



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

MCCR/2010/011/EN

Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration

**Synopsis of the Regional Workshop on
Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa:**

Towards New Initiatives and Approaches

**Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania
29 June - 3 July 2009**

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Table of Contents

I. Background	1
II. Attendance and agenda.....	3
III. Opening session and official statements.....	3
IV. Deliberations	6
V. Closing of the Workshop.....	14
VI. Key recommendations.....	15

I. Background

The United Nations defines civil registration as the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population as provided through degrees or regulations in accordance with the legal requirements of each country¹. The vital events considered in the registration system include live births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, divorces, annulments of marriage, judicial separation of marriage, adoption, legitimization and recognition.

According to the United Nations, civil registration has a dual purpose: administrative and legal on the one hand, and statistical, demographic and epidemiological on the other. The legal and administrative purpose of civil registration mainly relates to the establishment of legal relationships between Governments and their citizens through legal provisions in national constitutions and laws, international conventions and covenants. Civil registration records are the conventional instruments for implementing various human rights provisions embedded in national laws and international instruments. Moreover, civil registration systems have critical roles to play in a country's justice system, social and administrative services, and decentralization and democratization processes.

Civil registration is the conventional source of vital statistics information that is treated as one major function and branch of civil registration systems. Vital statistics derived from civil registration involve two major activities: collecting information on the frequency of occurrence of specified characteristics of events themselves and of the persons concerned, and compiling, processing, analyzing, evaluating, presenting and disseminating these data in statistical form. Vital statistics produce two broad types of data: demographic and health. These data types or items are invaluable inputs for the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sub-national, national, regional and global development programmes and interventions.

Today, it is becoming more evident that every African nation is suffering from the effects and consequences of lack of reliable and routine population and health statistics due to the absence of complete civil registration systems. Absence of routine population dynamics information has affected the preparation of current population estimates and the updating of population projections. This has resulted in limited use of national census data and lack of reliable statistics for the designing, implementation and monitoring of development policies and programmes. On the other hand, most Millennium Development Goal (MDG) health indicators, including infant and under-five mortality rates, maternal mortality ratios and cause-specific death rates are being affected by the absence of reliable and current mortality measures.

¹ United Nations (2002). Handbook on Training in Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems.

Considering increasing national, regional and global data demands and the shortcomings of indirect estimation methods in generating current and routine vital statistics information, the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), jointly with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and InWent, organized a regional workshop entitled “Regional Workshop on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa” in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania from 29 June to 3 July 2009. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Registration, Insolvency and Trusteeship Agency (RITA) of the United Republic of Tanzania were joint hosts of the workshop.

A. Objectives of the workshop

The long-term objective of the workshop was to promote and strengthen the capacity of African Governments to produce accurate, reliable and timely registration-based statistics and indicators for measuring development progress and social change.

The specific purposes of the workshop were to (a) provide training to countries on the implementation of the United Nations guidelines and international standards on civil registration and vital statistics concepts, definitions, data collection and compilation methods; (b) assess the current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems in participating countries and identify gaps to be filled; (c) establish the African Network of Civil Registrars and Vital Statisticians (AfCRVSNet); and (d) facilitate the establishment of a partnership forum for countries and regional and international organizations on future support and assistance.

B. Expected outcomes

The following outcomes were expected from the workshop:

- (i) Improved knowledge and understanding of civil registration and vital statistics systems and their roles in measuring development progress and social change in Africa
- (ii) Training, research and technical backstopping for addressing critical civil registration and vital statistics challenges in Africa
- (iii) Establishment of the AfCRVSNet to provide a regional platform for exchanging views, ideas and best practices on civil registration and vital statistics in the continent.

C. Participants

The workshop brought together countries with at various stages of the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems. The strategy was to enrich the discussion and outcomes of the workshop with a reasonable diversity of country experiences. In this regard, the regional workshop planned to gather all African countries (53 countries), with two representatives per country representing respectively the National Statistical Office and the Line Ministry (Home Affairs, Interior or Justice) or Agency in charge of civil registration system.

Statistical training centres, regional economic communities and key development partners were invited to the workshop.

D. Venue and date

The workshop was held at New Africa Hotel, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 29 June to 3 July 2009. Interpretation services were provided in English and French.

