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Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda for the expert segment\*

**Report on the evaluation of the Africa Programme on Accelerated  
Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (2010–2020)**

## **Evaluation of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems**

### **I. Introduction**

1. The need for strong civil registration and vital statistics systems is well recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with target 16.9 dedicated specifically to providing legal identity for all, including birth registration. Furthermore, the importance of statistics for development is highlighted in target 17.19, which is to be measured against the proportion of countries that have conducted at least one population and housing census in the past 10 years and have achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration by 2030. Civil registration and vital statistics are critical for achieving and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals: a total of 102 indicators relate in some fashion to people's access to birth, death and marriage certificates, a service that only civil registration and vital statistics systems can provide. Another 16 targets and 24 indicators require data that are best generated from a civil registration and vital statistics system,<sup>1</sup> and 7 of the 17 Goals and 17 of their corresponding indicators require data on causes of death from civil registration and vital

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\* CRMC/6/EXP/2022/1.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, *WHO Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Strategic Implementation Plan 2021–2025* (Geneva, 2021).



statistics systems for their measurement.<sup>2</sup> To truly ensure that no one is left behind, which is the goal of the 2030 Agenda, disaggregated population data will be needed to monitor progress, focusing on the most marginalized groups. Data from civil registration and vital statistics systems will be critical to fulfil this need and monitor 106 of the 232 population-based indicators of the Goals.<sup>3</sup>

2. In the past 15 years, there has been considerable growth in the interest in and commitments to strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems in low- and middle-income countries. However, progress has been slow and uneven. Very few African countries have civil registration and vital statistics systems that meet the United Nations definition of a civil registration and vital statistics system as a “continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events”.<sup>4</sup> These vital events are live births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages and divorces. In 2010, just one African country, Mauritius, a small island country with a population of slightly more than 1 million, was identified as having complete birth and death registration (that is, having a rate of registration above 90 per cent).<sup>5</sup> The importance of civil registration and the great need for vital statistics to inform policy were not widely recognized among political leaders on the continent. Not only did African countries not attempt to create demand for registration services, they were also not cognizant of the vital importance of civil registration data in planning for national development or in meeting the day-to-day needs of their citizens.

3. Previous attempts to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems were largely project-based and siloed ad hoc exercises focused on strengthening pieces of the system that aligned with the individual mandates of international agencies. For example, the United Nations Children’s Fund approached civil registration and vital statistics from a child rights perspective and was primarily concerned with birth registration. The World Health Organization often provided support to strengthen the medical certification of causes of death and improve data on causes of death. The Statistics Division of the United Nations and the United Nations Population Fund often focused on strengthening vital statistics data, but not necessarily from the perspective of improving access to legal documentation for the population, with the goal of greater completeness of information. Prior to 2010, contributions of regional organizations such as the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank and the African Union Commission had not been significant.

4. Civil registration and vital statistics are multisectoral in nature, with primary stakeholders ranging from civil registration authorities, ministries of health and national statistical offices to national information and communications technology agencies. Improving civil registration and vital statistics requires a systems-level approach that includes strengthening legislation and regulations, having clear standard operating procedures in place that are followed and enforced, providing the public with services that are free or affordable and accessible and do not require prohibitive paperwork or documentation, having links between government agencies that allow for the sharing of data in a timely manner, and analysing and disseminating data for policy use and to inform interventions in public health. Having a functioning robust system requires political commitment from leaders who both

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<sup>2</sup> University of Melbourne and Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative, “CRVS best-practice and advocacy: why the Sustainable Development Goal agenda needs strong civil registration and vital statistics systems”, Melbourne, Australia, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, *WHO Civil Registration and Vital Statistics*.

<sup>4</sup> *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System: Revision 3* (United Nations publication, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, “Status of civil registration and vital statistics in the SADC region: technical report”, 20 June 2010.

recognize the importance of civil registration and vital statistics in informing policy and health interventions and acknowledge the individual benefits to citizens.

5. It was thus recognized that a more holistic approach was needed to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa. To this end, a regional workshop on such systems was conducted in June 2009 in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, during which barriers to improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in the region were identified and recommendations were provided to build a framework for the future. One key recommendation was to devise a regional road map to guide improvements in civil registration and vital statistics in African countries. Following this recommendation, the first session of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration was held on 13 and 14 August 2010 in Addis Ababa. More than 40 African ministers in charge of civil registration attended the session, making commitments to improve civil registration and vital statistics in their respective countries, and adopted a number of declarations, thereby providing the policy foundation for the regional road map to be conceptualized into a regional programme.

