

Abstract: Interim measures for meeting needs for health sector data: births, deaths and causes of death

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Summary

Most developing countries do not have fully effective civil registration systems to provide necessary information about population health. Interim approaches - both innovative strategies for collection of data, and methods of assessment or estimation of these data - to fill the resulting information gaps have been developed and refined over the past four decades. To respond to the needs for data for births, deaths, and causes of death, data collection systems such as population censuses, sample vital registration systems, demographic surveillance sites, and internationally-coordinated sample survey programmes in combination with enhanced methods of assessment and analysis have been successfully implemented to complement civil registration systems. Methods of assessment and analysis of incomplete information or indirect indicators have also been improved, as have approaches to ascertainment of cause of death by verbal autopsy, disease modelling, and other strategies. Our knowledge of demography and descriptive epidemiology of populations in developing countries has been greatly increased by the widespread use of these interim approaches; although gaps remain, particularly for adult mortality. However, these approaches should not be regarded as substitutes for complete civil registration but rather as complements, essential parts of any fully comprehensive health information system. International organisations, national governments, and academia all have responsibilities in ensuring that data continue to be collected and that methods continue to be improved.