

COM5

FIFTH CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR CIVIL REGISTRATION

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AFRICAN MINISTERS AGREE TO UP THEIR GAME IN EFFORTS TO CLOSE IDENTITY GAP ON THE CONTINENT

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

The Fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration ended in Lusaka, Zambia, Friday with member States agreeing to scale-up efforts to address the huge identity gap that exists on the continent.

The ministers urged their governments to avail more financial resources to help them revamp and modernize the continent's CRVS and ID management systems to ensure they leave no one behind.

Partners were also called on to scale-up financial assistance to the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) which is leading the continent's efforts to create a modern and comprehensive CRVS systems.

In what they have dubbed the Lusaka Declaration, the ministers urged the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Union Commission (AUC) to support countries in harmonizing legislations governing civil registration and identity management, including interoperability of systems by using appropriate information and communication technology assets.

The ECA was further asked to scale-up efforts in helping reduce invisibility in Africa by increasing the number of current pilot countries participating in the UN Legal Identity Agenda so all countries can benefit from the holistic approach to CRVS in the shortest time possible.

The ministers recognized that integrated civil registration and identification systems were essential for promoting good governance, creating inclusive societies, protecting human rights, ensuring the effective and efficient delivery of public services, and tackling inequality; as well as providing individuals with essential legal documents to secure basic human and civil rights such as the right to a name, identity and nationality, and access to health care, education, employment, and social protection.

The conference also called on member States to strengthen the collaboration between national statistical offices, health, and legal identity management.

The ministers encouraged African countries to strengthen investment in digitization 'to facilitate interoperability between identity management systems for refugees and the national civil registration and vital statistics systems, within a framework of a strong data protection policy, as well as take steps to ensure the widespread recognition of identity documents issued to persons in need of international protection'

Members States should frequently publish quality vital statistics from the civil registration records of vital events, including causes of deaths to guide policy organs in developing strategies for the improvement of CRVS systems, and in support of Africa's Agenda

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Decade for Repositioning
of Civil Registration and
Vital Statistics in Africa
2017-2026



LUSAKA DECLARATION AT A GLANCE

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

Ministers welcomed the opportunity for the modernization of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa through technological solutions that aim to build centralized digital civil registries for all vital events to enable wide access, inclusive coverage, and reduced costs through automated systems.

They called for an increase in budgetary allocations by Member States for CRVS and identity management systems.

The conference encouraged Member States to strengthen investment in digitization to facilitate interoperability between identity management systems for refugees and national civil registration and vital statistics systems. This should be done within strong data protection policy frameworks.

The conference called on Member States to strengthen collaboration between national statistical offices, health, and legal identity management.

Member States were urged to frequently publish quality vital statistics from their civil registration records of vital events, including causes of deaths, to guide policy organs in developing strategies for the improvement of CRVS systems, and in support of Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030 for SDGs and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD@25).

The AUC and the Africa CDC were asked to provide guidance and support to Member States to mobilise resources for strengthening mortality surveillance systems and CRVS. The ministers encouraged the AUC and the ECA to continue working with Member States on the implementation of existing programmes and strategies as well as the decade on repositioning CRVS in Africa as the continent pushes to ensure legal identity universal coverage in terms.

The ECA and the AUC were requested to support countries in harmonizing legislations governing civil registration and identity management, including interoperability of systems by using appropriate information and communication technology assets.

The ECA and the UN Legal Identity Team were further requested to scale-up efforts in reducing invisibility in Africa by increasing the number of pilot countries participating in the UN Legal Identity Agenda so all African

countries or regions can benefit from the holistic approach to registration in the shortest time possible.

Ministers requested the AUC, in collaboration with the ECA, AfDB, CRVS Core Group, other partners, and the private sector, to create a knowledge platform where Member States can share experiences and success stories on strengthening their CRVS and identity management systems, particularly on registration of refugees, returnees, IDPs, and migrants in Africa.

