



CONCEPT NOTE

9TH AFRICAN SYMPOSIUM ON STATISTICAL DEVELOPMENT

Draft

Theme:

Promoting Use of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Support of Good Governance in Africa

Introduction

In its recently released report, the United Nations (UN) High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda recommended that the new development agenda be guided by the vision of “eradicating extreme poverty once and for all in the context of sustainable development”. While envisioning the post-2015 development agenda as **universal**, the panel proposed that it should be driven by five big, transformative shifts¹. Among them the first, ‘leave no one behind’ underscores the need to ensure that no person – regardless of ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or other status – is denied universal human rights and basic economic opportunities. The Panel has also suggested a set of illustrative goals and targets and emphasized the need for monitoring the related indicators at disaggregated levels. On peace and the need for accountable institutions, the panel calls for a fundamental shift- to recognize peace and **governance as core elements of well being, not an optional extra**. It also called for a **data revolution** for sustainable development, with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens.

¹ The five big transformative shifts proposed are 1. Leave no one behind; 2. Put sustainable development at the core; 3. Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growths; 4. Build peace, effective, open and accountable institutions for all; and 5. Forge a new global partnership

The ‘Outcome Document of the Regional Consultations on the Post 2015 Development Agenda’ developed by the pan-African institutions namely, the African Union Commission (AUC), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), African Development Bank (AfDB) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through a thorough process of consultations across Africa, also underpinned the need for sustainable and inclusive growth and eradication of extreme poverty. The document also among others identified good governance, human rights for all and enhanced statistical capacities on the continent as development enablers for the post-2015 development agenda.

By its very nature a Civil Registration system is universal and hence inclusive; it serves as an instrument through which the government can reach out to each individual and deliver its services at the very margins of the society. It is a system which allows every individual in the society to prove with certainty, the facts relating to her/his existence, identity, and personal family situation. The Civil Registration system helps people realize their right and privileges. The statistics generated from the system help governments to develop and implement programmes at all the lowest administrative level and monitor their progress on a regular basis. The Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system is therefore, an essential pre-requisite for inclusive and good governance.

In Africa a large number of people do not exist in government records and many remain invisible throughout their life time. This is primarily due to inadequate systems of registration of births and deaths in African countries. Despite long history of existence, Civil Registration systems in most African countries do not function properly to date. Most countries on the continent have systems characterized by incompleteness in terms of coverage of the entire population as well as in registration of events themselves. Since 2009, pan- African institutions namely, the ECA, the AUC, the AfDB in collaboration with UN agencies and other stakeholders such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Plan International, Statistics South Africa (as the Secretariat for ASSD) and IN-DEPTH Network are

together² implementing a continent wide programme on CRVS called the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS)..

The African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration gathered for the first time in August 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and made a declaration addressing strategic and policy issues on reforming and improving CRVS systems on the continent. The ministers also endorsed a six-year Medium Term Plan (2010-2015) for the regional programme. The Second conference of the ministers that was held in Durban, South Africa in September 2012 moved action on the ground by asking each country to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the system and to develop a strategic action plan for strengthening of CRVS. The ministerial meeting also asked pan-African institutions and their partners to assist the countries in this effort. The conference of Ministers has now been institutionalized as a standing regional platform that will meet every two years under the auspices AUC.

The May 2013 Botswana regional workshop marked the beginning of the implementation APAI-CRVS at the country level. The primary objective of the workshop was to develop the first batch of pool of African CRVS experts that would provide support to countries in conducting comprehensive assessment and preparation of strategic plan. In addition to training in all aspects of CRVS, the experts were equipped with methodologies and tools on assessment and planning which were developed by the Regional Core Group based on various similar tools and guidelines available and the International Principles and Recommendations and Vital Statistics. Member states were informed in an official communication through the regional CRVS secretariat about the availability of these experts trained in Botswana. Currently, a number of countries are engaged in the implementation of the first transformational undertaking.

As the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses is drawing to a close in 2014, gains made and lessons learnt in this round must be consolidated and taken on board for incorporation in the implementation of the 2020 round. Nearly all African countries, except two would have undertaken a population census by the end of 2014.

² These institutions together constitute the Regional Core Group on CRVS

Background

The 9th ASSD has come at a time when several member States are engaged in undertaking assessments of their CRVS systems and developing plans for improvement. The rationale for conducting an assessment goes beyond knowing the status and situation of CRVS in a country. The assessment will help to generate evidence that will enable countries to systematically and innovatively address various challenges. The assessment will also help countries to upgrade their current systems to international standards. It is the starting point in moving away from business as usual.

