Abstract: Towards universal civil registration and vital statistics systems: the time is now

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Summary

The health and development challenges of the coming decades cannot be tackled effectively without reliable data for births, deaths, and causes of death, which only a comprehensive civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system can deliver. Alternative methods such as surveys, censuses, or surveillance are not adequate substitutes from a statistical perspective, and do not provide individuals with the legal documentation they need to benefit from services and participate fully in a modern society. Research is needed to generate and disseminate evidence about which CRVS strategies work best in which contexts and to ensure that the potential benefits of innovation are successfully scaled up, and that possible pitfalls are avoided. Research findings need to be compiled and made readily accessible to users for policy making, programming, and practice. Modernisation of CRVS systems necessitates new, broad-based national and international coalitions. The global architecture for CRVS, so far dominated by UN agencies, should extend to include bilateral donors, funds, foundations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, academic institutions, and civil society. This change is essential to ensure that further development of CRVS systems is inclusive, participatory, multisectoral, and has a strong evidence base.