



**APAI-CRVS**  
Everyone visible in Africa



**Decade for Repositioning  
of Civil Registration and  
Vital Statistics in Africa  
2017-2026**

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**Meeting of the Task Force on the Establishment  
of the Committee of African Registrars General  
17-20 October 2017  
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe**

## **Background paper 1**

### **Establishing a committee of African registrars general: the rationale**

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## **A. Background**

1. It has been seven years since Africa began to write its own chapter on the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems. African countries embarked on this notable journey to improve these systems at the first Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, henceforth referred to as Conference of Ministers, which was held in 2010. The Conference of Ministers was institutionalized as a specialized technical committee of the African Union Commission with a mandate to report to the Heads of State and Government every two years on progress in the area of civil registration and vital statistics. The Conference of Ministers provides policy directions to the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) initiative which is being implemented through its secretariat in the African Centre for Statistics of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

2. The civil registration and vital statistics systems not only provide individuals with legal documents on occurrence of vital events, realizing basic human rights to a name and identity, but they are also a source of vital events data, including causes of death, essential for good governance, policy planning and monitoring at the national and lower administrative levels. In the absence of functioning civil registration systems, many African populations have remained unrecorded and hence unrecognized by the State. Although it will be a long time before civil registration and vital statistics systems become fully functional and aligned with the international principles of compulsoriness, continuity, universality and permanence in the recording of vital events, African countries have demonstrated that they are committed to achieve it.

3. Despite remarkable progress, the African civil registration and vital statistics systems are still confronted with many challenges. One of them is the lack of intergovernmental coordination, namely a reporting mechanism that would work with the Programme between and during the interministerial conference period and report directly to the Conference of Ministers. Realizing the importance of an intergovernmental mechanism to deliberate on policy and technical issues related to the development of civil registration systems, the eleventh Africa Symposium for Statistical Development, held in Libreville from 23 to 25 November 2015, recommended the establishment of a regional committee of African registrars general.

4. In view of the above, ECA is organizing a task force meeting to deliberate on the merit of establishing a regional committee of registrars general<sup>1</sup> entrusted with the management and improvement of civil registration in their respective countries and in the region, and the purpose of such a committee. The work of the committee would be organized under the modalities it establishes. The draft terms of reference and the rules and procedures that would govern the operations of the proposed committee of African registrars general are provided as separate documents. The working modalities are proposed to serve as a tool for the smooth functioning of the committee.

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<sup>1</sup> The head of national civil registration offices has a different designation in different countries, such as registrar general, director general and manager. For the purpose of the present document, the person heading the civil registration of the national agency is referred to as registrar general. The registrar general, in some countries is also responsible for national identification, immigration and some other duties in some countries.

## **B. Historical perspective on the development of civil registration systems**

5. For historical and practical reasons, the development of international principles and standards that characterize a functioning civil registration system has been driven by statisticians. In 1950, the United Nations, realizing the need to “improve mortality, fertility and other population data necessary for the study of basic demographic problems and the interrelationships of demographic, economic, and social factors” initiated work on “detailed draft recommendations for the improvement and standardization of vital statistics”.<sup>2</sup> The final output of this consultative work was the *Principles for Vital Statistics* from civil registration, which was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 1953. Although the focus of the publication was on vital statistics, it also covered civil registrations. Interest in improving civil registration and vital statistics as a system was stressed by the United Nations Statistical Commission, which revised and updated the principles and recommendations for a vital statistics system three times since 1953, in 1973, 2001 and 2014. The latter two updates focused more on the design and operation of efficient civil registration and vital statistics systems.

