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**REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME  
FOR ACCELERATING THE IMPROVEMENT OF VITAL  
STATISTICS AND CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEMS\***

**(Phase I: 1991-1996)**

by

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\* Issued without formal editing.

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## Introduction

1. Civil registration, and the vital statistics derived from this system, provide a broad and comprehensive information base for the population of a country. Such programmes as population dynamics, health status of the population, health trends assessment, protection of human rights and well-being of children, demography, allocation of health services and resources all realize benefits from a registration system. Furthermore, civil registration defines, with documented evidence, the population of a country. The geographic distribution of vital events, and the development of rates and other quantitative measures can give government programmes essential data and information. The data is crucial for planning, policy making and evaluation of population-based programmes at national, sub-national, and community levels. Without a well functioning civil registration system in place, this information becomes available only on an ad hoc basis by conducting special studies, one-time surveys, population censuses or through other sampling approaches. Uses of copies of the civil registration records for individuals within the society are very helpful for legal purposes to prove personal and property rights.
2. The International Programme, designed in 1989 by the United Nations Statistics Division, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics (IIVRS), is intended to maximize international technical cooperation toward the improvement of CR/VS systems and ensure coordination of activities. CR/VS in most of the developing countries are in great need for modernization and enhancement. The aim of this multi-agency effort is to bring the ill-functioning systems to a level of appropriate completeness, timeliness and reliability so that they will be the basis for continuous vital and health statistics, and certificate issuing to the population.
3. In 1991, the United Nations Statistical Commission requested UNSD to proceed with the phased implementation of the International Programme activities during the 1990s. It also urged the designing agencies of the Programme to lend their support to UNSD to carry out the programme activities. To this end, UNSD designed and submitted a project proposal to UNFPA for financial assistance, for a first phase implementation.
4. With the endorsement by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1989 and 1991, the International Programme works ever since, under the leadership of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)-Focal Point for the Programme-to strengthen the technical capabilities of developing countries to organize, operate and maintain effective and efficient civil registration and vital statistics systems (CR/VS). It also works to increase awareness among government authorities, producers, and users of the utility of data and information from the systems for a variety of social and development programmes. The International programme does not assist countries in obtaining necessary funds to supplement national efforts as countries can directly contact donors, including UNFPA.
5. A budgetary commitment in 1991 by UNFPA, enabled UNSD to organize a workshop for Latin American countries. Subsequent allocations by UNFPA have made possible the undertaking of workshops for other regions of the world and the implementation of meaningful activities aimed at strengthening national registration and vital statistics systems.
6. The Statistics Division, the United Nations Children's Fund, ESCWA and ECA have provided supplementary funds to the Programme, as well as human resources and technical support to the workshops

and other activities undertaken. Furthermore, the Programme received technical contributions from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the UNFPA Country Support Teams, IIVRS, WHO, the Pan American Health Organization, Denmark, Finland, France, Japan, Norway, Sweden, and the National Center for Health Statistics of the United States of America.

7. The sections below give an overview of the main achievements during phase I implementation of the International Programme, from December 1991 to 31 December 1996. It includes highlights on the workshops held at the regional level, manuals prepared to assist countries, assessment of UNFPA past technical cooperation for civil registration and vital statistics, follow up from the workshops, suggested future actions and recommendations.

