systems. As this committee/board consists of very senior persons, it may not be possible for it to have meetings regularly. So there decisions are likely to be in the nature of policy and on those issues that have involvement of multiple agencies. The Committee may not be able to meet more frequently than annually. As there may be issues that need to be discussed between smaller groups of ministries, the committee/board may appoint sub-committees that go into details of various aspects and submit its recommendations to the Committee/Board that can

deliberate on the suggestions and can take policy decisions on the issue. There are two types of decisions that need two to be taken: (a) decisions relating to organizational structure, involvement of various ministries, etc., required when a CRVS system is being set up or being reorganized to make it more effective; and (b) decisions required to take care of problems and issues that crop up once the the system has been set up / reorganized and is running. This would include activities aimed at creating demand for registration documents, IEC activities, use of information technology, etc.. The committee/ board should also monitor the working of the system periodically and see whether anything can be done to improve the situation. It may be mentioned that meticulous planning in the initial stages can reduce the problems in regular running of the system.

Assuming that the civil registration organization is set up under the law, the Committee/ Board should decide on the following at the time of establishment of the CRVS organisation or its reorganization:

a) The most suitable government functionary who can be appointed as registrar in rural and municipal areas.

b) The arrangement if some of the registration centers are located at long distances from the registrar's office.

c) The functionaries at the higher levels including the full functional hierarchy.

d) If the functionaries are are not from the same ministry/ organization as that of the registrar, method of ensuring effective supervision.

e) The facilities that the registrar should have for discharging his duties.

f) Persons who can be appointed notifiers in rural and urban areas, separately for births and deaths

g) The design and content of the reporting forms and registers. This would include,

   i. items to be included in the reporting forms and their definitions

   ii. items to be included in the registers and certificates

   iii. the design of the forms including whether it should have multiple parts like legal and statistical, etc..

h) The flow of information from the registrar to the CR and VS organizations. These include,

   i. the form, content and frequency of regular information on the number of events registered, etc., for monitoring purpose.

   ii. additional copies of the registration documents in countries where there is such a requirement.

   iii. The level at which the documents are transferred to the VS organization where it is different or to the VS unit of the CRVS organization where both functions are under the same unit

   iv. period of retention of the registration documents by the registrar after the end of the year.

   v. the place for archiving the documents - district, region or at national level.

i) Creation of demand for registration documents like birth/death certificates including procedure to avoid denying the rights guaranteed under laws of the country and international conventions.

j) Detailed procedures to be followed in case of late and delayed registrations.

k) Amount of penalties, late fee, fine for violation of the law when law does not specify the details.

l) Regulation to be issued for smooth functioning of the CRVS organization.

m) Training and capacity building strategy - including the integration of training with that of organizations from which CRVS functionaries are drawn.

n) Involvement of multiple ministries in IEC activities and method of integrating IEC for CRVS with that of the other related ministries.

o) Funding of various activities of CRVS – including printing of forms and registers, IEC activities, training and capacity building, etc..

p) Types of annual reports to be prepared by CR and VS organizations

In addition to the above, once the CRVS organization start functioning, the Committee/Board should review the functioning of the system periodically – at least annually. This would help identifying the issues that are hampering the improvement of the levels of registration. In such reviews the following should be specifically looked into:

a) The trend in number of registrations and the estimated level of registration defined as the percentage of events registered

b) Regional variations in level of registrations

c) Reasons for non registration in areas where the levels are low

d) Accessibility of registration centers to public including the ability of the functionaries to devote enough time for registration related work load

e) Problems faced by public and how to fine tune the system to avoid such problems

f) Problems faced by registrars and other functionaries

g) Effectiveness of notifiers

h) Punctuality of reporting by medical institutions

i) Cause of death certification – issues of quality, sensitization of medical practitioners, etc..

j) IEC activities to make it more focused on areas and groups where the levels of registration are low

k) Availability of funds and its utilization

The decisions taken by the Committee/Board should result in suitable regulations or government orders for implementing them.

Once it has been decided that the functionaries of a certain ministry/organization should do a certain work, that ministry/organization should integrate it into its functions. The activity should form part of the duty chart for that functionary. The funds required for the activity should be included in the budget of the concerned ministry/agency, etc.. Integration of the activities would prove to be economic. For example, if a health officer at district level is also a district registrar with supervisory functions over the registrar, during his missions to other areas to inspect health programs, he can also inspect civil registration work.

7.2 Coordination Committees

Unlike high level board/steering committees, coordinations committees would have very limited decision making power. The committee would normally be headed by a civil servant. It would have representations from all the concerned ministries and departments, normally by civil

servants who are not necessarily the senior most. One advantage of such a committee is that it would be in a better position to meet periodically and discuss the issues. As the officials of lower level are present, they may have a better feel of the grass root level issues and may be in a position to offer practical solutions. However, the possibility of the decisions or recommendations of the committee getting implemented depends on the CRVS organization's ability to influence other ministries and organizations of the government. In normal circumstances, it would require higher level interactions. The coordination committee should look after all topics that a board/steering committee of higher level would look after.

Even when there is a high level board/committee, it may be advisable to have a coordination committee that can meet and deliberate upon the issues and submit its recommendations to the board/steering committee. This would help them to take decisions without delay as the issues have already been deliberated upon in detail by the committee.

While a high level board/steering committee is normally set up only at the national level, coordination committees can be set up at regional and lower level. At the lowest level the committee may consist of the registrar, the notifiers of the area and may not even be a formally constituted committee. However, if the registrar and the other grass root level functionaries discuss the issued threadbare and implement possible solutions or suggest solutions that require higher level intervention, it is likely that higher level committees may get useful ideas and are more effective.

7.3 Coordination between CR and VS organizations

There is also a need for effective coordination between CR and VS organizations. If both are part of the same organizations, this is not much of an issue. As personnel in both sections come from different backgrounds, there may be lack of understanding and appreciation of the problems faced by the other that may impact the working of the systems. When both organizations in charge of CR and VS are different, it requires a lot more efforts for coordination. In most countries with such arrangements, the VS organization is part of the national Statistical Office (NSO). In such a situation, the head of the NSO should also be a member of the national CRVS board/steering committee wherever they exist. The CR and VS organization should work together on several issues including,

a) Items to be included in the reporting form for statistical purpose only
b) Concepts and definitions relating to all items on which information are collected
c) Flow of records to VS organization
d) Tabulations to be prepared
e) Management information sharing - like no. of events expected, number registered, etc..
f) Data dissemination
g) Data analysis
h) Quality of data collected for statistical purposes

To ensure that the data collected for statistical purposes are of good quality, it is necessary to empower the lowest levels of statistical functionaries associated with CR work to inspect CR offices and the registration work.