6. On the other hand, over the past five decades, international organizations have not focused on the establishment or strengthening of civil registration systems at the national level, except for some isolated efforts. In the majority of African countries, past initiatives and efforts aimed at improving civil registration and vital statistics systems were largely dominated by isolated project-based and institution led ad hoc exercises. These efforts were largely statistically oriented with a view to obtaining improved vital statistics on a regular basis. Support in this area mainly came from international organizations, such as the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and to a certain extent from the World Health Organization (WHO). The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) approached it from a child rights perspective and was mainly concerned with birth registration. The involvement and contributions of regional organizations, such as ECA, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the African Union Commission was limited. The efforts appeared to be addressing a non-functioning statistical system and consequently, one of the major failures associated with them was the lack of a holistic approach to the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

## **C. New era for civil registration and vital statistics systems**

7. Unfolding global and continental trends and dynamics are reviving the importance of civil registration and vital statistics as an indispensable tool for achieving human rights, good governance and informed decision-making, among others. In the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*,<sup>3</sup> civil registration is recognized as the most preferred source of vital statistics. Political support extended by the Conference of Ministers backed by continental and international technical and capacity support is helping countries move from a fragmented and isolated approach in the improvement process to improve civil registration and vital statistics to one that is more holistic. Some of the major initiatives and programmes that are supporting the much-needed paradigm shift to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems are the following:

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<sup>2</sup> *Principles for a Vital Statistics System* (United Nations publication, Sales No.: 1953. XVII. 8).

<sup>3</sup> *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.XVII.10).

## **1. International initiatives**

8. In an effort to accelerate progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations launched the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health in 2010. Under the strategy, many commitments and actions that needed to be tracked were mobilized. Recognizing that accountability for financial resources and results is critical to achieving the objectives of the Global Strategy, at the request of the Secretary-General, the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women’s and Children’s Health was established in December 2010. In the final report of the Commission, “Keeping promises, measuring results” ten practical recommendations to fast track results for women’s and children’s health and achieve the goals in the Global Strategy were presented. In the first one, it is stated: “By 2015, all countries have taken significant steps to establish a system for registration of births, deaths and causes of death, and have well-functioning health information systems that combine data from facilities, administrative sources and surveys”.<sup>4</sup>

9. The World Bank and WHO, with input from several agencies and countries, developed the Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistic Scaling Up Investment Plan 2015-2025 in 2014. The Plan includes implementing activities over a 10-year period from 2015 to 2024, with the goal to achieve “universal civil registration of births, deaths, marriages, and other vital events, including reporting cause of death, and access to legal proof of registration for all individuals by 2030”.<sup>5</sup>

10. In September 2015, Member States of the United Nations committed themselves to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda is rooted in universal rights and driven by the key principle of “leaving no one behind”. The Sustainable Development Goals of this agenda are ambitious, universal and transformational and are aimed at balancing economic growth, social development and environmental protection. A well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics system for the implementation and monitoring is required to track about 40 per cent of the indicators envisaged in Sustainable Development Goals.

## **2. Continental initiatives**

11. Previously, civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa were developed by countries sporadically on an individual basis. That changed radically with the establishment of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Civil Registration in August 2010, which heralded the much-needed high-level political commitment to improve such systems in the region. The Conference is institutionalized as a permanent platform that meets once every two years to provide policy directions necessary for transforming civil registration and vital statistics systems and to monitor and advise on progress in improving civil registration and vital statistics in the region. The ongoing efforts of the Conference of Ministers to enhance civil registration and vital statistics reflects the level of commitment by African countries to change the scandal of invisibility in their populations.

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<sup>4</sup> Commission on Information and Accountability for Women’s and Children’s Health, “Keeping promises, measuring results, Final report. Available at [http://www.who.int/topics/millennium\\_development\\_goals/accountability\\_commission/Commission\\_Report\\_advance\\_copy.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/topics/millennium_development_goals/accountability_commission/Commission_Report_advance_copy.pdf?ua=1).

<sup>5</sup> World Bank and World Health Organization, “Global civil registration and vital statistics scaling up investment plan 2015–2024” (Washington, D.C., 2014). Available at [www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health/publication/global-civil-registration-vital-statistics-scaling-up-investment](http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health/publication/global-civil-registration-vital-statistics-scaling-up-investment).

