

CSO Joint Statement
On Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in ASIA and the Pacific
Bangkok, Thailand, August 26-27 2014

Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Too many people in Asia and the Pacific live and die without leaving an official trace. In Asia and the Pacific, 135 million children under the age of five have not had their births registered.

We must ask: How can we measure our progress towards the Millennium Development Goals when not everyone is counted? How can governments build schools and employ teachers if they do not know how many children are born? How can children be vaccinated if nobody knows they exist?

We must count every man, woman, child and baby and be there with them at every stage of their lives – from birth to death – so that together we can ensure every child grows up to realise their dreams and ambitions.

We need to take a giant leap forward and accelerate our CRVS efforts by joining forces with governments, UN partners and the private sector to get everyone in the picture.

Today, it is my honour to speak on behalf of the 16 civil society organisations that met during the preparatory meeting in August 2014 to conduct their own review of the Ministerial Declaration and Regional Action framework.

The key message of our discussions was short and clear:

Acknowledging that governments, development partners and the private sector can play a significant role in supporting improvements of civil registration and vital statistics and that coordination is crucial to achieve sustainable CRVS changes in the next 10 years,

Civil Society Organizations are committed to contribute to the implementation of the Regional Action Framework so that by 2024 all people in Asia and the Pacific can benefit from universal and responsive CRVS.

In this context, we the delegates of the Civil Society Forum on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific, while reaffirming the human right of everyone to be recognised everywhere as a person before the law and recalling the obligation of States to register all children immediately after birth without discrimination,

Call for:

Leadership and political commitment to ensure clear, aligned and integrated responsibilities and accountability between key stakeholders. Action should be taken to remove blockages to the effective administration of a CRVS system around which donors, NGOs and CSOs can align their support.

- CRVS coordination mechanisms must be established at the national level and include representation of all levels of government involved in a CRVS system,
- Comprehensive assessments of a CRVS system must be conducted and a multi-sectoral national strategy with clear goals and targets must be developed and implemented

A multi-sectoral/stakeholder approach – the collection and use of CRVS information cuts across many sectors. National governments and regional bodies must encourage joint planning and coordination between all CRVS stakeholders. CSOs must be part of the CRVS national coordination committees. We are trusted agents at the community level and can play a key role in helping Governments to reach the hard-to-reach and marginalized population.

Legal reforms – where CRVS requires the review or adoption of laws (such as legal provisions for digitalisation; free of cost and easy to birth registration system), these legal reform processes must respect, protect and fulfil human rights and be in line with international standards.

It is important to ensure that efforts to increase civil registration do not have any adverse impacts on the enjoyment of other rights like education or health.

Investment and allocation of resources at the regional and national levels based around a solid understanding of the financial implications and potential long-term benefits derived from an efficient CRVS system. Measures need to be introduced **to ensure availability of registration infrastructure, staffing, equipment and supplies.**

Embracing of innovative technology through partnerships with technology providers and the private sector to find solutions that meet the needs of national CRVS systems. In this context, conduct thorough technical analysis and risk assessment to establish how digital technologies can best be used to support CRVS processes in a scalable and sustainable way, and ensuring that mitigation strategies are in place when there are possible threats to the rights of individuals, such as privacy.

Strategic communications – at regional and national levels, investment should be made in strategic communication campaigns to increase knowledge and awareness of well-functioning CRVS systems and the benefits they can provide. Special attention must be given to communications interventions designed to reach the most marginalised groups. Due to longstanding local presence in communities and CSOs' understanding of the needs and motivations of beneficiaries we offer a unique viewpoint to increase demand for registration services.

Disaster-resilient systems – recognising the region's vulnerability to climate change, as well as natural and human-made disasters, these systems can be used for retrieval of records, as well as preparation and response to all disaster and emergency situations.

Recognition of unique roles and capacities of civil society in the development of effective and rights based CRVS systems.

Research on the economic merits of CRVS – we call on government and development partners to recognise the need for and conduct research that would involve cost-benefit analyses on the socio-economic benefits of functional CRVS systems.

As part of our efforts to contribute to the realisation of CRVS systems that are effective, comprehensive and rights-based, we the CSOs commit to:

Represent and reach the most marginalised – CSOs are trusted agents at the community level and well positioned to play a key role in helping Governments to reach the hard-to-reach and marginalized population and making sure their voices are heard.

Involve children and young people in efforts to strengthen CRVS implementation.

Effective coordination – we will collaborate with governments and other stakeholders to ensure a CRVS coordinated approach to avoid duplication, *ad-hoc* interventions and to ensure proper utilisation of resources.

Assist with legislative reforms and full implementation of regulatory and legal frameworks.

Working on the demand side – we will utilise all forms of communications and channels, including social media, as well as local language and traditions, to increase knowledge and awareness of CRVS at all levels.

Make CRVS an integral component of CSO programmes such as health, governance and participation, child protection and education.

Support the implementation of innovative approaches to CRVS systems, such as Digital Birth Registration.

Strengthen capacity and catalyse the resources and knowledge of other organisations and stakeholders, including community leaders, religious leaders, traditional practitioners and community health workers.

Support government responses in recovery and rebuilding of CRVS systems before, during and after times of disaster and emergency.

We, the CSOs, thank Plan International, UNESCAP and World Vision International for facilitating the Civil Society Forum on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific and for encouraging CSOs from around the region to get involved and have their say on these very important issues to ensure that the Regional Action Framework and Ministerial Declaration are in line with our united vision for achieving comprehensive, effective and rights-based CRVS systems for every country in the Asia and the Pacific Region.