6. As a result, the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems was established during the first session of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration. The programme is guided by the policy directives of the Conference, which is now institutionalized as a permanent forum of the African Union Commission that is convened every two years. The programme is steered by a secretariat based at the Economic Commission for Africa and by a partnership of United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the leading pan-African organizations. The partnership is referred to as the civil registration and vital statistics regional core group.<sup>6</sup>

7. The Africa Programme emerged from the need to bring together disparate civil registration and vital statistics initiatives on the continent into a common and consolidated policy and advocacy framework to better coordinate pan-African institutions and agencies working in the field of civil registration and vital statistics. The overall objective of the Africa Programme is to provide management and programmatic guidance to the regional agenda of reforming and improving civil registration and vital statistics systems. Specifically, the regional programme aims to provide guidance on institutional and operational linkages, workflows and results-oriented management mechanisms in a more comprehensive and holistic manner, encompassing the interdisciplinary and intersectoral interfaces of civil registration and vital statistics systems. The Africa Programme is based on international standards, principles and recommendations relating to civil registration and vital statistics, while being guided by the policy directives of African ministers in charge of civil registration.

8. The Africa Programme is anchored in the following major guiding principles: (a) promoting country ownership and leadership; (b) promoting coordinated approaches and partnerships at the regional and country levels; (c) promoting phased, holistic and integrated approaches; (d) strengthening and building the capacity of national and regional civil registration and vital statistics institutions; (e) promoting innovation, research and the sharing of knowledge; (f) encouraging the use of register-based vital statistics for evidence-based policymaking; and (g) bringing international best practices to Africa.

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<sup>6</sup> The core group is composed of the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, the Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Data for Health Initiative and the International Organization of la Francophonie.

9. The Africa Programme began under the medium-term plan, developed by the African Centre for Statistics of the Economic Commission for Africa in close collaboration with the African Development Bank (see E/ECA/CMRCR/2/EXP/4). The medium-term plan covered the period from 2010 to 2015, with the goal to support African Governments in building sustainable and accountable public institutions and in measuring and monitoring their respective development efforts.

10. In 2016, a review was undertaken to assess the progress made, and a monitoring report was developed<sup>7</sup> in which progress was identified and an assessment was made of the gaps that needed to be addressed for the development of the strategic plan covering the period from 2017 to 2021. In the monitoring report, it was indicated that about half of African countries had completed a comprehensive assessment of their civil registration and vital statistics system and about three quarters had a mechanism for coordinating their civil registration and vital statistics, but in about half of those countries the mechanism was not functional. Furthermore, almost all African countries had some legal framework for civil registration, and most had a dedicated budget to maintain their civil registration and vital statistics system; however, the relevant legislation in many countries was outdated or not in line with international standards, and the majority of countries indicated that the budget was inadequate to maintain a fully functioning system. The majority of countries also indicated that their systems lacked adequate human resources and that the publication of vital statistics was not in line with international recommendations.

11. Recognizing that there was a need to shift the focus of the Africa Programme from advocacy and communication, which were necessary in the preparatory phase conducted from 2010 to 2015, to capacity-building efforts to meet the needs and demands of countries, the Africa Programme developed a strategic plan covering the period from 2017 to 2021.<sup>8</sup> The strategic plan was developed around the vision statement “everyone visible in Africa”, with the aim of achieving the complete and timely registration of vital events. The strategic plan comprised three strategic outcomes, including the provision of legal rights and privileges to individuals, the production of vital statistics that could be used and trusted for policymaking and improved governance of public administration services. The strategic plan was estimated to cost \$25,737,600 for the period from 2017 to 2021.

12. Following the conclusion of the second phase of the strategic plan and 10 years of progress made in the implementation of the Africa Programme, the secretariat of the Africa Programme, supported by the African Development Bank and the African Union Commission, undertook an evaluation of the programme. The present report contains a review of the status of African countries with regard to their civil registration and vital statistics systems, an evaluation of how well the objectives of the Africa Programme have been met, a summary of shortcomings and major barriers and recommendations to consider in developing the second phase of Africa Programme over the next 10 years.

13. The main objective of the present evaluation is to take stock of the status of countries with regard to civil registration and vital statistics, to assess the extent to which the programme objectives have been attained over the past 10 years, to identify the programme’s strengths and

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, *Report on the Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Africa: Outcome of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems Monitoring Framework*, Addis Ababa, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> See “Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics costed strategic plan 2017–2021”, report prepared for the fourth session of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, held in Nouakchott from 4 to 8 December 2017.

weaknesses and to draw lessons on improvements that can be made, which will help to shape the next regional strategy and action plan.