The ministers appealed to AUC, ECOWAS, IGAD, EAC, and SADC for the full implementation of the AUC-RECs-Statistics Sweden Pilot Programme on Capacity Building on Migration Statistics, and requested the AUC with the support of International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Labour Organization (ILO), Statistics Sweden, Statistics Norway, and other relevant international partners, to develop a comprehensive programme for the registration of migrants in the civil registration systems. The aim being to strengthen Member States CRVS systems to include migrants, build their capacities, and share good practices to produce and disseminate high quality vital data on migrants. The AUC to lead the resource mobilization for the implementation of the programme.

They also urged the AUC, ECA, AfDB CRVS Core Group, and other partners to support Member States to set up sustained capacity-building systems at all levels to improve the production and dissemination of vital statistics from civil registration systems.

The ECA was encouraged to strengthen its o-line monitoring framework for tracking progress made at national and regional levels regarding civil registration and vital statistics. This will be done in collaboration with the AUC, AfDB, CRVS Core Group and other partners.

The conference requested the AfDB, CRVS Core Group and other partners to scale-up their technical and financial support to Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) as Africa pushes ahead to close the identity gap on the continent. ■

The ECA was encouraged to strengthen its o-line monitoring framework for tracking progress made at national and regional levels regarding civil registration and vital statistics.

INTERVIEWS

By Sandra Nyaira



Cosmas Chanda
*UNDER Representative to
AUC and ECA*

We welcome the interest that member States have shown to realize the objectives of digitizing civil registration and vital statistics. We

also welcome the renewed commitment that they are going to mainstream the registration of refugees and other displaced persons. This will support the new humanitarian initiative which places emphasis on simultaneous support to refugees and communities that host them as elaborated in the Global Compact on Refugees.

What is pleasing to note is this common agreement among member States that they should urgently migrate to a common platform to support national development and also to prevent issues of statelessness, a position showing that member states have taken their enthusiasm, commitment and urgency in trying to address CRVS issues to the next level. ■



Mr. Tayo Oyetunji
*Federal Commissioner
Nigeria's National Population
Commission*

Nigeria, in addition to establishing the universal and continuous civil

registration programme which has been running since 1994 and to date we have 4000 registration centres, since 2008 we were collecting vital information at registration centres on paper. However, in 2009 we entered the information into computers to turn it into digital information. We subsequently scanned these records and we have since successfully turned them into digitalized records.

From 2010 we have started pilot programs of direct digital data capture at some of our registration centres. We have now established a database to host all the records that we have digitized. We are now in the process of making this database available online to all other stakeholders.

We are in the process of expanding the direct data capture to more and more centres.

This conference could not have come at a better time for us as Nigeria because while working on this program, the country had flagged off the enrollment of citizens on our national identity platform operated by an agency called the National Identity Management Commission-NIMC. This meeting has paved way for further discussion between two agencies from Nigeria towards a holistic approach that will integrate the CRVS program of the National Population Commission with the NIMC one since both agencies are attending the conference. To this end, various presentations and discussions have not only been enlightening but they have opened a pathway for better integration and collaboration. ■

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2063, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the International Conference on Population and Development.

The AUC and Africa CDC were urged to provide guidance and support to member States to mobilise resources for strengthening mortality surveillance systems and CRVS.

The ECA and the AUC were also encouraged to continue working with member States on the implementation of existing programmes and strategies as the continent pushes to end the scandal of invisibility by creating modern and comprehensive CRVS systems.

The conference urged the AUC, ECA, African Development Bank (AfDB), CRVS Core Group and their partners 'to support AU Member States to set up sustained capacity-building systems at all levels to improve the production and dissemination of vital statistics from civil registration systems'.

The main objective of the conference was to provide strategic and policy guidance to member States on pathways towards holistic, innovative and integrated CRVS and digital identity management systems in order to close the identity gap in Africa and in the process contribute to the implementation of Agendas 2063 and 2030, in particular, SDG target 16.9.

In closing Zambia's Home Affairs Minister Stephen Kampyongo, the AUC Deputy Chair Thomas Kwesi and ECA's representative, Oliver Chinganya, the Director of Statistics, all hailed Africa's total commitment to modern CRVS systems and legal identity for all on the continent.

Africa is estimated to have over 550 million people without legal identity, the majority of them being women and children.

Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, Identity Management, Health, and Information and Technology attended the conference as well as Registrars General, Directors General of National Statistical Offices, ICT experts, e-government, civil society organisations and non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, international development partners, and journalists.

The theme of the conference was "Innovative Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System: Foundation for Legal Identity Management." ■





CHINGANYA HAILS TRAINING OF JOURNALISTS IN USE OF CRVS DATA

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

In a recent piece published by the Financial Times, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Executive Secretary, Vera Songwe, said harnessing the potential of technology and the data economy was essential to meeting the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals in Africa, from assisting development and accelerating prosperity to ending poverty.

Unless positive action is taken, however, Africa could easily fall further behind, she said.

Ms. Songwe said decisions taken by African leaders and policymakers over the next few years on embracing the data economy will determine the scale of the benefits the continent and its people will realise. Rather than drilling for oil, Africa should be building for the data economy. Data is now the world's biggest, most expensive and most important commodity and no society can afford to ignore its potential.

Just as the article was being published, 20 journalists from across the African continent were gathering in Lusaka, Zambia, where they received training on the effective use of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) data in public health journalism at the fifth conference of African ministers responsible for CRVS.

The training was provided by the Bloomberg Data for Health Initiative and Vital Strategies, in collaboration with the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) team, among them the ECA.

Oliver Chinganya is the Director of the African Statistics Centre at the ECA. Officiating at an event to mark the end of the journalists' training agreed with Ms. Songwe on the importance of embracing the data economy.

He said the training of the journalists was essential as it enabled them to tell the African story in a better way, providing deeper insights into what is happening in their countries and how it could affect the lives of the ordinary people.

"We are grateful that you were able to attend and receive this very important training on how you can use data in your reporting by providing the analysis as the bond between data and journalism continues to grow," said Mr. Chinganya.

Tg stronger. In an age of big data, the growing importance of data journalism lies in the ability of its practitioners to provide context, clarity and, perhaps most important, find truth in the expanding amount of digital content in the world.

Gathering, filtering and visualizing what is happening beyond what the eye can see has a growing value about using data to improve news stories

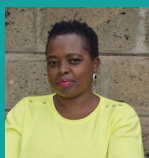
With rapid advancement of technology there is greater digitization of data

The journalists were unanimous that data is clearly becoming an increasingly important storytelling tool across the world. They thanked ECA and its partners for the training they said was invaluable. ■

JOURNALISTS IMPRESSIONS OF THE TRAINING



“ This has been, to me, a big eye opener as regards things CRVS, especially when it comes to reporting related stories. Unlike before, I have a better understanding of the concepts. Conceptual clarity is very important in our work as journalists. And I also have a better idea how to craft stories now. It will take practice, of course, to actually practice what we learned.” **James Karuhanga, Rwanda, The New Times**



“ The training was more useful in terms of data interpretation and visualization. We learnt how to present data in a simplified manner, in form of infographics to tell a story.” **Christabel Ligami, East African Magazine, Kenya**



« La formation sur l'utilisation des statistiques et d'enregistrement des faits d'état civil nous aide à crédibiliser nos articles, à aller à la source de l'information, utiliser des informations réelles qui permettront de changer les données et d'interpeller les décideurs pour planifier le développement.

La formation nous montre l'importance des statistiques dans l'information que nous publions et nous apprend à savoir lire et transmettre les chiffres dans nos articles. Avoir les réels chiffres dans tous les domaines nous permet d'avoir la situation réelle dans tous les domaines que nous abordons et nous permet d'aider les populations et les décideurs à vaincre le scandale de l'invisibilité » **Therese Isseki, PANA News Agency**



MUHWAVA UNPACKS UN LEGAL IDENTITY AGENDA AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

The United Nations Legal Agenda, which seeks to fulfil the promise of leaving no one behind in terms of legal identity was unpacked for participants at the 5th conference of African ministers responsible for civil registration and vital statistics.

William Muhwava, Chief-Demographic and Social Statistics at the African Centre for Statistics at the Economic Commission for Africa took the high-level participants through the UN's Legal Identity Agenda's Implementation plan in Africa.

He said nine African countries have been identified for possible collaboration with the World Bank on legal identity initiatives led by UN implementing agencies in collaboration with their government counterparts.

