



## Making the Invisible Visible: CRVS as a basis to meeting the 2030 Gender agenda

**Event:** High-Level Panel (HLP) and technical consultations on gender and Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)

**When:** 26 February 2018, 9:00 to 17:00

**Where:** International Development Research Centre (IDRC) 150 Kent Street in Ottawa, Canada

**Hosted by:** The Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems, IDRC

### OBJECTIVES:

1. To inspire a global commitment to integrating gender issues in civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems.
2. To showcase promising ideas, preliminary efforts and realistic opportunities to address gender issues in CRVS systems.
3. To catalyze the conversation about sustainable solutions at the political, policy and programmatic levels for generating reliable, real time, disaggregated data to inform policies and programs for improved lives of all.

### RATIONALE:

The Sustainable Development Goals seek to eliminate poverty and create better life conditions for everyone. For this, gender equality is a precondition. To help achieve gender equality and empower women, it is critical to have data that are reliable, timely, and disaggregated by age and sex. The data must also capture limitations on and inequalities of women's rights, both *de jure* and *de facto*. Only then will data serve to guide better policies and programs, particularly for the underserved and hard to reach, the overwhelming majority of whom are women and children. However, existing data gaps from incomplete or failing CRVS systems hamper the ability of governments and partners to achieve the ambitious 2030 agenda. Gender inequality in civil registration and vital statistics often starts at birth, continues in marriage and old age, and persists into death, as women's deaths are less likely to be registered. Taken together, this makes it difficult for governments to plan appropriate policies and programs across the life course.

Birth registration is a fundamental human right, and an important tool for social protection. And yet, only 25 percent of the world's population lives in countries where more than 90 percent of births and deaths are registered. Most of those countries are high-income countries.<sup>1</sup>The Convention on the Rights of the Child

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<sup>1</sup> [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/70889/1/WHO\\_IER\\_HSI\\_12.1\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/70889/1/WHO_IER_HSI_12.1_eng.pdf)





adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989 provides the fundamental right of any child, without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his/her parent's or legal guardian's race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national ethnic or social origin, disability or other status to be registered immediately after birth, to have a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, to the extent possible, to know his or her parents and to be brought up by them (*Article 7 paragraph 1 corroborated with Article 2 paragraph 1*). The birth certificate represents a vital prerequisite for the child to be able to enjoy the rights set forth in the Convention. A birth certificate is also a prerequisite for many other important legal and identity documents – including passports and adult identity documents. Birth registration, and therefore accurate knowledge of a child's age, can also contribute to reducing child marriage, in particular that of girl child.

While boys' and girls' births are registered almost equally, legislation or custom often requires the father or male representative of the family to register the birth. This poses a serious barrier for women to register the births of their children, particularly women who are unmarried, have been victims of violence, have fled conflict, and are on the move. Birth registration by right should be independent of the marital status of parents or identity of father but the reality is different. Hence, the most vulnerable children fall prey to these legal dispositions that are often more than half a century old and no longer reflect the social dynamics and the rapid change we are witnessing.

Gender inequalities are more pronounced when it comes to marriage and divorce registration. While societies have long regulated customs and norms around marriage, the recognition of this vital event by civil law is often not sought, for reasons sometimes attributed to ignorance of the benefits of marriage registration, economic barriers or others. Marriage (and divorce) registration are effective tools for women's empowerment, and for facilitating access to social benefits and social protection. For example, a marriage certificate is evidence of a woman's ability to legally claim her inheritance rights in the event of a spouse's death, while a divorce certificate facilitates access to a pension, alimony, child support, and a fair share of the assets acquired in the marriage union. While improving birth and death registration tends to be high on the CRVS political agenda, improving marriage registration is often not a priority, making it difficult for women to secure their rights between birth and death.

It is, however, in death registration that women are the most invisible. Less than half of all deaths in the world are registered. Of those registered deaths, cause of death information is often not captured. More troubling is that male deaths are more likely to be registered than women. For example, Romesh Silva has found that 65 percent of male deaths are reported in Morocco in comparison to 35 percent of female deaths<sup>2</sup>. Death registration is important because it closes an individual's legal identity. Where deaths are not registered, the dead remain legally alive, making it impossible for spouses, children and families to inherit, or for the surviving spouse to legally remarry – depriving them of assets, reducing family income, and increasing poverty. It also artificially inflates a country's population on paper, compromising effective governance and

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/26/presentations/Session3/silva-DDMs-slides-2016-11-03.pdf>



policy planning. Importantly, if the deaths of women and girls go unregistered, it hinders governments' abilities to identify preventable causes of death, and develop targeted policies and programs aimed at reducing the deaths of women or girls.

Further, producing accurate sex-disaggregated mortality statistics becomes an impossible task, because data either do not exist, or are unreliable. This forces countries to rely on modeled data based on surveys, which are not only costly, but depend on sampling, may be compromised by other issues of sex biases<sup>3</sup>, and are not appropriate for monitoring short-term changes. Most importantly, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the surveys considerably delay program definition and implementation. Real-time reliable death registration, capturing the causes of death could make the difference between life and death – especially in epidemics with high mortality rates, such as the recent Ebola crisis in West Africa, and the 2010 polio outbreak in the Republic of Congo, where several people died before authorities could establish the cause of death with support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and mount an emergency response.<sup>4</sup> Accurate and timely death registration, particularly capturing age, sex, geographic location along with causes of death, could be a game changer in the thinking, articulation and implementation of evidence-based health and economic policies that are based on real time reliable evidence and address issues that communities and societies are facing.

