



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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Item 3 (h) of the provisional agenda*

Review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of the regional institutions: Statistics

Outcome of the High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific**

Note by the Executive Secretary

Summary

As requested by the Commission in its resolution 67/12, the secretariat convened the High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok on 10 and 11 December 2012. The High-level Meeting was co-hosted with the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with an organizing committee comprising 18 other development partners and was attended by over 230 senior officials representing the health, civil registration and statistics sectors from 43 ESCAP member States, 3 non-ESCAP Member States and 22 development partners.

The present document contains the outcome of the High-level Meeting, which comprises the outcome statement and the consensus reached.

* E/ESCAP/69/L.1.

** The late submission of the present document is due to the need for consultations following the meeting in connection with the preparation of a draft resolution.

High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok, 10-11 December 2012

OUTCOME STATEMENT

Well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems in Asia and the Pacific by 2020

We, the participants¹ of the High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific (“High-level Meeting”), held in Bangkok from 10 to 11 December 2012,

Recall United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) resolution 67/12 on the improvement of CRVS in Asia and the Pacific, and *appreciate* its call to convene this High-level Meeting for the purpose of raising awareness and fostering increased commitment to improve CRVS systems in the region,

Recall the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Declaration on the Right to Development (1986), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) and the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000),

Acknowledge the efforts made by many ESCAP members and associate members to improve their CRVS systems, including the effort of Pacific Island countries and territories through the development of the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan 2011 – 2014,

Believe that well-functioning CRVS systems are crucial for inclusive and sustainable development in the region,

Recognize that the improvement of CRVS systems is critical to ensure that policy-decisions made by governments and international donors are based on complete and reliable data, thus enhancing the efficient allocation of government resources and aid effectiveness,

Reiterate the importance of CRVS systems for safeguarding human rights, producing crucial information, supporting good governance, improving development outcomes and monitoring progress towards nationally and internationally agreed upon development goals,

Envisage the continued and enhanced importance of CRVS systems for monitoring a post-2015 development agenda,

Express concern that the majority of ESCAP members and associate members lack well-functioning CRVS systems that meet relevant international standards and recommendations,²

¹ Including 232 participants representing 43 ESCAP members and associate members, 3 countries from outside of ESCAP and 23 organizations.

² (i): United Nations Statistics Division, *Principles and Recommendations of a Vital Statistics System Revision 2*, 2001, Sales No. E.01.XVII.10.

(ii): World Health Organization, *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems - 10th revision*, edition 2010, available: http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/ICD10Volume2_en_2010.pdf.

Note the challenges facing countries in the region in improving CRVS systems, such as: legislative gaps, weak administrative systems, social barriers and discrimination, geographical barriers, difficulties registering births and deaths that do not occur in a healthcare facility, difficulties identifying and coding causes of death, inadequate logistics and office equipment in remote areas, poorly trained and remunerated staff and hence staff retention challenges, limited financial resources for CRVS and competing national priorities,

Emphasize that the improvement of CRVS systems relies on the commitment and coordination of governments, non-governmental stakeholders, the private sector and the public, as well as the sustained allocation of adequate government resources,

Recognize that coordinated regional action adds value to national capacity development,

Acknowledge the commitment and coordination of international, regional and sub-regional organizations and development partners in drafting the Regional Strategic Plan for the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific (“Regional Strategic Plan”)³ and in co-organizing the High-Level Meeting,

Welcome the growing global momentum for the improvement of CRVS systems and, in that regard, *acknowledge and appreciate* the presence at the High-level Meeting of participants from other regions, including Africa and Latin America,

Extend our gratitude to the Kingdom of Thailand, as the host nation of the High-level Meeting, for the warm hospitality extended to all participants.

Our unifying vision is that, by 2020, all countries in Asia and the Pacific are supported by and benefit from a well-functioning CRVS system. With this vision in mind we,

Agree and stress that the time for coordinated national and regional action to improve CRVS systems in Asia and the Pacific is NOW.

