

Support for the Rabat Process on Migration and Development

Meeting of Experts on Civil Registry

“Improving civil status registration systems and combating document fraud”

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Session 1: Context setter

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Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System (APAI-CRVS)

In the majority of African countries, past initiatives and efforts aimed at improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems were largely dominated by isolated project-based and institution led *ad-hoc* exercises. The CRVS was seen to be a non-functioning statistical system and therefore, the above mentioned efforts in the region were largely statistically oriented with a view to obtaining vital statistics on a regular basis. The support in this area mainly came from international and regional agencies such as UNFPA, WHO and the United Nations Statistical Division and UNECA but mainly under statistical development programmes. UNICEF approached it from a child rights perspective and was mainly concerned with birth registration.

However, Civil Registration System is all about governance that requires strong legislative provisions, efficient operations and management systems within the given administrative and political structure of the country and backed by suitable monitoring and evaluation system. Above all the political commitment to improving the Civil Registration so as to generate useable vital statistics in a country within a given time frame is imperative. A coordinated approach with several players and stakeholders within the country and at the regional level is also crucial as CRVS is multi-disciplinary in nature. The project based approaches and pilots did not succeed as they did not address these core systemic issues dogging the CRVS systems in the countries. Again, in most instances there have not been properly developed national plans on CRVS, either at the medium or long term with clear targets and systematic mechanisms for evaluating successes and failures. Likewise, past interventions from regional and international development partners have not been guided by systematically developed regional plans, thus contributing to uncoordinated and fragmented resource use and limited impact.

Keeping in view the various issues stated above, it was clear that in Africa, civil registration system initiatives in the countries had to be re-designed and overhauled adopting a much more holistic approach to ensure that it not only provides efficient service to the people but also plays a fundamental role in modernizing the African public administration besides providing the much needed vital statistics. There was a need also to develop a regional framework that could guide systemic reforms and help make sustainable progress in the area



of CRVS in African countries. The importance of coordinated approach among all Pan-African institutions/agencies working in this area in Africa was also strongly felt.

The recommendations from the regional workshop on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems that was conducted in June 2009 in Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania addressed some of the fundamental bottlenecks that came in the way of improvement of the systems in the region. Accordingly, the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) at the UNECA, as per the mandate given by the workshop, initiated the preparation of a Medium-Term Plan (MTP) in close collaboration with the African Development Bank (AfDB). The preparation of the MTP was supported by field level information that was collected from field assessment missions in five countries. The MTP was also prepared in line with the *ECA Business Plan 2010-2012* and the recommendations of the Second Meeting of the Statistical Commission for Africa (STATCOM-Africa) that was convened in January 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

One of the most important initiatives was the organization of the First Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration held on 13-14 August 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Over forty African ministers in charge of civil registration attended the conference. During the conference, the Ministers committed to improve the CRVS in their respective countries and support the efforts being made in this regard by the regional organizations. They made a number of declarations providing the policy ground for moving the regional agenda into action. The Ministers also endorsed the MTP and directed the regional organizations to organize an expert meeting to finalize it based on the comments obtained during the conference. In January 2011, experts from countries, regional and international organizations reviewed and finalized the Plan. The Plan is expected to serve as a guiding tool for countries, regional and international organizations, in managing interventions and monitoring achievements in CRVS systems in Africa from 2010 to 2015.

The MTP is now under finalization based on comments from experts in during January meeting. It has a list of activities and outputs with clear timelines. The Plan identifies the agencies that will be responsible for the implementation of the various activities and is properly costed. The first activity that has been identified under the MTP is a comprehensive assessment of CRVS systems in each of the African countries. A questionnaire has already been developed and will soon be sent out to the countries. This will serve as the baseline information for the MTP

The following three major steps/decisions that are expected to provide impetus to the implementation of the APAI-CRVS



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- a) The Conference of Ministers responsible for Civil Registration that will be held once every two years will now be a permanent forum for follow up and monitoring of the implementation of APAI- CRVS
- b) The APAI-CRVS will be jointly implemented and resourced by UN Economic Commission for Africa, African Union Commission, African Development Bank, UNFPA, UNICEF, Health Metrics Network (HMN) and UNHCR. A Core Group has been set up with representative of each of these institutions to monitor the implementation of the MTP
- c) The Africa Symposium of Statistical Development (ASSD) which brings together all major statistical organizations, national statistical offices and professional statisticians in Africa every year to discuss a chosen statistical theme for next five years will focus on CRVS.

It is hoped that all the above mentioned initiatives under APAI-CRVS will help African Countries achieve the goal of complete and sustainable CRVS system in the shortest possible time.