II. Attendance and agenda

A. Attendance

The workshop was attended by 140 participants from 40 countries, five regional training institutions, two regional organizations, one sub-regional organization, five international organizations and seven other organizations. Among the 40 African countries, 19 were represented by both the civil registration authority and the national statistics office, while 13 were represented by the national statistics office alone, and 8 were represented by the civil registration authority alone.

B. Agenda

The agenda was divided into six major themes, excluding the opening session. Under each theme, were apportioned presentations, working group, panel discussions, general and thematic discussions and plenary.

III. Opening session and official statements

Ms. Albina Chuwa, Director General of the National Bureau of Statistics of Tanzania, welcomed the participants on behalf of the host country. The workshop was officially opened by Honorable Lawrence K. Masha (MP), Minister of Home Affairs of the United Republic of

Tanzania. Honorable Berhan Hailu, Minister of Justice of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has also delivered an opening statement to the workshop. Representatives of various organizations also delivered official statements. The keynote address was delivered by Mr. Pali Lehohla, Chairperson, United Nations Statistical Commission and Statistical Commission for Africa; and Statistician General, South Africa.

The Director General of the National Bureau of Statistics of Tanzania started her speech by extending a special welcome to the guest of honor and the Minister of Justice of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. She also welcomed representatives of the ECA, the UNSD, and the AfDB. The Director General re-iterated the challenges African Statistics Offices facing due to the incompleteness and inadequacy of civil registration and vital statistics systems currently prevailing in most countries of Africa.

Prof. Ben Kiregyera, Director of the African Centre for Statistics of the ECA, on behalf of the organizers of the workshop extended a special thanks to the two ministers, the Minister of Home Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania and the Minister of Justice of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The Director made a very comprehensive and enlightening speech that brought to the attention of the participants of the workshop: covering the importance of the systems, the varied implications and impacts the ignorance brought in the past four decades and the urgency in ensuring the presence of a universal and complete civil registration and reliable vital statistics systems in every nation of Africa.

Representing the UNSD, Mr. Srdjan Mrkic, addressed the workshop focusing on the importance of civil registration and vital statistics systems and its position in the UN Statistics System. Mr. Mrkic appreciated the theme the workshop has identified "Towards New Initiatives and Approaches" stressing the need for Africa to re-iterate its commitment in establishing the system firmly in the region. He has indicated the importance and the place civil registration and vital statistics takes in the UN statistical system in the following statements: *"Civil registration is the best source of detailed, accurate, relevant and timely vital statistics – is a guiding principle that the United Nations Statistics Division adopted since its inception in late 1940's and started to focus more closely and specifically implement in the past two decades. And vital statistics is crucial and irreplaceable component of national statistical systems as it generates numerical profile of the most precious resource of any country – its human capital. This paradigm of relationship of civil registration and vital statistics was unambiguously endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission, the apex body of international statistics,..."*

In his opening statement, Mr. Charles Leyeka Lufumpa, Director of the Statistics Department of the AfDB expressed the commitment of his organization to support and emancipate African countries from the situation he referred as an awful and sad condition that civil registration

and vital statistics remains underdeveloped and in bad shape in most African countries. Mr. Lufumpa expressed his impression about the necessity and timeliness of the workshop by stating how it is coincided with various development initiatives going on in the continent. Mr. Lufumpa concluded his statement by expressing the AfDB's commitment in the following way: *"For its part, the African Development Bank stands ready to play a key role in providing the necessary financial and technical support for improving statistics in African countries, including civil registration and vital statistics which we are emphasizing as part of our efforts to improve MDG monitoring on the continent. In these efforts, we are working very closely with our valued partners, ECA."*

Mr. Pali Lehohla through his delegate delivered an extensive, educative and comprehensive keynote statement to the workshop. Mr. Lehohla started his speech by thanking the organizers, specifically for bringing together representatives from the ministries or agencies in charge of civil or vital registration systems and representatives from national statistics offices. His speech was presented in a way that would give a general background on the historical development of civil registration and vital statistics systems globally and in Africa in particular. In his background statement, Mr. Lehohla comprehensively assessed the recognition of the importance and development of vital registration, since the London Bills of Mortality in 1592 and consecutive developments in England of more formal and systematic registration in 1603. He mentioned the contribution of John Graunt in 1662, which he called the founding classic of the modern sciences of vital statistics and epidemiology.

