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Technical Papers

Methods and Problems of Civil Registration Practices

and Vital Statistics Collection

In Africa

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FOREWORD

This review of the current status of civil registration practices and vital statistics collection problems in the African countries is timely, and is an indication of the growing interest in seeking improvements in vital registration and statistics for the African continent which includes some 50 countries—almost one-third of the countries in the world.

The African countries, big and small, are quite heterogeneous in character. Much of the civil registration and vital statistics systems, such as they are, are legacies of previous colonial administrations. With a few exceptions, the African countries are in need of substantial improvement and development in civil registration and vital statistics. Many of the obstacles to civil registration are discussed and the author proposes solutions to some of them.

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Methods and Problems of Civil Registration Practices and Vital Statistics Collection in Africa

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of the present study is to review the current status of civil registration practices and vital statistics collection in Africa. The study will also attempt to highlight some problems relating to civil registration administration and data collection and make tentative suggestions about their solutions.

The questionnaires on civil registration practices prepared and administered to African countries by the UN Statistical Office should have formed the main source of information for the study. But the completed questionnaires were received from only 19 out of 49 ECA member states, and these were, in many cases, partially filled out. It should be remembered, however, that not all the remaining 30 states have national registration systems.

Alternative sources of information were also employed. These include the civil registration documents (e.g., the civil registration legislations and questionnaires), project documents formulated by individual governments to seek financial and/or technical assistance from donor agencies, papers presented to past national and international meetings on the subject and specialised historical reports, in particular, the survey by the Organisation Commune Africaine Malgache et Mauricienne (OCAM).[1]

In spite of the attempts to use all available sources, it was found that information was completely or partially lacking on most countries. Only in a few could information be said to be reasonably complete. Thus, the report, although it attempts to present a balanced and broad picture of civil registration practices within the continent, provided its case studies from the few countries that have published materials on their system.

Normally, vital events on which data should be collected in a vital statistics system include live birth, death, foetal death, marriage, divorce, annulment, judicial separation, adoption, legitimation and recog-

nition.[2] But the focus on events in this study, mainly due to the constraints of information, has also been restricted—only birth and death, and partially marriage are treated.

Uses of vital records

The vital statistics systems in Africa are currently in an unsatisfactory state. In the majority of them, and this includes those countries with sizeable populations such as Nigeria, Zaire, Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania and Kenya, there are no viable nation-wide systems. However, within the past ten years or so, many have shown interest in the development of their registration systems and a few have even presented proposals to donor agencies for the improvement and/or expansion of their existing systems.

With the spread of social and economic development, vital records are assuming importance in African countries, given their demonstrated uses—legal, administrative and statistical. The birth record, for example, provides documentary proof of identity and civil status touching on such matters as age, nationality (citizenship), and parentage. Evidence of proof of identity is required in many countries to acquire a passport, to own property, to be employed in the civil service and participate in politics. Also, proof of age is demanded to enter schools and to seek regular employment in some countries. Similarly, the death record is required in the settlement of claims to inheritance and to insurance on deceased persons. Moreover, for the efficient implementation and evaluation of health projects in many African countries, vital records are needed. They can be used to monitor progress in public health programmes in such areas as the control of communicable diseases and maternal and child health projects. Also, in many African countries now plagued by the problems of external and internal population mobilities, governments are anxious to regulate these movements. Legal documentation of nationality, such as provided by birth records is one possible strategy for control.

With reference to statistical uses, vital records are employed in working out mortality and fertility rates. Besides this, figures collected over a period,

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[1] OCAM, La situation de l'état civil dans les pays de l'OCAM, 1974. The present name of the Organisation is "Organisation Commune Africaine Malgache et Mauricienne."

[2] UN, *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System,* Statistical papers, Series M. No. 19, 1973, para. 38

could also be used to estimate the growth, structure and geographic distribution of the population. In the period between decennial censuses, these estimates are needed in formulating and implementing programmes of social and economic development.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

A necessary though not a sufficient condition for the evolution of a nation-wide civil registration system is legislation which makes the registration of vital events compulsory for the entire country. "The compulsion or legal obligation to register a vital event is the basic premise of the entire civil registration system. When registration is voluntary rather than compulsory, there can be no assurance of complete or accurate vital records or statistics."[1]

Civil registration development during the colonial era, however, usually involved piecemeal extensions of compulsory registration laws. To be sure, in a few countries such as Algeria, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles, the institutions of civil registration systems for the entire country date back to the nineteenth century or earlier. But in the majority of the countries, this development occurred only within the past two decades. For example, in Eastern Africa—Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania (previously Tanganyika and Zanzibar), Malawi (previously Nyasaland) and Somalia—birth and death registrations were made compulsory for the European population in the first two decades of this century.[2] At about the same time, in some of these countries, registration was extended to Asians. However, it was not until after the attainment of independence in the 1960s that compulsory registration laws applicable to all population groups were passed in some of these countries.

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[1]UN. *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System,* Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 19, 1973; para. 293

[2]R.R. Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire, Vol. II* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1949)

[3]Ministère de la France d'Outre Mer, "Etude critique du fonctionnement de l'état-civil et des régistres de population," *Documents et statistiques,* March 1954; Organization Commune Africaine Malgache et Mauricienne (OCAM), *La situation de l'état civil dans les pays de l'OCAM,* May 1974.

[3]Union Douanière et Economique de l'Afrique Centrale (UDEAC)

[4]UDEAC, Présentation du Modèle révise de projet d'amélioration du système d'enregistrement et des Statistiques des faits d'état civil, Commission ad hoc sur l'état civil, Libreville, May 1978.

In ex-French West Africa, Senegal, Mali (previously French Sudan), Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Benin (previously Dahomey) and Niger, when compulsory registration was instituted in 1933 for the African population, it applied to only a selected group such as soldiers, public servants, residents of certain administrative centres, certain chiefs and their families and those eligible to pay taxes on landed property or income. In 1950, compulsory registration was extended, this time, to Africans living some ten kilometers around civil registration centres, which were usually located in principal towns.[3]

Similarly, in the former British West African territories when compulsory registration was extended to the African population in the nineteenth century, its application was geographically limited, e.g., St. Mary's Island in the Gambia, selected towns in Ghana (the former Gold Coast), Lagos in Nigeria and the colony area of Sierra Leone.