## I. ORGANIZATION OF REGIONAL/SUB-REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

8. The organization and implementation of regional workshops has been a major activity of the International Programme. Five workshops on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems were carried out: 1) for Latin American countries in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2) for countries in Western Asia (Arabic-speaking) in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, 3) for countries in East and South Asia in Beijing, China, 4) for English-speaking countries in Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and (5) for French-speaking countries of Africa in Rabat, Morocco. The workshops allowed UNSD and its partners in the Programme to meet with several countries in a more cost-effective manner. The cost of mounting short-term missions to all countries would have been very high for the resources available. The workshops served as a forum for exchange of information and experience among member states. They also facilitated the dialogue between registration and vital statistics officials of countries, in some instances, for the first time.
9. The workshops have identified administrative, financial, legal, technical, population unawareness problems. Their interaction seriously hamper the effectiveness and smooth operation of civil registration and vital statistics systems in participating countries. One of the main constrains was the lack of government attention and commitment toward the systems, which are at the grass roots of the administrative and financial problems and have led to the stagnation and poor performance of the systems. In fact, authorities at the highest level of the government did not clearly perceive the great potential for uses of data and information from robust registration and vital statistics systems. This resulted in insufficient allocation of funds and human resources to the proper operation and maintenance of the systems, absence of short, medium and long-term plans, weak surveillance and monitoring of the systems functions, etc.
10. With a few exceptions, most of the countries participating in the workshops have ill-equipped and under-staffed infrastructures. to operate their systems. This was true under centralized or decentralized administrations. Furthermore, the prevalence of weak communication, coordination and collaboration among the agencies that make up for the civil registration and vital statistics systems led to non-standardized methods and concepts, duplication of activities, inconsistent data, wastage of resources, etc. For most of the countries in the workshop, registration was incomplete, delayed, and inaccurate. Vital records that have a legal value to the individuals were very vulnerable to duplications, forgery, and counterfeiting. Similarly, vital statistics were incomplete and untimely published. The backlogs of unprocessed vital records added to the existing logistic problems.
11. Untimely and incomplete registration was prompted by unawareness of some groups of the population to report vital events, especially among the illiterate and the population living in scattered rural settlements, for whom transportation and communication are serious problems.
12. In addition, international technical cooperation have and still do favor sample surveys as a method to obtain quick demographic data. This policy further contributes to the postponement of the civil registration and vital statistics systems' improvement in developing countries, where funding is a major constrain to rapid systems enhancement.
13. Each workshop has designed strategies toward the gradual solution of the above-specified problems and others. The strategies are included in the corresponding workshop reports and have been strongly recommended for implementation by countries that are in need to streamline their civil registration and vital

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statistics. The resolutions passed in the workshops, indeed support the improvement of the systems in every country and area of the world. They all are considered feasible in an era of scarce resources but need individual countries to undertake actions. The success of the workshops depends on the understanding by individual countries of the importance of the workshop recommendations to enhance their systems. There is little that UNSD, ESCWA, UNFPA or other agencies can do without countries themselves taking long-term initiatives to improve their CR/VS systems. Co-operation takes at least two partners.

14. Relevant recommendations made at the Latin American workshop held in 1991, are quoted below as an example:

(a) Develop a plan of reform, whose main objective will be to improve completeness and quality of the data as part of the improvement of people's quality of life;

(b) Give the systems the same importance as is accorded to the population and housing censuses, within the context of a coordinated national statistics system;

(c) Establish or raise to a prominent level the National Committee for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics as a coordinating mechanism for agencies that make up the civil registration and vital statistics systems, with a view to making a better use of available resources and avoiding duplication of work;

(d) Create a National Committee for Civil registration and vital Statistics. Such a Committee should be based in a clear juridical framework, with specific clauses which will define the actions to be carried out by each of the components of the Committee in a context of collaboration;

(e) Increase awareness among the disadvantage groups of the population of social and individual importance of civil registration;

(f) Develop public relations campaigns to make people aware of the importance to put the national reform programme into practice to strengthening the systems of civil registration as an irreplaceable means for the preservation of a democratic system, enhancing security of personal identification services, etc.;

(g) Modernize the civil registration and the vital statistics offices through a reorganization that includes data processing technology;

(h) Make the political authorities aware of the importance of improved civil registration and vital statistics systems.

15. Furthermore, the Latin American Committee of Directors of Civil Registration, representing the civil registration system of each country was created at the workshop. The Committee aims at providing continued technical inputs to national systems of member states in the region.

16. The workshop for English-speaking countries of Africa held in Addis Ababa has adopted a five year Plan of Action for the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, in which goals and strategies were outlined for the year 2000. As coverage of registration in the majority of African countries is largely unsatisfactory, the workshop adopted specific goals on births and deaths coverage and the derived statistics as follows:

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(a) Births:

- Those countries that have below 30 percent registration coverage, should increase to at least 50 percent;
- Those countries that have between 30 to 50 percent registration coverage should raise their coverage up to at least 70 percent;
- Those countries that have between 50 to 70 percent should raise their coverage to at least 80 percent.