While flow of records may not be an issue when the system is fully computerized, this has to be efficiently managed to ensure that the data from CRVS are tabulated and disseminated in time. The VS organization may not have data processing facilities at all levels. In most countries such facilities are available only at the headquarters of the VS organization or NSO. However, there may be data capture facilities at various locations depending on the size of the country. If such facilities

are to be used, then it may be necessary to direct the flow of records for compilation of vital statistics to such centers. In some countries the law states the records should go from registrar to regional office and to national office from where it is to be given to the NSO. In such situations it would be necessary in the interest of efficiency and time saving to send the records to regional offices of the NSO from regional offices of the CR organization. If the national CR and VS organizations together agree to such an arrangement and that it would be deemed to have satisfied the legal provisions, probably there may not be any need for amending the law on this issue.

In general the records for statistical purposes should flow from the registrar to the district registrar to the regional CR organ, if any, and finally to the regional or national office of the VS organization. The other hand, the regional or branch office of the VS organization should be able to get involved in the inspections to improve the quality of data.

7.4 Integration of training and capacity building

Every ministry and organization of the government have their own programmes of training and capacity building. As many organizations are involved in the running of the civil registration system, it is better that people of all such organizations are provided basic training on civil registration functions and the basic activities. This would avoid the need to call people from various organizations for training. It may happen that some organization is hard pressed for urgent activities and is not able to release people for training. By building the training programmes into those of other organizations by including a module on CRVS, the employees also get a holistic picture of the duties that they have to perform.

Many countries have training programs for their civil service civil service personnel. These include programs for new recruits as well as refresher training. It would be advantageous to include modules on CRVS systems into these training programmes so that all civil service personnel are aware of the system and various issues.

Integration of training in the above manner would need the matter to be discussed and pursued with the concerned ministries and organizations. In countries with high powered boards or steering committees for CRVS, this may be done if decisions are taken at that level. In other countries this would require continued interaction and sensitization of the senior people of the concerned ministry/department.

7.5 Integration of IEC activities

Almost all governments have a dedicated IEC organization aimed at informing the public about the government programmes. In addition, many ministries with citizen centric programmes have separate IEC activities. Specifically, the ministries that deal with health, children, etc. have a stake in improving CRVS systems. So if they include messages relating to CRVS in their IEC materials, it would go a long way in promoting CRVS. For example, along with the messages relating to child immunization, a message on the need to register the birth as one of the first requirements of a child would be very useful.

These type of integration of IEC activities with various ministries and other agencies would require policy decision at higher levels. The Board/Steering Committee, wherever they exist can play a positive role in this. However, it would require more efforts in getting the organizations on board, if there is no board/steering committee with decision making powers. In that case considerable amount of lobbying would have to be done with the concerned officials.

7.6 Demand creation

Creating demand for civil registration records is one of the options for bringing in

awareness on CRVS. However, it has to be implemented only when a significant proportion events are getting registered. Some of the important purposes for which birth/death certificates can be made mandatory are,

a) Proving date of birth at time of
    i. school admission
    ii. applying for passport
    iii. applying for identity cards
    iv. at immunization
b) Proving a birth in the family for adding the child's name to food card
c) Proving death of a person for insurance and inheritance purposes
d) Proving the age for
    i. juvenile justice related issues
    ii. avoiding child labour.
    iii. Claiming old age pensions
    iv. adding the name to voter's list
e) Proof of marriage for several purposes

This is only an illustrative list. The important point to be kept view is that while making the production of birth/death certificates mandatory, the system should not end up denying some of the basic rights. Instead, non possession of a certificate on account of non registration should be treated as opportunity to encourage the concerned family to register the event. If non production of birth certificate results in denial of school admission the right of the child to get education would be denied. Instead of that the child should be admitted to school and the date of birth should be kept as provisional till a birth certificate is produced. Initially, such an approach may result in some delayed registrations.

The coordination mechanism should consider these issues and decide on a way forward. This may include the following.

a) Publicity o the proposal to make such documents compulsory much in advance – for example for school admission the publicity should focus on government decision to make birth certificate five years later. So that children born now should be registered
b) So relaxation of the late and delayed registration process for some timeliness
c) Implementation of the decision to make such documents compulsory may be made in phases for different purposes and also in different areas.

It should be ensured that the public are not put into difficulties by suddenly making registration documents compulsory for all purposes. The concerned ministries/agencies should also get enough time for sensitizing their staff on the issues and solutions. These are all areas in which the coordination mechanism can play a vital role.

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

For any program to be successfully implemented, there should be a strong Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) set up. Since CRVS system is a permanent one and there would always be scope for improvement, there has to be an permanent M&E arrangement within this system. This would include the monitoring of the operations through operational statistics and periodic evaluation of the system. The CRVS system would achieve its target when all vital events get registered. However, there is no source that can give exact figures of vital events of any type in a country. Hence evaluation of coverage has to depend on several indirect methods that have their limitations. This chapter looks at various options on M&E.

8.1 Monitoring

As the CRVS system encompasses several layers of officials from various ministries/ organizations spread over the length and breadth of the country, monitoring of the work is of key importance to ensure that everything is being done as per instructions. In case of a completely automated system using information technology (*Refer to chapter 8 for details*) all data required for monitoring purpose would be generated automatically. Hence the discussions in this section focus on partially automated and manual systems only.

Every registrar is expected to periodically forward documents to higher authorities. In countries where multiple copies of the registration documents have been mandated by law, it may be one or more copies of the document that goes to the next higher level. In countries where only one copy each of the register and reporting form are required, it would be the information for compiling vital statistics that are being so forwarded. These may either be a detachable portion of the reporting form or a summary of simple tables. Person who receives the documents need to ensure that he has received all documents for any given period. He may find that he has not received the documents for certain registration centers. This may be the result of,

a) the documents being lost in transit;

b) no documents being sent as there were no events for registration in the center for the relevant period;

c) the registrar forgetting to sent the documents; or

d) no registration work being done in the area due to some reason.