12. A major initiative, the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System, was developed by pan-African institutions and key development partners and endorsed by the Conference of Ministers in 2012. The main objective of the Programme is to support countries in adopting a holistic approach to address systemic issues related to legal, policy, management and operational aspects of civil registration and vital statistics. One of the major achievements in this regard has been the commitment made by the first Conference of Ministers, held in Addis Ababa in August 2010, to support a time-bound implementation plan of the reform process for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in their respective countries.

13. Improving coordination at the regional and country levels is another important guiding principle of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System. The African Regional Core Group on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics<sup>6</sup> is an example of best practice in coordination among development partners. The strong concerted effort and commitment of the group to support the continental framework has led to the alignment of institutional mandates and optimal use of available resources in the continent. It also has ensured that critical capacity-building support, technical assistance and advisory services extended to countries and efforts to promote South-South cooperation were carried out in an integrated and holistic manner. The Core Group and the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System have collaborated in the programme delivery at the continental level and set standards for similar arrangements at the country level.

14. Another important region-wide initiative is the South-Africa-led African Symposium on Statistical Development, which organized a series of five symposiums devoted to civil registration and vital statistics, starting in 2012. The meetings brought together civil registration authorities and national statistical offices to deliberate on improving civil registration and vital statistics systems within the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System framework.

15. In 2015, the African Union Commission adopted Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, and its accompanying first Ten Year Implementation Plan (2014-2023).<sup>7</sup> The Agenda serves as a transformative development framework for achieving accelerated, sustained and inclusive economic growth that will spur sound, resilient and inclusive socioeconomic development on the continent in the next 50 years. Similar to the global 2030 Agenda, complete and efficient civil registration and vital statistics systems in the countries are required to monitor progress in implementing the continental Agenda.

#### **D. Making everyone visible in Africa: major achievements and challenges**

16. In the historical first conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, held in Addis Ababa in 2010, the Ministers emphasized the centrality of civil registration and vital statistics systems for the development of Africa and laid the foundation for securing the much-needed political commitment for accelerating the improvement of it

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<sup>6</sup> The Core Group is comprised of three pan-African organizations (African Union Commission, AfDB, and ECA), the African Symposium on Statistical Development, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR), UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, the INDEPTH Network, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century and the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Data for Health Initiative.

<sup>7</sup> African Union Commission, *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (Addis Ababa, 2015). Available at [www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf).

in African countries. The Conference also emphasized the need for a coordinated and integrated approach for strengthening civil registration and vital statistics at the national level and requested three pan-African institutions to support the initiative in partnership with United Nations and other organizations. The second Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, held in Durban, South Africa in 2012, took action to work with countries committed to undertake comprehensive assessments and develop costed action plans supported by the Core Group. The Ministers in their third conference, held in Yamoussoukro in 2015, provided directions on various technical aspects, such as use of information communications technology, causes of death, linkage with national identification programmes, vital statistics and realization of human rights. In the past six years, African countries have significantly enhanced their civil registration and vital statistics systems. However, going forward, they still must overcome some serious challenges to further improve them.

## **1. Achievements**

17. The guidance of ministers since 2010 has proved to be critical in ensuring political commitment and leadership at the highest level and in steering the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System initiative in the right direction at the regional level as well as in a large number of countries. In this connection, some of the major achievements of the initiative are as follows:<sup>8</sup>:

- (a) The Executive Council of the African Union Commission, in their twenty-ninth ordinary session, held in Kigali from 13 to 15 July 2016, declared 2017-2026 as the decade for repositioning civil registration and vital Statistics in Africa;<sup>9</sup>
- (b) Taking leadership and ownership, most countries have adopted a holistic approach to improving their civil registration and vital statistics systems. There has been increased engagement and involvement of the health sectors in countries in improving birth and death registration coverage. To date, about 40 countries have conducted or initiated comprehensive assessments of their civil registration and vital statistics systems; many of these countries have developed costed national action plans and a few of them have begun to implement them;
- (c) In most African countries, particularly those that have begun to implement plans to improve their civil registration and vital statistics system, high-level interministerial steering committees and technical committees were constituted to provide oversight and guide the implementation process. In many countries, joint United Nations support for the process was also ensured;
- (d) Most of the countries have conducted assessments to identify existing civil registration laws that are major impediments to the registration process and have taken steps to amend them. This has been done by simplifying the registration process, while taking into account the local culture and social norms, and evolving needs and additional requirements related to the digitization of civil registration and vital statistics systems;