(b) Deaths:

- Those countries that have under 15 percent should raise death registration coverage to at least 30 percent;
- Those countries that have 15 to 30 percent should raise their coverage to at least 50 percent;
- Those countries that have 30 to 50 percent coverage should raise to at least 70 percent coverage;
- Those countries that have 50 to 70 percent coverage should raise to at least 80 percent coverage;

17. In regard to vital statistics, the African Workshop recommended that the agency responsible for vital statistics disseminate them on a regular and timely basis, including tabulations for areas in the country that have almost complete registration.

18. A number of strategies were devised to help to attain the above goals. Furthermore, the governments of Africa were urged to accord high priority and provide adequate budgetary support to the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics. Inter alia, the establishment of an inter-agency Steering Committee in each country was recommended to assist, advise and guide the responsible agencies for civil registration and vital statistics to the efficient functioning of the systems. Countries should also review existing laws concerning registration and vital statistics, in order to make civil registration comprehensive, compulsory, effective nationwide and free of charge. In addition, registration officials should move from a passive to an active role. The workshop in Addis Ababa, attached great importance to increased public awareness of well functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems for their own benefit. Training of registrars, enhanced logistic support toward the systems, close coordination among participating agencies, close monitoring of systems' activities, were among the several strategies designed.

19. Similarly, the workshop for French-speaking countries of Africa, held in Rabat, adopted a five-year Plan of Action that includes goals for the year 2000, along with meaningful strategies for their attainment.

20. Selected recommendations adopted at the Western Asia workshop for countries of the ESCWA region, are quoted below:

(a) The establishment and development of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in countries of ESCWA that have not adopted these systems yet, and improving those in existence, benefiting

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from the experiences of other countries in the region and from those more advanced countries. For this purpose countries should review all relevant legislation and regulations, inter alia;

(b) Establishing national committees on civil registration and vital statistics in each one of the ESCWA countries to exercise the authority of designing plans of work and strategies concerning the establishment and development of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems from the organizational, administrative and technical viewpoints, and consolidation of co-operation and co-ordination among competent authorities;

(c) Calling upon ESCWA countries to form a high level regional committee in the field of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, to be assigned with offering and facilitating the exchange of experience and information in these fields. (The hosting country of this workshop, The Syrian Arab Republic should invite this committee to hold its first meeting, in order to set up regulations defining its tasks and functions);

(d) To draw relevant national plans of work, taking into consideration: 1) the automation of the activities of civil registration and vital statistics; 2) reliance on the civil registration records as main sources of vital statistics, benefiting therefrom in the fields of planning, programming, research and assessment; 3) focusing on the training of personnel working in the fields of civil registration and civil statistics on the use of the most modern means in this field, raising the standard of their efficiency and providing them with incentives and privileges; 4) protection of civil registration data, since it has great importance in the lives of individuals and society, and safeguarding its secrecy and safety; 5) benefiting from the output of an experimental project on a limited scale, in order to assess and rectify the stages of implementation on a larger scale; 6) taking measures necessary to secure the highest degree of comprehensiveness in registration, particularly through the promotion of statistical awareness, simplification of registration procedures and setting up increasing numbers of registration offices; and stressing the importance and necessity of monitoring the causes of death in certificates reporting death events;

(e) Calling upon ESCWA to play a prominent role in the provision of information and technical expertise in areas concerning civil registration and vital statistics systems to ESCWA member states.

21. Countries participating in the workshops were advised to shift away from pilot and demonstration projects as an overall problem solving strategy for civil registration and vital statistics systems. Rather, activities with a nationwide scope should be pursued. This recommendation is in line with the findings in a study that focused on an evaluation of past technical cooperation from UNFPA to country driven projects in civil registration and vital statistics. The study was sponsored by the International Programme.

