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DATA FOR
HEALTH INITIATIVE

IMPROVING CAUSE OF DEATH INFORMATION

**Strong CRVS systems:
Country partnerships are
paramount**

CRVS Roadmaps for Action

June 2017



Introduction

A global scandal of invisibility exists, in which the poorest and most vulnerable members of society are frequently unregistered and therefore not counted by governments due to weak civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems.¹ CRVS systems record major vital events, including births, deaths and cause of death. Information from these records are important to produce vital statistics on a population's fertility and mortality. Decision-makers need this information to plan, deliver, and monitor health and social development programs as they work toward reducing their nation's burden of disease and tracking progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, every birth and death should be registered – this is not only for generating accurate and reliable population health data, but is a matter of acknowledging and promoting human dignity and redressing health inequities.

Strong CRVS systems are a development imperative, and will improve equity and accountability to individuals and families – so long as CRVS systems and data strengthening receives sustained support from national policy-makers and development partners.² The scaling-up of CRVS systems, however, must be sustainable and integrated across government, “serving the needs of public and private sectors and all citizens of a country”.³

Common roadblocks

Many low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) have weak CRVS systems that fail to cover the entire population, register and certify all births and deaths, and generate vital statistics. This problem has come about due to several factors, including outdated and incomplete birth and death registration laws, as well as a lack of coordination between the poorly-linked government ministries responsible for CRVS systems.

Moving forward

Partnerships for strengthening CRVS systems are crucial

In recent years there has not only been growth in countries' commitment to improving CRVS systems, but also increased engagement by donors, UN agencies, development banks, academic partners, and regional bodies. Regional partnerships in particular have been successful in playing an advocacy role, and have helped facilitate political commitment for CRVS systems-strengthening at ministerial levels.

A collaborative approach to strengthening CRVS systems will utilise existing political relationships among government and key CRVS stakeholders, and will create a sense of joint commitment and accountability.

There are a number of different types of partnerships – ranging from international and regional partnerships to domestic ones – that will be pivotal to support country CRVS improvement efforts. Many of these are captured in **Figure 1**. However, this *CRVS Roadmap for Action* highlights five key partnerships that countries should prioritise: establishing a National CRVS Committee, community collaboration, technical/implementation partnerships, information technology (IT) partnerships, and engaging in regional and international CRVS networks.

National CRVS Committee

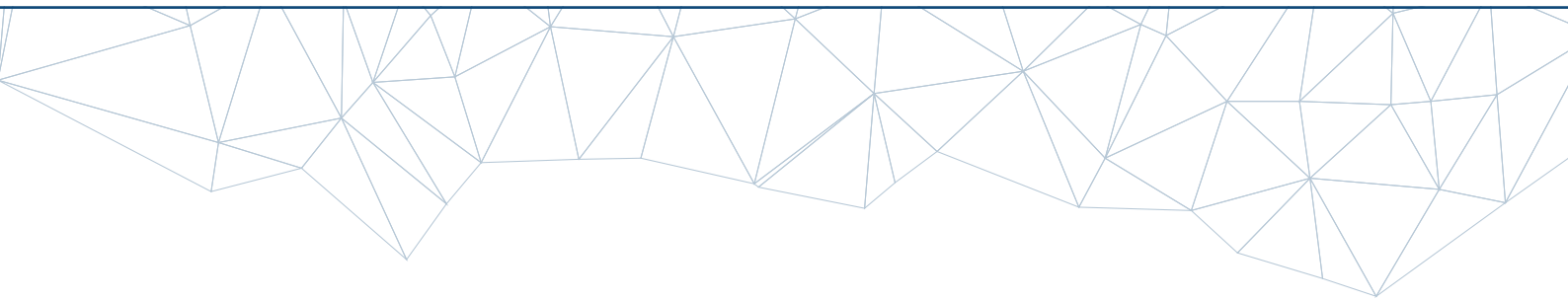
There are many actors, institutes and interests at the cross-section of the production of complete and reliable vital statistics AND use of vital statistics data on births and deaths for policy and planning purposes. Unsurprisingly, complex governance challenges can and do arise. In response, a National CRVS Committee should be established.⁴ This Committee can bring together many of the key actors in the relevant departments and sectors concerned, such as from health, justice, finance, home affairs, education, the Office of the Registrar General, and as well as from specialised sub-agencies such as national statistics, national health insurance, e-government (etc).

