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New strategic areas for the Economic Commission for Africa and statutory reports**Progress report on the implementation of the
Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil
Registration and Vital Statistics Systems****I. Introduction**

1. The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems is currently being implemented on the basis of policy and programmatic guidance provided in the resolutions adopted at the four sessions of the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration. At the first session, held in Addis Ababa in 2010, ministers underscored that civil registration and vital statistics were a development imperative for Africa and made a strong commitment to improving practices in that regard in their countries. At the second session, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2012, ministers recommended specific and practical steps to be taken, with a view to establishing comprehensive and efficient civil registration and vital statistics systems; urged three pan-African institutions, namely, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank (AfDB), to support the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems; and called upon other development partners to participate in that regional initiative. At the third session, held in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, in 2015, it was recommended, among other things, that a real-time death registration and cause of death system should be established, that strong links should be established between countries' civil registration and national identity systems and that statistics from civil registration systems should be analysed and disseminated appropriately. The fourth session, held in Nouakchott in 2017, endorsed the civil registration and vital statistics strategic plan (2017–2021) and approved the establishment of the Africa Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems Improvement Fund.

2. In addition, African experts considered numerous topics at the four sessions of the Conference of African Ministers and made recommendations to the ministers on various issues pertinent to the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems. Among other things, they underscored the need to promote capacity-building and coordination among national stakeholders and strengthen partnerships with countries' health-care sectors, as well as the need to conduct comprehensive assessments of national civil registration and vital statistics systems,

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develop costed strategic plans, review the impact of countries' legislative frameworks on their systems, provide adequate human and financial resources for civil registration and vital statistics programmes, monitor and evaluate regional initiatives and country programmes, conduct research on specific subjects such as how to improve death registration mechanisms and the collection of cause-of-death information in Africa, and adopt appropriate information and communication technology solutions.

3. The present report contains a review of the progress made in the implementation of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in the past two years, in the light of commitments made by the African ministers responsible for civil registration.

II. Fourth session of the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration: strengthening the political commitment of African Union member States

4. The fourth session of the Conference of African Ministers was held in Nouakchott from 4 to 6 December 2017 on the theme, "Accelerating a coordinated improvement of civil registration and vital statistics for implementation and monitoring of the development agenda in Africa: review of progress and the way forward". The Conference was attended by 28 ministers or their representatives, more than 50 regional and global stakeholders and more than 150 experts from civil registration offices, national statistics offices and ministries of health in 52 member States.

5. At the Conference, the participants reviewed the progress made, in the light of previous ministerial conference resolutions, reached consensus on the strategic direction to be taken to revitalize the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, endorsed the Programme's five-year strategic plan for the period 2017-2021, approved the establishment of the Africa Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems Improvement Fund and invited member States to commemorate 10 August as Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Day.

6. The first Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Day was celebrated by member States on 10 August 2018 under the theme, "Promoting innovative universal civil registration and vital statistics systems for good governance and better lives".

7. The regional civil registration and vital statistics core group, which comprises key civil registration and vital statistics actors on the continent, including pan-African institutions, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has proved to be very effective in coordinating the regional civil registration and vital statistics programme throughout Africa. Established in 2011, the core group strives to harmonize approaches and harness synergies, thereby preventing the duplication of efforts, and provides technical and financial support to the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems initiatives.

III. Helping countries to implement the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems

A. Promoting collaboration among key national civil registration and vital statistics system stakeholders

8. On the basis of recommendations adopted at the sessions of the Conference of African Ministers, every effort has been made to promote systematic and coordinated approaches and partnerships at the national and regional levels. ECA has encouraged each country to establish a high-level coordination committee to monitor and oversee improvements to its civil registration and vital statistics system, and the majority of member States have established high-level coordination committees and technical working groups to oversee their national civil registration and vital statistics system improvement programmes.