14. The aim of the evaluation is to assess the contribution of the Africa Programme to the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics policies, processes and methods, to propose recommendations on the strategic direction and to enhance the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa by informing future civil registration and vital statistics initiatives and the second phase of the Africa Programme. The evaluation serves to provide accountability to the Conference and other stakeholders involved in civil registration and vital statistics in Africa.

15. The evaluation has been developed on the basis of the priorities set by the Africa Programme over the past 10 years, as outlined in previous strategic and medium-term plans and resolutions and recommendations adopted at various sessions of the Conference. A high-level and non-exhaustive list of questions has been established to guide the evaluation.

## **II. Methodology**

16. The present report contains both an evaluation of the Africa Programme and a review of the current status of countries with regard to civil registration and vital statistics systems, which was also used to inform the evaluation of the programme. Components of the evaluation were determined by mapping key activities and objectives established in the medium-term plan, strategic plan and resolutions adopted at the sessions of the Conference. Nine key thematic areas were identified from the mapping exercise, as follows:

- Civil registration laws
- National coordination mechanisms
- System improvements through the development of national civil registration and vital statistics plans
- Political commitment to civil registration and vital statistics
- Completeness of birth and death registration
- Production of vital statistics
- Use of vital statistics
- Innovations in technology
- Strengthening of the secretariat of the Africa Programme

17. Information in the present report was drawn from four components (questionnaires, interviews, a desk review and data sets from existing databases). Each of those components will be discussed in the following sections.

## **A. Questionnaires**

18. Questionnaires were developed for three distinct groups: (a) national civil registration and vital statistics committees; (b) members of the core group; and (c) former members of the core group and other development partners that are familiar with the Africa Programme.

### **1. Questionnaire sent to national civil registration and vital statistics committees**

19. This questionnaire, administered as a Microsoft Word document, was composed of the following five components:

(a) Questions on the progress made by countries in the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems;

(b) Questions on the political commitment to civil registration and vital statistics;

(c) Questions pertaining to the country's engagement in the Africa Programme;

(d) General evaluation questions regarding the Africa Programme;

(e) Questions regarding recommendations for the second phase of the Africa Programme.

20. Questions on the progress made by countries covered eight of the nine key thematic areas mentioned above to achieve a better understanding of the current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems on the continent and to better understand what has been achieved since the inception of the Africa Programme. Questions pertaining to political commitment were focused on the inclusion of civil registration and vital statistics in national development strategies, statistical development plans and the plans of line ministries to better understand countries' political commitment to civil registration and vital statistics. If civil registration and vital statistics were given priority in a national development strategy, it could be assumed that there was political will to improve the system and that it was seen as a priority in that country. The section pertaining to countries' engagement in the Africa Programme contained both quantitative and qualitative questions aimed at understanding how well the programme supported countries in improving their civil registration and vital statistics systems in a variety of areas. General evaluation questions were focused on, among other things, which best practices should be continued, what lessons had been learned and whether there had been any missed opportunities. The final section contained a request for feedback from countries on priority areas in civil registration and vital statistics to inform the direction and key objectives of the second phase of the Africa Programme for the period from 2023 to 2027.

21. As at mid-August 2022, two thirds of countries (36 of the 54 surveyed) had returned the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, countries were asked about their familiarity with the Africa Programme. If a country responds that they are not familiar with the programme, their responses may be considered for exclusion in the final analysis. At the time of writing the present report, no country had selected this response.

22. At the time of writing the present report, the following countries had returned the questionnaire: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea,

Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Togo, Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

## **2. Questionnaire sent to members of the core group**

23. This questionnaire was administered to all members of the core group via Google Forms. Many agencies to whom the questionnaire was sent have multiple regional offices within Africa and also have members from their headquarters participate in the core group. Thus, if an agency had more than one core group member, it was requested that all members complete the questionnaire in order to receive subregional, regional and global perspectives on the matter. The questionnaire comprised seven sections, as follows:

- (a) Questions about the respondent and the organization;
- (b) Questions about the functionality of the core group and how well it has achieved its objectives;
- (c) Questions about the secretariat of the Africa Programme, including its strengths and weaknesses;
- (d) Questions about the programming initiatives of the Africa Programme and how well the objectives of the mid-term plan and strategic plan have been met;
- (e) Questions about how well the Africa Programme has supported countries in improving their civil registration and vital statistics systems in a variety of areas;
- (f) (Questions regarding how well the Africa Programme has achieved its objectives overall;
- (g) Questions regarding recommendations for the next strategic plan and the second phase of the Africa Programme.

24. At the time of writing the present report, 10 respondents covering nine entities had completed the questionnaire. Responses had been received from the following key entities that regularly participate in meetings of the core group: the United Nations Population Fund, Vital Strategies, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the World Bank, the Economic Commission for Africa, the World Health Organization, the African Development Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund and the African Union Commission.