"Legal identity is a fundamental human right and what we are saying as the UN is that we can reduce the global identity gap or even close it completely if we work closely together. So far the target is to close the gap by over 300 million by 2025," said Mr. Muhwava.

He said the UN Legal Identity Agenda was a game-changer seeking to help close the global identity gap and fulfil the promise of leaving no one behind, especially as the world races to achieve the sustainable development goals with only a decade to go.

The UN launched the Legal Identity Agenda (UN LIA) to support member States in achieving the SDGs through meeting target 16.9 by 2030, that is providing legal identity for all, including birth registration. The UN legal identity consists of the lifecycle, "birth-to-death", and holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics including causes of death and identity management.

Mr. Muhwava explained that UN agencies and the CRVS Core Group coordinated by the ECA, will continue to drive a coherent and effective response in supporting member States to achieve the goal of leaving no one behind by addressing the root causes of exclusion.

In coordination with UN DOC, the ECA working with AUC, other UN agencies and World Bank, will continue to support member States with a benchmark goal of reducing the global legal identity gap by over 300 million within the next four years.

"The goal is to have all countries in the region to implement the UN Legal Identity Agenda by end of 2020," said Mr. Muhwava.

He also spoke about operationalizing the UNLIA; coordination mechanisms; roles and mandates of UN entities; project development and implementation; role of national governments; and financing of the implementation.

The ECA is mandated to coordinate country implementation efforts in Africa, build on the institutional mechanism established through the African Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS), and promote a holistic and integrated legal identity initiatives at national and regional levels.

The goal is to have all countries in the region to implement the UN Legal Identity Agenda by end of 2020," said Mr. Muhwava.

The organization is also expected to ensure the alignment between the UN Legal Identity agenda and the Africa digital identity initiative as a key opportunity to accelerate a holistic and integrated approach to CRVS and digital identity in countries, said Mr. Muhwava.

"Member States need to adopt and implement the holistic approach to civil registration of all vital events; produce vital statistics; establish and maintain population registers and identity management apparatus from birth to death," he told participants.

"There should be full interoperability between these functions simultaneously, in accordance with international standards and recommendations."

In their efforts to establish legal identity for all, member States should promote the inclusion of marginalized and poor communities to avoid leaving them further behind in the spirit of implementing the essential principle of universal civil registration, said Mr. Muhwava

He said plans to set-up the UN LIA Multi-Partner Trust Fund were currently underway. This fund will facilitate a cohesive UN approach to support member States' requests to strengthen respective legal identity policy and programming at all levels; and allow major funding and development partners supporting efforts across the UN system to pool resources and maximize investments.

Once the MPTF is set, there will be a call for member states to apply, he said. ■

QUOTABLE QUOTES FROM THE CONFERENCE

“To Provide information necessary for the well-being of the living, we must, firstly record relevant information provided by the dead”

— *Head of the Sierra Leone delegation in relation to determination of cause-of-death, on 15 October 2019*

“We share a common vision to build an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven and managed by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena. The reality therefore is that therefore, we cannot achieve this greater African vision without counting and recording our citizens, which civil registration is all about. A full functional CRVS system with universal birth, marriage death registration is the foundation of a comprehensive, robust and sustainable legal identity system. As and by leaving no one behind, we should reflect on those women who become invisible and lose their identity when they enter what we call matrimony situation - marriage - we should reflect on those women who run away from conflict with babies on their backs and suddenly become invisible, we should reflect on those babies born to illiterate mothers and fathers in villages and never acquire a national identity.”

— *H.E Inonge Wina/VP of Zambia opening COM5 on 17 October 2019*

“To lack a legal identity means that you do not exist at all in the eyes of the state, a scenario that is critically alarming and that contravenes each of our human development efforts.”

“Without knowing the numbers and characteristics of the residents of a country, governments cannot plan neither can they craft adequate policies or monitor progress. This steers us further away from achieving our human development commitments as set out by the Africa agenda 2063 and the 2030 sustainable development agenda.”