9. Between 2012 and 2015, the annual gatherings of the African Symposium on Statistical Development focused on civil registration and vital statistics. At those meetings, collaboration among key country-level civil registration and vital statistics actors was promoted, including national statistics and civil registration offices. The seventh African Symposium was the first-ever continent-wide meeting that brought together the heads of civil registration offices and the heads of national statistics offices. Key recommendations adopted at the seventh African Symposium included strengthening coordination between each country's national statistics office and civil registration office and strengthening the role played by those offices in the monitoring and implementation of country-level civil registration and vital statistics initiatives.

B. Supporting efforts by countries to conduct comprehensive assessments of their civil registration and vital statistics systems and formulate strategic improvement plans

10. At the second session of the Conference of Ministers, held in 2012, there were a number of specific recommendations, and participants called upon all member States to undertake, as a matter of priority, comprehensive civil registration and vital statistics assessments and develop national civil registration and vital statistics improvement plans. As of May 2018, 32 countries had conducted assessments of their civil registration and vital statistics systems, including 23 that had completed comprehensive assessments and 9 that had completed rapid assessments. Twenty-nine of those countries have developed strategic improvement plans and a number of countries are implementing their national improvement plans. A further 13 countries are carrying out comprehensive assessments. The core group has contributed immensely to that process by supporting the development of resource materials and helping governments to mobilize the financial resources needed to conduct their civil registration and vital statistics assessments and formulate civil registration and vital statistics improvement plans. The status of each country's assessments and plans is detailed in the table below.

Table
Status of country assessments and civil registration and vital statistics improvement plans

<i>Country</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Plan</i>
Algeria	Rapid assessment completed	Developed
Angola	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Benin	Rapid assessment completed	Developed
Botswana	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Burkina Faso	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Burundi	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Cameroon	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Cabo Verde	Not initiated	
Central African Republic	Not initiated	
Chad	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Comoros	Not initiated	
Congo	Not initiated	
Côte d'Ivoire	Initiated	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Initiated	
Djibouti	Rapid assessment completed	Developed
Egypt	Rapid assessment completed	Developed
Equatorial Guinea	Not initiated	
Eritrea	Not initiated	
Eswatini	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Ethiopia	Rapid assessment completed	Developed
Gabon	Initiated	
Gambia	Comprehensive assessment completed	
Ghana	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Guinea	Not initiated	
Guinea-Bissau	Initiated	
Kenya	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Lesotho	Comprehensive assessment completed	
Liberia	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Libya	Not initiated	
Madagascar	In progress	
Malawi	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Mali	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Mauritania	Initiated	
Mauritius	Not initiated	
Morocco	Rapid assessment completed	Developed
Mozambique	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Namibia	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Niger	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Nigeria	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Rwanda	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Sao Tome and Principe	Not initiated	
Senegal	In progress	
Seychelles	Not initiated	

Sierra Leone	In progress	
Somalia	Rapid assessment completed	Developed
South Africa	Comprehensive assessment completed	
South Sudan	Not Initiated	
Sudan	Rapid assessment completed	Developed
United Republic of Tanzania	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Togo	Not initiated	
Tunisia	Rapid assessment completed	Developed
Uganda	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Zambia	Comprehensive assessment completed	Developed
Zimbabwe	Initiated	

11. Owing to differences between the civil registration and vital statistics systems in English-speaking and French-speaking countries, the ECA Subregional Office for West Africa was requested, in particular, to help French-speaking countries to implement the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems programme. The Subregional Office oversaw the translation of technical materials on civil registration and vital statistics and their adaptation to the needs of civil registration and vital statistics systems in French-speaking countries. A subregional core group was established at the Subregional Office in 2013 to address the specific needs of French-speaking African countries, and a regional support group for francophone countries was established in February 2015.

IV. Capacity-building

A. Digitization of civil registration and vital statistics systems

12. The regional civil registration and vital statistics core group continues to provide technical guidance to African countries and support their capacity-building activities in order to improve the management and operation of their civil registration and vital statistics systems. With the support of ECA, AfDB, country experts throughout Africa, and the African NGO Jembi Health Systems, the core group has developed a civil registration and vital statistics digitization handbook to facilitate that process.