## **3. Questionnaire sent to former members of the core group and partners of the Africa Programme**

25. The questionnaire, administered as a Microsoft Word document, was sent to former members of the core group who were instrumental in the inception and early years of the Africa Programme and to partners who regularly collaborate with the Africa Programme. The questionnaire consisted of the following four questions:

- (a) What are the greatest achievements and strengths of the programme?
- (b) What are some of the major challenges and weaknesses of the programme?

(c) What are your suggestions as to how any of the above challenges could be addressed?

(d) What should be the key focus areas of the programme in the future? How should the programme evolve in the coming 10 years?

26. At the time of writing the present report, four questionnaires had been returned with detailed responses.

## **B. Interviews**

27. Video interviews were conducted with former members of the core group who were instrumental in the inception and early years of the Africa Programme. Additional video interviews are also planned with high-level staff of the pan-African institutions and a few country representatives from the Bureau of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration. Questions asked during interviews with former members of the core group and current staff of the secretariat of the Africa Programme are expected to be based loosely on the four questions included in the questionnaire sent to former members of the core group and other development partners. At the time of writing the present report, four former members of the core group had been interviewed.

## **C. Desk review**

28. A comprehensive desk review was conducted on the initiatives and activities related to civil registration and vital statistics undertaken between 2010 and 2022. The review included all declarations adopted by the Conference, the medium-term plan, the strategic plan, the monitoring report issued in 2017, feedback from countries from the expert group meeting of African Registrars General held in Kigali in 2021, questionnaires related to capacity-building, press releases and meeting summaries. External resources and reports were also consulted, including reports developed by the World Health Organization as part of the SCORE for Health Data Technical Package; the report of the Statistics Division of the United Nations on the status of civil registration and vital statistics in the Southern African Development Community; a report of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation entitled *COVID-19 in Africa: A Challenging Road to Recovery*; the Africa Integrity Indicators, which measure the extent to which birth and death certificates are available within 30 days free of charge; and reports of the International Development Research Centre and other partners in the field of civil registration and vital statistics.

## **D. Existing databases**

29. Data from the Statistics Division of the United Nations on the completeness of birth and death registration were accessed for use alongside the self-reporting conducted by countries and to bridge gaps when countries did not return the questionnaire. The database of the United Nations Children's Fund on birth registration was consulted for comparison. Data from the World Health Organization on the completeness of causes of death information were also accessed.



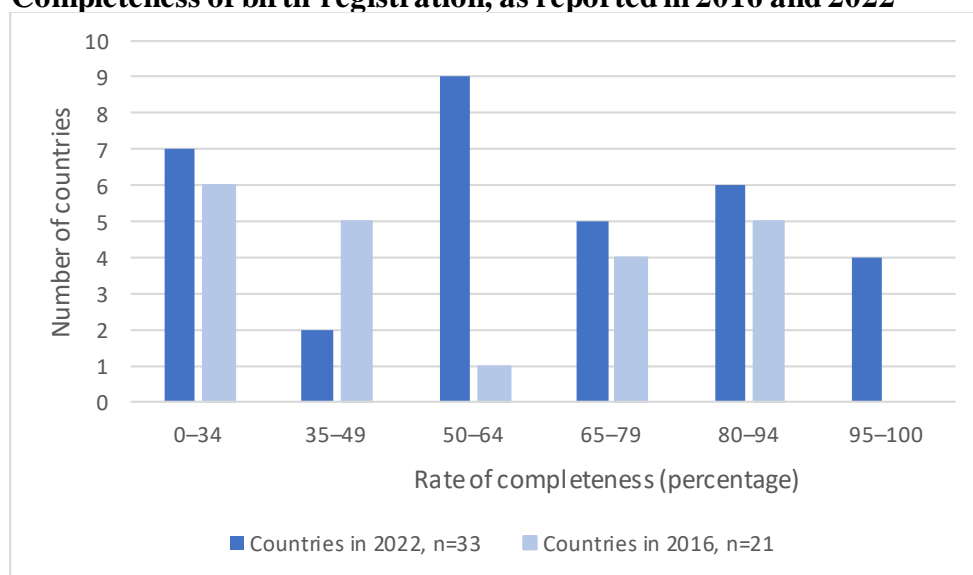
### III. Preliminary findings

#### A. Completeness of birth registration

30. The number of countries that reported data on the completeness of birth registration increased by more than 50 per cent between 2016 and 2022. This figure alone reflects increased awareness of the importance of civil registration and vital statistics and increased capacity to produce vital statistics, even if the rates of completeness are still low. In 2016, no countries reported having a rate of completeness of birth registration between 95 and 100 per cent; however, in 2022, four countries reported a rate of completeness in this range. Completeness categories with rates of 50 per cent and higher all increased between 2016 and 2022 (see figure I).