Mr. Lehohla reminded participants that currently civil registration and vital statistics in the contemporary developed countries is complete and published figures on fertility, mortality and causes of death are up to the standard. Mr. Lehohla has tried to show the parallel situation in Africa, where he demonstrated the colonial influence in most African countries by witnessing the historical development and experience in Mauritius (since 1667), Ghana (1888), Tanzania (1920), Uganda (1904) and South Africa (1842). Mr. Lehohla revealed the discriminations practiced in registering vital events by the colonial powers on the Africans, where in most cases Africans were not allowed and included in the registration system before independence. He further testified reviewing the situation in his own country. Mr. Lehohla continued his speech presenting on the importance, challenges and opportunities of civil registration and vital statistics in Africa.

In his final speech, Mr. Lehohla stressed and detailed the role and responsibilities of national statistical offices in improving civil registration and the need for them to be more outward looking.

Honorable Minister of Justice of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Mr. Berhan Hai-lu addressed the participants of the workshop in his opening statement about his government's

commitment in establishing and developing conventional civil registration and vital statistics systems following the UN principles and recommendations. Mr. Hailu expressed his regrets that his country has not had a functioning civil registration law until this date and indicated the challenges the country facing in addressing data and information needs in national and sectoral development planning and programme design, implementation and monitoring. In the initiatives currently going on in establishing the registration and statistics systems in the country, Mr. Hailu expressed his belief about the objectives and the essences of the systems and their differing character from previous attempts. The Minister, with strong words expressed the impact rendered due to lack of the systems in the country and the implications of further delays.

The Honorable Minister further noted on the currently prevailing conducive programmatic and administrative arrangements and political situation in establishing the registration system in the country. He further expressed about the studies and researches conducted in addressing technical and operational preparatory activities that would facilitate the implementation of the various components of the registration and vital statistics systems. Specifically, he mentioned the need for taking advantages of parallel sectoral development programs and the need for integration and collaboration with other departments in ensuring the sustainability and permanence of the systems. Finally, Mr. Hailu urged the delegates to cooperate and support each other.

The Hon. Minister for Home Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania started his speech by warmly welcoming Hon. Berhan Hailu, Minister of Justice of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Honorable Minister, Mr. Lawrence K. Masha addressed the participants the global, regional and country level challenges and situations facing Africa and despite these shortcomings the progress achieved. Mr. Masha further stated the critical role of civil registration system in the production of vital statistics information.

Mr. Masha further reminded country delegates on the need to ensure country ownerships of initiatives and support programs and also on the need to work on long-term and sustainable programs. The Minister urged African countries to reiterate and re-visit their commitments and act urgently and strategically on this long overdue critical development agenda. Finally, the Honorable Minister pledged African leaders and scholars to join hands to emancipate Africa from this unacceptable situation where citizens are coming and going without leaving traceable legal or statistical records in the 21 century.

IV. Deliberations

The technical deliberations of the workshop were sub-divided into six sessions. The first session covered the introduction and orientation part on civil registration and vital statistics systems, the second about the challenges and opportunities and the third session dealt on country

experiences focusing on challenges and opportunities. The remaining three sessions refer to presentations on new approaches and initiatives for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa, regional and international support and inter-country collaboration and finally the launching of the AfCRVSNet and endorsing the recommendation of the workshop.

Session 1: Orientation to civil registration and vital statistics systems

Mr. Srdjan Mrkic, Chief of the Social and Housing Statistics Section of UNSD, delivered five presentations on various aspects of civil registration and vital statistics following the guidelines, principles and recommendations of the United Nations.

(i) Need for a civil registration system

In his first presentation, Mr. Mrkic defined civil registration as the universal, continuous, permanent and compulsory recording of vital events. He said that civil registration should be run by the Government, which has the primary responsibility of providing official and permanent records serving general and individual interests. He listed civil registration outputs in two main categories: individual outputs and aggregate outputs. He further displayed the individual record types and their use for individuals and for society as a whole. On the aggregate aspect, he showed how the individual records were aggregated and used to generate statistical information. Mr. Mrkic further elaborated on the components of the registration system, namely, law, civil registration infrastructure, participation by the population, service to the public, confidentiality, and checks and balances. He made a pictorial presentation on the various components of the registration system. Mr. Mrkic further elaborated on the importance of civil registration records, noting that lack of registration records could lead to the denial of basic human rights. He cited examples of some basic rights and privileges and demonstrated how the lack thereof affected individuals and societies.

