STRENGTHENING CRVS SYSTEMS

CRVS systems need well-functioning civil registry offices

CRVS Roadmaps for Action

August 2017

Introduction

Civil registration systems record the occurrence and characteristics of major vital events, such as births and deaths. Records of such vital events are then used by civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems to generate vital statistics on fertility and mortality. These statistics are important because governments use them to plan, deliver and monitor health and social development programs. This ensures that a country's limited human and financial resources are best-invested in evidence-based health policy and planning.

For a CRVS system to function properly, smooth cooperation among multiple agencies – the key CRVS stakeholders – is essential. Such coordination efforts within governments are often led by the Office of the Civil Registrar, also known as the Office of the Registrar General (ORG).

Important functions of the ORG

- Setting up and monitoring standards for the registration and certification of vital events

- Ensuring compliance with registration law

- Establishing quality assurance processes for completeness and integrity of individual registration records

- Servicing customers, such as issuing certificates or copies of the vital records to eligible individuals on demand

- Overseeing collection and transmission of birth and death registration data to a central repository or national CRVS database[1]

- Issuing certified copies of registration records to individuals and families

- Transmitting a statistical report of all vital events registration to the relevant statistical agency for compilation, analysis and dissemination

- Establishing a vital registration database as a unique, national archive dataset, with no duplicate entries, for all registered births and deaths

- Ensuring that records within the national archive are protected and maintained in the event of – for example – natural disaster, war and conflict, or hacking

- Transmitting vital registration data to relevant government agencies (eg the Bureau of Statistics) for statistical analysis, interpretation and dissemination

- Closely engage with the national CRVS committee

- Developing protocols for sharing information with other agencies, such as national identification (ID) cards and voter registration

- Ensuring data confidentiality and security.[2]

Common roadblocks

Although many low- and middle-income countries have had registration systems in place for decades, these systems are often incomplete due in part to the lack of a well-functioning ORG.
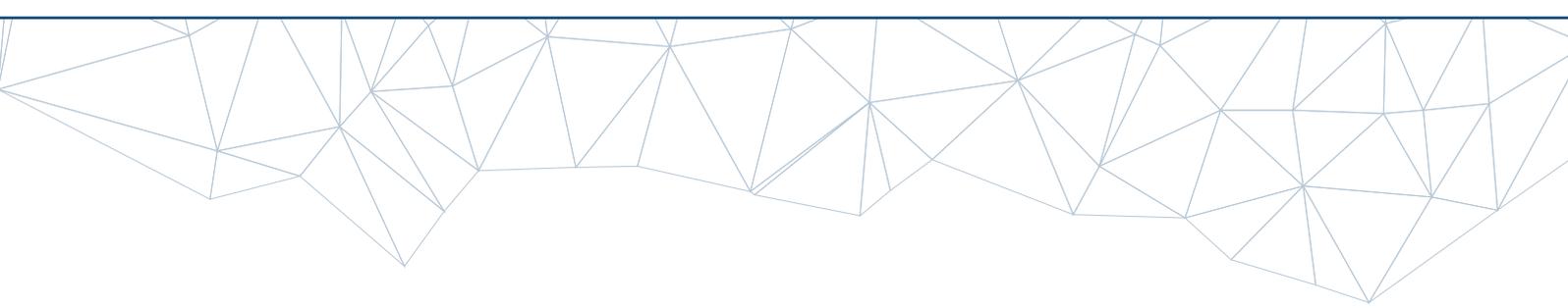
The absence of a well-functioning ORG means that, most likely, no one entity has complete oversight of CRVS processes. This task, which includes careful communication and coordination with the multiple agencies involved in CRVS, is important for improving the completeness and quality of registration activities and the information collected in the process.

The absence of a functional ORG can result in:

- Lack of functional systems to notify births and deaths to the civil registry
- Poor coordination among government agencies involved in CRVS
- Absence of a central repository for registration information
- No linkage of birth or death registration to national ID systems
- No flow of data to the appropriate statistical authorities for analysis and reporting of vital statistics
- Poor-quality and/or low birth and death registration rates.

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1   It is often the National Statistics Office that maintains this database.

2   For more information on recommended duties and responsibilities of the ORG, please see UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2014). (revision 3), UN, New York. Available online: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/standmeth/principles/M19Rev3en.pdf

Moving forward

In view of the key role the ORG plays in improving CRVS systems and data, government investment in a well-functioning civil registry is crucial.