Figure I

#### Completeness of birth registration, as reported in 2016 and 2022

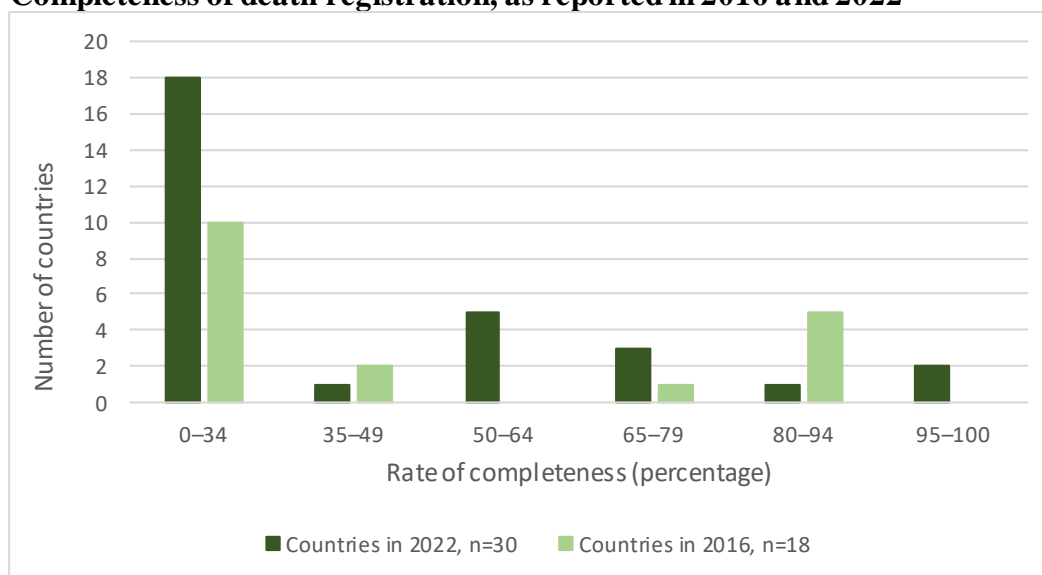


Note: n = sample size.

#### B. Completeness of death registration

31. The number of countries that reported data on the completeness of death registration increased by more than 67 per cent between 2016 and 2022. Similar to birth registration, while no countries reported a rate of completeness of death registration above 95 per cent in 2016, two countries reported a rate of completeness in this range in 2022 (see figure II).

Figure II  
**Completeness of death registration, as reported in 2016 and 2022**



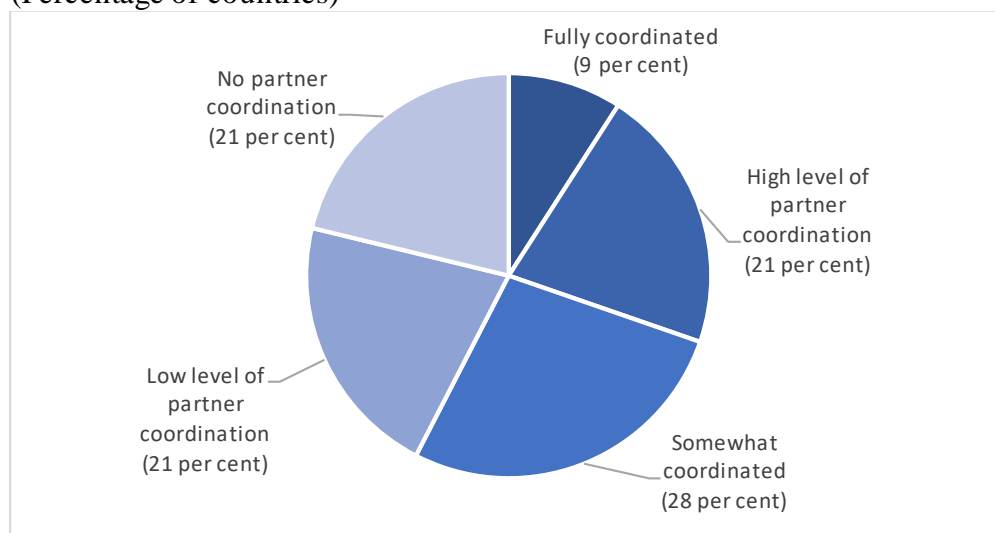
*Note:* n = sample size.

32. Because so few countries are able to produce estimates, countries were not asked for estimates of the completeness of registration of marriages, divorces or adoptions. While these indicators are critical to monitoring progress in completeness, the act of estimating denominators for such calculations is prohibitive for many countries.

