

Abstract: Civil registration systems and vital statistics: successes and missed opportunities

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Summary

Vital statistics generated through civil registration systems are the major source of continuous monitoring of births and deaths over time. The usefulness of vital statistics depends on their quality. In the second paper in this Series we propose a comprehensive and practical framework for assessment of the quality of vital statistics. With use of routine reports to the UN and cause-of-death data reported to WHO, we review the present situation and past trends of vital statistics in the world and note little improvement in worldwide availability of general vital statistics or cause-of-death statistics. Only a few developing countries have been able to improve their civil registration and vital statistics systems in the past 50 years. International efforts to improve comparability of vital statistics seem to be effective, and there is reasonable progress in collection and publication of data. However, worldwide efforts to improve data have been limited to sporadic and short-term measures. We conclude that countries and developmental partners have not recognised that civil registration systems are a priority.