If no procedure has been prescribed, he would have to contact all the centers from which reports have not been received. By specifying that the centers with no events to register for the period should sent a report saying the number of events registered is '*Nil*', for centers where registration could not be done due to any reason other than absence of registrar should be informed in the report the number of centers to be contacted can be reduced. This is important if registration areas have small population sizes resulting in too few events. He should contact other centers to find out what has happened. If non receipt is due to loss in transit, the registrar should make extra copies and send them. If registrations were not done due to absence of registrar, the higher level official should take up the matter with concerned officials and make alternative arrangements, if the registrar has not returned.

Similar monitoring process needs to be set up at all levels through which the records pass. If the law provides for the periodicity of sending the documents, then the monitoring needs to be aligned to that periodicity. If the law does not provide any periodicity, then the periodicity of the transfer of records as decided by the CRVS agency or the steering committee/board would prevail.

It is suggested that the frequency of monitoring should not be lower than once in two months as longer intervals would result in delay in corrective actions.

Apart from monitoring the receipt of records, whether all the required records are being sent also need to be monitored. Each time a set records are dispatched there should be a summary sheet indicating the number of events by type for which the records are being sent. This number has to tally with the actual number of records being received.

If registrations are going on smoothly, then the proportion of delayed registration should come down. This is an indicator that is worth monitoring at least on an annual basis. Similarly, the the seasonal variation in the events (not registrations as registrations may get bunched together) may give some clue to whether some are being missed. Births and deaths, may have some seasonality. If number registered are less even after allowing for some seasonality, then it indicates some issue. Marriages may have much more seasonality depending on cultural factors and one has to be careful about drawing conclusions on the basis of the seasonal variation alone.

8.2 Evaluation

Evaluation is different from monitoring of the registration work. It tries to put all evidences together to evaluate various aspects of civil registration. These include evaluation of coverage, quality of contents, evaluation of processes, evaluation of the legal provisions.

8.2.1 Coverage

There are several methods to estimate the level of registration – some direct while some are indirect. Direct methods base the results on surveys that tries to collect data on coverage either through responses of individuals /households or through verification of the registration records. Indirect methods try to get the coverage levels from other data like those collected in censuses or surveys.

Most countries have some estimates for birth, death and infant mortality rates based on surveys. The approximate number of births, deaths and infant deaths at national level (and regional level for large countries) can be worked out and compared with the registrations relating to the particular year to get an idea of the level of registration. At lower levels this strategy may not work as the estimates of vital rates from surveys would have large sampling errors.

Many countries have regular household surveys on a variety of topics. Periodically these surveys can be used to evaluate the coverage of CRVS system by asking about the occurrence and registration of births, deaths and marriages in the sample households. This does not add much to the cost of the survey. If it can be done periodically till the registration system improves consistently to a high level, it would be a good source of information. The vital events recorded in these surveys can be traced and their registration status checked with civil registration records to get a more accurate picture. However, this may be a costly and cumbersome process due to the fact that the place of registration may be different from the current place of residence. If sample sizes are sufficiently large, it may be possible to get estimates at regional levels. In a larger scale, there can be comparison between census and registration records of children. However, in most of the developing countries, the children are under enumerated in census and hence it may be difficult to get reliable estimates of coverage in this manner.

By comparing age data from two censuses and age specific number of deaths registered, it is possible to get at some indication on death registration completeness. However, the reliability would be affected when once census is having relatively more undercount than the other.

The guidelines on Vital Statistics provides a more detailed discussion on the methods of evaluation of coverage.

8.2.2 Quality of contents

Quality of information collected is an important factor. Errors in some details can result in the person being identified wrongly or not being identified at all. Correctness of address is also important in ensuring that the events are not registered again. The use of witnesses help in recording at least identity correctly, though they may not be able to vouch for other details like exact age or birth order. Use of witness is not mandatory in all countries. In a completely automated system, some of the errors may be brought out by comparison with responses given earlier. However, this does not applies only to marriages and deaths.

Evaluation of the quality of the contents periodically would help the CRVS organization identify the type of errors and take necessary action to see that these are not repeated. The process itself can contribute to some of the errors as indicated below:

a) In countries where the information given by the family over the counter to medical institutions form the basis of their reporting, chances of errors are very high. If such practice is being followed, there is a need to redesign the process so that the family gives the details in writing under their signature and this would reduce errors.

b) It has been observed that if information is being recorded in a language other than the mother tongue, there is a possibility of transliteration error.

Sensitizing public is the only way to bring in a sustained improvement in the quality of information provided by them. Though there may be legal provisions against giving false information, it is neither practical nor desirable to take action against informants who have wrong information. It may be noted that errors in the registration documents included in the certificates may get identified and may come up for correction. An analysis of the type of corrections that are being made itself would point to the possible solutions. However, these would not cover items included for statistical purposes alone. The CRVS organizations needs to periodically evaluate its process and if necessary conduct field studies to identify the types of errors.

8.2.3 Processes

The process that is followed can not only result in errors as indicated above, but may not be citizen friendly. This is an area where the CRVS organization should take action. The perspectives of civil servants who design the process and that of the citizen may not be same when it comes to complying with the established process and the issues associated with it. There is a need to identify the issues in the processes so that it can be redesigned. The organization can have some public hearings at village/habitation level and with medical institutions, notifiers, etc. to identify issues. Such hearings may be conducted some after major changes are brought out in the processes.

The information flow and certification process within the organization may have bottlenecks that also needs to be evaluated. It is also possible that alternate routes of information flow may have become easier. Hence this is an area that may also be looked into critically.

8.2.4 Legal framework

As indicated earlier, making changes in the law is long process in most countries. However, this should not deter the organization from periodically looking at the legal provisions for possible changes. It is difficult to expect that the legal provisions in an evolving area like CRVS system in any country can remain the same for more than 10-15 years. If some changes are required at the end of 15 years of operation, it is necessary that the process to identify the changes required, preparing proposed changes, discussing it in the technical committees and bringing it to the high level committee, etc., may take a minimum of 2-3 years depending on the governing

structure of the country. In view of this, it is suggested that the countries with more than 12-15 year old legal provisions and where registration has not improved to high levels should start the process of reviewing the law.

9. USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Many national governments are using Information Technology (IT) for streamlining administration and improving citizen services. Civil Registration is one sector that can benefit substantially from the use of IT. It can help reduce a lot of paperwork and at the same time improve efficiency and reliability. There can be different ways in which computers can be used in the registration activities. However, an integrated approach for computerization along with that of other government would be more useful and economic. Considering that cost of computer hardware d networking are coming down and that a lot more open source software for general use are available today, computerization would be cost beneficial in any country. This chapter discusses some of the options for use of IT and the related issues.