1 Setel et al, on behalf of the Monitoring of Vital Events (MoVE) writing group. A scandal of invisibility: making everyone count by counting everyone. *The Lancet*. 2007;370(9598):1569-1577.

2 AbouZahr et al. Civil registration and vital statistics: progress in the data revolution for counting and accountability. *The Lancet*. 2015;386(10001):1373-1385.

3 World Bank. *Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Scaling Up Investment Plan 2015-2024*. 2017. Available Online: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health/publication/global-civil-registration-vital-statistics-scaling-up-investment>

4 De Savigny et al. Integrating community-based verbal autopsy into civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS): system-level considerations. *Global Health Action*. 2017;10:127882.



The national ministries or agencies on the Committee need to also establish formal relationships, perhaps by way of memoranda of understanding. The CRVS Committee should have the responsibility of owning national strategies and plans to improve the system, and extend the necessary sponsorship.

The Committee should also undertake to map out information flows using the Enterprise Architecture approach,⁵ review the legal and regulatory framework for a best practice CRVS system, and produce period assessment of system performance and outcomes. The Committee could further convene sub-committees, such as a National Sub-Committee on Mortality and Cause of Death. The latter sub-committee would be responsible for developing and overseeing a strategy for ensuring that nationally representative mortality data are available to, and used by, decision makers for planning. Such a sub-committee could fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Health

Without establishing and documenting such a high-level collaboration, governments will likely struggle to collect, validate, and transfer data about vital events, which may then translate into questionable vital statistics.

Community collaboration

Strong partnerships between governments and communities are crucial for CRVS systems to function properly. CRVS systems must be available, accessible, of quality and acceptable for community members – not only in urban environments, but for communities located in rural and remote settings too.⁶ If communities are unaware of the importance of birth and death registration for vital statistics, they will lack incentive to register such events, resulting in incomplete vital statistics. Communities therefore need to engage and collaborate in initiatives to strengthen CRVS systems, such as national reference groups, which include a representative cross-section of the population. Community awareness raising activities and building positive government/community partnerships in relation to CRVS will also be important.

A well-functioning Office of the Civil Registrar can play an active role in coordinating advocacy efforts within communities to raise awareness about the importance of CRVS. This might take the form of a national month of CRVS promotion, as was done in Rwanda, to more targeted messages in areas or populations with especially low registration rates.

Other stakeholders, such as civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, and community health workers (for instance), can also assist.

Technical/implementation partners

Technical and implementation partners can play a key role in supporting countries strengthen the collection and use of their CRVS information. The Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative, for example, has partnered with 20 LMICs to provide technical assistance, capacity-building and program funding for long-term CRVS improvement, as well as to facilitate strategic use of CRVS data for population health policy and planning.⁷

IT partners

With the increasing availability, affordability, and cost-effectiveness of digital solution, IT specialists are central to CRVS strengthening efforts than they have ever been. Governments striving to assign causes of death for all deaths as well as to improve birth and death registration must invest in the appropriate IT infrastructure and staff. This is because new information technologies will help accelerate efficient and cost-effective CRVS data collection and analysis, data storage and sharing, and increase access to service delivery for individuals and families.

⁵ Enterprise architecture (EA) is a conceptual map, or blueprint, that defines an organisation's structure and processes. Its purpose is to determine how an organisation can achieve its current and future objectives most efficiently.

⁶ Gouda, et al. New challenges for verbal autopsy: Considering the ethical and social implications of verbal autopsy methods in routine health information systems. *Social Science and Medicine*. 2017;184:65-74.