### **C. Evaluating the core tenants of the Africa Programme: partner coordination, mobilization of resources and technical support**

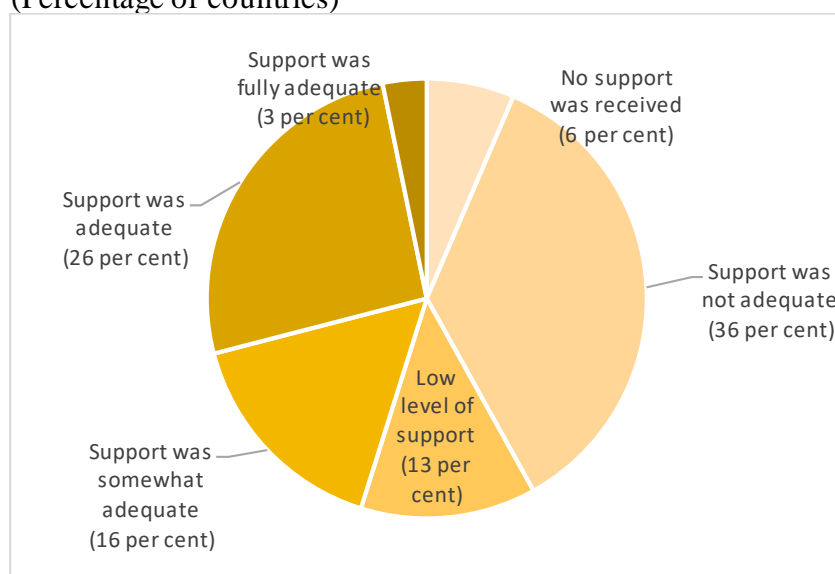
33. While almost one in three countries reported a high level of partner coordination in the area of civil registration and vital statistics, 42 per cent reported that there had been no or only a low level of partner coordination, indicating that improvement was needed in this area (see figure III). Similarly, one third of respondents from the core group said that there was a low level of partner coordination within countries, and the remaining two thirds believed that partners were only somewhat coordinated.

**Figure III**  
**Perceptions among countries surveyed regarding partner coordination in the field of civil registration and vital statistics**  
(Percentage of countries)



34. More than half of countries indicated that support for the mobilization of resources had not been adequate or that no support or only a low level of support had been received (see figure IV). Among respondents from the core group, 25 per cent also felt that support in this area had not been adequate, but a higher proportion than country respondents, 63 per cent, felt that support had been somewhat adequate. As more than half of countries indicated that support had not been sufficient and as many indicated the need for resource mobilization in their qualitative responses about their needs and the future objectives of the programme, this should be a key area for consideration in the future.

**Figure IV**  
**Perceptions among countries surveyed regarding support for the mobilization of resources for civil registration and vital statistics**  
(Percentage of countries)



35. While there was a divide among countries regarding whether technical support had been sufficient, with 36 per cent disagreeing and 43 per cent agreeing (see figure V), a clear majority

of countries indicated that the technical support that they had received had been useful (63 per cent) (see figure VI).

Figure V

**Perceptions among countries surveyed regarding whether technical support had been sufficient**

(Percentage of countries)

