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CIVIL REGISTRATION CONFERENCE TO BENEFIT AFRICAN NATIONS SEEKING TO ADDRESS 'SCANDAL OF INVISIBILITY'

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

African countries are expected to continue strengthening their civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems as a foundation for robust and sustainable legal identity systems on the continent following the ongoing fifth conference of African ministers responsible for civil registration.

This was said Tuesday by Zambia's Home Affairs Minister, Stephen Kampyongo, during a ministerial media briefing on the conference that opened in Lusaka, Zambia, Monday.

The conference is a standing regional forum of the African Union which was set up to provide policy directions for the transformation and accelerated improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa.

The ministers conference is preceded by a three-day expert meeting that focuses on technical deliberations of various aspects of CRVS in Africa, culminating in draft resolutions and recommendations that will be discussed in the ministerial forum.

Mr. Kampyongo said some African countries had made progress in their institutional capacities to deliver legal identity but added more needed to be done to address the continent's 'scandal of invisibility' where half of the continent's children are not registered at birth.

At least 1.5 billion people lack proof of legal identity the world over. Half of them are in Africa, exposing them to vulnerabilities, including lack of access to services.

"This entails formulating and implementing appropriate policies and having guiding principles focused on our aspirations according to the sustainable development goals and Africa's Agenda 2063," Mr. Kampyongo said, adding African ministers were expected to support interventions that seek to integrate CRVS and digital identity management systems.

On advances made so far, the Minister said; "This progress includes ensuring that all member States have country owned action plans which are informed by comprehensive assessments of their CRVS systems, as part of the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems." The theme for this year's conference is; "Innovative Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System: Foundation for Legal Identity Management".

"This theme is timely for all African countries including Zambia. This is so because all African countries are striving to achieve the aspirations of sustainable development goal target 16.9 which seeks to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration by 2030," said Mr. Kampyongo.

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AFRICA URGED TO HARNESS DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FOR LEGAL IDENTITY

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

Advances in technology present Africa with an important opportunity for the digitalization of its civil registration and vital statistics systems through which the strategic benefits of legal identity for all can be harnessed for the continent's development.

This was said Monday by Zambia's Home Affairs Permanent Secretary, Ms. Liya Mutale, in remarks to the 5th conference of African Ministers responsible for civil registration (COM5) which opened in Lusaka under the theme: Innovative Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Foundation for Legal Identity Management.

Ms. Mutale said digital technology, including the extensive use of mobile devices in Africa, provided an incomparable opportunity for interoperability and real-time data sharing through interconnected systems across public and private sectors.

"Inclusive and trustworthy civil registration and digital systems are also crucial components for accelerating progress towards many of the sustainable development goal targets relating to poverty, good governance, social protection, financial inclusion, gender equality, migration and universal health coverage," she said.

The Permanent Secretary also spoke of the importance of integrating digital identity with civil registration systems.

"This combination helps to improve the lives of millions of people while also boosting national capacities to register vital events and produce vital statistics. When digital identity systems are recognized across borders and used online, they can be a powerful platform for innovation and for fast-tracking the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area," she added.

Zambia, Ms. Mutale said, has embarked on the implementation of the integrated national registration system through which the collection of biometric data and eventual issuance of birth certification and electronic identity cards to all citizens seeks to make civil registration a foundation for legal identity.

For his part, Mr. Oliver Chinganya, Director of the African Statistics Centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), emphasized the importance of digitalization as a facilitator of CRVS.

"We have gathered here for COM5 with an expanded mandate and with the full acknowledgement that civil registration is the foundation of legal identity - a universal requirement for SDG 16.9 to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration. It also needs to harness the dividends of digitalization," he said.

"A holistic and integrated approach on civil registration, vital statistics, including cause of death and identity management helps to build a robust and sustainable legal identity system. It also strengthens the health system, prevents duplication of efforts, saves resources and time, and allows efficient public service delivery."

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He said the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) Costed Strategic Plan 2017-2021, with the vision of making Everyone Visible in Africa, offered a platform for the continent to collaborate on CRVS issues.

"I am sure if we all combine our efforts and we speak with one voice in the various countries that we work in, we will reap the multiplier effects of collaboration," said Mr. Chinganya.

Speaker after speaker emphasized the importance for Africa to modernize and build a comprehensive civil registration and vital statistics system for the betterment of its people.