Table 2 gives information on the quality of registered events from fifty countries. It shows that only a handful of countries, namely Cape Verde, Egypt, Mauritius, Reunion, Sao Tome and the Seychelles, and probably now Algeria, Tunisia and Madagascar, have vital registration systems whose national coverages of births and/or deaths are reasonably complete. Thus, the situation now is that though in the sixties and seventies several countries have passed legislations making the registration of vital events compulsory for all population groups, because of various problems such as the absence of the necessary organizational set-up and motivation to register, the coverage of events from such systems is so incomplete that they contribute only marginally to quantitative demographic information.

THE SPATIAL COVERAGE OF THE CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEMS IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Despite the existence of compulsory nation-wide registration laws in many African countries, registration and/or reporting centres are inadequately established especially in the rural areas because of a variety of reasons. For example, it has been recently observed in connection with UDEAC[4] countries that "the numbers of registration centres for vital events is insufficient, notably in the rural areas where informants have generally to travel long distances over sometimes difficult terrains to complete the registration procedures".[5]

A similar remark has been made about the civil registration system in Nigeria, one of Africa's most

populous countries. Here "Registration centres hardly exist in villages; in other words, the system has never been brought within the easy reach of the ordinary folk."[1]

Spatial distribution of registration centres within African countries

To get an idea of the spatial spread of registration centres within 21 African countries, three indices of accessibility have been worked out in Table 3: the area (square kilometers per registration centre), registration units per 1000 square kilometers, and a summary index, the Arriaga index of accessibility.[2]

The Arriaga index attempts to provide a quantitative measure of accessibility of registration centres by estimating the problems informants have to overcome to register vital events. It takes into account two main variables (1) the number of registry offices and (2) kilometers of roads per square kilometer of habitable area in each state. This index varies directly with the accessibility of registration centres.

In the interpretation of this and the other indices, note should be taken of the following shortcomings of the data. First, the area includes not only habitable but substantial deserted and sparsely populated areas in such countries as Libya, Botswana and Niger. Second, a weakness of the Arriaga index is that account is not taken of population size and/or density.

The indices, individually and collectively, show the sparse spatial spread of registration facilities in many African countries. Among the 21 countries surveyed, 11 have, on the average, less than three registration centres per 1,000 square kilometers, among which seven have, on the average, a single or virtually no centre for areas of over 1,000 square kilometers. On the other hand, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Tunisia, in order of ranking, scored high on the Arriaga index.

A conclusion from an examination of the Table is that most African countries have still to expend a lot of effort on programmes for improvements of their vital registration systems, before they can attain acceptable indices of accessibility such as have been achieved by Mauritius, Seychelles and

Tunisia which have 25, 14, 8 registration centres per 1,000 square kilometers, respectively.

Three macro case studies more clearly substantiate the above finding of woefully inadequate civil registration centres within many African countries. Specifically, the two related indices, namely, square kilometers per registration centres and the converse, registration centres per 1,000 square kilometers of the land area, show that, in the past, registration centres were established with little attention paid to such factors as population density or proportional area distribution. Rather, regions in which large towns are located were assigned a disproportionate share of these facilities.

The case of Benin is a typical example. Atlantique and Oueme regions, the sites of the economic and administrative capitals, respectively, have also the largest shares of registration centres: 12 and 8 each per 1,000 square kilometers of their land area. In three of the remaining four regions, there are, on the average, less than three centres for the comparable land area. With reference to the index, square kilometers per registration centres, we have the extreme case in the region Borgou with on the average 1,342 square kilometers of its area per registration centre vis-à-vis 81 and 131 for Atlantique and Oueme, respectively.

In Ghana, another example, the Greater Accra region is the location of both the economic and administration capital, Accra. This region has, on the average, about nine registration centres per 1,000 square kilometers of its area compared with the national average of just two centres. Also, the area, square kilometers per registration centre, is 118 compared with 2,270 in the Northern region, the other extreme case.

In certain countries, the situation is even worse with no facilities available for the collection of vital registration statistics in parts of its rural areas. For example, it has been observed in Nigeria that "the provisions of the registration ordinance have been ignored [in rural areas] because no proper provision has been made for the registration of vital events."[3]

A major reason for the sparse spread of registration centres within African countries, has been assigned to lack of finance. The Ghanaian situation exemplifies this situation: "The difficulty in realising the objectives of the vital registration system proposed under the Registration of Births and Deaths Act of 1965 (which instituted nationwide civil registration) is attributed to the lack of funds for the establishment of a field staff that would carry the registration facilities to the doorsteps of the people".[4]

[1]O.E. Umoh, "Demographic statistics in Nigeria" in S.H. Ominde and C.N. Ejiogu (ed.) *Population Growth and Economic Development in Africa* (London, Heinemann, 1972) p. 23.

[2]Eduardo E. Arriaga, "Rural-urban Mortality in Developing Countries: An index for detecting rural underregistration," *Demography* 4 (1), 1967.

[3]O.E. Umoh, "Demographic Statistics in Nigeria".

[4]UNFPA, "Assistance for the Expansion of the National Registration System for births and deaths," Project No. GH/72/PO2, 1976.

ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION OF REGISTRATION SYSTEMS

The collection of vital events is done through a chain of local registration offices. The spatial distribution of these offices relative to population density, their relationship (e.g. centralized or decentralized, i.e., whether coordination and supervision are done only at the national level or at both national and local levels) with the central office(s) and the administrative structure within which both the central and local offices operate, influence the efficiency and effectiveness of the registration process. On these points, three criteria have been suggested[1], which we briefly state below:

First, in order for the registration facilities to be easily accessible to the public, local registration offices should be amply established: "It is a maxim that the provision of a registration office easily accessible to every segment of the population is the first step in securing complete registration."[2]

Second, the creation of a national agency whose duties should include some, but preferably all of the following functions: coordination, unification, supervision and promotion of registration to satisfy both legal and statistical objectives is strongly recommended. This arrangement will result in the standardization of the various civil registration functions and procedures in, for example, such areas as the design of forms and their statistical contents, the application of the registration laws and the adherence to specific time schedules in statistical reporting.