(ii) Civil registration systems and their use for vital statistics

In the second presentation, Mr. Mrkic first introduced the list of vital events recommended by the United Nations to be registered by member States, including live birth, death, foetal death, marriage, divorce, annulment, judicial separation, adoption, legitimation and recognition. He further recalled the three basic legal, administrative and statistical functions of civil registration. Mr. Mrkic discussed the technical details, specifically the type of variables and information collected, the techniques used in the calculation of indices and how to use them in the analysis of fertility and mortality measures and indicators. He explained the different ways of recording and producing statistical reports in different countries, noting the two most commonly used, either using the same forms for legal documentation and statistical reporting, or to use separate forms for the two purposes.

(iii) Integration and coordination of civil registration and vital statistics systems

The third presentation highlighted the need for coordination and integration within and between civil registration and vital statistics systems. Three aspects of coordination were addressed: a) coordination within the civil registration system, b) coordination within the vital statistics system; and c) coordination between the two systems. The presenter said that coordination was important for two reasons: to improve coverage and accuracy of civil registration; and to improve availability and quality of vital statistics generated from the civil registration system.

In the presentation, the two most prevalent organizational structures for civil registration were displayed pictorially, namely, the centralized structure with dual agencies and administrations, and the decentralized structure with a national office for general legal oversight or with cooperative or advisory responsibilities. With respect to coordination in the vital statistics system, uniform and nationwide legislation and regulation across all sources were required, covering definition of vital events, characteristics of persons experiencing these events, coding schemes and classification and utilization of base population in calculating vital rates.

(iv) Cause-of-death data collection through the civil registration system

The presentation on causes of death was delivered by Dr. Yoko Akachi of Health Metrics Network (HMN). She explained the problems associated with data collection on critical health variables and indicators, specifically in the area of adult mortality and causes of death. The presenter raised some critical questions on the need and importance of death and cause-of-death information, and noted why such information was needed.

The shortcomings of the currently available data sources in the developing world for the critical MDG indicators, such as the under-five mortality rate, maternal mortality ratio and HIV-, malaria-, and tuberculosis-related mortality rates, were demonstrated and the need for conventional civil registration systems emphasized. The presenter made a comparison, in matrix form, of the various available data sources for births, child mortality, adult mortality and causes of death. Dr. Yoko further argued that civil registration was the gold standard source of data for cause-of-death information. The presenter revealed some of the commonly seen errors made in recording underlying causes of death. Dr. Yoko introduced the alternative approach of recording causes of death through verbal autopsy method, which is defined as an approach that used to determine cause of death by asking caregivers, friends, or family members about signs and symptoms experienced by the deceased in the period before death. She also talked about the availability of implementation manuals showing the application of verbal autopsy questionnaires and guidelines for cause-of-death certification and coding with corresponding ICD-10 codes.

(v) Evaluating the completeness of civil registration systems

Mr. Mrkic shared with participants the different evaluation methods developed and recommended by the United Nations and other organizations. Accordingly, the technical details and varieties of the direct and indirect evaluation methods were presented.

(vi) United Nations Statistics Division's expertise and resources for improving civil registration and vital statistics around the world

In his fifth and final presentation, Mr. Mrkic reiterated the need for civil registration and the different sources used to generate vital statistics. He presented a matrix that showed the pros and cons of the three sources of fertility and mortality data, rating them on a scale of high, medium and low based on 12 dimensions. Mr. Mrkic continued presenting the instruments and methodological framework of the UNSD.

Finally, Mr. Mrkic introduced the recently prepared guidelines and their major contents. The titles of the guidelines were:

- Principles and recommendations for vital statistics systems
- Handbook on civil registration and vital statistics: preparation of a legal framework
- Handbook on civil registration and vital statistics: management, operation and maintenance
- Handbook on civil registration and vital statistics: developing programmes for information, education and communication
- Handbook on civil registration and vital statistics: computerization
- Handbook on training in civil registration and vital statistics systems

(vii) Discussion and summary points

Some of the issues and questions raised in the general discussion session were related to the hindrance effect of the outdated laws inherited from colonial powers in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in the countries, as reflected mainly by Malawi, Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire. Different practices of issuing birth, death and marriage certificates and in some countries the exaggerated fees required were some of the major factors stated as contributing to the low coverage and completeness of the registration systems. The effects and implications of low capacity in using ICT were also mentioned by a participant from an Ethiopian ICT company.