22. The workshops have commended the coordinating role of the United Nations Statistical Division to boost CR/VS systems through its International Programme. They also praised the cooperation and collaboration of the United Nations regional commissions, UNFPA Country Support Teams, other cooperating agencies of the Programme and developed countries. The workshop also recommended a closer involvement and support of WHO, donor agencies, and NGO's in technical cooperation to upgrade CR/VS systems. programmes.

23. Eighty-four countries have participated in the workshops, including a few developed countries that cooperated with UNSD with their own resources. They have all benefitted directly from the activities of the Programme. Initially, countries with 80 percent or more birth/death registration coverage were targeted for

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participation in the workshop. Later, other countries with lower birth/death registration coverage were invited to the workshops as its activities moved from Latin America to Asia and Africa. In addition, participants from International, regional, bilateral and non-governmental organizations have contributed technical input to the workshops.

24. The venues, dates, and countries that participated in the five workshops are provided in Annex I.

## II. PREPARATION OF SUBJECT-SPECIFIC MANUALS FOR CR/VS SYSTEMS

25. From the very first workshop held in Buenos Aires, it was clear that more specific and long-term technical assistance to the countries was needed, particularly on ways to strengthen their CR/VS. Therefore, the International Programme undertook another major activity that involved the preparation of a series of subject-specific manuals, to assist countries, through indirect technical cooperation, in the successful administration, operation and maintenance of their registration and vital statistics systems.

26. Four manuals have been drafted and completed so far, and a fifth has started late in December 1996. Two of the four drafted manuals have just been edited and will soon be submitted for publication. All manuals are scheduled for publication in 1997 in one official language of the United Nations. UNSD will do its best in 1998 for the translation of the manuals into the other five official languages, so that worldwide distribution can be secured among all countries and areas of the world. It is the hope of the Statistics Division that the manuals will assist developing countries to streamline their systems, which will surely have a lasting effect worldwide. The sections below highlight the state of the art and scope of each manual.

### A. Manual for the management, operation and maintenance of civil registration and vital statistics systems

27. Good management is a fundamental tool for having sound, efficient and productive civil registration and vital statistics systems at each functional level within the systems - administration, operation and maintenance. Thus the importance of this manual that is designed to help existing programmes, which may require improvements in certain areas. In countries where a civil registration system is not established, the Manual specifies the components necessary for their development and achievement.

28. The manual describes the daily tasks related to the operation of civil registration and vital statistics systems, the methods and procedures for sound administration, management, and ongoing maintenance. It covers the broad spectrum of civil registration, including forms, data collection, record processing, record keeping, legal and administrative requirements, and daily functions. The manual also addresses the relationships with other programmes, applications using vital statistics, health program evaluation, and research uses. The intent is to integrate the functions of a civil registration system with the diverse uses the system offers other programmes, systems, and administrative activities of government.

29. Special emphasis is given in the manual to the handling of a vital statistics system, based on civil registration data. To this end, the manual contains details relating to structure, function, interrelationship, management, operation and maintenance of both systems.

30. The recommendations for organizing, operating, and maintaining these systems are based on existing organizational infrastructure in the country - centralized, decentralized and locally administered. As

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appropriate, these functions relate to the legal structure in place in the country. Decentralized or centralized infrastructures and the legal framework affect the process and procedures involved in civil registration and vital statistics, particularly the reporting and data collection components required for a vital statistics system. They also impact the development of the management methods including organizational structure, planning, policy and decision making strategies, and the use of technology for registration and statistical activities.

31. The agencies responsible for conducting civil registration activities may be placed in local offices of different ministries such as the ministry of interior, health, or home affairs. They may also be located in municipalities, parishes or health centers (hospitals and clinics). It is important that the procedures and processes be standardized, in any of these sites. Most countries can benefit from the descriptions, processes and protocols described in the manual.