There are several factors countries should consider when setting up or improving the operation of their ORG.

Functional and political independence

Consider the organisational arrangements for the ORG. Importantly, does sufficient functional independence exist to allow the ORG to assume a leadership role across the agencies involved in wider civil registration systems? Is this functional independence guaranteed in national law? Where the ORG sits (eg under the home/interior ministry, the ministry of health or under the national statistics office) will affect the degree of its functional independence.

Legislation

Address any legislative gaps around the functional independence of the ORG, including the confidentiality of, and protections around, personal information and the approach to vital event registration.

Clarify CRVS agency relationships

Implement memorandums of understanding to clarify the parameters of the relationship and the roles of the ORG with a national CRVS committee, if one is present, or other associated government agencies. These could include the electoral commission, the national statistics office or the health department.

A well-resourced office

Monitor adequacy of funding to the ORG, ensuring that wider objectives for civil registration are achieved. Ensure adequate investment in the infrastructure needed for meeting such objectives, such as staffing (including information technology [IT] expertise) and technology. Appropriate investment will be needed for all offices located throughout the country, not only those in urban or metropolitan locations.

Improve quality and coverage of information collected

The ORG must focus on improving completeness for early registration of all births and deaths in the population. This includes improving the quality of the information collected about these vital events.

Privacy of information

Ensure that personal information is protected under current legislation. If it is not, clarify what is needed to protect citizen rights and the integrity of the registers.

Incentives

Consider implementing incentives to increase birth and death registration, as well as redressing any existing disincentives to birth and death registration. For example, countries with birth registration fees should consider making registration free. Death registrations can be increased by linking and enforcing the declaration, notification or registration to obtaining burial or cremation permits.

Public awareness raising

Increase awareness efforts targeting the general public. This should include advocating for the value of birth and death registration and vital statistics, and the relevance of CRVS systems and vital statistics for public health decision-makers. The ORG should also adopt national policy and measures enabling the public to be informed of the procedures and requirements of registration.

Staff training

Provide comprehensive training for ORG staff, especially those who oversee and handle birth and death records, and the transmission of vital statistics data to the appropriate statistical authorities. IT staff will need to know how to support the system and resolve technological issues.

Monitoring and evaluation

Introduce interventions for frequent monitoring of the ORG's performance, which may evaluate how staff members:

- Maintain integrity of registration records
- Compile data in a central repository
- Share information with other agencies
- Ensure data confidentiality.

Active networks and partnerships

Countries should seek to form or take part in regional and international civil registrar networks to share information, lessons learned and best practices. Such networks will foster a sense of partnership, coordination and integration of civil registrars' input and ideas regarding implementation of national CRVS development plans and of overarching frameworks for CRVS development (see Box 1).

Box 1: Examples of networks and partnerships

- The **Pacific Civil Registrars Network (PCRN)** has members from more than 36 countries, 25 agencies and 12 businesses. The group aims to 'get everyone in the picture' and facilitate regional efforts to achieve universal registration of vital events.[3]

- The **UN Economic Commission for Africa** (**UN ECA**) and the **UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)** are engaged in activities to strengthen vital events registration, including progressing regional plans that involve those in ministerial levels responsible for CRVS.[4]

- The **Global CRVS Group** comprises international and regional organisations that aim to strengthen national CRVS systems through coordination, collaboration and exchange of information on global and regional initiatives.[5]

Summary

A strong CRVS system requires coordination between multiple stakeholders, which are led by the ORG.

Given that the ORG plays a key role in maintaining data completeness and quality, governments must invest in a well-functioning civil registry.

As such, governments must take steps to ensure that:

- The ORG is functionally independent

- Key legislation is in place

- There are clear CRVS agency relationships

- Funding is adequate

- The information collected is of high quality and covers all it needs to

- Information remains private

- There are incentives for registration

- There are awareness-raising efforts

- Staff are trained

- There are monitoring and evaluation processes.

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3   For more information on the PCRN, please see: http://www.getinthepicture.org/partners/pacific-civil-registrars-network
4   For more information on UN ECA and its CRVS activities, see: https://www.uneca.org/crvs
    For more information on the UN ESCAP and its CRVS activities, see: www.getinthepicture.org/asia-pacific-crvs-decade-2015-2024
5   For more information on the Global CRVS Group, see: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/crvs/globalcrvs.html

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