Computerization of registration documents for the purpose of generating vital statistics is discussed in detail in the Guidelines on Vital Statistics. In countries where computerization is not done at least in a portion of CRVS system, the computerization of the vital statistics generation would be mostly independent of similar efforts in the civil registration process.

9.1 Fully automated system

In a fully automated system all actions after the receipt of report on a vital event is done over a computerized system. Such a system would require certain infrastructure and other pre-requisites as below:

a) A national network of computers that connects all registration centres, the intermediate and national level civil registration and vital statistics offices.

b) As the registration centres would not have enough workload to fully use the equipments full time there should be other computerized activities that use the same equipments. If this is not so, the investment would be uneconomic from the cost benefit point of view

c) All forms designed for easy computerization

d) Legal provisions in the country, not necessarily in the civil registration law, should support keeping registers and other documents in electronic form. In many countries of the region the law in the current form requires the registrars/ informants to make multiple copies of the register/report. These would become unnecessary if entire work is computerized. Hence for copies also the provisions should support use of electronic versions.

e) Law should support issue of certificates based on the electronic registers. It should also support certifying the particulars from any place in the country irrespective of the place of registration of the event

f) If they are informants under the law, institutions like hospitals that have large number of events should also be included in the computer network so that they can report events directly through the network.

g) All registration centres have computers, printers, scanners and uninterrupted power supply.

h) Though all the data in a decentralized system would be entered through the same computer network, it is not necessary that they are all going into the same database. It can also be stored as separate databases for each region in a decentralized system. However, it is recommended that everything is kept in one database so that it is easy to ensure safety of the data. It is also to be noted that small regions in a country may not have much data to go into a separate database.

The entire information collected in the reporting forms needs to be transferred onto a database. Actually, there can be two databases, one containing information that are part of the registers and another one for all statistical information. Apart from identification particulars, some information like dates of occurrence and registration, age of parents for birth, age of the deceased for death, etc., would be common to both the databases. Scanned copies of the reporting forms, certificates from medical practitioners, etc.. should form the archive to be created simultaneously. In case of oral reporting, the information can be directly entered into the database and a printout of the same can be got signed by the informant (and witnesses if any). There should be a system of entering the data and its verification by someone else to ensure that the data are correct and also to ensure that there is no foul play. It can later be scanned and added to the archive. For security purposes, it may be ensured that the registration is deemed to be done only when the reporting forms have been archived. This would ensure that no events are registered without a signed reporting form.

If medical institutions and similar informants are provided facility to enter data directly into the database, they should send the original reporting forms to the registrar and the verification be done in his office to complete the registration process. The forms can also be scanned there.

In countries where a national population database is being maintained or there is an identity card issuing system that has a database of people eligible to get an identity card, the updating of these databases for births and deaths and, if necessary, for marriages and divorces should be based on the vital events database. Whenever a vital event is registered it will check for the identity of the concerned individual, parents, diseased, couple, informants and witnesses with the population database to ensure that they are all genuine individuals. Information relating to new events would be sent tp the population database automatically as soon as registration is complete. If the identity card database contains only people of certain age and above, the information about births would not be sent. Instead, the list of persons who have crossed the age limit would be sent periodically (monthly or quarterly). The identity card authorities would use this as the list of people who are to be given identity cards.

The originals of the scanned forms should be kept for sometime -at least 3 years - before they are disposed of. Once the registration is complete, it should be possible to get certificates from any registration centre or other authorised offices.

The computer software in this case should have at least the following functionalities.

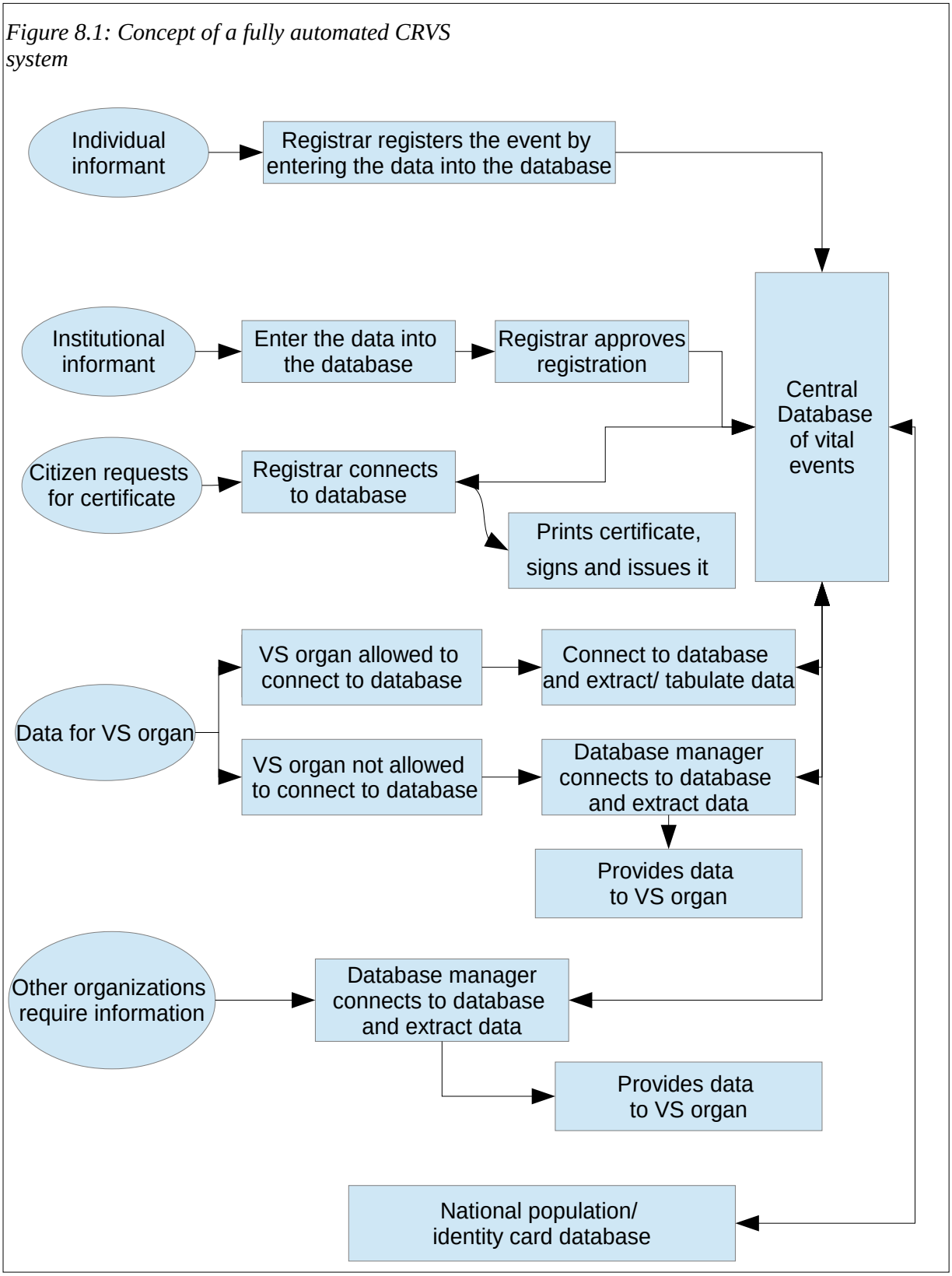
a) To acquire data from the network nodes in online and offline mode. The later would be useful in times of connectivity failure, etc., so that the work is not get interrupted.