Lack of cooperation from politicians and their tendency to manipulate statistics for political and other interests was also indicated by some participants. In reference to the presentation on

the contents of the registration and statistics forms, the Ethiopian delegate suggested that the statistics and registration forms should be simplified, citing as an example the difficulties in including variables like birth weight. Eritrea mentioned the use of denominators from sample surveys as one major problem in calculating demographic rates and ratios. It was also indicated that civil registration and other enumeration methods should be seen as complementary rather than competing undertakings, which need to be harmonized.

Representatives from different countries like Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire enumerated major challenges from their country perspectives: high illiteracy rates, over 70 per cent of women giving birth at home, incorrect or concealed causes of death, as with HIV/AIDS cases, registration of abandoned children, problem in transmitting records from districts to the centre, funding problems, lack of training, registration being conducted by volunteers, etc. Representative from Senegal cited a positive experience the country had working with the World Bank and UNICEF on birth registration projects. In reference to the practice for registering and coding causes of death, one of the participants asked whether the responsibility should be with the national statistics office or the ministry of health. The presenter responded that such decisions should be based on the organizational and administrative arrangements that exist in the country, but it was suggested that coordination mechanism can be set that involves both institutions.

Session 2: Challenges and opportunities of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa

The purpose of this session was to review the challenges and opportunities of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa and to come up with proposals for their improvement. Three topics were identified for discussion in three different groups: a) reviewing and updating civil registration laws in Africa; b) government policies and programmes for civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa; and c) maintaining the interface between civil registration and vital statistics systems.

Each group was given two hours for the group work and then to make a presentation in the plenary. As per the template prepared for reporting, each group made a presentation covering the situation analysis, challenges and opportunities.

Session 3: Country experiences, focusing on challenges and opportunities

This session was chaired by the AfDB and Mauritius, Ghana, Tanzania, Senegal, Niger, Madagascar and Seychelles made presentations on the status of civil registration and vital statistics systems in their respective countries following the major areas indicated below.

- Civil registration process and completeness status, including situation on political commitment
- Vital statistics compilation, analysis and report dissemination
- Cause-of-death registration and reporting status
- Measures taken to cover vulnerable groups in the registration system
- Coordination between the registration and statistics offices and involvement of partner institutions
- Challenges and measures taken to alleviate problems related to civil registration
- Challenges and measures taken to alleviate problems related to vital statistics
- Opportunities for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in the specific country
- Way forward

Except Mauritius and Seychelles, all the remaining countries do not produce complete population dynamics data and hence are not using the vital statistics for estimation of population sizes and updating projections. In the majority of cases, divorce is managed by Ministry of Justice or its equivalent and the other events by another ministry. In all the presentations, compilation of vital statistics is structured under the national statistics office. None of the countries reported existence of formal or structured coordination between the civil registration and vital statistics offices. Almost all the countries did not report exact completeness level of the registration system, except mentioning figures that are not based on systematically made evaluation studies. None of the countries mentioned any measures taken in covering the vulnerable groups in the registration system. Except Mauritius and Seychelles all the remaining countries do not have properly functioning causes of death recording and classification system. From the presentation it was observed that problems and challenges greatly vary among the countries. A summary of the reflections on the major issues raised by each of the countries and discussion points are presented in the main report of the workshop.

Session 4: New approaches and initiatives for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa

This session was meant to give countries, organizations and individuals a chance to present about the special efforts made in the recent past to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems in diverse situations. Accordingly, from countries South Africa and Ethiopia shared their experiences, where South Africa in reference to the coping mechanisms and approaches it applied after the 1990s, while Ethiopia as one of the largest and populous country in Africa without civil registration, shared its initiatives and progress made in establishing the systems in the country. On the other hand, three presentations representing different organizations and addressing special efforts in their area of competence were delivered. Among these organiza-

tions, HMN presented in reference to the different initiatives and workshops conducted on civil registration in 2009 in Geneva, Paris and Washington DC. The second was presented by the Executive Director of the African Child Policy Forum, Dr. Assefa Bequele on universal birth registration initiatives implemented in collaboration with different partner organizations, primarily UNICEF and PLAN International. The third presentation referred to legislative drafting presented by Prof. Ann Seidman from Boston University on law drafting techniques and its application to civil registration laws. The details of the presentations by various speakers are presented in the main report of the workshop.