32. Managers must know the full potential of uses of data and information from civil registration and vital statistics systems so that they will give full support for their sound operation. With this purpose, the manual explains in detail the application and use of the data and information from the civil registration and vital statistics systems. Uses include for example, trend analyses of causes of death and morbidity, the assessment of the quality of health care services and providers, utilization of health resources, health status surveillance of the population and, administrative programme service areas. In many countries this data represent the baseline for the development of new health programmes and the improvement of existing programmes. Supplemented with data from population and sample surveys, the vital statistics data allows for assessing health trends, health status and needs of the population on continuous basis.

33. Other uses of the data help assess the impact of programmes directed at specific subgroups of the population. The scope and content of the data items collected through the registration and vital statistics systems provide a database which can be used to address a wide variety of issues. Internally the data is useful to improve the system components of registration. The external uses include those that establish personal and property rights and those related to research, statistical analyses, and programme design.

34. The manual emphasizes that civil registration and vital statistics systems must have appropriate levels of completeness of reporting and accuracy of data to make the uses truly beneficial.

**B. Draft manual on how to prepare a legal framework for civil registration and vital statistics systems**

35. The core of the manual provides the elements and steps on how to elaborate a comprehensive law for a centralized civil registration system, including discussions on the legal language, subjects that are part of the law's body, and those which belong in the regulations. It also explains how a comprehensive law is developed, and the role the legal infrastructure plays in a civil registration system. It also defines the civil registration main objectives and functions, the inter-agency relationships.

36. The manual gives the necessary elements and components to draft a comprehensive registration law that gives support to centrally-administered civil registration and vital statistics systems. It is not intended as a model law. Rather it is aimed at assisting countries in their efforts to revise existing registration laws or to help them draft a new one if none is available. The manual makes references to other country infrastructures, for example decentralized settings and makes recommendations on how the components of the law can be adapted to such circumstances to handle civil registration.

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37. The manual focuses on a civil registration system as it is conceptualized by the United Nations, defines the vital events and civil status events to be recorded. Then the main functions, elements for its infrastructure, organization, administration, and basic documentation are described.

38. In explaining the full potential of the data and information from civil registration, the manual draws the attention on how registration records contribute to the normal functioning of societies, to the legal organization of the family, to the assessment of population trends. The role it plays in designing social assistance and housing programmes for the population. Special emphasis is given in the manual to the role civil registration plays in protecting the human rights, which are embodied in several International Resolutions and Acts. The attainment of at least twenty of such human rights, have a close relationship or depend upon civil registration records.

39. Finally, the manual presents the rationale for drawing a comprehensive law, outlines the plan that will guide the development of a law, and the component articles of the law. It concludes with transitional dispositions to ensure a smooth development from an ongoing registration system to an enhanced one.

40. Throughout the manual, the need for a sound legal framework is emphasized. It is in fact an important component of a national improvement programme seeking robust and sound civil registration and vital statistics systems.

C. Manual on developing information, education and communication for effective civil registration and vital statistics systems

41. Information, education and communication are necessary, first of all, in order to inform high level government officials of the necessity of effective, efficient systems, of the many resulting benefits, and to obtain from them firm commitments to provide sufficient financial resources to undertake successful reforms to the current systems. This manual is directed principally to two categories of officials: (i) the policy and decision-making officials at the governmental level, who enact the necessary laws and regulations to activate civil registration improvement programmes and allocate necessary funds to implement an effective programme; (ii) the Civil Registration Officials in a centralized system or decentralized system.

42. A well informed population will contribute spontaneously to the timely and accurate registration of vital and civil status events as they occur. This manual focuses on how to design and carry out self-sustaining actions to establish a successful education and communication programmes to improve and maintain civil registration and vital statistics systems. The elements of an effective information, education and communication campaign in support of the CR/VS systems improvement programme are underlined as well as its importance.

43. The manual advises on how to obtain the co-operation and commitment to participate of influential professional groups such as medical societies and practitioners and other medical personnel and organizations, high-level civil registration/vital statistics officials, the legal profession, and religious organizations.