⁷ For more information on the work of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative, see: <http://mspgh.unimelb.edu.au/dataforhealth/about/bloomberg-data-for-health-initiative>

Regional and global networks

Countries working to improve CRVS systems should seek out, form, or take part in existing regional and international networks for CRVS systems strengthening. Such networks can provide a means of sharing information, lessons learned, and best practices.

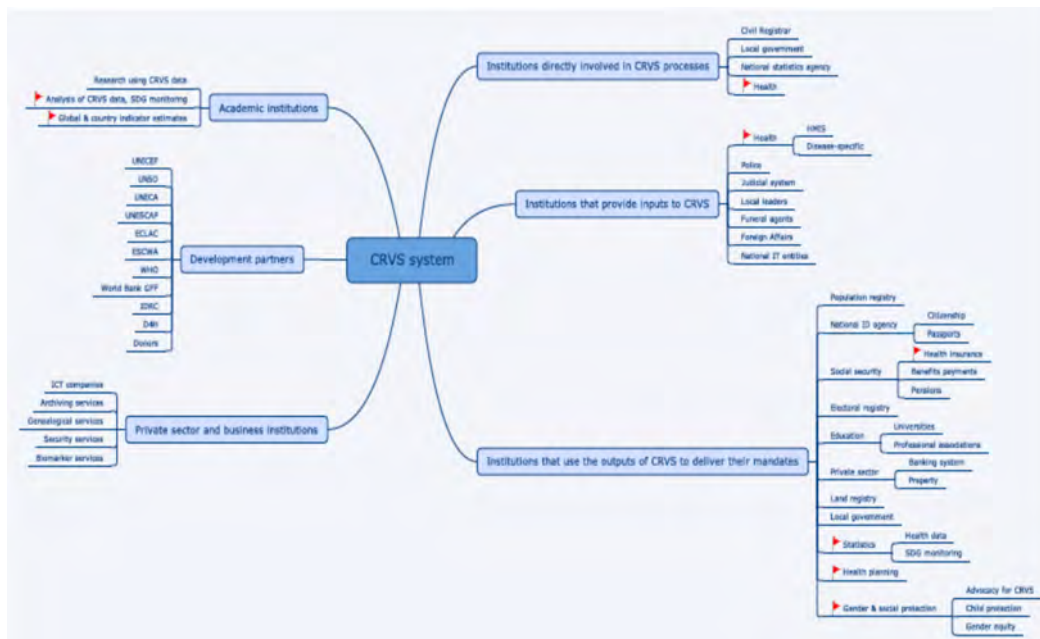
Countries in these networks will benefit from a sense of partnership and coordination regarding implementation of national CRVS development plans as well as broader regional and global frameworks for CRVS development.

Health ministers and other key decision-makers have been convening to develop regional programs to strengthen CRVS systems, like the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of CRVS (APAI-CRVS) and the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Framework for CRVS.¹ Another notable example of a regional network for CRVS strengthening is the Pacific Civil Registrars Network (PCRN), while the Global CRVS Group is a good example of a global network.²

Summary

Many countries worldwide have begun to recognise the importance of strong CRVS systems for good governance and accountability, and for progressing health and development initiatives. However, it is essential that governments engage in and strengthen multi-level partnerships in coordinating and advancing CRVS systems strengthening efforts. Within countries, governments must strengthen key partnerships among different government agencies and in-country CRVS stakeholders, the community, technical partners, IT specialists, as well as regional and global networks.

Figure 1



8 For more information on the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of CRVS (APAI-CRVS), see: <http://www.apai-crvs.org/>. For more information on the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Framework for CRVS, see: <http://www.getthepicture.org/regional-action-framework>

9 For more information on the Pacific Civil Registrars Network (PCRN), see: <http://www.getthepicture.org/partners/pacific-civil-registrars-network>. For more information on the Global CRVS Group, see: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/crvs/globalcrvs.html>.

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