The conference was organized by the African Union Commission in collaboration with the ECA, the African Development Bank (AfDB), and Government of the Zambia. The conference is also supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Health Organization (WHO), Plan International, the Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD) and other partners. ■

INTERVIEWS

By Sandra Nyaira



Judy Obitre-Gama
*National Identification and
Registration Authority, Uganda*

We are scaling up CRVS issues in Uganda through different innovative ways. We have a Mobile Vital Records System (MVRS) which we have deployed in health facilities to electronically feed us with birth notifications to enable the registration of births as soon as they occur. We are planning to scale-up the deployment of MVRS to more health facilities so that we have a nationwide coverage. We have also concluded the development of the death registration module and deployed it on the MVRS. This is being piloted in the capital, Kampala. Once the pilot is successful, the module will be deployed nationwide. This we are doing with financing from the government of Uganda, UNICEF and the World Bank.

This conference is about CRVS and what we have done with the MVRS is something innovative. We also have mobile registration trucks and a van. From this conference we expect to learn how to innovate even better than we have done thus far. Our target is to ensure that by the end of the CRVS decade (2015-2024), Uganda would be at a point of close to universal registration. ■



Clemence Masango
Registrar General, Zimbabwe

A well developed and functioning civil registration system ensures the registration of all vital events of a person's life including birth, marriage and death and issues relevant certificates as proof of such registration. As Zimbabwe we have done a lot in terms of civil registration and vital statistics but we still need to centralize even further – that is integrating our sub-stations. We have computerized all our district and provincial centres. They are all connected to the national central registry for all services from IDs, birth certificates, marriages, deaths to passports. We have decentralized to provincial offices. We still need to decentralize further in terms of connecting our sub-offices - we have 206 of them within the districts. This is work in progress. We want to do more as a country because this is very important. Civil registration helps promote efficient government planning, effective use of resources and even more accurate monitoring of progress towards achieving our national development plans, Africa's Agenda 2063 and the sustainable development goals.

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The main objectives of the conference are to:

- identify key challenges in the implementation of the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics at regional and national levels.
- reaffirm the commitment of governments and development partners to CRVS and identity management through a holistic approach that strengthens institutional mechanisms for accelerated improvement of civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems on the continent; and
- to review and share best practices from African countries on CRVS and identity management system digitization processes, using appropriate information technology infrastructure and improving innovative business processes, to ensure that universal CRVS systems are interoperable with national identity management and various government functions.

“As a country we are looking forward to learning best practices on the optimal use of technology in enhancing CRVS systems especially that Zambia is working towards implementing an integrated national registration information system – a platform which will use a unique identifier from birth to death,” the Home Affairs Minister said.

Zambia's Health Minister, Dr. Chitalu Chilufya, said the nation was prioritizing CRVS and collection of reliable and accurate data to help the country in mapping out its health policies.

The conference will be attended by Ministers responsible for civil registration, national identity, health, ICT and e-governance from all AU member States, heads of civil registration, heads of national identity, heads of national statistics, and several developmental partners among other actors in Africa's CRVS space. ■

We currently have an impending project – the comprehensive national country assessment of our CRVS system. The whole idea is to identify gaps so we can focus our attention on addressing those shortcomings to further enhance our system. We also want to embark on a more rigorous public awareness campaign to encourage those who are not registered in any way to come and ensure they are counted and visible to the authorities. We have generally done well as a country but we still have some who are not registered for various reasons, including living far away from registration centres. There is also a section of our people who are yet to be registered because their parents or guardians emigrated; we also have orphans and others. We are making arrangements to help them get into the system. We are already in the middle of an outreach programme – a mobile registration exercise – targeting those who currently are not in the system so they can have IDs, birth certificates and other relevant documents.

The conference is really important to us a country because we get to share experiences with others and learn from those who are ahead of us as well. It is invaluable, especially as we seek to modernize and create comprehensive CRVS systems on the continent. ■



ECA & PARTNERS ASSURE AU MEMBER STATES OF CONTINUED SUPPORT TO MODERNIZE AFRICA'S CRVS SYSTEMS

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

The Fifth Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration opened in Lusaka, Zambia, Monday with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and its key partners, the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) stressing the importance for the continent to create a modern and comprehensive civil registration and vital statistic system (CRVS).

The partners reiterated their commitment to continue supporting African countries' efforts to modernize their CRVS systems so every person on the continent is visible.