44. In many countries, registration is administered in a de-centralized manner, the manual recommends that registrars at all levels, state, province or regional level, be fully involved in the education and communication programme. It also stresses that an education and communication programme be a necessary component of an overall national plan designed to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems. A long-term IEC campaign is needed as an integral part of the operation of the civil registration and vital statistics systems. Furthermore, the manual emphasizes the need to obtain the wholehearted co-operation and assistance of local registrars in every part of the country. Their help is needed to ensure an effective and efficient registration system on a comprehensive and long-term basis.

45. The manual also describes the most effective methods and techniques to raise public awareness of the benefits to the societies as well as to individuals, of good civil registration and vital statistics systems. It is recommended that publicity campaigns be directed to several target groups: the public in general, specific groups such as the disadvantaged, illiterate, neo-literate, people who live in rural areas with poor communication systems, to inform the population of the purpose and requirements of registration. Isolated attempts to educate certain target groups should be avoided.

46. The manual recommends that the campaign adopt a strategy of phased implementation, with a high degree of coordination and collaboration among the agencies participating in CR/VS systems and donor agencies, wherever applicable. Producers and main users of data and information should work in a coordinated and collaborative manner to strengthen these important systems so relevant to the individual and to the society.

47. An important element in a registration improvement programme is the assurance that Government will ensure confidentiality of Civil registration and vitals statistics data and information.

48. In addition to the methods for conducting a campaign, the manual also discusses the organizational aspects of education and communication for civil registration and vital statistics systems. The structure of the education and communication office, development of goals and objectives, identification of problem areas and setting of priorities are described. Major activities are outlined, including formation of a national plan of action, an approach to government and the establishment of a high-level Advisory Committee. The manual describes the actual implementation of the communication campaign, including launching, monitoring, ongoing research, evaluation and revision/adjustment of the campaign.

49. The recommended actions and strategies in the manual are intended only as guidelines to be adapted in accordance with the actual situations and conditions of the country concerned. In fact, many of the recommended actions could well be carried out by registrars at the local level, who, because of their positions, have to maintain an active and interactive role and good working relationships with the community and the main users of civil registration and vital statistics data and information.

#### D. Manual for the computerization of civil registration and vital statistics systems

50. The manual addresses the purposes of computerization and the benefits which are obtained. For example, computerization eliminates the redundancy of civil information and increases the data quality as data are collected and stored in one database, to which all public authorities may have access. The full benefits depend on the assignment of a unique identification number for every individual registered in the system, thus providing the key for external users of the information and yet protecting privacy and confidentiality. The enhancement of vital statistics drawn from the civil registration database is an immediate benefit of computerization and may be obtained at early stages of the computerization process. The automated issuing of certificate copies may also be introduced at an early stage of the computerization.

51. This manual is intended as a practical guide to support the computerization, in phases, of civil registration and vital statistics. It describes a civil registration system that records and processes vital event records and leads to a database, which delivers by extraction the required data to the vital statistics system for further statistical treatment.

52. An overview is given of the major decisions and problem areas of computerization. The framework of the civil registration systems and that of the vital statistics system is defined along with the specific events contained in the systems as per the United Nations definitions. The interface and dependencies between the

systems are described. The phased implementation of computerization for civil registration and vital statistics systems is emphasized.

53. To this end, the manual provides the elements for each phase, from the advance planning to the system development. It recommends establishing a master plan that covers all aspects of the project, which will constitute the basis for setting the goals of computerization and the implementation strategy.

54. Organizational and management aspects of computerization are also discussed. A general structure in two layers, that includes the central civil registration authority and the local registries, is recommended is portrayed.

55. The manual explains how to start the computerization process and provides a method on how to decide on the strategy. It also describes the way the system functions and what the requirements are. Recommendations cover the data contents, the on-line functions and functionality, business rules and validations as well as systems utilities. The hardware requirements and security aspects are addressed.

E. Draft manual on recommended policies and protocols governing access to and release of individual information on vital records, for research, statistical and other uses

56. This manual is being developed.

### III. EVALUATION OF PAST UNFPA TECHNICAL COOPERATION

57. The study concluded that UNFPA's contributions to country projects in civil registration and vital statistics systems, in the past twenty years or so, have not been successful because they were just pilot or demonstration projects. Most of the countries that engaged in demonstration or pilot projects have been so far unable to expand their activities countrywide.