13. In addition, a regional capacity-building training workshop on the digitization of civil registration and vital statistics systems was held from 28 August to 1 September 2017 and was attended by civil registration and vital statistics stakeholders from seven countries.

B. Enhancing the production of vital statistics from civil registration records

14. The core group is also working to strengthen the capacity of countries to produce vital statistics from their civil registration records. The importance of such activities was underscored at the third session of the Conference of African Ministers, held in 2015, at which ministers called upon countries to analyse and disseminate statistics derived from civil registration records, regardless of whether those statistics were comprehensive, in order to ascertain the level of development of countries' civil registration and vital statistics systems. In 2017, in collaboration with Statistics Norway and with the support of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), ECA developed a vital statistics report template and a set of guidelines to help countries to compile those statistics.

15. A regional capacity-building training workshop on the production of vital statistics from civil registration records and on assessing the quality of civil registration and vital statistics

systems was conducted from 2 to 6 October 2017. The workshop was attended by 27 civil registration and vital statistics stakeholders from eight countries.

C. Enhancing death registration and mortality statistics

16. Measuring and compiling mortality statistics and monitoring and reporting improvements in that area, in the light of national and global health-related targets and indicators, is often a significant challenge for African countries. Death registration records in most African countries are woefully inadequate, and there are almost no statistics on the causes of death. At the third session of the Conference of African Ministers, held in 2015, ministers noted those statistics gaps and called upon the World Health Organization (WHO) and pan-African organizations to take urgent steps to facilitate the efforts of African States to establish real-time death registration and cause-of-death information systems.

17. One of the key challenges facing countries in Africa is a lack of guidance on how to improve their death registration systems, in particular, when the majority of deaths occur outside medical facilities. To address that challenge, ECA, with support of the regional core group, has developed guidelines to help countries to design and implement appropriate death registration systems. Those guidelines address all aspects of countries' death registration systems, from the notification of deaths to the compilation and dissemination of death statistics.

18. A capacity-building workshop on WHO standards for recording the cause of death and on recording deaths that occur outside health facilities using verbal autopsy methods will be held in November 2018. More than 30 participants from 15 countries are expected to participate in that workshop.

D. Developing a global e-learning course on civil registration and vital statistics systems

19. ECA and other members of the core group are working with the World Bank to develop a global e-learning course on civil registration and vital statistics that will support countries' capacity-building efforts and strengthen their civil registration and vital statistics systems.

20. More than 45 experts from the civil registration offices and ministries of health in 14 English-speaking African countries participated in a training workshop on the civil registration and vital statistics e-learning course that was held in Windhoek from 10 to 19 April 2018. In addition, more than 35 experts from the civil registration offices and ministries of health in 14 French-speaking African countries participated in a similar workshop (adapted for French speakers) that was held in Dakar from 16 to 25 July 2018.

21. A pilot in-country capacity-building training of trainers workshop on the e-learning course was held in Ethiopia from 25 to 30 June 2018.

V. Promoting knowledge-sharing

22. In order to facilitate cross-learning among countries, with a view to improving their civil registration and vital statistics systems, ECA and ESCAP convened a two-day inter-regional seminar in Addis Ababa in June 2016 to share best practices on civil registration and vital statistics. At the meeting, representatives of countries in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region reviewed common challenges impeding the implementation of civil registration and vital statistics programmes and discussed a number of mitigating strategies adopted by countries in the two regions to address those challenges.

23. In June 2016, the core group launched a regional civil registration and vital statistics website (<http://www.apai-crvs.org>), which provides a platform for sharing expertise and best practices on civil registration and vital statistics among countries, development partners and training and research institutions. The website will help to foster partnerships and promote collaboration among relevant stakeholders, facilitate resource management, coordinate initiatives by the core group and other development partners and help member States to report on their improvement efforts.