b) Facility to make corrections and cancellations as per the legal provisions. Cancellation/correction should be done in such a way that if necessary the original entries can be recovered. If need arises, it should also be possible to identify the users who made specific entries.

c) It should also have provisions for changes in name in countries where people are permitted to do so in the birth register or link the change of names done under some other law to the name in the birth register.

d) The process through the computer should follow all the provisions under the legal provisions and regulations

Figure 8.1: Concept of a fully automated CRVS system



e) It should be possible to transfer the database with statistical information to the VS organization. Alternatively, the should be able to use the same network for the purpose of statistical compilation.

f) It should be able to get the identity of the concerned individuals verified from the population database and also send the list of relevant information to the identity card database instantaneously on registration or periodically as required.

The system as discussed above appears simple as all details of the procedures have not been discussed. However, if not properly implemented it can lead to serious issues.

9.2 Partially automated system

In many countries of the region, it may take several years for all the registration centres to get connected to computer networks. However, it should not deter the CRVS organizations from automating the system with the available facilities. Though it is possible to computerize the registration information without using a networked system, it is not being considered here. Such systems where all information are stored in local computers are prone to several problems. Many a times people do not take systematic backup of data. This can result in loss of data in case of problems with the computer. Bringing together information available on computers in different physical locations is not an easy task, especially when they are located all over the country and collation of information is required at frequent intervals; weekly or at least monthly. However, this need not restrain countries from making a start with computerization. Computerization of civil registration activities can be started at the locations where infrastructure is available. However, in such cases computerization can not be done simultaneously with registration.

To computerize civil registration documents at a location away from the registrar's office would require the documents to be sent over there. It would be difficult in the normal course of work as the documents are required for day-to-day work in the registrar's office. However, in countries where registration documents are prepared in multiple copies, one of them can be used for computerization without affecting the regular work. The disadvantage of this system compared to a fully automated system is that it would not be able to provide any information on a real time basis as data are entered with a time lag. The advantages of taking up computerization even on a piece meal basis are:

a) substantial amount of data would get computerized by the time the computerization is taken up at the lowest level;

b) the country can learn a lot form the experience as some sort of on line registration can be introduced at the location where computerization is being done and nearby areas;

c) citizen services can be streamlined in some locations and even in remote areas where postal facilities are good, better services can be made available; and

d) with simultaneous scanning and archiving of the documents in electronic form the storage and archival issues can be solved earlier.

If the computerization is done in multiple centers and they are connected to a network all the data can go into the same database. If they are not connected, then data from all the centers can be sent to one server either through physical transport of the entered data in computer media or when connections are available.

It is possible to have automatic data capture through scanning of the forms and intelligent character recognition (ICR) technology. The basic requirements and constraints in this case are:

a) require specially designed forms printed with precision;

b) preservation of the forms without folding and other damages till it is scanned;

c) specialized software, that may prove to be costly unless the there is enough workload;

d) availability of the software to recognize characters written in the language used for official documents in the country; and

e) 100% checking of the scanned information that goes into the register as they have legal value.

9.3 Use of mobile devices

Mobile devices like mobile phones and palmtops are becoming an alternative for interface with computer servers. These can be used to communicate with the databases of vital events from remote places. These facilities can be used for improving registration and computer services.

One use of the mobile device is to file reports of vital events. Authorized mobile devices (select mobile numbers) or personnel (with identification) can use this facility from places that are not connected to the network. However, this facility should be used with caution. Since the legal position in many countries is to have signed declarations from informants to report vital events, reporting through mobile devices may not satisfy this legal requirement. However, these can be used in form similar to the remote reporting by medical institutions through the network. The entries would be accepted by the registrar and such registrations would be treated as *provisional* till the registrar gets signed declarations and issue of certificates should wait for the receipt of signed declarations. The date of receipt of information by the person who has send the message through the mobile device can be deemed to be the date of receipt provided there is nothing against it in the law. Once the registration process is completed, it may be possible to issue electronic certificates through the network.

Once computerized systems are put in place all over the country, it may not be necessary to provide signed and stamped certificates. The websites of the CRVS organization can facilitate on line verification of the certificate by anyone. This would help people and the authorities who use certificates need not rely only on the document presented to them.

10. FINANCE AND BUDGETING

In any government activity, sufficient funds are required to ensure its successful implementation. Civil registration is a government function and is part of the governance related activities. It is not to be confused with ad hoc government programs designed to achieve certain objectives in a specified period of time and no further activities to be continued. Civil registration is a permanent activity and would continue for all times. Hence national governments should ensure sufficient funding to this activity on a sustained basis.

One of the foremost requirements to ensure sufficient budget for the running of CRVA systems is a political and administrative will. If the political executive and the top levels of bureaucracy are properly sensitized about the advantages a good CRVS system can provide to the government in running its development programs as well as general administration would, they would support providing budgetary support to various activities of the CRVS organization. The obligation to establish and run a CRVS system under the law of the country would ensure that some minimum budget is guaranteed. However, this may not be enough for all activities that are required to bring in accelerated iprovement.