Fully support the Regional Strategic Plan and agree that the Regional Strategic Plan addresses our concerns and priorities, and are confident that the outcomes of the Regional Strategic Plan are achievable by 2020. We note in particular that,

1. Effective governance structures at the regional and national levels are essential for the Regional Strategic Plan, and the proposed **governance structure** provides a coherent platform for guiding and coordinating activities throughout the duration of the Plan. This includes support through a dedicated **regional support office** to ensure continued coordination of activities and resources and to sustain the momentum for the improvement of CRVS systems, as well the establishment of a **regional steering committee** to provide oversight and to ensure that regional action is country driven⁴.
2. Countries in Asia and the Pacific will benefit from regular sharing of experiences within and beyond the region, including lessons learnt from the Pacific sub-region and from regions across the globe. A **regional knowledge platform and a regional training network** on CRVS, comprising institutions such as the regional civil registration and population database training centre proposed by Thailand are an important means

³ <http://www.unescap.org/stat/vital-stat/high-level/Regional-Strategic-Plan-031212.pdf>

⁴ The African region provides an excellent example of high-level oversight as governments made a commitment to hold ministerial meetings every two years to provide additional supervision for the regional programme and to elevate the status of CRVS.

towards that end. Also, the regional network for civil registrars proposed for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) provides an excellent example of a way to share knowledge and expertise; countries and development partners can build upon the initiative of ASEAN.

3. **High-level regional commitment** and established regional milestones could build awareness, accountability and foster political commitment. The creation of ‘achievement awards,’ that recognize tangible commitment and progress in respect to CRVS systems could spur and maintain government commitment and interest. Regional and country level champions are also necessary to maintain momentum and drive improvement agendas.

We agree that realizing our vision depends on high-level political commitment at the national and international levels, and therefore call for the following immediate actions to be taken,

1. A **meeting of relevant ministers** of ESCAP members and associate members to discuss and agree on the vision of well-functioning CRVS systems in Asia and the Pacific by 2020. The meeting should aim to achieve:
 - a. Endorsement of the Regional Strategic Plan,
 - b. Endorsement of regional milestones and indicators for monitoring and reporting the state of CRVS systems and progress in implementing the Regional Strategic Plan,
 - c. Endorsement of a governance structure for the Regional Strategic Plan, including the proposed regional support office and regional steering committee,
 - d. Agreement to allocate appropriate resources to CRVS systems,
2. Donors and development partners should begin a well coordinated **funding and advocacy campaign**, in consultation with governments, to support the country actions and to fully develop and help fund the regional support activities contained in the Regional Strategic Plan.

High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok, 10-11 December 2012

CONSENSUS OF THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING

We, the participants of the High-level Meeting reached consensus that,

1. **CRVS systems are important for people's lives and for safeguarding their rights and those of their children, and are crucial for inclusive social and economic development.**
 - a. Civil registration is a **right**, which every government should provide to its people. Every person living in a country, including women, children, vulnerable populations, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and the stateless, has the right to have their birth registered and to a legal identity, regardless of nationality, religion or ethnicity.
 - b. The official recording of vital events – comprising births, adoptions, marriages, divorces and deaths – provides essential **documentary evidence** of legal identity and family relationships. This documentary evidence can:
 - i. Enable access to services, such as health, education, social welfare and protection;
 - ii. Help prove nationality;
 - iii. Help guarantee the right to travel and return to one's territory;
 - iv. Underpin efforts to reduce child marriages, child labour, family separation, human trafficking and violence against women and children;
 - v. Facilitate community, political and economic participation, including voting, standing for elective office, access to employment and opening bank accounts; and
 - vi. Protect the rights to inheritance of the surviving family of the deceased.
 - c. A well-functioning CRVS system is reliant upon sound **legislation** that makes registration compulsory for all persons, and determines the functions, duties and responsibilities of all stakeholders.
 - d. Improving CRVS systems requires building national **capacities** across all relevant sectors to:
 - i. Ensure individuals have the documentary evidence often required to secure recognition of their legal identity;
 - ii. Notify and classify information on births, adoptions, marriages, divorces, deaths and causes of death, such as to reduce the burden on persons using related records to access services;
 - iii. Compile and analyse statistics from the records; and
 - iv. Disseminate vital statistics.
 - e. In order to identify and address deficiencies in CRVS systems, ESCAP members and associate members should conduct comprehensive **assessments** to establish the evidence base for developing and implementing national multi-sectoral improvement plans linked to National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) and health information systems.

- f. Civil registration records are an important source of vital statistics on population, fertility and health, which provides a foundation for evidence-based policy, efficient allocation of resources, public administration, and decision-making in the public and private sectors.
- g. Innovations in **information and communications technology (ICT)** offer significant potential for overcoming the geographical, logistical and other barriers to universal civil registration and have significantly increased the capacity to compile, exchange, analyze and disseminate vital statistics. However, ICT does not guarantee completeness or quality of the data, hence countries should be cautious to ensure that every person has a legally secure and safe civil registration record.

2. High-level political support and investment are indispensable enablers for improving CRVS systems.

- a. Political commitment and leadership at the highest-levels of government, and within civil registration offices, national statistical offices, ministries of health and other relevant government departments, are essential to ensure that CRVS improvement efforts are effective and sustainable.
- b. National champions should take ownership and rally support for CRVS systems to ensure that commitment and progress towards improving CRVS systems is sustained over time.
- c. CRVS systems rely on government to provide an enabling policy environment, sound CRVS infrastructure and sufficient and sustainable national financial, technical and human resources.