The theme of the 9th ASSD is focused on use of CRVS systems in promoting good governance. What is 'Good Governance'? Although, there is no single definition of 'good governance', for the theme it makes sense to look at how UNDP defines it - 'Good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable. It is effective and equitable. It promotes the rule of law. Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision making over the allocation of development resources.'³ The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) also identified transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation and responsiveness (to the needs of the people).

The UN Panel on the post 2015 development agenda has suggested good governance and effective institutions as one of the twelve goals and while explaining the rationale for the inclusion of the goal (Goal 10) and the targets under the goal, the panel took into account almost all the characteristics stated above. In fact the target 'Provide free and universal legal identity, such as birth registration' (Target 10 a) almost explicitly recognizes civil registration as an essential pre-requisite for good governance.

Civil registration plays an important role in proving and in establishing, implementing and realizing many of the human rights embodied in international declarations and conventions *'It should be emphasized that the role played by civil registration in proving and in establishing, implementing and realizing many of the human rights embodied in international declarations*

³ <http://magnet.undp.org/>

and conventions is one of its most important contributions to the normal functioning of societies. Essentially, two groups of human rights can be identified in that respect: (a) human rights that require States to ensure that vital events are registered, for example, right to be registered and named, as per Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and (b) human rights that may depend on the vital events having been registered, for example, the right to vote, as per Article 21(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁴.

The documents emanating from the civil registration registers such as certificates of births, deaths, marriages and other vital events are of immense probative value for individuals to claim several benefits and privileges. *‘The main raison d’être of civil registration, its basic purpose, and the purpose which must be facilitated by the State, is to be an institution for disclosing facts relating to civil status based on technical legal principles, through which individuals can be assured of the legitimacy and authenticity of civil status facts in order to accredit them to other individuals or the administration itself, by means of public registration documents known as certifications⁵’.*

One of the areas of organizing linkage between good governance and human rights is service delivery. ‘In the realm of delivering state services to the public, good governance reforms advance human rights when they improve the state’s capacity to fulfill its responsibility to provide public goods which are essential for the protection of a number of human rights, such as the right to education, health and food. Reform initiatives may include mechanisms of accountability and transparency, culturally sensitive policy tools to ensure that services are accessible and acceptable to all, and paths for public participation in decision-making⁶’. The civil registration is well ordained to provide some of key public services either directly or through other systems that could be linked to it.

More and more countries are linking the civil registration system to population registers. When updated with address, these registers serve as a comprehensive tool for governance and form the

⁴ Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System Revision 3, Final Draft April 2003 ; United Nations Statistics Division

⁵ Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System Revision 3, Final Draft April 2003 ; United Nations Statistics Division

⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/Development/GoodGovernance/Pages/GoodGovernanceIndex.aspx>

basis for individual identity numbers or cards. A population register with unique ID for each individual can facilitate efficient delivery of government services (such as social grants, health services), generate complete electoral lists, ensure better tax collection etc. It reduces pilferage through better targeting and hence makes economic sense for many countries to invest in development of such registers. However, such a register can soon become redundant and unusable unless it is continuously updated through births and deaths information from the civil registration system. All this clearly pre-supposes that both the population database and registration database have to be maintained at the national level and linked electronically.

Having credible data is the basis for good governance. The basic data that any government needs on a regular basis for the purpose of governance is size of the population and its distribution. The births and deaths data from the civil registration system can be used to determine population estimates in the interim years between census collections, as well as for population projections. The information on how many children are born in each village and town is required to plan and implement school education programmes. Health intervention programmes cannot be efficiently planned and implemented unless there are data on how many people are dying, where and of what diseases. Lacking CRVS systems, most countries rely on infrequent and expensive surveys for vital statistics, the latter being of limited value when it comes to obtaining such data at the disaggregated level.

The Busan Plan of Action⁷ on Statistics while fittingly stating that **Statistics are a matter of life and death**, identified the lack or inadequacy of CRVS systems in most countries as one of the major gaps in statistical systems and calls for urgent action for its improvement. The UN Task Team on Post -2015 UN Development Agenda in its report *Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda: Overview* states that ‘reliable and comprehensive Civil Registration systems are a basic component of good governance and are essential for the production of vital statistics and of many health and population indicators’. The report calls for a focused programme of support to improve these statistics to strengthen basic statistics for post-2015 indicators in many fields.

⁷ Statistics for Transparency, Accountability, and Results: A Busan Plan of Action for Statistics , November 2011

Objectives

The 9th ASSD will be held on the theme “*Promoting Use of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Support of Good Governance in Africa*”. The overall objective of the 9th ASSD is to mobilize member States to generate authentic civil registration records in response to the requirements of institutions engaged in the provision of legal, administrative and social services and production of vital statistics for the purpose of planning and monitoring development. The symposium will also ensure that continuous mobilization for undertaking of population censuses in Africa is taken into the 2020 round of population and housing censuses. The specific objectives include:-

- i. To review existing business processes of CRVS systems including their linkages and inter-operability with other systems, identify challenges therein and discuss new processes for improved and efficient use the records, documents and data emanating from the system for good governance;
- ii. To review the status and progress made in conducting country-level assessment studies and preparation of strategic plans as per the resolution of the second CRVS ministerial conference;
- iii. To review progress made in the implementation of the African Programme of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses.

