

The role of research in strengthening CRVS systems



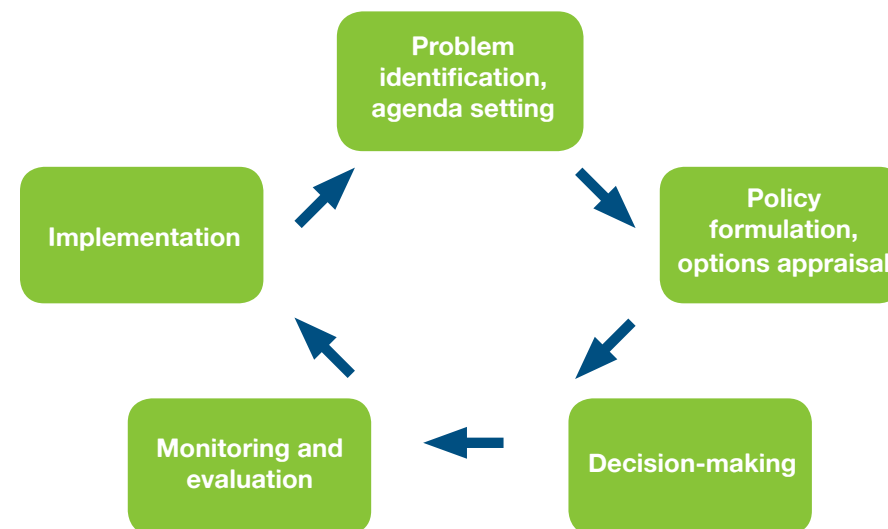


As evidenced by the Declaration adopted at the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific to 'Get every one in the picture' and the proclamation of the 'Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade' for 2015-2024, there is growing interest in strengthening country CRVS systems.

However, a major obstacle to achieving the goals of the CRVS decade are the weaknesses of civil registration systems in many low- and middle-income countries struggling to provide a registration service that is both accessible and acceptable to the population. At the same time, country vital statistics systems are often inadequate in meeting the needs of policy-makers and practitioners for reliable and timely health and demographic data.

Research in the CRVS policy cycle

If policymakers are going to make the decisions to strengthen their CRVS systems, they need to know whether they are investing resources wisely and optimally. Research can help them take effective actions at each stage of the policy cycle.





Research can also help identify topics requiring the attention of decision-makers and is critical for exploring options or alternative courses of action for addressing priority problems. At the decision-making stage, research can inform alternative courses of action by offering evidence of lessons learnt from the past or other settings. Once decisions are taken and put into practice, research is conducted to assess effectiveness in terms of intentions and results by examining impact and outcomes.

CRVS issues and challenges that research can address

Country experiences identified a number of challenges faced by decision makers seeking to strengthen CRVS systems. Among others, these include:

- Introducing effective and fair incentives for registration and ensuring that penalties for non-registration do not impede the realization of rights, such as access to health and education.
- Working with communities to raise awareness of the purpose and benefits of civil registration and encourage registration of vital events.

- Understanding the dimensions and causes of weaknesses in CRVS systems
- Identifying barriers and bottlenecks to functional CVRS systems and remedial actions to overcome them.
- Developing capacities for high quality registration and certification of vital events.
- Strengthening capacities for quality assurance, compilation, analysis and use of vital statistics.
- Testing and evaluating potential innovations for CRVS, such as use of ICT and mobile registration.
- Harnessing multisectoral initiatives, such as the introduction of individual identity systems for which CRVS can provide the underpinning.
- Documenting cross-country implementation experiences and lessons learnt, on which those working to improve CRVS can draw.
- Ensuring that the lessons of success and failure are communicated and acted upon.
- Generating knowledge, enabling practitioners to filter and make sense of available information on CRVS, and supporting the translation of knowledge into action.



We are all researchers

Research is not confined to academia. Anyone engaged in the different aspects of CRVS can contribute. Research not only encompasses formal scientific methods of investigation, but also covers a compilation of experiences and lessons learnt. Indeed, such experiences are often the most instructive for policy makers.

Moreover, research also covers the use of evidence and knowledge to influence policy, programming, and planning across multiple sectors. Research for CRVS should be both locally relevant and also applicable to regional and global utility.

Three main types of research are envisaged for CRVS:

Operational research: Addresses issues of concern on national and local levels of action; such as a local registration office or a local health facility where births and deaths occur. The findings of such research are mainly relevant to specific, local contexts and circumstances.

Implementation research: Predominantly of use to higher-level managers of civil registration and vital statistics; for example, when considering how to roll out a large-scale improvement effort. While contextual factors remain important, the findings can often be generalized to other settings within the country or even for other countries.

Systems-wide research: Primarily aimed at improving weaknesses in CRVS systems as a whole and is of most use to those who manage or need to design policies, programmes, and business processes for CRVS. Systems-wide research requires a high degree of cross-sectorial collaboration and use of interdisciplinary methods.



From research to action



The lessons learnt from research and country experiences in CRVS – successes and failures – should be documented and shared. Findings should be compiled, interpreted and made readily accessible to users in a variety of formats for the purposes of policy, programming and practice. It is essential to develop a knowledge translation strategy ensuring that the findings of research and lessons learned from countries are brought together and analysed for the benefit of those working to build CRVS at the country level. There is immense potential to harness mutual sharing and learning through South-South Cooperation and peer-to-peer interactions.

Stimulating CRVS research

In order to encourage research supporting CRVS development, country decision-makers, development partners, and researchers should collaborate to ensure that priorities for research are included in country CRVS plans, and in requests for support to development partners. Regional workshops can be useful mechanisms for bringing together research practitioners and CRVS implementers adapting research methods to country needs. Workshops can also enable the sharing of research findings and lessons learnt.

Current regional research initiatives underway include:



UN ESCAP

- Regional analysis on CRVS system status and progress
- Analysis of key steps in improving CRVS and benefits of well functioning systems
- Country case studies



World Health Organisation

- Improving the availability and quality of mortality statistics;
- Capacity development strategies for cause of death certification and coding;
- Piloting and promoting the utilization of web-based, electronic vital event notification systems;
- Piloting the utilization of social networks on the ground and community health workers for vital event notification.



IUSSP

- Potential of data linkage studies to improve the completeness and quality of vital statistics from CRVS.



PLAN International

- The role of CSOs in CRVS campaigns;
- Remote and underserved populations;
- Country case studies and examples of best practice.



UNICEF

- Economic, social and cultural barriers;
- Levels, trends and differentials in birth registration.



UNHCR

- Registration for marginalized and hard to reach group.



Bloomberg Data 4 Health

- Capacity building for CRVS systems;
- Strengthening CR systems for birth and death notification and registration; Improving cause of death information for community and facility deaths;
- High quality vital statistics.



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