Mr. Oliver Chinganya, Director of the African Statistics Centre at the ECA, said it was not right that half of Africa's population is not registered at birth. This, he said, rendered most of the continent's poor unseen, uncounted and excluded, affecting their ability to enjoy universal rights.

Mr. Chinganya said the call by the United Nations Deputy Secretary General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, to reduce the identity gap by 300 million by 2025, was a mammoth but achievable task if the continent addressed the challenges of its registration systems. More than 1.1 billion people in the world have no legal identity.

The Director assured participants of the 'ECA's commitment to strengthen the CRVS and ID management processes in member States as well as in ensuring that no one is left behind, and we achieve the aspirations of agenda 2063, the Africa We Want and the 2030 Development Agenda'.

He said digital ID can provide enormous benefits for the continent if fully embraced.

Mr. Chinganya lauded the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statics (APAI-CRVS) adding its Secretariat stood ready to provide technical support the member States. The APAI-CRVS is a joint project developed by the ECA, the AUC and the AfDB.

"Integrated and interoperable civil registration and national ID management systems form foundational legal identity necessary for proof of multiple functional identity registers. So, our civil registration systems should be accessible, inclusive and integrative."

For his part, the AUC's Commissioner for Economic Affairs, Mr. Victor Harrison, said civil registration data was essential for a functional and people-centred integration process that aims to improve well-being, promote job creation, and market expansion through trade, free movement and labour mobility.

He said the lack of formal and robust identification and poor CRVS on the continent has contributed to marginalization and exclusion of many citizens.

Mr. Chinganya said the call by the United Nations Deputy Secretary General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, to reduce the identity gap by 300 million by 2025, was a mammoth but achievable task if the continent addressed the challenges of its registration systems. More than 1.1 billion people in the world have no legal identity.

"In response to that, AUC in collaboration with UNECA, AfDB, RECS, World Bank and other partners have developed a comprehensive Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa to harness the full benefits of digital transformation to ensure that universal legal identity as part of the civil registration system is achieved by 2030," the Commissioner said.

Mr. Charles Lufumpa, Acting Chief Economic and Vice President, and Director of Statistics at the AfDB, said Africa has made progress in revitalizing its CRVS systems in the past decade.

But, he added, more still needs to be done to ensure the continent develops viable ideas and solutions that can address significant challenges that remain, including lack of adequately skilled human resources.

"It is high time we upscale our efforts regarding modernization and digitilisation. Lingerin challenges in the areas of infrastructure, use of technology, legal and regulatory frameworks, coordination and resources, have left CRVS systems weak in most part of the continent," said Mr. Lufumpa.

He reiterated the Bank's commitment to CRVS issues on the continent. ■





AFRICA HAS MADE PROGRESS IN CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS BUT MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE

By Lavender Degre // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

Africa has made impressive progress in revamping its Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems in the past few years, says William Muhwava, Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistics Section in the African Statistics Centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

In his presentation at the ongoing 5th Conference of African Ministers responsible for CRVS in Lusaka, Zambia, Mr. Muhwava outlined key achievements and progress made by the continent, adding much, however, remained to be done to ensure everyone on the continent was visible.

One of the biggest achievements was the institutionalization of the Conference of African Ministers responsible for CRVS as a standing forum of the African Union Commission to provide policy directions for the transformation and accelerated improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa.

Mr. Muhwava's presentation reviewed progress made by the continent in the implementation of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) over the past two years against commitments made by the African ministers responsible for CRVS.

The ECA expert said the formation of the regional core group on civil registration and vital statistics was another key achievement for the continent as it seeks to create a modern and comprehensive CRVS system. The core group harmonizes approaches, harnesses synergies and help to avoid duplication of CRVS efforts, as well as providing financial and technical support to APAI-CRVS.

He said there are also ongoing efforts to establish a committee of African Registrars General aimed at strengthening and supporting the work of the Conference of Ministers.

"There is a need for an intergovernmental process to sustain the momentum and accelerate progress in the development of CRVS statistics," said Mr. Muhwava.

The report emphasized that progress has also been made in digitization of civil registration and vital statistics, keeping records, promoting knowledge sharing and establishment of a monitoring framework.

Mr. Muhwava said death registration levels in most African countries were abysmally low, and the recording and compilation of causes of death was almost non-existent.