58. The recommendations of the technical report "Review and evaluation of UNFPA-supported projects on civil registration and vital statistics" call for the re-directing of international technical cooperation when dealing with country projects on civil registration and vital statistics systems. Demonstration or pilot projects, that characterized country driven projects funded by UNFPA in the past 20 to 25 years were discouraged. Instead, activities with a nationwide scope are preferred to ensure long-lasting effects in the national civil registration and vital statistics systems of recipient countries.

### IV. FOLLOW UP FROM THE WORKSHOP IN ESCWA REGION

59. A few countries that participated in the 1993 workshop have designed a national plan to streamline civil registration and vital statistics systems and the implementation of activities is underway. Jordan, Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen are known to be committed to the improvement of their civil registration and vital statistics systems.

60. The Syrian Arab Republic has been able to computerize its vital records under the Ministry of Interior. A database for civil registration is also designed to produce and publish vital statistics. For the first time, Syria is preparing a publication that includes vital statistics generated from the said database. Previously, the Central Bureau of Statistics produced, by manual extraction from the vital records, limited tabulations of vital statistics.

61. Jordan has, *inter alia*, enhanced the capability of its main frame computer at the central authority for civil registration in Amman. It has also expanded computerization for registration to its local registries. The goal is to perform on-line registration and issuing of certified copies of vital records. Furthermore, efforts are being made to expedite the production of vital statistics. Responsibility for vital statistics rests with another agency, the Department of Statistics .

62. Yemen has persistently continued its efforts to integrate the two existing registration systems prior to unification with UNFPA assistance.

63. It should be stressed that the Statistical Division of ESCWA, a partner with UNSD in the 1993 Western Asia Workshop held in Damascus, has played an important role prior, during and after the Workshop and even allocated additional funds for its implementation. After the workshop, ESCWA has worked to encourage countries to implement the workshop recommendations and has followed up closely in their activities.

64. The matter of improving civil registration systems in the region has been taken further by ESCWA during three meetings of Senior Statisticians (SS) of the ESCWA region, held in Amman, Jordan, in October 1993, November 1995, and now in February 1997. The second meeting of SS recommended that "1996-1999 be adopted as the quinquennium to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems in countries of the ESCWA region".

## V. ONGOING AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES

### A. Ongoing activities

65. The United Nations Statistics Division sought and obtained the cooperation of ESCWA by November 1996, to translate into English and publish the compendium of national reports on CR/VS for Arabic-speaking countries. The compendium was published by ESCWA in Arabic language, in 1994. Furthermore, the drafting of the manual on recommended policies and protocols governing access to and release of individual information on vital records, for research, statistical and other uses is in progress.

### B. Future activities by UNSD regular budget: 1988-1999

66. UNSD will undertake the revision of the "Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics Systems" that were published in 1973. Its publication is scheduled for 1999. This activity will be another major contribution of UNSD to the enhancement of CR/VS systems worldwide. It will be supported by the UNSD regular budget for 1988-1999.

67. Continued leadership by the United Nations Statistics Division toward the improvement of national civil registration and vital statistics systems is in line with its mandate to annually compile and publish reliable and accurate demographic data for all countries and areas of the world in its Demographic Yearbook. To this end, the Statistics Division devotes a great deal of work to the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

### C. Proposed additional training activities with extra-budgetary funds

68. UNSD has designed a new project proposal for a Phase II Implementation of the International Programme. Provided that funds are granted by UNFPA, *inter alia*, about 56 least developed countries, would be targeted for training activities. Three seminars have been proposed. The five manuals prepared in phase I would be used as training materials. Although the project is yet to be approved by UNFPA in

1997, it is hoped that UNFPA would realize the importance of having sound and continuous data and information from civil registration, regardless of the time it may take for their improvement. There is no alternative method to obtain causes of death, including maternal deaths. If complete and accurate, civil registration is the best for these purposes and other multiple applications. It also makes sense the improvement of civil registration data in the light of recommendations for new coding standards of causes of death, contained in the 10th ICD revision of WHO. National efforts should be coherent. Better coding features will not solve problems due to inaccurate data.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