3. CRVS systems cannot be improved without public awareness and support.

- a. Civil registration depends upon individuals and families registering vital events. Therefore, CRVS systems must be universal, non-discriminatory, culturally acceptable, responsive and provide a service of value to the public.
- b. Targeted national and regional advocacy campaigns, which reach out to diverse audiences and stakeholders, are necessary to build public awareness and support. Mobilizing non-government organizations, women's groups and other stakeholders can galvanize existing networks for reaching marginalized groups, remote populations and communities.

4. Coordinated national action across relevant sectors of government, academia, non-government organizations and civil society, such as religious institutions and women's organizations, is necessary for the improvement of CRVS systems.

- a. Effective action to improve CRVS systems hinges on coordination and collaboration among national, regional and international stakeholders, is inclusive of all stakeholders, and promotes public-private partnerships.
- b. Sustainable, representative and functioning national coordination mechanisms, with clear mandates and responsibilities, are needed to maximize efficiency, effectiveness, completeness and quality of CRVS systems.

- c. CRVS systems are multi-sectoral by nature and high-level political support facilitates the necessary inter-sectoral cooperation and enhanced accountability amongst stakeholders required to improve CRVS systems.
- d. Collaboration and effective information sharing across all relevant CRVS stakeholders will reduce duplication. This is achieved through robust partnerships and working relationships between civil registrars, statisticians, health officials and other stakeholders.
- e. Regional partners should support the establishment of national coordination mechanisms and the development of national multi-sectoral improvement plans for CRVS systems.
- f. National statistical offices should share their expertise in data management, including data confidentiality, analysis and dissemination for the benefit of other CRVS stakeholders. Collaboration with other sources of population records should be considered for quality assurance and sharing of experiences.
- g. The health sector plays a key role in the notification of births and deaths and identification of cause of death. Therefore, it is essential that health professionals cooperate and have the skills and experience to meet international standards for the statistical classification of causes of death.

5. The effective use of vital statistics is a necessary condition for better decision-making and policy monitoring for meeting people's needs.

- a. Vital statistics derived from civil registration can be the foundation for evidence-based policy, efficient resource allocation, effective public administration, social and economic planning, and decision-making in the public and private sectors. They underpin ongoing reporting and monitoring of progress towards national, regional and international agreements and goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.
- b. Data users should not have to rely on statistical modelling for estimates of vital statistics. High quality civil registration records, including the registration of vital events within the health system, are the most effective and efficient source of continuous and universal vital statistics for administrative divisions and local areas, providing information on population, fertility, mortality and health. CRVS has not been appropriately advocated as an essential data source. Potential users must be convinced that there is no substitute for vital statistics derived from a well-functioning CRVS system.
- c. High quality and timely vital statistics should be regularly disseminated to the public and used to develop and report progress in development and health plans.
- d. Building awareness among users and providing user-friendly presentations of vital statistics will support improved decision making and increase the demand and resources for CRVS systems.
- e. Understanding population dynamics and levels, patterns and trends in mortality and causes of death is imperative for identifying emerging health trends and introducing effective public health interventions and policy.

- 6. Capacity building, provision of incentives, adequate logistics and office equipment are necessary for completeness in coverage and improvement in the quality of CRVS systems.**
 - a. Regular training is necessary for capacity building of agencies responsible for CRVS systems, such as local registrars, for standardization and improvement in civil registration processes and the collection and compilation of civil registration records for statistical purposes.
 - b. Provision of incentives for staff retention and performance, as well as adequate office equipment, particularly at the local-level, is critical for efficient and timely civil registration processes and the collection and compilation of civil registration records for statistical purposes.

- 7. A regional approach to CRVS adds value to national efforts and can generate impetus and momentum for improving CRVS systems across Asia and the Pacific.**
 - a. Successful implementation of a regional approach will help foster the necessary political commitment and leadership to improve CRVS systems in the region.
 - b. A regional approach will provide a platform for sharing expertise and lessons learned and promote cooperation to overcome common challenges and develop innovative national multi-sectoral improvement plans. The knowledge, expertise and skills available from more mature CRVS systems should be utilized for the benefit of countries that are working to improve their CRVS systems.
 - c. Regional champions are important to generate political support and to mobilize international, regional and sub-regional organizations, donors and other stakeholders.
 - d. Regional and international organizations and development partners should coordinate and align their activities with national and sub-regional strategies for improving CRVS systems.