ECA and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have jointly developed an Africa mortality statistics strategy (2016–2020) to directly deal with this ministerial call for action on pan-African organizations to take urgent steps to support African States in establishing real-time death registration and cause-of-death information systems.

Despite progress made, the report pointed out challenges met in the implementation of the CRVS programme. First and foremost, funding for APAI-CRVS, sourced largely from development partners, has been inadequate and ad hoc in nature. The unpredictability of resources has affected its smooth implementation, including sustaining the human resources required to run the APAI-CRVS secretariat. Further to that, many countries lack the mechanisms and capacity to routinely monitor the performance of their civil registration systems, and they cannot therefore adequately report on the improvements emerging from their interventions.

The CRVS Digitization Guidebook was developed by the Regional Core Group under the technical leadership of Plan International, supported by ECA and the African Development Bank in collaboration with country experts in Africa.

"Together we can do this for the continent. Progress has been made and we need to keep moving forward, working together and speaking with one voice as we seek to develop viable ideas and solutions to our CRVS challenges."

The 5th Conference of Ministers aims to provide strategic and policy guidance on pathways towards holistic, innovative and integrated civil registration and vital statistics and digital identity management systems to help close the identity gap in Africa where more than 500 million people have no legal identity. ■

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UN OFFICIAL LAUDS ZAMBIA FOR EFFORTS TO ENSURE EVERYONE HAS LEGAL IDENTITY

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

The United Nations Resident Coordinator to Zambia, Ms. Coumba Mar Gadio, on Wednesday lauded the southern African nation for how it is seriously dealing with civil registration and vital statistics issues by updating legislation and policy and making the process more accessible to citizens.

Speaking at the Press Conference on the 5th Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, Ms. Gadio said it was no accident that Zambia was hosting the important meeting.

"It is a tribute to how seriously the government takes civil registration and vital statistics. For despite the importance of identification and ongoing efforts to improve these processes, many African governments still lack adequate, viable, complete and digital registration systems," she said.

Zambia has been updating its policies and making registration more accessible. The country has also built an integrated and digital national registration system that covers Zambians from birth to death.

Ms. Gadio said the UN system was readily available to help Zambia in perfecting this process.

"I know in the area of birth registration, UNICEF, with funding from the European Union, has been a key partner. And UN agencies have been working closely with the ministry of Home of Affairs, notably the Economic Commission for Africa, IOM, UNFPA, UNHCR and WHO, which have helped with technical and financial support both nationally and through the African structures," she said.

"To ensure sustainability of these efforts, Zambia should take strides to find sustainable financing mechanisms for CRVS. The UN stands ready to accompany you in this endeavour, including through exploring innovative funding mechanisms and expanded partnerships."

Ms. Gadio said the conference provides an opportunity to African governments and stakeholders to sensitize and raise awareness

among the people on the importance and use of civil registration, adding the meeting will also provide a useful platform for resource mobilisation to supported continued CRVS reform.

The UN Resident Coordinator said it was unfortunate that half of the children in Africa were not registered at birth, which should be the foundation for any civil registration system.

"These are the citizens that are frequently most exposed to poverty and other vulnerabilities. Not being registered renders them unseen,

uncounted and excluded. By extension, this affects their ability to enjoy universal human rights and social protection benefits," said Ms. Gadio.

She added that migrants, refugees and those displaced through humanitarian crises were particularly vulnerable when they lack identity and travel documents. Incomplete civil registration systems mean millions of African people have come into this world and left without leaving a trace on official records'.

For his part, Mr. Oliver Chinganya, Director of the African Centre for Statistics at the Economic Commission for Africa, explained the importance of the conference and importance for Africa to modernize and build a comprehensive civil registration and vital statistics system for the betterment of its people.

He said over the past eight years the UN and its partners have noticed tremendous improvement in the registration of African children at birth. More still needs to be done, however, he added.

Mr. Chinganya said the ultimate goal of the conference was to ensure Africa meets sustainable development goal target 16.9 that seeks to ensure everyone on the continent has a legal identity, including free birth registration by 2030.

The high level conference provides an ideal platform for the sharing of experiences, policy guidance and lessons learned among countries and governments. ■

Ms. Gadio said the conference provides an opportunity to African governments and stakeholders to sensitize and raise awareness among the people on the importance and use of civil registration, adding the meeting will also provide a useful platform for resource mobilisation to supported continued CRVS reform.

THE CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

Photo by Bedson Nyoni