Third, where possible, the registration arrangement ought to be built within the existing administrative structure.

Administrative structures

In English-speaking countries, there is usually a national registration office in the administrative capital that is responsible for the supervision and coordination of all registration units in the country. But in French-speaking countries, a more decentralised system exists: many (local) central registration offices each independent of the other—usually named centres principaux—have been established,

each responsible for the supervision and coordination of the functions of regional registration agencies, usually named centres secondaires.

In the majority of French-speaking countries, for example, Gabon, Chad, the Central African Republic and Upper Volta, both the principal centres and the secondary centres are responsible for the receipt and custody of registration documents, and the issue of certificates for births and deaths. (Although the secondary centres could register marriages, they cannot celebrate them. This is a function of the principal centres)[3].

In one group of English-speaking countries, the issue of birth and death certificates is the responsibility of the central registration unit. The functions of the local units within such a structure are to receive and issue registration forms and partially register the events. Uganda and Swaziland are examples of this group of countries.

In Uganda, the basic unit of registration is the township and the Gombolola (i.e. subcounties). The central agency in Kampala was until 1977 the only body responsible for the issuance of birth and death certificates. That such a system has some drawbacks for a large country like Uganda was commented upon by the UN civil registration expert who campaigned for its revision: "a single centralized office in Kampala cannot cope with a task of such magnitude (i.e. the centralized issue of birth and death certificates) considering also the enormous work of posting to and back the information and documents of each event."[4] But in Swaziland, because of the small size of the area and the population, some of the problems experienced by Uganda seem to be absent. Here, the local registration agencies, through the ministry of local administration collect and process the registration forms. But central registration and custody of the completed forms and issuance of certificates are the responsibility of the Registrar General's office located in the capital.

In Ghana, there exists a three tier registration system, comprising the central registry located in Accra which supervises and coordinates the registration machinery, deals with legal matters relating to vital registration, as well as performing other registration functions such as registration and issuance of certificates. Next are the registry offices situated in selected towns. They are responsible for registration and issuance of certificates and the receipt of completed forms from the primary centres. The primary centres, where registration forms are partially filled before they are submitted to the registry offices, are located in selected villages.

[1] United Nations, *Principles and Recommendations*, para.: 300-308

[2] United Nations, *Principles and Recommendations*, para: 306

[3] OCAM, *La situation de l'état civil dans les pays de l'OCAM.*

[4] Uganda, Minutes of the meeting of the committee on births and deaths, Entebbe, 1973.

In Mauritius, there is a main civil status office that supervises some 50 local civil status offices. Registrations of vital events and the issuance of certificates are done in each of the local civil status offices.

In Kenya, responsibility for registering births, deaths and marriages and custody of the registration documents is vested in the Registrar-General who is in charge of the national agency in Nairobi. In the various districts, registration offices are supervised by full-time registrars, who are helped by part-time registrars (usually chiefs, teachers or health personnel). The collection of registration forms from the public and institutions such as hospitals, and editing and preliminary allocation of codes are performed at the district registries.

Agency responsible for civil registration functions at national and sub-national levels

The only generalization that can be made concerning the agencies of government responsible for registration at the national level is with respect to French-speaking countries. For most of them, the civil registration structures are located within the Ministry of the Interior, with the Justice Ministry responsible, in many cases, for the legal aspects of registration.

In the remaining countries, the agencies to which the civil registration office is attached varies. In Kenya, Uganda, Swaziland, Malawi and Mauritius, it is a Registrar General's office, in most cases, located within the Justice Ministry; in Ghana, it is the Central Bureau of Statistics, itself a division of the Ministry of Economic Planning, and in Sierra Leone, the Health Ministry.

At the sub-national level, in the majority of French-speaking countries, use is made of a two tier hierarchical administrative structure. At the head of the structure are the principal centres located in the major regional headquarters; next in line are the secondary centres, usually situated in the rural areas.

An area of continuing debate, especially in English-speaking countries, is the agency location of the civil registration structure in order for it to effectively perform its many functions, namely, legal, medical and statistical. Various government agencies, for example, the Health Ministry, the Registrar-General's office (with some affiliation with the Justice Ministry) and the Bureau of Statistics, have in some

countries, at one time or the other, been the location of the system.

Ghana is a classic case. At the start of the civil registration system from 1895 to 1951, the Medical Department was the agency responsible for the civil registration functions; from 1952 to 1965, the Registrar-General's office took over, and from 1965 to 1972, the registration office was located in the Ministry of Local Government, with the Government Statistician exercising some authority over the statistical functions. After 1972 the Central Bureau of Statistics took over completely, with the Registry of Births and Deaths operating directly under its control.

Arguments could be advanced for each of the various agencies; for example, the Medical Department, the Registrar-General's office, and the Statistics Office to be the ideal location of the vital registration office. However, no matter where the office is located, what is important is for all concerned to look upon it as a multi-disciplinary agency. Consequently, for the efficient collection, evaluation and statistical analysis and dissemination of the information the system provides, it is necessary to make "arrangements for the co-ordination of needs and services among the official agencies concerned with the registration of events for legal purposes, those responsible for compiling facts for statistical purposes and those that use these data for administrative or analytic purposes."[1]

Types of registration systems

Broadly, two types of registration systems could be identified in Africa, namely (a) passive and (b) active. In the majority of African countries, a passive system exists; that is, the registration personnel waits until informants come to their offices to register their vital events. Such a registration system relies heavily on the goodwill and cooperation of the public and institutions such as hospitals that provide the information.

In compact urban areas there are usually good transportation facilities and so no major problems of accessibility of registration centres exist. Also here, some people appreciate the values of documents generated by the registration system since they are called upon at times to provide them as evidence, for example, to attest to nationality in acquiring travel papers, to prove the dates of birth for first admission of their children to school, and for inheritance cases.

The same cannot be said of the rural areas in most African countries. Here, difficulties of distance, terrain or transportation that do exist, act as

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[1] UN, *Principles and recommendations*, para. 287.

hindrances to the informants to travel to the registration offices to register vital events. Furthermore, there is the problem of inertia, as the benefits of vital records are not immediately self-evident in such social milieu, where they have virtually no uses.

In this environment, a passive registration system can hardly work. Among the changes suggested to improve the coverage of the registration of vital events such as the provision of adequate registration centres, is the institution of a system of active registration.[1] By this approach, the registration personnel should go around to canvass the vital events that have occurred rather than wait for the informants to do so. As part of this system, chiefs, school teachers, health workers, midwives and other local government functionaries could be used either as notifiers (to the registration personnel) of all vital events that have occurred within their locality or could directly report to the nearest registration centres.

OFFICIALS OF THE CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM

Civil registration officials, such as registrars (or their equivalent) and other personnel that they supervise, are responsible for registering the occurrence of vital events and the recording of the required information concerning them. Specifically, the following have been suggested as their major functions:[2]

1) receiving reports on all registrable vital events,
2) ensuring compliance with the registration laws,
3) the legal recording of the specified information relating to vital events,
4) checking on the accuracy and completeness of each record,
5) informing the public of the necessary procedures and requirements for effecting registration and the value of vital statistics,
6) custody of records, and
7) the recording and reporting of data for statistical purposes.

Generally, in French-speaking countries, the officials of the civil registration system comprise of two classes of personnel, (1) the registrars (les officiers d'état civil) and (2) clerks (les agents). The post of registrar is usually assigned to elected municipal officials such as mayors or their deputies,

[1] A.M. Podlewski, "On the improvements of vital registration in Africa South of the Sahara", Paper presented at the first African Regional Population Conference, Accra, Ghana, Dec. 1971.

[2] UN, Principles and Recommendations, para. 309.

prefects and subprefects who perform this function on a part-time basis. The registration functions are divided between the registrars and the clerks. Broadly, the registrar's main functions here are ensuring compliance with the registration laws, signing completed birth and death certificates and officiating at weddings. The day-to-day performance of registration tasks, such as, receiving reports on births and deaths, the recording of the specified information, custody of the records and recording and reporting of data for statistical purposes are the duties of the clerks.

There also exists an arrangement in certain rural registration units where school teachers, sanitary officers, other civil servants, and chiefs of villages in the French-speaking system gather the details about the occurrences of vital events within their areas. For the purpose of legal registration, this information has to be reported at nearby registration centres in towns where the registers are kept.

In English-speaking countries, the officials of the civil registration system usually comprise (1) a Registrar-General (deputy and/or regional registrars) and (2) sometimes, part-time assistant registrars. The Registrar General, a single post as opposed to the multiple registrars in the French system, is normally a full-time civil servant responsible for the overall management and supervision of the civil registration system in the country. He is usually based in the capital city where the principal registration office is located. The deputy and/or regional registrars (and sometimes part-time assistant registrars) perform the civil registration functions listed above, under his supervision and direction.

In the French-speaking countries and also in the majority of English-speaking countries, hospitals, nursing homes and health centres serve only as notifying agencies with the legal registration of the notified events done at the registration centres.

Broadly, the civil registration structures in English-speaking countries seem more centralized than in French-speaking countries. The Registrar-General has overall supervision of the civil registration system and receives reports of vital events that have occurred within a particular time period, say quarterly, from the various centres.

In the French-speaking countries, there theoretically exists an agency in such Ministries as the Interior that should oversee the national system. But in most of the countries, it is non-operational. However, a system of control is in force for each registration unit. The heads of each hierarchical civil

registration structure, usually in the principal centres supervises officials in the other subordinate structures, the secondary centres.

Mauritius is one of the few African countries whose civil registration laws document in detail the functions of the civil registration personnel. The law states separately the functions of (1) the Registrar-General and (2) the other civil status officers. The functions of the Registrar-General, the head of the civil registration system, are to:

1) enforce the provisions of the civil registration laws;
2) register or cause to be registered all births, marriages and deaths and other acts connected with civil status in the District of Port Louis;
3) prepare the annual report on the vital statistics of the country for the preceding year;
4) assist in the taking of any census of the population; and
5) have custody and be answerable for the safe keeping of registers, records, documents and instruments.

The functions of the other civil status officers are, to receive, draw up and register all acts of birth, marriage and death and other acts connected with the civil status in the various Districts. Also, they are responsible for the preparation of yearly indices of the registers of birth, death, and marriage.

Ivory Coast is another country, this time representative of the French-speaking countries, that briefly stated in its registration law some of the functions of the registration personnel. Here, registration units of the status of principal centres are headed by officers de l'etát civil and registration units of the status of secondary centres by agents de l'état. Each of these officials is helped in the running of the various centres by a small staff.

The Officers and the agents are the only legally authorized staff empowered to receive the declarations of vital events and to draw up the pertinent certificates for their various centres. The officers are also responsible for the supervision of the work of the agents and are the only officials with the power to celebrate marriages, whether these are performed at the principal or secondary centres.

Methods to improve the efficiency of the registration personnel

As the registration personnel play a pivotal role in the operations of the civil registration system,

the efficient performance of their duties is crucial to the entire system. Therefore, any scheme to improve the system must include these officials' position.

With regard to current African conditions, we can identify the following to be the important strategies by which the efficiency of the registration personnel could be enhanced:

1) conferring status on the post, and
2) adequate supervision and training.

Conferring status on the post. The registration process is a cooperative endeavour as the registration personnel have to rely on informants (the public and officials of institutions such as hospitals, clinics and health centres) to supply them with the needed information to complete vital event questionnaires. To effectively perform their various functions, therefore, these officials must strive to maintain a good working relationship with the public and officials such as doctors, midwives, and public health workers who act as informants. Accordingly, the "post of registrar should be one of importance in the community so that registration is an acknowledged and willingly accepted obligation among the public."[1]

In a few African countries, for example Sierra Leone, the post of registrar, especially at regional levels, is filled by minor civil servants or other government functionaries who do not inspire confidence in the public nor officials of agencies such as hospitals, clinics and health centres who provide them with the information for completing vital event forms. Where this is the case, an improvement in the professional status of such officials would go a long way to ameliorating the coverage of the registration of events.

On the other hand, in French-speaking countries, the employment of municipal officials such as mayors, their deputies, prefects, and subprefects as heads of civil registration centres has the advantage that citizens of high standing act as registrars. However, this arrangement has one disadvantage, namely, that they perform their duties on a part-time basis. This too is the case in the rural areas of many other countries where school teachers, health workers and midwives are employed as part-time registration personnel.

Some have criticised the system of part-time registration personnel. The argument is that in many cases such persons are "forced to undertake additional employment to finance themselves and so will not be able to give full attention to vital events and statistics."[2] The following suggestions have been made to counter the argument against part-time

[1] UN, *Principles and Recommendations*, Para. 314.

[2] UN, *A handbook of Vital Statistics*

registration personnel. With respect to the French-speaking countries, to further strengthen the system, one of the deputies (mayor, prefect, etc.,) could be assigned registration tasks on a full-time basis.

Relative to the situation in rural areas, full-time officials could be appointed, each responsible for a number of scattered localities which he is to visit over a periodic interval, say, monthly to register vital events that have occurred since his last visit. In these localities, the task of canvassing the births and deaths during the interval between the visits of the itinerant registration official could be assigned to chiefs, school teachers, public health workers and midwives.

Supervision and Training. The registration of vital events is governed by laws and regulations. To effectively perform their functions, the registration personnel must be conversant with them. More specifically, the registration personnel (1) should be instructed with respect to the terms of the law under which the system operates, and the policies adopted in their interpretation; (2) must be aware of their perogatives as well as their duties; and (3) must be issued with instructions, manuals and other directives that, for example, show how they are to perform their functions such as completing the forms.

Further measures necessary to enhance the skills of registration officers in emergent civil registration systems such as now exist in many African countries include periodic training, supervision and inspections.

THE REGISTRATION PROCESS

How current registration is made

The standard procedure for the registration of a vital event is for the informant to make a report about the fact of its occurrence along with certain of its characteristics to registration personnel. This reporting can take two forms (1) a verbal declaration and (2) a written statement.

Birth. From the 18 African countries surveyed, the simple procedure, where a birth is reported either verbally or by a written declaration, but more usually verbally, by an informant without the fulfillment of any subsidiary requirements is followed by only two: Seychelles and Ghana. In many African countries, subsidiary requirements are stipulated for birth registration. The most popular is the condition that witnesses should substantiate the statement of the infor-

mant. (In Senegal, this requirement is limited to the rural areas.) Another condition in certain countries which has only limited spatial application, is the certification of a birth by a doctor or midwife. Since hospitals, clinics and health centres are sparsely spread out in many countries with the majority located in the urban areas, only birth registrations in places where they are located can possibly satisfy this condition.

Death. With respect to death registration, Ghana is the only country among the 18 countries with the simple procedure of reporting a death by the informant without the fulfillment of any other condition. In the majority of the countries, witnesses are required to support the statement of the informant. (In Senegal, this provision applies only in the rural areas.) Also, in a few countries, medical certification of the cause(s) of death is required, a condition that can only be fulfilled in areas with medical and diagnostic facilities.

The cost of current registration. Two types of fees are usually imposed for the current registration of vital events. The first type is intended for the registration process itself and the second for the initial proof of registration. The fees charged by most African countries are usually for the initial proof of registration, with the actual registration process free of charge.

For the fledgling vital registration systems in Africa to attain acceptable levels of coverage, one of the basic requirements is the cooperation of the public, which cannot be taken for granted especially in the rural areas. Given this situation, there should be no obstacles placed before informants who want to register vital events if they satisfy all the requirements stipulated by law for current registration. In these cases, it is recommended that both the registration process and the initial proof of registration should be provided free of charge.

The current position of this subject in 18 African countries is that for current birth registration, about half of the countries demand a fee for the initial proof of registration. A fewer number, six, also require a fee for the same purpose for current death registration.

Where registrations for birth and death are made

The two types of geographic concepts used in the registration of births and deaths are: (1) the place of occurrence of the event, and (2) the place of usual residence (i.e., the usual residence of the father or mother of the newborn child and the usual residence

of the deceased). The concept, place of occurrence of the births, is used in the majority of the 20 countries for which data are available. Only Botswana uses both the concepts, the occurrence of the birth and the usual residence of the mother. In one, Morocco, the residence concept employed is the usual residence of the mother.

With respect to death registration, the popular concept used is also the place of occurrence of the event, i.e., the death. Only Ghana, among the twenty countries, uses both the concepts, place of occurrence of the death and the usual residence of the deceased. In Morocco, the residence concept for death registration is the usual residence of the deceased.

Time allowed for current registration

Another subject of civil registration laws relates to the designation of the period within which vital events must be registered by the informants. After taking into account such factors as climate, the topology of the area, the availability of comunication facilities, and local customs, countries are encouraged to favour prompt registration as the risks of recall lapse are much lessened in such cases.

Among the 23 African countries surveyed on this topic, a wide variety of maximum periods exists. For births, the range was from seven days (for Libya) to twelve months (for Swaziland). The maximum period of one month is the mode chosen by eight countries. The range for the maximum period for death registration is from 24 hours to 12 months. The maximum periods of 24 hours (used by four countries) and 30 days (used by three) are the two most representative.

The requirements for delayed (or late) and/or declared registration

Laws pertaining to registration within the time period specified are not always adhered to, due to certain circumstances such as distance from the registration office or general inertia on the part of the public.

We can distinguish two types of registration that are available after the legal period, that is, (1) delayed (or late) registrations; and (2) declared registrations.

Delayed registration has been defined as registration of vital events (mainly births) within reasonably short periods after the maximum time specified

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[1] OCAM, La situation de l'Etat civil, op. cit., para. 40.
[2] Uganda, "Births and Deaths Registration Bill", para. 10.

for such registration. The period may be a few days, sometimes a few weeks and/or months after the legal date. The important consideration in these cases is that the registration personnel, if required, could easily verify the facts of the occurrences of the events, given that they have occurred within a relatively short period. Also, it is possible to register in accordance with the procedure for current registration, i.e., the informants and witnesses (if required) could appear before the registration personnel and attest to the facts of the vital event.

The opposite is true of declared registrations. In these cases, the vital event would have occurred years back before requests for the registrations are made. Because of the long interval between the occurrence of the events and the requests, supporting evidence concerning the facts of their occurrence would tend to be hard to acquire. In view of this fact, the probability of giving false information is usually high, so more rigorous tests concerning the facts of their occurrences are laid down.

In most African countries, especially French-speaking, registrations made after the legal period are processed by some form of declared registration method. For example, in the Central African Republic, when a birth is not registered within the statutory period (i.e., one month after birth) registration is only possible after the issuance by a competent court of a judgment procedure. Similarly, in Benin, "only the first degree court transformed into a conciliatory court is the relevant body to issue a judgment procedure corresponding to the declaration".[1] However, in a few countries, a distinction is sometimes made between delayed and declared registrations. For example, in Uganda, the maximum period within which current registration procedures for birth could be used is three months. Three months after this period, registration proceeds in the same manner as with current registration. But "after six months from the date of birth or finding of a child, particulars concerning the birth of the child shall not be registered unless the registrar is satisfied as to the truth of such particulars and is directed to register them by the Registrar-general and the prescribed fee has been paid".[2] Similarly, in Ghana, the maximum period within which the current registration procedures for births could be used is 21 days from the date of birth. Between the end of this period and 12 months from the date of birth, births may be registered following the procedure for current registration. However, after 12 months registration can take place only with the written authority of the registrar and upon payment of the prescribed fee.

In certain African countries, particularly English-speaking, a method exists outside the registration system that provides documentary legal proof of birth. For example, in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, an older relative, acquaintance or next of kin can testify in a sworn statement before a court registrar or a Justice of the Peace, that another person was born at a given date and place and that there was no local birth-registrar in the area at the time of the event. Umoh has argued that this system helps to "stifle the vital registration system"[1] for two reasons. First, because the sworn declarations are never built into the registration system as delayed or declared registrations, and second, because even if the declarations are built into the registration system, they could still fail to meet demographic needs, since demographic data must be timely and continuous.

The Informant

The informant is the person given the responsibility to report to the registration personnel about the occurrence of a vital event and furnish other details about its characteristics. Accordingly, the informant's role is an important one for the effective coverage and prompt reporting of vital events. Therefore, not only should the identity of the person(s) responsible for performing this function for each event be clearly stated in civil registration laws and regulations but also his duties should be "publicized in such a way that familiarity with the legal obligations is established":[2]

Identity of informant in selected African countries: Live Birth. In all the 24 countries providing information on this item, the primary responsibility for registering the facts of live births rests with the parents, and in the majority of them, specifically with the father. The substitute informants are usually the relatives or persons who assisted in the delivery such as the doctor or midwife.

Death. The primary responsibility with respect to the registration of the facts of deaths is assigned mainly to the parents, i.e., in about half of the countries listed. The surviving spouse and relatives are the other two highly represented groups of primary informants. In two countries, the task is given to the inmates of the house and the head of the family. Substitute informants vary from the doctors who administered to the deceased, to relatives and any other person present at the time of death, such as the owner of the house in which the event occurred.

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[1] O.E. Umoh, "Demographic Statistics in Nigeria", p. 23.

[2] UN, *Principles and Recommendations*, para. 325.

THE CIVIL REGISTRATION DOCUMENTS

Various documents are used in carrying out the functions of the civil registration administration. For both English- and French-speaking countries, we can distinguish the following categories:
1) Declaration (or notice) of births, deaths and marriages;
2) Registers, containing birth and death certificates;
3) Extracts or copies from the register;
4) Declaration forms for late registration; and,
5) Other documents, e.g., monthly summary forms and statistical forms.

Declaration (or notice) of births, deaths and marriages

These are preliminary questionnaires for the reporting of births, deaths and marriages. They are generally abbreviated forms of the information contained in the register, containing only the most important particulars. A birth declaration form may contain, for example, such information as the name of the physician or midwife who attended the birth, the name and the location of the institution, and the date of occurrence of the event. For deaths, the questionnaire may include the name of the physician who certified the death, the date and time of the occurrence of the event, and the cause(s) of death.

The uses of the declaration form can be distinguished in two types of situations. The first is when a birth or death occurs in a hospital, clinic, or health centre, etc., and was attended by a doctor or midwife. A declaration document is filed by a doctor or a midwife and contains details of the event, which is transmitted to the civil registration centre.

The second situation is where a birth or death occurs, particularly in the rural areas, outside a hospital or a health centre and without a doctor or a midwife in attendance. In these cases, the persons designated as informants such as the father or mother of the newborn child or the relatives of the deceased are to make a verbal report of the event to the nearest registration centre. In some countries, before this information is entered into the register, the data are first reported on a special declaration form.

The Registers

The registers contain the information used for the legal registration of vital events. There are two kinds, detachable and nondetachable. The register with detachable sheets may have a set containing about four identical copies, which are prepared for each vital event. For documentary proof of regis-

tration, informants are given certified copies or abstracts from the register.

The information in the various registers usually contains the full particulars required by law to be provided by the informant, such as:

1) the dates of occurrence and registration of births, deaths, stillbirths and marriages;
2) the place of occurrence;
3) the characteristics of the newborn child, e.g., sex; and of the deceased, e.g., sex, age, marital status and occupation;
4) the characteristics of the parents of the new-born child and sometimes of the deceased;
5) other details such as the causes of death, attendant at birth, hospitalization, and particulars about the informants.
6) Nationality of parents of the newborn child.

Abstracts and copies

After the registration of the event, a need may arise on many occasions for some particulars on the record, for example, for legal purposes. In these cases, the registration personnel are allowed to extract the details from the register, fully or in an abbreviated form.

Declaration for late registration or affidavits

In most of the countries, a sworn testimony of the informant sometimes supported by witnesses before a stipulated tribunal or official(s) is necessary for registration made outside the period for current registration. Special forms exist for the entry of the information of the events to be registered in this manner.

Other documents

Birth and Death Acts and regulations. The officials of the civil registration system should be acquainted with the rules and regulations governing the system to effectively perform their many functions. Accordingly, it is usual for all the offices to be supplied with a copy of the Act and any amendments and other administrative regulations issued from time to time.

Monthly (or quarterly) summary forms. These are the statistical summary forms used by the regional offices for the periodic report of vital events in their area.

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[1]UN, "Demographic surveys in Africa, 1950-1970", in *Methodology of Demographic Sample Surveys,* Statistical Papers, series M. No. 51. 1971.
[2]ECA, "Study on the methods and problems of the 1970 round of African Population and Housing Censuses," *op. cit.*

Contents of birth and death forms

The contents of the birth and death forms of 20 African countries are summarised in tables 8 and 9. In tables 10 and 11, are the lists of the topics that we consider should be included on the birth and death forms of African countries. These topics have been divided into two groups: basic and other useful.

The basic topics are those items that we tentatively consider as the minimum number that should appear on the forms of each country. On the other hand, the other useful topics are optional items.

An examination of tables 8 and 9 shows that some of the other useful topics such as legitimacy status of the newborn child, duration of marriage, weight of the newborn child, children born alive and cause of death currently appear on the forms of only a few countries. The reasons for this may be attributed to three interrelated factors, namely (1) conceptual and practical problems in the application of some of the topics, such as causes of death, (2) assignment of low priority to some topics, and (3) the use in some countries of out-of-date forms. Accordingly, countries must make an assessment of some of these problems in choosing the useful topics.

OTHER METHODS USED IN THE COLLECTION OF VITAL STATISTICS

The methods used to collect fertility and mortality data in Africa in the 1950s, given the virtual nonexistence of viable national vital statistics systems, were by sample surveys. A large number of these surveys were carried out in French-speaking countries under the auspices of INSEE, beginning with the Guinea Survey of 1954-55.[1]

Since this period, many other African countries have conducted demographic sample surveys. Generally speaking, the single round retrospective survey appears to be the most popular form of data collection method used in the continent. Next in popularity was the multi-round survey. Also, many countries have either on a 100 percent or sample basis in their 1960 and 1970 rounds of censuses, derived fertility and mortality indices using such questions as the total number of children ever born, split into the three classes: those at home, elsewhere and dead; and the date of the women's most recent live birth.[2]

The orphanhood question has been included in censuses and surveys in the following countries: Botswana (1971 census), Chad (1963-64 survey),

Gambia (1973 census), Sudan (1973 census), Sierra Leone (1974 census), Lesotho (1967-1968 and 1971-72 surveys), Malawi (1970-72 survey) and Tanzania (1973 survey).

Dual record surveys in Africa

A smaller number of countries, namely, Kenya (1972-77), Lesotho (1971-73), Liberia (1969-73), Malawi (1970-72) and Morocco (1970-73) have also experimented with the dual record system.[1] The Kenyan and Moroccan surveys are among the best documented.[2]

Kenya. The survey area consisted of a band of seven contiguous districts totalling about 35,000 sq. kms., with a population of 93,000. Probability sampling of clusters of households was used. The urban and low density rural clusters had on the average a population of 800, while the rural had 1,600.

Through regular household visits, recorders covered one full cluster of each pair (from the 72 paired clusters selected) each month, except in the low density rural areas. During the same month, the other cluster of the pair was covered informally by a few community contacts who were supposed to communicate their observations to the recorder. This procedure facilitated some experimentation with community contacts versus household visits method. The study, however, showed no clear-cut superiority of the household visit or community recording procedures. However, it would appear that the community contact procedure was less tedious for the respondents, less time-consuming for recorders and thus more economical.

Morocco. The study area comprised approximately 90,000 sq. kms., with a combined population of 84,000. Probability sampling of clusters of households was used. The average size of the urban cluster was 1,300 and the rural 1,700.

The recording aspects comprised some tests on the efficiency of full-time nonresident versus part-time resident personnel. The part-time resident

recorders were employed five days per month for one half of the clusters. The other half of the clusters were handled on a full-time basis by three teams of nonresident roving recorders and their supervisors. In the urban areas, recorders made monthly calls to every household, whereas, in the rural areas a mixed pattern of house-to-house visits, supplemented by special or regular community contact points was used. Although the findings on the superiority of the two types of personnel was inconclusive, the study showed that by eliminating residency as a requirement and using roving recorders, administrative control and supervision might be tightened and simplified.

The sample registration scheme

A few African countries have also experimented or have plans to experiment with registration schemes. The Central African Republic, Ghana, and Kenya are examples.

One of the earliest experimentations in Africa with the methodologies of the civil registration system took place in Kenya in the sixties.[3] This pilot scheme was undertaken in (1) Nairobi city, (2) Nyeri district, (3) Bungoma district and (4) Kwale district. The project, (1) a continuous recording system and (2) sample surveys in the three districts, provided insights into the types of administrative structures and personnel suitable for the running of vital registration systems in urban and rural areas. More specifically, the "fundamental lesson which emerged is the necessity of establishing in each district a full-time officer whose sole task would be to keep constant pressure on the schoolmaster-registrars and to forward their returns with the minimum of delay to the office of the registrar-general in Nairobi."

Ghana's current project to develop vital registration in the country, involves an experimental and a probability sampling scheme.[4] The experimental scheme, which forms the first phase of the programme, aims to test the suitability of the field staff and the legal and administrative procedures to be used in the sampling phase. The next phase of the exercise is the probability sampling programme, in which data collection mechanisms would include (1) a vital registration system and (2) a sampling survey subsystem. Among the objectives of this phase would be the generation of interim vital rates.

[1] J.G.C. Blacker, "Dual record demographic surveys".

[2] J.R. Abernathy and H. Booth, *The dual record system: An overview of experience in five countries.* Poplab, Scientific Report Series, No. 26, 1976.

[3] J.G.C. Blacker, "Experiments in vital registration and sample surveys of births and deaths in Kenya", B/CM.14/CAS.4/VS/16.

[4] UNFPA, "Assistance for the expansion of national registration system for births and deaths, and development of vital statistics" Project No. GHA/72/P04 Sept. 1975.

The principal feature of the plan to improve the vital registration system in the Central African Republic is the establishment of a model registration or exper-

imental geographical area.[1] The objective of this aspect of the project is to make the registration system work in a limited area. With this objective satisfactorily achieved, the system would be extended gradually to other regions in the country until all attain the same standard. Civil registration laws, documents, and other forms that would be used eventually in all the regions, with, of course, changes made in them to improve them from experience gained in the exercise, would be instituted in the model area. To test underreporting of events and to generate and evaluate vital rates, sample surveys would be periodically mounted.