69. It is strongly recommended that:

- (1) A Regional Committee of Registrar-Generals and Vital Statistics Chiefs of ESCWA countries be established, as soon as possible, to serve as a forum for mutual assistance among countries of the region and for exchange of experiences and information;
- (2) Member states of ESCWA adopt the recommendations of the workshop, held in Damascus in 1993 in their annual work programmes for civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- (3) A training seminar be organized and implemented in collaboration with UNSD, UNFPA Country Support Teams, and other agencies, for civil registration and vital statistics officials of countries of the ESCWA region, preferably in 1988 or 1999, and perhaps at the Cairo Demographic Center;
- (4) The manuals prepared by the International Programme be translated into the Arabic language and issued;
- (5) A periodical bulletin on Vital Statistics for ESCWA countries.
- (6) A newsletter be published for dissemination among countries of the region to highlight progress made in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in individual countries.
- (7) Assess periodically the implementation of recommendations of the Damascus workshop in countries of the region;
- (8) Individual member states of ESCWA commit resources to assess coverage and quality of civil registration and vital statistics on a regular basis and establish permanent monitoring methods to evaluate their performance;
- (9) Strengthen coordination and cooperation among ESCWA, UNFPA Country Support Teams, other regional, international and donor agencies, to provide technical cooperation to member states committed to CR/VS improvement programmes.

## Annex I

### WORKSHOPS SPONSORED BY THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME: 1991-1995

#### A. Latin American Workshop (Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 2 to 6 December 1991)

This workshop inaugurated the launching of the International Programme. The Government of Argentina hosted the workshop. Countries with birth/death registration coverage of 80 percent or more were invited. These included eleven Spanish and Portuguese-speaking, namely: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela and Uruguay. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics (IIVRS) lent their technical support and actively participated.

#### B. Western Asia Workshop (Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, 20-24 June 1993)

The workshop, jointly organized by UNSD and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), was hosted by the Prime Minister's Office of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Central Bureau of Statistics. The following ESCWA member states participated: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Sultanate of Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates, and the Republic of Yemen. Other participants in the workshop included representatives from Argentina, Denmark and the United States of America as well as from the World Health Organization Headquarters and the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Country Support Team (CST) in Amman, the Cairo Demographic Center, and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics. The Report of the workshop was issued in Arabic and English. A Compendium of the country reports was published in Arabic by ESCWA. It is now being translated into English and subsequently published. UNSD has sought the cooperation of ESCWA to execute the translation and publication.

#### C. East and South Asia Workshop (Beijing, China, 29 November-3 December 1993)

The workshop was organized by UNSD with the participation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and was hosted by the State Statistical Bureau of the People's Republic of China. It was attended by high rank officials from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. Denmark, Japan, Sweden and the United States of America, WHO, ESCAP, IIVRS and UNICEF also attended the workshop. As recommended by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, countries in the Pacific subregion were not invited because of limited resources and therefore will require a separate workshop. The report of the workshop was published in English. Country reports are available in hard copy and machine readable form.

#### D. African Workshop for English-speaking countries (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 5-9 December 1994)

The workshop was jointly organized by UNSD and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) for selected English-speaking countries. ECA hosted the workshop. High level government officials from Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe attended the workshop. Delegates from Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United States of America also participated. The report of the workshop was published by ECA in English language. Country reports are available in hard copy and machine readable form also in English language.



E. African Workshop for French-speaking countries (Rabat, Morocco, 4-8 December 1995)

Jointly organized by UNSD and ECA for selected French-speaking countries of Africa, the workshop was hosted by the Government of Morocco. High rank officials from the following countries attended: Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Madagascar, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Senegal and Seychelles. Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, Sweden, the United States of America and UNFPA CST teams of Addis Ababa and Dakar also attended the workshop. The report of the workshop was issued in French with the collaboration of ECA. Country reports are available in hard copy and machine readable form in the French language.

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