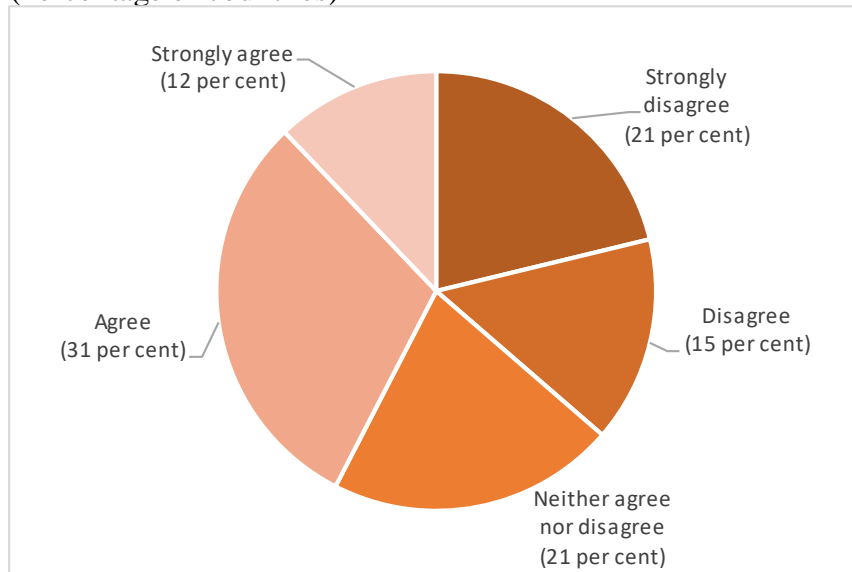
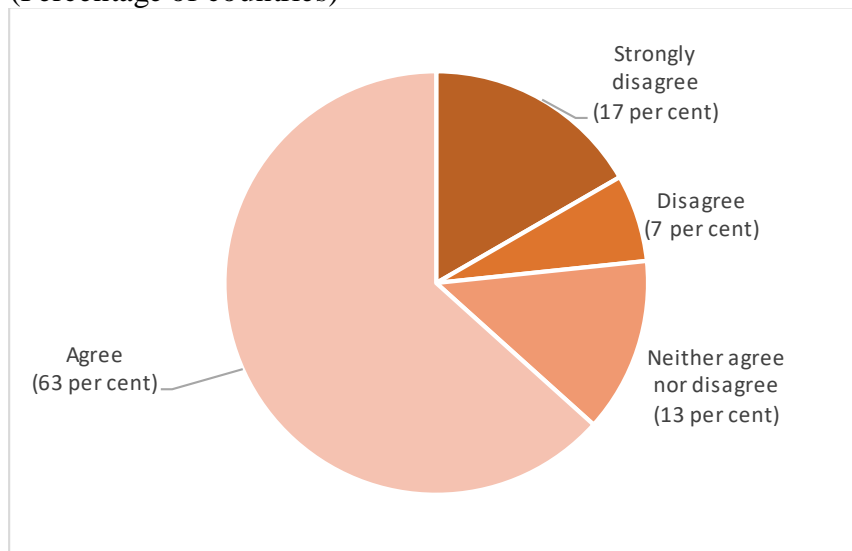


Figure VI

**Perceptions among countries surveyed regarding whether technical support had been useful**

(Percentage of countries)



## **D. Achievements and shortcomings of the Africa Programme**

36. The primary achievements of the Africa Programme identified by countries, members and former members of the core group and development partners were as follows:

(a) The programme raised awareness of the importance of civil registration and vital statistics and placed it on the development agenda in a way that it had never been prioritized before, both among government agencies, citizens, and regional and global development partners;

(b) While global development narratives were generated using a top-down approach, the programme demonstrated the value of a more ground-up approach by using empirical evidence and African voices, thereby changing the way global actors in the arena collaborated;

(c) The programme increased political commitment to civil registration and vital statistics at the national, regional and global levels;

(d) The programme increased technical capacity in countries in the area of civil registration and vital statistics;

(e) Completeness of birth and death registration improved over the period of programme operation;

(f) The programme supported the sharing of best practices in the area of civil registration and vital statistics and provided useful tools and guidelines, in particular at the grass roots level, where countries shared with other countries the practical measures they were taking to improve civil registration and vital statistics, thereby cultivating a rich source of information in relevant domains;

(g) The programme improved partner coordination of activities related to civil registration and vital statistics at the national, regional, and global levels;

(h) On an operational level, among the 91 activities outlined in the 2017 strategic plan, 62 were completed (68 per cent), four were partially completed (4 per cent), and nine have not yet been completed (10 per cent). Another 16 (18 per cent) require further investigation to understand the extent of completion. While the majority of activities were completed, further analysis is needed to understand how effective they were in achieving the strategic objectives.

37. The primary shortcomings of the Africa Programme identified by countries, members and former members of the core group and development partners were as follows:

(a) The mobilization of resources was insufficient, both for the provision of support to countries and for the strengthening of the secretariat;

(b) Countries indicated that they had not received enough support in terms of technical capacity-building to strengthen their civil registration and vital statistics systems;

(c) Current and former members of the core group indicated that a more developed structure for the secretariat was needed in order to maintain momentum and strengthen leadership of the programme;

(d) There was a lack of follow-up and administrative support to monitor progress and ensure that goals and objectives were being achieved in a timely manner and to the fullest extent;

(e) There remained a lack of partner coordination, which hindered the achievement of the goals and objectives of the programme.

38. The programme was instrumental in influencing development actors to recognize the importance of civil registration and vital statistics in the global agenda and in increasing the political commitment of countries to strengthen their corresponding systems. Furthermore, the programme facilitated collaboration among development partners in the area of civil registration and vital statistics, and it achieved a degree of harmonization of partner activities not previously seen on such a large scale. However, as the programme progressed, number of its objectives and activities increased, while resource mobilization did not keep pace, which made it challenging to achieve full registration of vital events in all of Africa.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

39. The power of the Conference of Ministers and their ministerial declarations cannot be understated; both are critical to the success of the programme and are the rudder that steers the programme's goals and objectives. Given the above, the convening of the Conference should continue, with the feasibility and utility of convening biennially to be discussed or adjusted accordingly. Resolutions adopted by the Conference should continue to guide the programme's objectives to ensure a country-led approach and a programme that is developed by African countries for African countries.