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<sup>8</sup> A detailed list of achievements is provided in the concept note prepared for the Fourth Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration. AUC/CRMC4/2017/01 (July 2017).

<sup>9</sup> African Union Commission, Decision 921. Available at [https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/31275-ex\\_cl\\_dec\\_919\\_-\\_925\\_and\\_928\\_-\\_938\\_xxix\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/31275-ex_cl_dec_919_-_925_and_928_-_938_xxix_e.pdf).

- (e) In some of the countries, Governments have agreed to fund their civil registration and vital statistics improvement plans, decreasing their dependence on external assistance;
- (f) Several regional tools and publications have been developed by the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System in collaboration with the Core Group, for use by the countries. These include: civil registration and vital statistics comprehensive assessment tools and guidelines; strategic planning guidelines; a civil registration and vital statistics digitization guidebook; a handbook for developing a vital statistics report; a trainers manual for the production of vital statistics from civil registration records; a strategy to improve mortality statistics in Africa, covering the period 2015-2010; and a practical guide on death registration and causes of death processes in civil registration. More such guides and handbooks will be produced in the future;
- (g) Taking into account the different legal and technical requirements in French-speaking African countries a regional support group on civil registration and vital statistics for Francophone countries was established in early 2015. ECA is leading this initiative, in collaboration with UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO. Two other organizations involved in this initiative are ADfB and the Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS). This group is proving to be useful as more and more French-speaking countries seek assistance in assessing and planning their civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- (h) A few countries have come up with innovations to improve their civil registration operations, particularly on the hard to reach and vulnerable populations.

## **2. Challenges**

18. Africa must do more to achieve the vision “Everyone visible in Africa”, which although seems distant, cannot be lost sight of. Consequently, there is an urgent need to take stock of the challenges associated with the implementation of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System and make strategic course corrections, if required. Several challenges were encountered during last six years in implementing this Programme at the regional and country levels, which can be categorized as technical, logistical and administrative. Some of the major challenges are listed below:

- (a) In some countries, particularly those in Western and Central Africa, leadership and ownership with regard to the implementation of the Programme remain a challenge;
- (b) Coordination at the country level among the government ministries and departments and development partners has not been at the desired level in many countries;
- (c) The coverage and quality of the assessments and plans related to the Programme have not always been in accordance with standard procedures. For example, in some countries the element on causes of death was completely missed out. In most countries, the “as-is” and “would be” business process mappings were not

done at all, resulting in lack of a clear vision and hence strategies that are not in line with the vision;

- (d) After countries have conducted comprehensive assessments, there has been no guidance on how to proceed with the implementation – who should take the lead, where to start, how to start, how to prioritize?
- (e) Because the civil registration and vital statistics systems are multifaceted, technical support is required in a variety of areas. Therefore, technical assistance is needed in several areas, requiring many experts. For example, technical support for amending a law is completely different from the technical support needed to set up a cause of death system, this cannot be provided by one expert;
- (f) With the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems gaining momentum in Africa, various donors and development partners are starting to show renewed interest and are, consequently, providing support and funds for different technical aspects of civil registration and vital statistics, but sometimes this comes with strings attached. These kinds of donor interventions have helped advance the work of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System, but, occasionally, they have proved to be counterproductive by diverting the attention of countries from the civil registration and vital statistics improvement process. Some countries have shown that with strong leadership, individual interests of donors can be centralized with the objective to apply a more integrated approach in sourcing the already existing civil registration and vital statistics improvement plan.
- (g) Most countries lack a monitoring and evaluation system as a part of their civil registration and vital statistics plans. Only a few of them have in place a system for counting the basic number of vital events that need to be registered. Therefore, the rate of completeness of coverage cannot be measured for most countries.