Focus Areas of the Symposium

It may be appreciated that only a complete and efficient CRVS system can provide documents, records and data that can be utilized by individual and governments effectively for meeting the fundamental requirements of good governance as discussed in the above. Therefore, the symposium will continue to focus on conceptual and methodological aspects and what needs to be done to transform the current systems to meet the recommended regional and international standards. Specifically, the meeting will deliberate on bottlenecks and challenges of the existing processes that countries are adopting in registration of various vital events and discuss strategies that would propel them to a much more efficient and complete registration system in shortest possible time. This would require a clear vision of the business processes for registration of various types of events that countries would like to adopt in future. This may for some countries require a complete revamping or even overhauling of the existing legal provisions, organization

and management structure, advocacy and communication strategies, registration forms and compilation of vital statistics including causes of death. Use of Information and Communication Technology will play a key role and can be a determining factor in designing of the new business processes and therefore, will be discussed in the meeting as one of enablers.

In the first part of the symposium, countries with best practices on delivery of various services that are linked to civil registration will be requested to make presentations. These will include services such as the national identification systems, population register, health and education services, social grant and similar programs. A few countries will also be requested to present best practices of utilization of registration data in planning and monitoring of development programmes. A few of those countries that have used technology solutions for improving the efficiency of CRVS systems will also make interventions.

As a part of the second substantive issue, the meeting will focus on one of the main engagements of national civil registration authorities: assessment and planning, which is expected to serve as a foundation in bringing about institutional transformation in a country. The meeting will engage each member state in exchanging ideas and practices in the preparation and conduct of comprehensive CRVS assessment including preparation of costed national CRVS plans. Member states are expected to present the challenges they faced and measures they have taken in delivering the commitments of their ministers as resolved during the second CRVS conference.

Although the main focus of the symposium will be on CRVS and good governance, the meeting will also provide a forum for;

- *Taking stock of the progress made by the region in conducting the 2010 round of Population and Housing censuses highlighting lessons to be taken forward for the 2020 round.*
- *Taking stock of the progress made in implementation of the ISIBalo Capacity Building Programme and the Young African Statisticians Programme, in particular.*
- *Mapping a strategic direction for inclusion of other statistical areas such as economic, environmental, etc to complement Africa's Agenda 2063.*

Expected accomplishments

The 9th Symposium is expected to deliver the following:

- Declaration specifying the commitments of Civil Registration Offices and the NSOs in accelerating their efforts in reforming the management and operations of CRVS systems for promoting good governance on the continent;
- Strategies to be adopted by countries in implementing the most efficient business process for achieving a complete and efficient CRVS system in the shortest possible time.;
- A time bound roadmap for conducting country assessments and the development of national CRVS action plans as per the declarations of the 2nd CRVS Ministers Conference;
- Statement on the inclusion of other statistical areas moving forward to 2063.
- 9th ASSD recommendations.

Activities

The activities to be undertaken in organising the 9th ASSD will include the following specific pre-symposium activities:

- Preparing concept note and work programme;
- First meeting of focal points from lead partner organisations and host country;
- Sharing proposed task assignments;
- Undertaking advocacy and resource mobilisation activities;
- Invitation and arrangement of logistics; and
- Identification and communication of resource persons.

Activities during the symposium will cover the actual implementation of the work programme of the meeting. On the other hand, post-meeting activities will include handling of administrative and logistics issues and preparation of reports and related activities. Accordingly, the organisers are expected to handle financial and logistics issues and prepare and disseminate the meeting reports.

Organisers of the Symposium

The 9th ASSD will be hosted by the Republic of Botswana which has constituted a National ASSD Committee (NASSDC) jointly headed by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs and the Statistician-General of Statistics Botswana and drawing membership from all government departments and key development partners. The NASSDC is supported by a Planning Committee which includes Statistics South Africa as the ASSD Secretariat, the ECA as the CRVS Secretariat, the AfDB, AUC, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and other partners.

Participants

The 9th Symposium is expected to bring a total of about 600 delegates made up of participants from NSOs and Civil Registration Authorities in Africa, representatives of regional and international organisations as well as invited participants from different institutions and associations.

Venue and Date

The meeting will be held in Gaborone from 17th to 21st February 2014.