“We stand at an important time in history whereby the legal identity agenda is preeminently reflected in the 2030 sustainable development agenda, including through a goal of its own, and where there is increasing interest from various fronts to support this agenda. It is pertinent that we make use of this window to make all the relevant progress and in particular to harness the best for our identity management ecosystems systems without leaving either behind.”

“The legal identity challenge is one that we should embrace. It is a challenge we believe we can win, it is a challenge that will make us remember Zambia as a milestone in the direction we have taken to ensure 550m Africans no longer have the problem of legal identity.”

— *ECA Executive Secretary Vera Songwe on the 17 October 2019*

“My appeal to you in this session of this conference: “As you develop CRVS systems, do not leave out if you have in your country refugees and IDPs. This is a very important element of inclusion that should not be neglected. We recommend to countries to avoid creating separate CR systems for refugees but making sure to the extent possible and while distinguishing these people as refugees, of course you have to maintain that identification, but link them as much as possible to your national system of civil registration. This is what we have observed in some countries and we have seen that this is beneficial not only to the refugees but also to the government as you respond to this refugee crisis until the time has come for these people to go back to their home countries. In this regards, UNHCR ready to mobilize resources to allow adding this component of refugees to your national efforts to have universal civil registration.”

— *UNHCR Chief Filippo Grandi on 17 October 2019*

“ We cannot give financial institutions the power to access the data and confidential information that must be in the possession of the state. However, in order to prevent our citizens from queuing for a long time when they request a service at our offices, we have established a partnership with the banks and given them the power to collect biometric data on behalf of the Ministry of Home Affairs. These practices have made our people very happy for our service delivery system”.

— *South Africa's Justice Minister, Ronald Lamola, in response to a question on the confidentiality of civil registration (October 17, 2019).*

“ In adopting Agenda 2063, African Member States committed to eradicating poverty in a generation, catalyzing education, promoting science and technology, fast-tracking the establishment of AfCFTA, strengthening domestic resource mobilization, and introducing an African passport. An important foundation for realizing these objectives is establishing legal identities for African people. The realization of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development requires that every vital event is registered and relevant statistics are collected, compiled, produced and disseminated in a regular and continuous manner to guide policy and planning, to inform decisions, enable all stakeholders to track progress and make the necessary adjustments to ensure transparency and mutual accountability. That is the reason why both the continental and global agendas recognize the importance of CRVS systems and gave a reference to CRVS. Conclusively, Africa cannot ignore, falter or relent in improving our civil registration and identity management mechanisms at the national level. This will require appropriate legal and policy frameworks to be established as well as requisite resources to enhance its wide implementation on the continent.

— *AUC Deputy Chair, Mr. Quartey Thomas Kwesi on 17 October 2019*

Interview continued from page 03



Mozambique to host 6th COM

Zita Maria Domingos Joaquim

Planning and Cooperation Director, civil registry office, Mozambique

Mozambique will host the next conference of ministers on civil registration and vital statistics. Zita Maria Domingos Joaquim coordinates the inter ministerial group on CRVS and related issues. She says Mozambique is elated by the honour to host the next COM but adds as the country is currently going through elections, confirmation will come through in February.

“We will formalize in February. Our Minister of Justice has already said ok when we consulted him but all processes will be done by February,” she insisted.

On Mozambique’s CRVS systems, Ms. Joaquim said her country is developing an innovative CRVS and ID system to ensure every child is recorded at birth and that everyone had legal identity. We are also reviewing our legislation to allow the country to implement the systems and make some changes so no one is left behind.

She said Mozambique has introduced a unique process whereby birth registrations could be started without a person’s name with a unique number being given to a child. The parents can finish the process later. Mozambique, Ms. Joaquim said, does not have free birth registration yet but currently they are offering free service for the child’s first four months. After four months parents have to pay to get birth certificates for their children.

Mozambique is progressing, she says, adding the COM6 will give the country an opportunity to share how it is managing to close the identity gap. The country’s electronic governance is linked with CRVS, banks and tax systems. Ms. Joaquim said in 2017 the country enacted a law enabling the government to develop a platform the platform. We are not testing the linkages of date of birth on CRVS and health systems. ■

Mozambique will host the next conference of ministers on civil registration and vital statistics.

THE CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

Photos by Bedson Nyoni