Session 5: Regional and international support and inter-country collaboration for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa

This session was designed for development partners to discuss critical civil registration and vital statistics intervention issues. The panelists included UNSD, AfDB, World Bank, HMN/WHO and AFRISTAT. The panel discussion was facilitated by Prof. Ben Kiregyera, Director of ACS. In the panel discussion, UNSD's intervention was more focused on the technical aspects, where the presenter demonstrated the various UN handbooks and guidelines published and regional trainings conducted. He talked also about the limitations or absence of sustainable and long-term training programmes in civil registration and vital statistics for the developing world. He affirmed UNSD's readiness to provide its technical support for the development of appropriate curriculums for civil registration and to provide courses in regional training institutions and universities. The panelist from AfDB gave a general background of the Bank's intervention areas, specifically in the region's statistical capacity-building programme and its implementation modalities. The Bank disclosed the resources earmarked for statistical development of the region and urged countries to approach the Bank with feasible projects and programmes. The panelist indicated that country ownership was the underlining criteria as per the Bank's support policy and that National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) was one of the umbrella statistical support programmes of the Bank, into which civil registration and vital statistics could be mainstreamed.

The panelist from AFRISTAT introduced the mandate, major activities and accomplishments of AFRISTAT and also indicated that while his institution was regional in scope, it is still not well known in some countries. He reviewed, from the technical point of view, the dysfunctional situation of the civil registration system in most African countries. He also examined the failure of demographers to use their expertise to support initiatives going on in various countries. The panelist demonstrated the various activities surrounding the five-year statistical capacity development project currently going on with AfDB, where civil registration could be used to improve demographic statistics of countries.

The panelist from the World Bank assured the participants about the Bank's readiness to support civil registration initiatives in Africa. He explained the importance and relevance of civil registration and vital statistics to the Bank's programme in improving the statistical systems of countries. It was indicated that country initiatives, ownership and level of commitment are the major criteria's considered in resource allocation and endorsement of proposals. The panelist from HMN/WHO reiterated the commitment of HMN to support civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa and elsewhere in the developing countries. It was indicated that HMN is more interested in global, regional and national health information systems focusing on births, deaths and causes of death to improve the unsatisfactory situation currently prevailing in Africa. The panelist from the ECA-ACS listed the major responsibilities of the Centre in the development of statistics in the member states. The panelist indicated that civil registration and vital statistics is one of the statistical areas the Centre is dealing and further indicated how the initiative for organizing the current workshop was evolved. Finally, the panelist requested key partners to maintain the current very vibrant partnership in addressing the challenges member states facing in improving the systems.

Finally, the non-representation of specialized United Nations agencies such as UNFPA and UNICEF in the panel was raised. The organizers noted that the two agencies had been included in the programme, but due to conflicting schedules they could not participate in the panel discussion.

Following the panel discussion, individual countries presented their action plans. The purpose of developing the action plan was to obtain a snapshot of country impressions and immediate actions for the improvement of their civil registration and vital statistics systems of their respective countries, based on the inputs they had gathered from the workshop.

Session 6: Launching of the AfCRVSNet and endorsing the recommendations of the workshop

One of the main objectives of the workshop was the launching of the African Network of Civil Registrars and Vital Statisticians. Accordingly, ACS presented a draft proposal for establishing and maintaining the network. The objective of the network is to provide a regional platform for exchanging views, ideas and best practices on civil registration and vital statistics systems in the continent. It also provides a forum for policy dialogue on civil registration and vital statistics in Africa. The proposal was endorsed by the workshop participants.

The key recommendations of the workshop are presented in four subsections, advocacy, operational, technical and partnership. The meeting discussed and commented on the proposed

recommendations and finally endorsed. The recommendation of the workshop is annexed to this report.

V. Closing of the Workshop

The Director General of the National Statistical Bureau of Tanzania, representatives of UNSD, AfDB and the Director of the African Centre for Statistics of the ECA made closing remarks before the workshop was officially closed by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania. The Director of the ACS in his final speech recalled the unique characteristics and benefits of civil registration and vital statistics systems and its limitations in Africa. The Director re-iterated on how the idea of holding this workshop was evolved and how the participation was enlarged to involve all African countries with the support of AfDB and other development partners. The Director appreciated and greatly honored the presence of the Hon. Minister of Justice of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in participating in the workshop. He further thanked the host country, and the participants who accepted the invitation and participated very actively in the five day heavily packed workshop programme.