Establishing a monitoring framework

24. At the second session of the Conference of African Ministers, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2012, ministers called for the development of results-based monitoring and evaluation systems and tools to monitor and report on progress on civil registration and vital statistics. In response to that call, the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems secretariat developed a framework to document and monitor steps taken by member States to improve their civil registration and vital statistics systems. An initial regional web-based monitoring exercise was held in October 2016 and a report on the status of countries' civil registration and vital statistics systems was presented at the fourth session of the Conference in December 2017.

VI. Challenges

25. Funding for the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, which is provided primarily by development partners, remains inadequate and ad hoc in nature. The chronic unpredictability of financial resources has impeded the smooth implementation of the Programme and has made it difficult to retain the human resources required to staff its secretariat. Inadequate funding has critical implications for the Programme's success, and African ministers must, as a matter of priority, take action and provide strategic guidance to address that challenge.

26. At the country level, funding is provided by African Governments. Given their financial constraints, some countries will require catalytic funds to kick-start implementation.

27. Many African Governments and regional economic communities have taken action to establish national identification systems and have made a commitment to allocating substantial resources to support that endeavour. Although national identification systems are indispensable for good governance, their sustainability and robustness can be compromised if they are not organically linked to countries' civil registration systems. While the primary source of documents on birth, deaths and marriages for a country's national identification system should be that country's civil registration system, this is not the case in many African countries. There is a risk that governments and their development partners may focus on and divert resources towards efforts to develop countries' national identification systems but fail to also build efficient and comprehensive civil registration systems. It is therefore crucial to strengthen coordination among donor and development partner interventions in order to avoid the duplication of efforts and ensure that resources are not squandered.

28. Many countries lack the mechanisms and capacity to monitor the performance of their civil registration systems on a regular basis. As a result, they cannot adequately report on improvements resulting from their interventions. To address that challenge, the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems has established a country-level monitoring mechanism to help to monitor progress achieved under the regional civil registration and vital statistics initiative. That mechanism will also facilitate an annual review of progress in each country to support and inform the ongoing implementation of their improvement plans.

29. Although the country-led process of assessments currently under way is helping to develop capacity throughout the continent, a more systematic approach is needed. In collaboration with other relevant institutions, the core group is developing a strategy and action plan to support a more sustainable approach to civil registration and vital statistics capacity-building on the continent.

30. As outlined above, most African countries have now conducted civil registration and vital statistics assessments and many have developed national civil registration and vital statistics plans. It is therefore crucial to support and provide guidance to countries to ensure that their improvement plans are implemented effectively and lead to tangible sustainable change. Civil registration and vital statistics is, by nature, multidisciplinary and various types of support will be needed. The core group is therefore developing guidelines for countries in key areas relevant to civil registration and vital statistics, including digitization and the generation of mortality and vital statistics. Additional support and capacity-building is needed, however, in order to, among other things, establish a pool of specialized experts.

31. Although most countries have adopted a uniform approach when conducting their civil registration and vital statistics assessments, some countries have adopted non-standard methodologies and tools that are significantly different from those developed by the core group. This is the case for countries in North Africa and in countries that completed their assessments prior to the development of tools and guidelines by the core group. Similarly, a number of countries have adopted non-standard approaches when developing their civil registration and vital statistics improvement plans. Moreover, a number of countries have adopted consultant-driven assessment and planning methodologies. The question that needs to be addressed is whether the strategies and plans developed by those countries can facilitate the establishment of efficient and effective civil registration and vital statistics systems that comply with international benchmarks, as set forth in the relevant United Nations Principles and Recommendations, as well as with other global guidelines and standards. It is also crucial to examine whether those non-standard methodologies are appropriate for each country's specific circumstances.

32. Owing primarily to a lack of appropriate guidance and analysis tools, some countries have been unable to analyse civil registration and vital statistics system business processes effectively. To address that challenge, a strategy to facilitate the effective incorporation of business practices in the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems assessment guidelines and tools is being developed.