The areas relating to CRVS that require funding may vary depending the stage of development of CRVS in a country. There are certain activities that would require regular funding year after year. These include,

a) salary and allowances of full time staff engaged in CRVS

b) printing of forms (reporting, notifiers and certificates) and registers

c) communication expenses, including expenses relating to distribution of forms and registers to registrars

d) refresher training of staff

e) IEC activities (Though this can be discontinued once 100% registration of all types of vital events is achieved, it may take a long time and hence is included here)

There are other activities that may be important when a new initiative is launched or when changes are made into the system including,

a) training of staff on new procedures including expenses on training programs,

b) preparation of training material,

c) IEC activities on the new processes – both with public and the staff involved

The national governments should include the funds required for the above in their annual budget. It would be highly counter-productive to plan for the CRVS system to generate funds through fees to be charged for certificates, etc., especially at the stages when the level of registration is low. Depending on the system of financial administration in the country, if necessary, funds should be clearly earmarked for specific activities.

As several ministries/organizations of the government would be engaged in the activities of the CRVS system, they all would require funds to implement their part of the work. For example, if health staff is to work as registrars/notifiers and their supervisors also supervise the work relating CRVS, it can be logically be said that a portion of the budget is actually spent for CRVS. However, in most cases, except when someone is traveling for training or participating in training, it would be impossible to segregate the expenditure between CRVS and other activities. In such cases, it may not be necessary to provide for an item of expenditure for CRVS in the budget. However, the

concerned ministry/organization (Health, in the above example) would have to ensure that the functions are properly integrated with their work.

In some cases, the notifiers or even the registrars may be from some ministry/organization that is not directly related to the CRVS work and only selected staff may be assigned CRVS work, in addition to their normal duties. In such cases, the governments should consider giving a suitable compensation to the staff so deployed. (Example: Village school teacher assigned the work of registrar). The funds for such expenditure is budgeted by the CRVS organization would be better.

The short term requirement of funds for improving CRVS systems have to be viewed differently. As far as possible, the national governments should find some way of funding these activities. The international agencies may be able to help in some specific cases. However, national governments should be aware that the international funding is limited and that there are competing demands from various sectors and countries and hence it would be difficult to get assistance from international agencies on a sustainable basis.

11. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The discussions in the previous chapters pointed to various possibilities that may exist with regard to the CRVS system in the country. As already mentioned, the main purpose of this guideline is to support the countries in their efforts to bring about accelerated improvement in CRVS systems by providing standards against which their current systems can be compared. On many issues multiple alternatives have been discussed as the provisions of the law are not same across the countries. The countries would have to identify the alternative that suits the legal provisions that the have. It is possible that some other alternative may appear to be better in terms of operational feasibility. This would point to the need for changes in the legal provisions – depending on the particular change, it may be possible to make amendments through regulations or it may be necessary to amend the law itself. This chapter summarizes the suggestions and process of bringing about changes.

Irrespective of the current levels of registration, the first step is to make a comprehensive situational analysis. This should include the legal framework, organizational structure and its effectiveness, registration process, public awareness, inter-sectoral coordination, budget, development in use of information technology, etc.. Once the areas that require changes have been identified, the countries need to prepare an action plan with clear time lines. The plan should cover the areas where changes are required, the process of bringing in changes – whether through executive decisions of the government or through amendment of the law or regulations- and the time period in which such changes can be made. Obviously the time requirement for amending the law would be high in almost all countries. This does not mean that countries can not set in motion the process of changes. It only mans that it has to carefully prioritize the proposed changes.

The first set of activities that needs to be taken up is those that do not require changes in the legal framework. While some of the activities require changes in the law, there may be some others that can be set in motion within the existing legal framework in an informal manner and can be given formal status when the laws are amended. For example, the inter-sectoral coordination mechanism may not be mentioned in the law. It does not prevent the government from establishing a high level committee for this purpose. Only when this committee is sought to be given powers to oversee the CRVS organization, objections on legal ground may come up (like, *"Can the CRVS organization appointed under the laws made the parliament by overseen by a committee appointed by the executive?").* However, in practice it may be possible to make decisions taken by the committee binding on the CRVS organization as long as it is not in conflict with the law.

Similar to those changes that require amendments in law, there may be changes that can brought about through regulations, also called subordinate legislations. Regulations are provisions made by the government under the legal frame work when the law clearly says that such provisions may be made. The law may have provisions saying "*the government may through regulations...", "the government may prescribe the procedures",* etc.. If the changes required can be brought about by new regulations or changes in the existing ones, then it should be taken up as early as possible as it may only need a approval of the minister concerned or the cabinet and not that of the parliament or the highest law making body in the country.

The changes in the structure of the organization, if required, should be given high priority. As the law in most countries talks about the CRBS organization only briefly, it should be possible to bring about many changes without difficulty. Most of it can be done through government decisions within the existing provisions of the law. This would include the organizational structure down to the lowest level and should also include appointment of notifiers. The accessibility of the registrars to the public and at the same time having an organization not too widely spread to have effective

control is important and needs careful planning. This is an area where the effectiveness of the coordination mechanism established would be tested as it would be necessary to involve staff from various government organization in the CRVS system.

Another area where a substantial amount of changes can be brought in without changes in the legal framework is in the contents of the forms of and registers. In most countries the items of information to be collected are not specified in the law. Information that needs to be included in the registers may not have much scope for change in many countries as they may been included keeping in the needs of the country. Still, it is necessary to critically look into each item of information and see whether some item is unnecessary, missing or needs modification. The concepts an definitions involved also needs to be looked into, not only to ensure that they are comprehensive, bu also to align them with international practices. The items collected for statistical purposes needs to be looked into with the objectives of identifying items that would help research into vital statistics and items that would throw light on the regional variations as well as variations among socio-cultural groups within the country in various demographic parameters.