**E. The rationale for establishing a committee of African registrars general: who should tell the story?**

19. To strengthen and support the work of the Conference of Ministers, there is need for an intergovernmental process to sustain the momentum and accelerate progress in the development of civil registration and vital statistics. This process, which would entail deliberating on important related issues and working with the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System, can be achieved by establishing a committee of representative government institutions entrusted with the registration of vital events in the countries – a committee of African registrars general.

20. The establishment of an intergovernmental body based on the noble commitment to change the civil registration and vital statistics landscape in Africa will have many benefits. Such a committee would ensure that Africa has a common voice and position in determining civil registration issues and that government officials would work with other key stakeholders in addressing common challenges. The committee, working with the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System, would ensure the implementation of recommendations of the Conference of Ministers; and advise on the strategic direction of the work of pan-African organizations on the

development of civil registration and vital statistics systems and the implementation of related activities. It will also serve as a forum to discuss new innovations and technologies and emerging issues.

21. The idea of forming such an intergovernmental body is not new. Latin America and Caribbean countries have a similar arrangement, which was launched in 2005 and the Pacific Civil Registrars Network was formed in 2015. Important lessons can also be learned from other communities, such as statisticians and those working in the health sector. The directors general of the national statistical offices of African countries meet once every year.<sup>10</sup> Through these forums, the statistical community has, for example, developed common methodologies, concepts and standards; shared valuable lessons and experiences in adopting new technologies; and taken a common position in determining capacity-building requirements.

22. The community of registrars general are better equipped to discuss issues related to civil registration than any other group. In that regard, they are in the forefront in, for example, addressing the main issues and concerns; identifying which of the challenges brought up in a comprehensive assessment need to be addressed as a matter of urgency; prioritizing a costed strategic plan; and processing the scaling up of the implementation of improvement plans. There are also major general issues that are better tackled by a team of peers, with a shared vision than by individual countries. Some of these issues are listed below.

### **1. Ensuring continuous leadership from the Conference of Ministers**

23. The Conference of Ministers is expected to meet every two years, unless the situation requires the meeting to be postponed. The inaugural conference was held in 2010, in Addis Ababa. The second conference meeting was held in Durban, in 2012, exactly two years later. The ministers held their third conference in Yamoussoukro in February 2015, after a six-month delay. The fourth Conference is scheduled to be held in December 2017 (see the table below). The first two conferences were organized by ECA. Delays in holding the conferences are to be expected but if the trend continues then the delay period may increase. The implication of this is that the much-needed political support and leadership on various issues could weaken and policy directives may come far apart as a result of the delayed meetings.

Table  
**Venues and dates of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Civil Registration**

Conference of ministers	Venue	Date
First	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	August 2010
Second	Durban, South Africa	September 2012
Third	Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire	February 2015
Fourth	Nouakchott, Mauritania	December 2017

<sup>10</sup> This intergovernmental body meets once every year as a joint Committee of Director Generals under the auspices of the African Union Commission and the Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa). The meeting is organized by ECA.

24. In the past three conferences, an informal bureau was formed for the duration of each conference, namely two days. This arrangement is not effective. One approach to ensure the much-needed leadership and engagement of the ministers on issues pertaining to civil registration and vital statistics on a continuous basis is to establish a rolling but permanent bureau of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Civil Registration. Members of this bureau would be, for example, the minister from the country hosting the conference, as chair, and the ministers of the two future host countries. The proposed committee of African registrars general and the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System would support the bureau.