Finally, the Director promised to take forward the recommendations made at the workshop with the seriousness and vigor they deserve. The Director also promised to continue consultation with the leadership of ECA as well as the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia about the possibility of convening the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration in 2010.

The Permanent Secretary called on the participants representing the 40 African countries to collaborate with each other in building the African knowledge base by sharing experiences and information through a network as recommended by the workshop. He also requested the partners and supporters to align their initiatives, harmonize their interests, and integrate their efforts to capacitate the regional platform at ECA. The Permanent Secretary further expressed the commitment of his Government to correct past drawbacks that neglected civil registration, as was the case in most African countries, and mentioned recent improvements and activities undertaken to strengthen the systems through the Tanzania Statistical Master Plan. Finally, he thanked all the participants and organizers of the workshop and urged the participants to use the knowledge and information they had acquired to improve the civil registration and vital statistics systems in their respective countries.

VI. Key recommendations

The workshop adopted the following recommendations:

Advocacy

- Dedicate the Theme for the 2009 African Statistics Day to civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- All African governments are called upon to take appropriate measures in availing the necessary resources and support to civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- Explore the possibility of organizing a high-level Ministerial Conference on Improving Civil Registration in as near-future as possible to maintain the momentum.

Operational

- Civil Registration Offices and National Statistics Offices, development partners and regional training institutions are urged to actively participate in the regional Network on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa;
- Countries are encouraged to use as opportunities sectoral reform programs, democratization and decentralization processes currently going on in Africa to bring civil registration services to their populations;
- All governments are strongly encouraged to revisit the topic of fees for issuing documents based on civil registration records – the Workshop reiterated that the United Nations recommend that the registration is always free of charge and that the fee for documents should be as low as possible;
- The African Development Bank, being a regional development bank, is requested to continue its support for African countries and devise a special program that promotes speedy improvements for civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa;
- Regional training institutions are urged to take the initiative in developing appropriate curriculum for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa and to actively participate in evaluation studies and research undertakings and also in strengthening the aforementioned Network;
- Countries need to proactively interact with each other to share knowledge, experience and resources using various mechanisms, such as, study tours, workshops, technical support,
- Organize biennially the regional workshop on civil registration and vital statistics systems;

- African Centre for Statistics to continue leading and serving as regional platform for civil registration and vital statistics systems and in leveraging resources, technical support and coordination among countries in Africa;
- UN Statistics Division to continue its support and, in close collaboration with regional institutions in Africa and other partners, devise a special programme for Africa in general and fragile states in particular;
- African Centre for Statistics and the African Development Bank in collaboration with other development partners to develop a medium-term programme for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa;
- Countries to finalize their country action plans (drafted at the workshop) and submit them to African Centre for Statistics.

Technical

- Countries are advised and encouraged to revisit and update their civil registration laws and statistical legislations in-line with current developments and take measures that ensure their proper implementation;
- Countries need to identify underlying reasons for the low level of civil registration in the rural areas and design strategies to overcome this low coverage, including the introduction of mobile registration units in nomadic and hard to reach areas;
- It is indispensable to ensure that both civil registrars and statisticians are fully cross-trained in basic concepts, definitions and procedures in both areas;
- Civil registration offices and NSOs are urged to collaborate and interface, and the NSOs are urged to play an active role in setting national standards and methods for civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- Countries are encouraged to use conventional methods in evaluating their civil registration and vital statistics systems and to take measures in ensuring proper utilization and documentation of their data and information;
- Countries are encouraged to use UN guidelines and recommendations as a basis for their civil registration and vital statistics improvement programme;

Partnership

- African Centre for Statistics and UN Statistics Division need to strengthen institutional linkages in facilitating integration, harmonization and coordination of efforts currently going on by various organizations at country and regional levels in order to promote cost-effective mechanisms and avoid duplication of efforts;

- Donors, UN agencies, consortiums, education and training centres, NGOs and other development partners are urged to support Africa in the area of capacity building, such as, provision of training, public education, IT development, data capturing, coding, processing and analysis and provision of other capacity building materials and financial support.
- Countries are urged to mainstream civil registration and vital statistics systems in their national statistical development programmes;

Follow-up

A full workshop report is under preparation. In addition, a compendium of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa will be prepared as part of the post-workshop activities. The compendium will comprise the status of country civil registration and vital statistics systems together with an action plan for the improvement of the systems. It will be used in the preparation of the medium-term regional programme for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa.