



Conference Newsletter
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AFRICA'S VISION FOR PROSPERITY & INCLUSIVENESS REQUIRES TIMELY AND ACCURATE STATISTICS, SAYS VP WINA

By Bedson Nyoni

African leaders have a great vision of building an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent that is driven and managed by its own citizens, and represents a dynamic force in the international arena, Zambia's Vice President Inonge Mutukwa Wina said Thursday.

But the vision can only be realized if the continent's citizens were all visible and known to the authorities for planning purposes, with timely and accurate statistics always readily available, Ms. Wina said in opening remarks to the fifth Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil registration in Lusaka.

"If you truly understand civil registration, the reality is that we cannot achieve this great African vision without counting and recording our citizens," she said.

"A fully functioning CRVS system with universal birth, marriage and death registration is the foundation of a comprehensive, robust and sustainable legal identity system."

The VP lauded African leaders for the initiative to build comprehensive and robust CRVS systems following the declaration of the decade for repositioning CRVS in Africa's continental, regional and national development agenda.

She said the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development recognized that innovative and sustainable CRVS systems, integrated with health and national identity management, were powerful drivers for more inclusive economies.

"We should applaud ourselves for taking bold steps as African member states in recognizing the central role CRVS play in Africa's development agenda," said the VP, adding this helps the continent to have information to use in responding and contributing to solving its development challenges.

Economic Commission for Africa's Executive Secretary, Vera Songwe, earlier challenged Ms. Wina to champion the legal identity cause on the continent to bridge the identity gap, especially for the over 250 million invisible African women and others seeking economic empowerment.

"Identity is recognition, respect and dignity. If we can imagine that on our continent we have 550 million people without that recognition that is needed to exist as legitimate members of society, then as a society we have a people," she said.

"Madame Vice President, we will make this event memorable and historical as important decisions and

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Decade for Repositioning
of Civil Registration and
Vital Statistics in Africa
2017-2026



“Without knowing the numbers and characteristics of the residents of a country, governments cannot plan neither can they craft adequate policies or monitor progress. This steers us further away from achieving our human development commitments as set out by the Africa Agenda 2063 and the 2030 sustainable development agenda.”

CIVIL REGISTRATION IMPORTANT FOR AFRICA’S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, SAYS SONGWE

By Sandra Nyaira

Advances in technology present Africa with an important opportunity for the digitalization of its civil registration and vital statistics systems through which the strategic benefits of legal identity for all can be harnessed for the continent’s development.

Civil registration is a subject that is of crucial importance to Africa’s economic and social development and is at the core of the realization of the continent’s ambitions to eradicate poverty, achieve inclusive and sustainable development, and respect for human rights.

This was said Thursday by Vera Songwe, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, in a speech during the opening session of the fifth Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration which is being held in Lusaka on the theme “Innovative Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems as a foundation for legal identity management”.

“Without knowing the numbers and characteristics of the residents of a country, governments cannot plan neither can they craft adequate policies or monitor progress. This steers us further away from achieving our human development commitments as set out by the Africa Agenda 2063 and the 2030 sustainable development agenda,” the ECA Chief said.

Africa, which is home to 1.3 billion people, is faced with a critical legal identity gap, whereby many exist without being known to their governments and without any means to prove who they are. Half of these 1.3 billion people live in Africa and 250m are women.

“To lack a legal identity means that you do not exist at all in the eyes of the state, a scenario that is critically alarming and that contravenes each of our human development efforts,” said Ms. Songwe.

Undocumented persons who are often women, children, refugees and migrants face critical challenges in exercising basic human rights, in participating in society and seeking protection by the law, a situation that only worsens their vulnerability.

Ms. Songwe said Africa today faced fundamental challenges in its bid to address the legal identity gap, especially that of weak and archaic civil registration systems that fail to achieve key principles of completeness, universality and accuracy. Many countries run fragmented paper-based

systems, with a huge burden of reporting placed on the public, and with a requirement to travel long distances to access registration services.

“This manual nature of civil registration databases in many countries limits their ability to support other important government functions therefore contributing to their under-resourcing and underutilization by governments,” she said.

The other challenge, the ECA Chief said, is the notable increase in investments made by many African governments towards sophisticated civil identification systems that are delinked from civil registration systems.

“Robust civil identification databases can only be sustained when linked and updated with timely birth and death data that flows from civil registration,” added Ms. Songwe.

The legal identity agenda is pre-eminently reflected in the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

“It is pertinent that we make use of this window to make all the relevant progress and in particular to harness the best for our identity management ecosystems systems without leaving either behind.”

Ms. Songwe informed the Ministers of the UN’s Legal Identity Agenda to support member States in achieving the SDGs through meeting target 16.9 by 2030, which is to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.

The UN agencies and the CRVS Core Group coordinated by the ECA, will continue to drive a coherent and effective response in supporting member states to achieve the goal of leaving no one behind by addressing the root causes of exclusion, she said.

“The legal identity challenge is one that we should embrace. It is a challenge we believe we can win, it is a challenge that will make us remember Zambia as a milestone in the direction we have taken to ensure 550m Africans no longer have the problem of legal identity,” the ECA Chief said.

The conference, said Ms. Songwe, is expected to provide directions on pathways towards achieving holistic, innovative and integrated CRVS and digital identity management systems in African countries, with the goal of closing the identity gap in Africa. ■

INTERVIEWS

By Sandra Nyaira



Filippo Grandi
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

This is a very important initiative by the African continent to build holistic, innovative and integrated civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) and digital identity management systems to help close the identity gap on the continent. I was here to encourage member States that as they improve their CRVS and vital statistics systems, that they do not forget the refugees. Inclusion in CRVS and national identity systems can help to both protect and empower refugees and to realise SDG target 16.9. that supports the goal of legal identity for all by 2030, and recognizes its critical importance for the world's most vulnerable people. The more and more this initiative progresses, the more you avoid having people without IDs and birth certificates, which is a dangerous ground for statelessness.

The goal should be digital identity for all, including refugees to increase their empowerment, inclusion, and protection because refugees are often left out of the CRVS and national identity systems of the countries in which they live. This lack of legal identity prevents access to both public and private services, increases the risk of statelessness, and inhibits effective state planning. ■



Maleta Tuoane-Nkhasi
Senior Health Specialist, CRVS, Global Financing Facility

The Global Financing Facility (GFF) supports the strengthening of CRVS systems in low- and lower-middle income countries as an important data source for monitoring progress made in ending preventable maternal, newborn, child and adolescent deaths; and as an area that has been inadequately funded in the past. The GFF supports the strengthening of CRVS systems by ensuring that CRVS components for the provision of timely and accurate health data are included in RMNCAH investment cases. The GFF also aids analysis of the CRVS system to identify gaps and key interventions required to strengthen CRVS.

The GFF Trust Fund is providing financing and technical assistance to Governments, through the responsible ministries, to strengthen CRVS systems and protect the basic human rights of women, children, and adolescents. In Africa, the GFF Trust Fund, matched with financing from IDA, has provided financing to specifically strength-

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resolutions will be made here, which will take civil registration and identity management to greater heights."

For his part, the African Union Commission's Deputy Chairperson, Thomas Kwesi said the theme of the conference; "Innovative Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System: Foundation for Legal Identity Management" was timely as ensuring legal identity would contribute to the implementation of major continental initiatives including the African Continental Free Trade Area, the Protocol on Free Movement of People, the African Passport and the Single African Air Transport market.

The realization of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 for sustainable development required that every vital event is registered and relevant statistics are collected, compiled, produced and disseminated in a regular and continuous manner to guide policy and planning, to inform decisions, enable all stakeholders to track progress and make the necessary adjustments to ensure transparency and mutual accountability, he said.

African Development Bank's Statistics Director, Charles Lufumpa, said although progress had been made in efforts to revamp CRVS systems in Africa, more still needed to be done. He said CRVS was crucial for important decision making for policy, informing SDGs, Agenda 2063 and the Bank's High 5s agenda.

"While significant progress has been made, work still needs to be done as most of our CRVS systems remain weak," Mr. Lufumpa said, adding the bank continuously advocated for improved CRVS systems both in terms of coverage and quality through promoting the use of ICT, human capital development, south-south cooperation and coordination.

The conference ends Friday. ■

en CRVS systems in 10 countries including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda. The total financing provided per country ranges from US\$1million to US\$20 million.

Through the funding provided, these countries are in the process of implementing activities to strengthen their institutional capacity to delivery civil registration (CR) services, including death registration and causes of death, expand CR including decentralization and mobile CR services; training and capacity building of staff; and improving supervision and monitoring. Through the GFF processes at country level, there has been strengthened collaboration between CR agencies and ministries of health in particular, and improved coordination among development partners supporting CRVS. ■



ZAMBIAN MINISTER SAYS NATION COMMITTED TO RECORDING VITAL EVENTS OF REFUGEES IN THE COUNTRY

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

Zambia is committed to the registration of vital events occurring among refugees and internally displaced persons with 1,465 refugees provided with identity cards in 2018, according to Home Affairs Minister Stephen Kampyongo.

In a speech during the opening ceremony of the fifth conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, Mr. Kampyongo said the government of Zambia also provided birth registration for refugees in the country.

Many of Africa's children are not registered at birth. According to UNICEF, the births of 2 in 3 infants in Africa south of the Sahara remain unregistered, and 3 out of every 4 lack a birth certificate. It is projected that if the current trends continue, the number of unregistered children aged below 5 in the region will soar to nearly 115 million by 2030.

"These children lack the means to claim protection by law. Studies show that the lack of an official identity disproportionately affects the poorest and the most vulnerable groups, mainly women, children and girls, migrants, refugees, stateless persons and people living in remote areas," said Mr. Kampyongo.

He said the fact that an estimated 550 million Africans lacked legal identity was the reason the ministers were gathered in Lusaka for their fifth conference to identify sustainable strategies to close the identity gap to ensure every African was visible and had means to prove their identity.

"Let there be no doubt, the invisibility will be a thing of the past in a few years as we adapt innovative approaches and new technologies in our quest towards universal and efficient civil registration," the Minister said.

He also said Zambia was moving forward in adopting innovative approaches to improving civil registration.

Mr. Kampyongo recognized and commended the growth in the diversity of stakeholders now engaged in the Africa CRVS dialogue,

spanning from civil registration officials to national statistics officials, health sector representatives, national identity experts, non-governmental organizations, international agencies and the private sector.

He said there was political commitment on the continent and in Zambia to civil registration and vital statistics.

"Zambia is therefore poised for greater achievements in improving civil registration and vital statistics. It is my desire that all member states give the needed support at the highest level to continue this important dialogue," the Minister said.

"It is now widely recognized that civil registration systems form a solid foundation for sustainable national identity systems. Zambia has taken significant steps in improving its CRVS landscape."

Zambia is among the first African countries to conduct comprehensive CRVS assessments and formulating improvement plans. ■

"Let there be no doubt, the invisibility will be a thing of the past in a few years as we adapt innovative approaches and new technologies in our quest towards universal and efficient civil registration."





LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT INNOVATIVE CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

By Lavender Chungu Degre // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

High-level participants at the ongoing fifth Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration (COM5) had the opportunity to focus on leveraging partnerships in Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) as they continued to seek ways to bridge the identity gap on the continent.

Hundreds of millions of people worldwide lack proof of legal identity, the majority of them being children who were never registered at birth.

With CRVS systems improvement gaining momentum in Africa, representatives from various donors and development partners, including the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF.

Centre of Excellence for CRVS and Global Financing Fund presented funding and donor initiatives in improving specific technical aspects of CRVS. The objective was to guide countries on the kinds of support available from different partners and how to leverage these opportunities for the benefit of countries' CRVS systems improvement initiatives.

A representative of the AfDB stated that the institution is the main financial sponsor of statistical capacity in Africa. This includes support to data collection, CRVS, production of tools and guide and technical assistance to countries. AfDB is currently working on mobilising more resources to support CRVS. AfDB reiterated its commitment to support the improvement of CRVS systems across the continent and recalled various ways for countries to request support from the institution.

UNFPA was represented by Fredrick Okwayo, from the Johannesburg Regional Office. He said that their agency was committed to strengthening its support across Africa to census and improvement of vital statistics. Regarding the data for development nexus, UNFPA will continue support on data development. UNFPA also engaged in the strengthening of registration and analysis of marriages and divorces. On the census, the representative confirmed that UNFPA developed a technical note to include more civil registration variables. The UN agency informed the meeting that it will host, in collaboration with the Government of Kenya and Denmark, the 25th Anniversary of ICPD in Africa, from 12 to 14 November 2019, in Nairobi, Kenya. The conference will be an opportunity to discuss the issue of CRVS improvement.

On the other hand, the representative from UNHCR, Cosmas Chanda placed special emphasis on the organisation's mandate to contribute

to the development and dissemination of statistics of refugees, returnees, forced displaced people, and stateless people. "UNHCR is keen to continue to support countries to improve their CRVS systems to better people's lives", he said.

The representative from UNICEF, Eri Suzuki, stated that the organization was an active member of APAL- CRVS Core Group. Regarding the theme of the Conference of Ministers, it was noted that civil registration information and registration of births and deaths, was the source for the identity management system. UNICEF also emphasised the importance of health sector to maintain an interoperability system. The importance of domestic resources to support the improvement of CRVS was flagged with UNICEF reiterating its commitment to support countries and strengthen partnerships towards the improvement of CRVS system.

The representative of WHO indicated the close collaboration with UNICEF in the health sector and that improvement in CRVS was key to promoting health. The Institution is committed to supporting countries in the areas of death registration and registration of causes of deaths. WHO informed the meeting of the launch, in collaboration with UNICEF, of a guideline on the contribution to the health sector in the improvement of CRVS system.

The Centre of Excellence (CoE) reiterated its commitment to be a global hub of knowledge generation and delivery in CRVS. CoE advised of the current development of a knowledge product on investing in CRVS. Various support provided and initiatives were mentioned, including capacity building for CRVS country experts and local consultants. A database of local consultants was also developed.

The presentations were concluded by Maletela Tuoane-Nkhasi from Global Financing Fund who pointed out the need to improve the registration of preventable deaths of women and children. GFF provided financial support to 10 countries, at an amount of 20 million USD to improve CRVS. The various support provided included technical assistance and coordination, alignment between partners, development of knowledge products and capacity building on CRVS.

All partners hoped that the Conference will provide strategic and policy guidance on pathways towards holistic, innovative and integrated civil registration and vital statistics and digital identity management systems to help close the identity gap in Africa, where more than 500 million people have no legal identity. ■

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ECA'S CHINGANYA BRIEFS ZAMBIAN VP WINA ON COM5

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

The United Nations Resident Coordinator to Zambia, Ms. Coumba Mar Gadio, on Wednesday lauded the southern African nation for how it is seriously dealing with civil registration and vital statistics issues by updating legislation and policy and making the process more accessible to citizens.

Oliver Chinganya, the Director of Statistics at the Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA) African Centre for Statistics, had the opportunity to brief Zambia's Vice President, Inonge Mutukwa Wina, on the 5th Conference of African Ministers responsible for CRVS and the records it was setting as Africa seeks to bridge the huge identity gap on the continent.

Mr. Chinganya's brief to the VP was mainly about the CRVS, the content, coverage, number of participants and level of representation, which included Registrars General, Directors General of National Statistical Offices, ICT experts, e-government, civil society organisations/non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, international development partners, and journalists. A total of 53 African countries attended.

The Statistics Director emphasized that this was the largest conference since 2010 with over 800 high level delegates attending.

This was the largest conference since 2010 with over 800 high level delegates attending.

"Zambia will now carry the flag on behalf of the continent in championing the CRVS and ID management for the next two years as chair of the bureau," said Mr. Chinganya.

He thanked the government of Zambia for hosting the 5th conference.

Africa, which is home to 1.3 billion people, is faced with a critical legal identity gap, whereby many exist without being known to their governments and without any means to prove who they are.

In her remarks to the conference later, VP Wina said it must be appreciated that this year's conference had brought together ministers responsible for CRVS, national identity, health and information technology.

"Indeed, this shows a realization that providing legal identity for all cuts across several sectors," she said.

VP Wina added; "As we celebrate the positive steps we are taking, this is the time to work with greater determination".

The conference was deliberated on the theme "Innovative Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems as a foundation for legal identity management". ■



NEW BUREAU OF THE CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR CRVS

- Chair: Zambia — Southern Africa
- First Vice-Chair: Kenya — East Africa
- Second Vice-Chair: Chad — Central Africa
- Third Vice-Chair: Sierra Leone — West Africa
- Rapporteur: Mauritania — North Africa



SCRIBES TRAINED IN EFFECTIVE USE OF DATA IN PUBLIC HEALTH JOURNALISM AT COM5

By Sandra Nyaira // Photo by Bedson Nyoni

Twenty journalists from newsrooms across Africa this week received training on effective use of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) data in public health journalism at the on-going fifth conference of African ministers responsible for CRVS.

The training was provided by the Bloomberg Data for Health Initiative and Vital Strategies, in collaboration with the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) team, among them the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

“We had 20 journalists representing five countries across the Africa region who participated in this two-day training program that focused on the importance of functional national CRVS systems and the rich stories that can emerge from CRVS data for public engagement and accountability for national development,” said James Mwanza of the Bloomberg Data for Health Initiative and Vital Strategies.

The journalists, he said, gained skills in best practices for including accurate and transparent data in stories, with a particular focus on building analytical skills that are most relevant to their work as journalists.

William Muhwava, Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistics Section of the ECA’s African Centre for Statistics, said the training was essential to help journalists in their reporting especially as data becomes more prevalent and accessible.

Mr. Muhwava said the training will also help the journalists and their newsrooms to understand more and assess the validity of various types of health data they receive or unearth and communicate it clearly and accurately.

“Statistics can be challenging for anyone and such training helps bring out the best in our journalists on the continent as they report on public health challenges facing our communities from community, national, and even global levels,” he said.

Mr. Muhwava said the training will also help the journalists and their newsrooms to understand more and assess the validity of various types of health data they receive or unearth and communicate it clearly and accurately.

The conference provided an opportunity for the journalists to delve into CRVS related topics that they will be developing into data stories once they return to their newsrooms.

The journalists had the opportunity to participate in a press conference with ministers and senior United Nations officials on CRVS and had interviews with experts in the Fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration

(COM5) and Government representatives from their home countries and across the continent.

The training provided a detailed overview of CRVS in terms of what it is and why it is important. It helped the select group of journalists to build and improve skills related to data use in reporting. Topics covered included primary sources of public health data; common data related terms and concepts; basic methods for analysing, interpreting, and visualizing public health data; and effective tactics for interviewing public health experts about data-rich topics. ■

THE CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

Photos by Bedson Nyoni