In addition to understanding the gender implications and root causes of disparities in CRVS registration rates, it is important to recognize the legal frameworks in which they exist. Mandating registration activities by law accompanied by rules and regulations is essential for the efficient management, operation, and maintenance of CRVS systems. Legislation helps to ensure the completeness of registration and to improve the accuracy of information held in the civil record. Additionally, a legal framework for civil registration plays a critical role in delivering the basic human rights outlined in United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Legal frameworks and legislation should be evaluated within a country to determine whether they contain gender biases that negatively impact women and girls. For example, as noted in *Every Child's Birth Right*, in countries such as Nepal, Nicaragua, and Bhutan, children cannot be registered permanently without the father's or grandfather's name.<sup>5</sup> A review of marriage registration laws in six countries prepared for Data2X by Aparna Polavarapu showed a common thread: each legal system fails to adequately recognize forms of marriage embraced by the population and in doing so, denies women in these marriages important rights.<sup>6</sup>

## FORMAT:

The Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems, along with its partners – including governments, United Nations agencies and civil society – are pleased to host a High-Level Panel (HLP) and technical consultation sessions on gender and CRVS. This event will be divided into two components: the first component is a high-level

<sup>3</sup> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1740-9713.2016.00899.x/full>

<sup>4</sup> <http://pubmedcentralcanada.ca/pmcc/articles/PMC4663667/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/Embargoed\\_11\\_Dec\\_Birth\\_Registration\\_report\\_low\\_res.pdf](https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/Embargoed_11_Dec_Birth_Registration_report_low_res.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Gendered-Dimensions-of-Marriage-and-Divorce-Registration-Laws-in-Africa.pdf>



panel that will aim to inspire a global commitment to integrating gender issues in Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems. The second component consist of technical meetings to discuss the status of the field, evaluate opportunities and challenges, and identify priority and actionable areas that could help strengthen CRVS systems to better capture the vital events of women and girls. By making the invisible visible – both in vital event registration and consequently at the policy level – efforts in this direction can help contribute to achieving gender equality goals.

## **AGENDA:**

### **MORNING SESSION**

#### **Welcoming (9:00-10:30)**

Introductory remarks by IDRC hosts

Opening speeches by:

1. Jean Lebel, President, International Development Research Centre (TBC)
2. Celina Caesar-Chavannes, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Canada (TBC)
3. Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (TBC)
4. Lisa Bersales, National Statistician and Civil Registrar General, Philippines Statistics Authority, Philippines
5. Jean-Louis Ville, Head of Unit for Governance, Democracy, Gender and Human Rights, European Commission

#### **Coffee Break (10:30-11:00)**



### High-Level Panel (11:00-12:30)

**Panel Chair and Discussant:** Montasser Kamal, Program Leader, IDRC

Panelists:

1. Engendering Population Data: the case of CRVS Systems - Gaps in gender equality – Rachel Snow, Chief, Population and Development Branch, United Nations Population Fund
2. Role of UN: Francesca Perucci, Assistant Director, the United Nations Statistics Division
3. Role of donors: Haishan Fu, Director of Development Data Group, World Bank
4. Role of regional organizations: Oliver Chinganya, Director of African Center for Statistics, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
5. Role of national government: Jaime Bulande Guta, National Director of Civil Registration and Notaries – Directorate of Civil Registration and Notaries, Mozambique (TBC)

**Lunch break (12:30-13:30)**

### AFTERNOON SESSION

#### Technical Session 1: Research and Strategy (13:30-14:45)

**Moderator:** Irina Dincu, IDRC Center of Excellence for CRVS

Panelists:

1. Scene setting on issues of gender and CRVS: Mayra Buvinic, Senior Fellow, Data2X
2. An example of a country addressing CRVS gender issues: Lisa Bersales, National Statistician and Civil Registrar General, Philippines Statistics Authority
3. Example of a prominent organization working in the field of CRVS-gender: Papa Seck, Chief Statistician, UN Women
4. Legislations and rights as a key focus/priority area for the CRVS-gender (TBC)
5. Areas under research such as sex differentials in CRVS: Romesh Silva, Technical Specialist, United Nations Population Fund

**Coffee break (14:45-15:00PM)**



**Technical Session 2: Planning and Implementation (15:00-16:15)**

**Moderator:** Shaida Badiee, Managing Director, Open Data Watch

**Panelists:**

1. CRVS-gender within the “Leave No One Behind” and the SDG/2030 agenda: Jenna Slotin, Senior Director for Policy and Strategy, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data
2. Progress on CRVS-gender from a regional perspective: Rikke Munk Hansen, Chief, Economic and Environment Statistics Section, UNESCAP Statistics Division (TBC)
3. Role of CSOs in CRVS-gender implementation: Tanja Suvilaakso, Senior Child Rights and Protection Advisor, Plan International Canada
4. Role of donors with focus on gender issues: Sarah Hendriks, Director, Gender Equality, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
5. Role of specialized UN agencies in CRVS-gender implementation: Kendra Gregson, Child Protection Regional Advisor for UNICEF South Asia (TBC)

**Concluding Remarks: Moving the CRVS-gender Agenda Forward (16:15- 17:00)**

Moderators: Irina Dincu and Shaida Badiee will highlight the key points from the previous sessions and moderate a discussion on key take away messages from the roundtable discussion on CRVS-gender that will be presented at the subsequent CRVS innovation sessions.