## **2. Thinking beyond civil registration and vital statistics systems**

25. The institutions involved in the civil registration and vital statistics system can be roughly grouped into three categories:<sup>11</sup> (i) those directly involved in the civil registration and vital statistics processes, such as those that register vital events (including births, deaths, marriage, divorces)<sup>12</sup> or produce vital statistics; (ii) those that provide input into the civil registration and vital statistics system, such as health institutions for events occurring in health facilities and also provide information on causes of death; and (iii) those that use outputs from the civil registration and vital statistics system to carry out their mandates and deliver their services, such as education and national identification services. Before embarking on the civil registration and vital statistics reform process, it is important to know the major actors and stakeholders and their level of influence. Improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa requires active participation of the key actors in a cohesive manner similar to what the civil registration agencies and national statistical offices have developed and nurtured. For instance, with the advent of the data revolution, the private sector is now keen to work with the public sector. Similarly, the call to integrate national identity document (ID) system with the civil registration and vital statistics system, and recognize it as a critical tool for strengthening governance in Africa is gaining momentum. The system should also be flexible enough to accommodate new stakeholders getting involved in civil registration and vital statistics.

## **3. Coordination at country and continental levels**

26. Improving coordination at continental and country levels is yet another important guiding principle of the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System. The Core Group mechanism has proved to be very effective in coordinating the programme across the continent. In many of the countries, particularly those that have initiated the plans to improve their civil registration and vital statistics system, high-level interministerial steering committees were constituted to provide oversight and technical committees to ensure implementation. A similar collaborative mechanism for countries is missing at this stage at the continental level, particularly a technical forum of practitioners to discuss developments, plans, challenges and achievements. The committee of African registrars general would serve as a platform to improve coordination and collaboration among countries.

## **4. Capacity-building**

27. For many years, the authoritative and widely used civil registration and vital statistics documents have been the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for a*

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<sup>11</sup> World Bank, CRVS eLearning, Module 3: Institutional arrangements of civil registration and vital statistics systems. Available at <https://olc.worldbank.org/content/civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-systems-self-paced>.

<sup>12</sup> In a few countries, there are separate registration institutions, one for births and deaths and another for marriages and divorces.

*Vital Statistics System* and the supplement civil registration and vital statistics handbooks. These documents are still very useful. Since 2010, as noted earlier, several publication and tools have been developed by the African Regional Core Group on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics for countries. These include: (a) civil registration and vital statistics comprehensive assessment tools and guidelines; (b) strategic planning guidelines; (c) a civil registration and vital statistics digitization guidebook; (d) a handbook for development of vital statistics reports; (e) a trainers manual for production of vital statistics from civil registration records; (f) a strategy to improve mortality statistic in Africa, covering the period 2015-2020; and (g) a practical guide on death registration and causes of death processes in civil registration. The production and updating of more guides and handbooks are in the pipeline. The production of these documents has been more supply driven rather than demand driven. The committee of African registrars general would be expected to suggest the types of documents needed to advance efforts to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems.

28. An important step in building sustainable capacities in Africa in civil registration and vital statistics was the development of a pool of regional experts. These experts have received training in various aspects of civil registration and vital statistics, including the use of comprehensive assessment and planning tools. They have been assisting countries in undertaking assessments of and developing national action plans and have trained many civil registration and vital statistics officials, which has resulted in in-country knowledge-sharing and transfer. Many civil registrations and vital statistics country champions have emerged and are being deployed to support other countries in the region. Several training workshops on various aspects of civil registration and vital statistics were organized to train civil registration and vital statistics experts as part of the capacity-building effort in the region. The committee of African registrars general, working with the APAI-CRVS secretariat and the Core Group, should be involved in defining the kind of training required by countries.

## **5. Developing civil registration as a discipline and the role of learning institutions**

29. The principles of permanency and continuity are essential for a well-functioning civil registration system, which requires an uninterrupted supply of qualified registrars. There are hundreds of thousands of civil registration officers in Africa. For instance, Ethiopia alone has about 20,000 registration officers. To maintain civil registration systems, a continuous flow of registrars trained at different levels is required. Workshops alone cannot satisfy this demand. The committee of African registrars general can play a catalytic role in supporting efforts to build expertise in civil registration, vital statistics and cause of death; and encourage existing educational institutions to revise their existing curricula and produce civil registration professionals at different levels. In the long run, civil registration could also become a discipline with equal standing as, for example, statistics, demography and sociology. The committee of African registrars general can lay the ground for this.