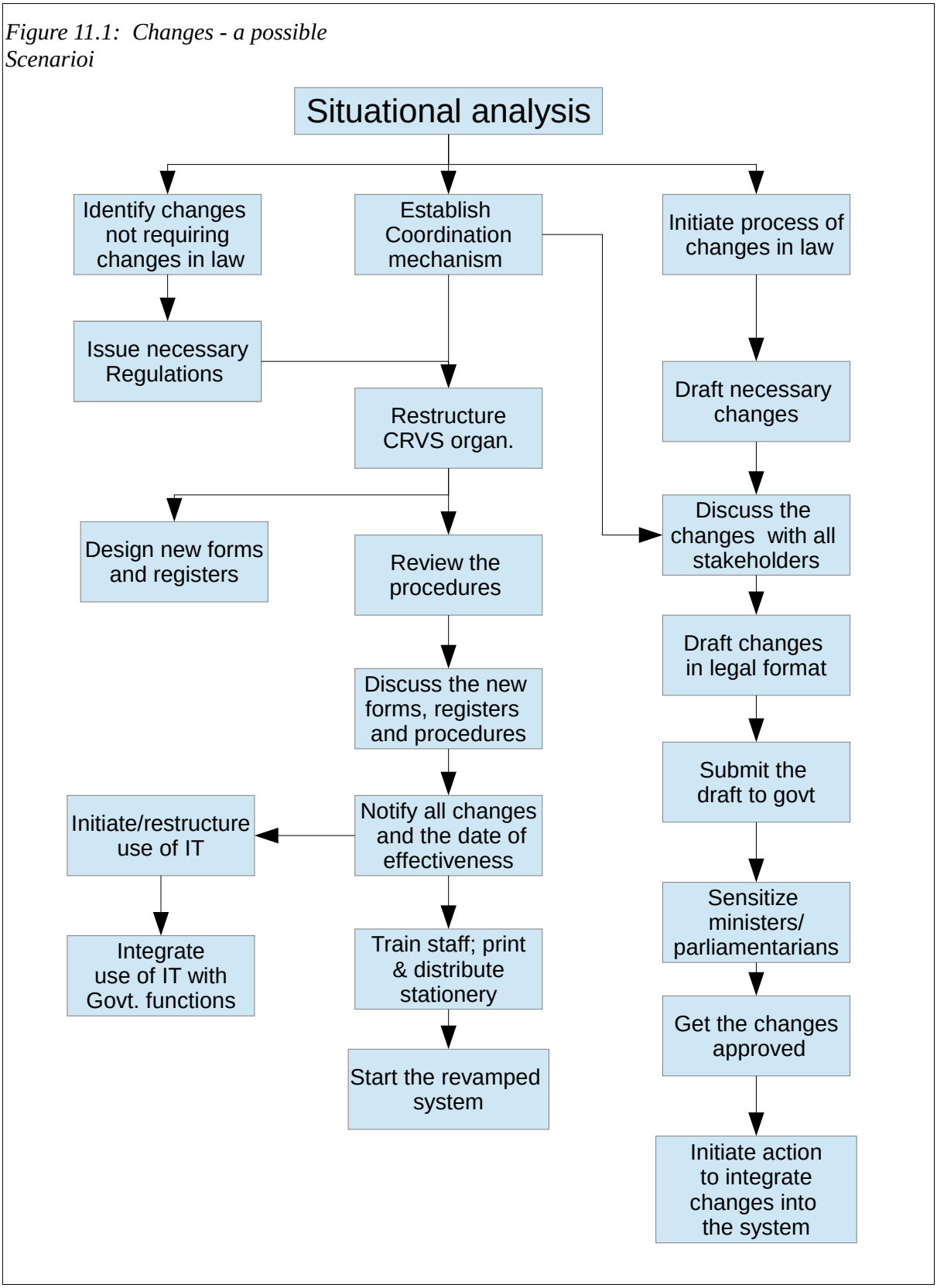
The process of registration is an area that should be analyzed in detail to bring in improvements as it has the potential to encourage/deter the public to approach the CRVS organization for their rights and duties. The process should be simple and citizen friendly and at the same time it should take care of all legal requirements. As far as possible the certificate of registration should be free of cost. It should also have enough checks and balances to ensure that no events are registered or information given for registration in a fraudulent manner. Similarly, while ensuring confidentiality of private information, it should be easy for public and other agencies to verify registration related information.

The plans for use of IT for registration purposes should be in such a way that it Is integrated with that of other government functions so that it is cost effective. Necessary legal back up should be ensured for use of computerized documents and certificates. It can be effectively used for archival of records. It may also require legal support, not necessarily through civil registration law.

Many of the changes may require a strong and comprehensive CRVS law. Countries with a weak legal framework should start efforts to amend the laws or bring about a completely new law. As this would take time, when changes are being planned, it should be forward looking so that further changes are not required for some time. Within the constraints of the legal system of the country, the law should provide for use of regulations to fine tune the general aspects given through its provisions.

In summary action for improvement of CRVS systems should be planned in such a manner that several activities are taken up simultaneously. Figure 11.1 indicates a possible scenario. The activities on the same level in different streams may not necessarily be completed at the same time. Once changes are brought in the legal framework, it may be necessary to go back to the beginning depending on the changes that could be made. If changes in forms, registers and procedures already made have been designed to be consistent with the changes proposed in the legal frame work, then very little course correction only would be required. The situation would vary from country to country.

Figure 11.1: Changes - a possible Scenarioi



Annex 1:VITAL EVENTS-DEFINITIONS

This annex provides definitions of vital events. These definitions have been taken from the recommended standards provided in the United Nations Handbook on Civil Registration [7]. While using these definitions in the countries, appropriate references to the laws of the country should be included for clarity. It would also be appropriate to supplement the definitions with legal provisions in the country relating marriage, divorce, etc., in all training materials.

a) 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 must be registered and counted-as such irrespective of gestational age or whether alive or dead at time of registration, and if they die at any time following birth, they must also be registered and counted as a death;

b) 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.

The foetal deaths can be further categorized on the basis of the growth of the foetus. These categorization was earlier based on gestational age of the foetus such as, *early foetal death*, at less than 20 completed weeks of pregnancy; *intermediate foetal death* at 20 but less than 28 weeks of gestation; and *late foetal death*, at 28 completed weeks or more of gestation. However, now it is recommended to replace these classifications on the basis of the growth of the foetus in terms of its weight rather than age[8]. It is recommended that dead foetuses weighing 500 or more grams at birth (or those of 22 completed weeks of gestation or crown-heel body length of 25 or more centimetres if weight is not known) be registered. In addition, for statistical purposes, it is recommended that such terminology as “abortion”, “early foetal death”, and “late foetal death” be replaced by the use of weight-specific measures, e.g., the foetal death rate for foetuses of1,000 or more grams or the foetal death rate for foetuses weighing between 500 and 1,000 grams etc.)