40. The process for drafting resolutions should be considered for review. In the past, the resolutions have been almost too numerous to count, and certainly too numerous to track given the programme's lack of funding for staff dedicated specifically to the programme within the secretariat. Furthermore, many resolutions did not build on the achievements of, or remain consistent with, previous resolutions, which further complicated follow-up to and tracking of achievements. In order to make progress in the area of civil registration and vital statistics, it is necessary for resolutions to be more focused and consistent and fewer in number. It is recommended that the Conference of Ministers investigate the possibility of establishing rules of engagement, defined by the ministers, to determine what goes into recommendations, what is the process for developing the outcome document, who oversees the processing of the outcome document, who determines what goes into a resolution and how is a resolution defined, and how will the achievement of resolutions be monitored? Having such rules will better streamline the number and scope of resolutions, thereby allowing the programme to better support countries in strengthening their civil registration and vital statistics systems through the development of guidelines and tools to support achievement of the goals set out in those resolutions.

41. Similarly, it is recommended that the programme considers a more process-based and step-by-step approach for phase II that consists of a few high-level goals, achievable and measurable objectives, and mid-way benchmarks. Starting with a smaller circle of objectives and activities is important for two reasons: (a) if funding remains elusive for positions within the programme secretariat, it will not be possible to provide support for achieving the programme objectives or the goals set out in numerous ministerial resolutions, nor will it be possible to follow up on and track their achievement; (b) future ministerial declarations will

likely modify or add to the scope of the programme, and too many objectives and activities will result in lower-quality or partial completion.

42. Monitoring and evaluation of the secretariat should also be consistently performed over time. While the secretariat continually supports countries, there is no clear public record documenting their achievements. The lack of pre-defined reporting mechanism been exacerbated by the lack of a knowledge repository and the absence of a dedicated website. It recommended that ECA or another institution investigate hosting the knowledge repository on its website or consider an architecture that could easily be ported over to an existing website should dedicated funding for a knowledge repository cease in the future.

43. It is highly recommended that funding be acquired to support staff dedicated to the programme within the secretariat. It is not possible to achieve the goal of “Everyone visible in Africa” without a staff dedicated full-time to this objective within the secretariat. Strengthening capacity through secondment of staff to the section at the African Union Commission that supports the programme should be considered to help build a solid support structure for the secretariat. Likewise, it is critical that the core group become strengthened through formalizing the draft memorandum of understanding developed to outline the framework for collaboration and strengthen communication and planning among members. However, barring the possibility of funding additional full-time staff within the secretariat, the programme should consider the suggestion articulated by one core group member, that the “Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems does not have to the shoulder the whole strategic plan. Rather, it should more actively coordinate regionally and support Governments at the national level to steer donors and partners to underresourced aspects of the plan. The secretariat should be very selective about what it takes on as direct responsibilities. There is not the capacity within the secretariat to do it all alone”.

44. Finally, the programme should carefully consider where it sits within the development landscape. In recent years, national identification initiatives have taken front and centre stage in the development arena, potentially refocusing countries’ attention and resources away from civil registration and vital statistics towards national identification systems. While the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda aims to take a holistic approach and acknowledges civil registration as the foundation for the acquisition of legal identity, the impact of broadening attention beyond civil registration to also include national identification systems remains to be determined. However, it is widely acknowledged that both national identification systems and civil registration and vital statistics systems benefit from being intrinsically linked. Thus, there is an opportunity to better promote and strengthen civil registration and vital statistics through the legal identity agenda and the promotion of national identification systems.

45. Another opportunity has arisen in the wake of the recent coronavirus disease pandemic. While the pandemic is still fresh on everyone’s minds, and the importance of death registration for mortality estimation and cause of death data for public health monitoring are well-recognized, the programme should capitalize on this momentum and appeal to donors and Governments alike to promote the of strengthening of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

46. Lastly, pursuant to target 16.9 and indicator 17.19.2 under the 2030 Agenda, countries should provide universal legal identity for all and achieve at 100 per cent birth and 80 per cent death registration, a feat that cannot be achieved without robust civil registration systems. The programme will need to be strategic to ensure that civil registration remains at the forefront and is not lost within the broader legal identify agenda in Africa, while still capitalizing on the

synergies with and momentum of the legal identity and national identification agendas, and at the same time promoting the importance of data that are critical for informing public health policy to achieving the goal of “Everyone visible in Africa”.

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