## **6. Narrowing the civil registration operations divide between groups of African countries**

30. As discussed earlier, one attempt to narrow the gap in civil registration operations between groups of African countries is the establishment of a regional support group on civil registration and vital statistics for French-speaking African countries that takes into account their special legal and technical requirements. The experience in the main language – English, French and Portuguese – groups of African countries needs to be shared and

commonalities and differences should be discussed. Ways need to be devised to bridge the gaps or build interfaces between the two systems in the English and French speaking countries. Experiences in such countries as Rwanda, where transition from one system into other is taking place gradually, needs to be studied.

## **7. New and emerging issues**

31. Existing and emerging information and communications technology, social media and mobile devices (with or without access to the Internet) used for creating awareness and recording information and transmitting registered information can play an important role in building an enabling environment for civil registration offices to improve the coverage and timeliness of their services. Other developments, such as verbal autopsies to record probable cause of death in the communities and integrate the process in the civil registration and vital statistics systems are contributing significantly to the effort to improve the dismal state of death registration and collecting information on the cause of death.

32. In the statistics sector, Africa is an early innovator and participant in the data revolution era. A data revolution in Africa would afford the continent the opportunity to interact with diverse data communities and to embrace a wide range of data sources, tools and innovative technologies, which would enable the continent to produce disaggregated data, including gender-disaggregated data, for decision-making, service delivery and citizen engagement. A civil registration system is central and necessary for the transformation of Africa.

## **F. Objectives of the committee of African registrars general**

33. The overall objective of the committed of African registrars general would be to deliberate on how to make strategic shifts to advance the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System initiative to the next higher level by taking stock of the achievements made so far, identifying and prioritizing the available opportunities, and devising ways and means of addressing the challenges associated with it. The committee would work closely with the APAI-CRVS secretariat in contributing to the formulation of policies related to civil registration in the continent in support of the Conference of Ministers. The committee would also deal with the development of national and continental civil registration, methodological issues and the coordination and integration of the African civil registration and vital statistics systems, and support technical cooperation activities related to civil registration organizational matters, among others. It is intended to provide strategic support to the Conference of Ministers and the work of AfDB, the African Union Commission and ECA on the development of civil registration systems in Africa.

34. In general, the Committee would collaborate with the APAI-CRVS secretariat in the following activities:

- (a) Contextualizing the Programme against the backdrop of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 so that no one is left behind;
- (b) Identifying key challenges in implementing the Programme at the regional level and in countries and propose practical solutions;
- (c) Deliberating on possible corrective measures aimed at improving the delivery of the Programme.

35. The specific objectives of the Committee of African registrars general are given in greater detail in the terms of reference, as a separate document.

## **G. Matters for discussion and decisions by the Task Force**

36. In general, the meeting is expected to do the following:

- (a) Reach at an improved understanding about the centrality of civil registration and vital statistics in the implementation of national development plans, the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and other international instruments that would enhance human rights;
- (b) Agree on a strategic direction to revitalize the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System through a systematic review and improved coordination, monitoring and reporting.

37. In connection with the background document, the Task Force may wish to do the following:

- (a) Discuss and agree on the merit of establishing a committee of African registrars general;
- (b) Review and, if necessary, update or improve the present document, which describes the rationale for establishing the committee;
- (c) Prepare and present a document on the same topic for presentation at the Experts Meeting, which will precede the fourth Conference of Ministers responsible for Civil Registration for discussion;
- (d) Discuss and agree on the proposed terms of reference, which will be discussed separately;
- (e) Review the proposal on the rules of procedures, which will be one of the first topics to be discussed by the committee after it is formed;
- (f) Draft a recommendations statement, which will be submitted to the Experts Meeting, in the anticipation that it will support the proposal, and for endorsement by the Conference of Ministers.