c) Death: the permanent disappearance of all evidence of life at any time after live birth has taken place (post-nata1 cessation of vital functions without capability of resuscitation). definition therefore excludes foetal deaths;

d) Marriage: the act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of husband and wife is constituted; The legality of the union may be established by civil., religious or other means as recognized by the laws of each country;

e) Divorce : the final dissolution of a marriage, that is, the separation of 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;

f) Annulment: the invalidation or voiding of a- marriage. by a competent authority,

7 United Nations (1998): Studies in Methods -Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, Preparation of legal framework, Series F. No . 71, Sales No. E.98 XVII.7

8 Ibid. page 10 (footnote)

according to the laws of each country, which confers on the parties the status of never having been married to each other;

g) Judicial separation: the disunion of married persons, according to the laws of each country, without conferring on the parties the right to remarry;

h) Adoption: the legal and voluntary taking and treating of, the child of other parents as one's own, in so far as provided by the laws of each country;

i) Legitimation: the formal investing of a person with the status and rights of legitimacy, according to the laws of each country;

j) Recognition : the legal acknowledgment, either voluntarily or compulsorily, of the maternity or paternity of an illegitimate child

Issue of surrogate mothers

Though not common in the region, registration of births through surrogate mothers pose some legal issues. The mother who delivers the child in this case is not the real mother of the child in the sense that the child is not the product of conception with her egg. The fertilized egg from another woman has been transferred to the woman who finally delivers the child. In some countries there are laws regulating surrogate motherhood. However, there seems to be some lack of clarity as to the mother of the child for the purposes of registration of birth.

The definition of birth as, "*the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of conception"* seems to indicate that the mother is the one who delivered the child. In such a situation registering the name of another woman as mother would require legal approval. The national governments may consider the issue and provide appropriate provisions to deal with such cases. It would be appropriate to define mother as "*the woman whose egg has fertiized and developed into the foetus*"

Annex 2: ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN FORMS AND REGISTERS

The list of items to be included in the forms and registers would vary significantly from country to country. While there are certain items that are absolutely necessary in the registers, those on which information are to be collected in the forms depend on the amount of data that the country would like to have, in relation to the vital events. Though the capacity to process may also be considered as a constraint, considering that data processing using electronic means is becoming cheaper as time goes by, countries should not be guided by the current constraints and should plan for the future. The items marked in bold are considered priority items that should go into the forms to collect vital statistics.

A) Births

a) Characteristics of the event

1. **Attendance at birth**
2. **Date of occurrence**
3. **Date of Registration**
4. **Place of occurrence**
5. Hospitalization status
6. **Type of birth(single or multiple)**

b) Characteristics of the child

1. Gestational age
2. **Legitimacy status**
3. **Sex**
4. **Weight at birth**

c) characteristics of the parents

1. **Age/date of birth of father**
2. **Age /date of birth of mother**
3. **Citizenship(or nationality) of father, mother**
4. **Date of marriage (for legitimate births)**
5. **Duration of residence at usual place of residence for mother, father**
6. **Literacy/Educational attainment of mother, father**
7. **Ethnic group of mother, father**
8. **Interval since last previous live birth of this mother**
9. **Number of children born alive to this mother**
10. **Number of foetal deaths to this mother**
11. **Occupation of mother, father**
12. **Place of birth of mother, father**
13. **Place of residence at specified past date for mother, father**
14. **Place of usual residence of mother**
15. **Place of usual residence, father**
16. **Type of activity, father**

B) Deaths

a) Characteristics of the event

1. Attendant at birth for death under one year of age
2. Cause of death
3. Certifier
4. Date of occurrence
5. Date of registration
6. Hospitalization
7. Place of occurrence

b) Characteristics of the deceased

1. Age (or date of birth)
2. Age of surviving spouse (for married)
3. Citizenship
4. Duration (or date)of marriage
5. Educational attainment
6. Ethnic (or national) group
7. Legitimacy status (for deceased under one year of age)
8. Literacy

9. Marital Status
10. No. of children born alive (for females of child bearing age or older)
11. No. of children still living (for females of child bearing age or older)
12. Occupation
13. Place of birth
14. Place of residence at specific past date
15. Place of usual residence
16. Sex
17. Type of activity
18. Was the birth registered?(for deceased under one year of age)

C) Foetal deaths

a) Characteristics of the event

1. Attendant at birth
2. Cause of foetal death
3. Certifier
4. Date of occurrence
5. Date of registration
6. Hospitalization
7. Place of occurrence
8. Type of birth (single or multiple issue)

b) Characteristics of the foetus

1. Gestational age
2. Legitimacy
3. Sex
4. Weight at delivery

c) Characteristics of the parents

1. Age (or date of birth) of father
2. Age (or date of birth) of mother
3. Citizenship (or nationality of mother, father
4. Duration (or date) of marriage (for legitimate pregnancies)
5. Educational attainment of mother, father
6. Literacy status of mother, father
7. Occupation of mother, father
8. Number of children born alive to this mother
9. Number of children of this mother still alive
10. Number of foetal deaths to this mother
11. Place of birth of mother, father
12. Place of usual residence of mother, father
13. Type of activity of mother, father

D) Marriages

a) Characteristics of the event

1. Date of occurrence
2. Date of registration
3. Place of occurrence
4. Type of marriage (civil, religious, etc..)

b) Characteristics of bride and groom

1. Age (or date of birth)
2. citizenship(or nationality)
3. Duration of residence in usual (present) place
4. Educational attainment
5. Ethnic (and /or national) group
6. Literacy status
7. Marital status
8. Number of previous marriages
9. Occupation
10. Place of birth

11. Place of residence at a specific past date
12. Place of usual residence
13. Type of activity
14. Place of previous residences

E) Divorces

a) Characteristics of the event

1. Date of occurrence
2. Date of registration
3. Place of occurrence
4. Type of marriage (civil, religious, etc..)

b) Characteristics of divorcees

1. Age (or date of birth)
2. Citizenship(or nationality)
3. Date (or duration) of marriage
4. Educational attainment
5. Ethnic (or national) group
6. Literacy status
7. Mode of dissolution of marriage
8. Number of children born alive to this marriage
9. Number of dependent children of divorcee
10. Number of previous marriages
11. Occupation
12. Place of birth
13. Place of previous residences
14. Place of residence at a specific past time
15. Place of usual residences
16. Type of activity
17. Type of marriage being dissolved
18. Duration of residence in usual (present) place of residence
19. Place of occurrence of marriage being dissolved