Other

Apart from the conventional systems of data collection such as population census, sample surveys and the global vital registration system, some authors have suggested experimentations with nonconventional systems, for example, administrative records and population and parish registers for the estimation of vital rates and population totals and attributes.[2] However, evaluations of these systems and the data they generated in the past show that their coverages of information are grossly incomplete. Accordingly, they have proved so far not very successful for the estimation of national demographic rates and population totals.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present status of civil registration systems in Africa is unsatisfactory. The position is that excluding the small island countries like Sao Tome, Seychelles, Reunion and Mauritius, because their terrains and patterns of population settlements are not representative of the rest of the continent, the few countries with sizeable populations that have reasonable nationwide coverages of the registration of births and/or deaths are Algeria, Egypt, Madagascar and Tunisia. In the rest of the other countries, including some with large populations as Nigeria, Ethopia and Zaire, registrations of vital events are still incomplete.

To be sure, within some of these countries, there are isolated areas, mainly urban, which are well

served by registration centres, where the coverage of registration is fairly complete. But in the much larger rural areas, there are either insufficient numbers of registration centres or none at all.

The development of viable civil registration systems in many African countries has been beset with several problems. These include:

1) Allocation of insufficient funds to this activity;
2) Lack of motivation on the part of the public;
3) Problems connected with the registration officials;
4) Administrative management problems, and
5) Problems of the rural areas.

Allocation of insufficient funds to this activity

At the heart of the problems of the civil registration systems in Africa is the allocation of insufficient funds to this sector by national governments. For example, in Ghana it has been observed that one of the main obstacles affecting the effective implementation of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act of 1965, which instituted nationwide compulsory registration "is attributable to lack of funds for the establishment of a field machinery that would carry the registration facilities to the doorsteps of the people".[3]

Schemes to improve and/or expand the coverage of civil registration systems involve several integrated strategies, such as the campaign to motivate the public to register, the opening of new registration centres, and the recruitment and training of staff which cannot be implemented without the initial outlay of substantial funds. Therefore, in countries where the political support for the expansion and/or improvement of the civil registration is lacking, efforts should be made to get members of the government interested in the project.

Lack of motivation on the part of the public

For the public to cooperate in the registration of vital events, the products of the system, i.e., the birth, death and marriage certificates should have some usefulness for them. In many African countries, especially within the rural areas, the benefits of vital records and statistics are not so self-evident. Thus, there is the need to educate the public about their uses and benefits.

In the campaign to educate the public with regard to civil registration functions, practices and benefits, it would be necessary to enlist the support and cooperation of the following groups of persons: doctors, teachers, local administrators, social welfare workers, and religious leaders. The publicity cam-

[1]UNDP, Amélioration du système d'enregistrement et de statistiques des faits d'Etat-Civil.

[2]J. Conde "Non-Conventional Sources of demographic data" and B. Lacombe, "The utilization of parish and vital events registers in African demography" in IUSSP, Population in African Development.

[3]UNFPA, "Assistance for the expansion of national registration for births and deaths, and development of vital statistics", project No. GHA/72/POP, Sept. 1975.

paign should focus on such points as the procedures for the declaration of vital events, the usefulness of the documents and the obligation to report the vital events that occur in the community.

To create demand for vital records, the government should make it obligatory to acquire them in certain circumstances, for example, when children are first admitted to school to attest to their dates of birth, and acquiring travel papers to prove nationality. Moreover, efforts should be made to eliminate all those features of the civil registration procedures that would tend to discourage the public to register their vital events. In this regard, fees, for example, should not be levied either for the cost of registering or the first proof of registration.

Problems connected with the registration officials

The status, condition of service and expertise of the civil registration officials in many African countries must be improved. Some of the problems of these officials include:

a) low status and/or expertise; and

b) inadequate numbers in relation to the registration work to be performed.

Low status and/or expertise. In a few African countries, the posts of registration officers especially at regional levels are filled by minor civil servants or other government functionaries, who do not inspire confidence in the public nor in officials of agencies such as hospitals, clinics and health centres who provide them with information for completing vital event forms. An improvement in the professional status of such officials would go a long way to ameliorating the coverage of the registration of vital events.

Inadequate numbers in relation to the registration work to be performed. Another problem of the vital registration system is the uneven work distribution of the registration personnel. In especially rural areas in some countries, these officials are too thinly spread out. Ideally, for the registration personnel to efficiently perform their various functions "the size of the registration unit in terms of both area and population density should be such that the registrar can give to that unit the attention required to produce good registration".[1]

[1] UN, *Principles and recommendations,* op. cit. para. 308.

[2] For more on this see: G.M.K. Kpedekpo, "The legal aspects of vital registration systems in Africa", in U.U. Uche (ed.) *Law and Population in Africa,* Nairobi: East African Literature bureau, 1976, pp. 254-262.

Administrative management problems

The administrative mechanism for vital registration currently existing in many African countries is in need of reform. A problem area, especially in the French-speaking countries, is the lack of a centralized (national) agency that supervises, coordinates and oversees the whole civil registration system.

To facilitate standardization of the various civil registration functions and procedures, for example, in the design of forms, their statistical contents, the uniform application of the registration laws and the adherence to specific time schedules in statistical reporting there is need for at least two coordinating bodies. These are the central (national) coordinating agency and the multi-agency vital registration committee.

The central (national) coordinating agency would be mainly concerned with the coordination and supervision of the various civil registration units in the country. The multi-agency vital registration committee's principal duties would include coordination among the various bodies involved with vital records and statistics in order that registration could more efficiently serve its various functions—administrative, medical and statistical.

Another subject for reform in certain countries is civil registration legislation.[2] There are still a few countries in Africa that do not yet have uniform national legislation governing the compulsory registrations of births and deaths. Also, there is another group of countries that operates legislations that do not reflect recent developments relating to the civil registration. There is a need for the formulation of either new or revised legislations in these countries.

Problems of the rural areas

The civil registration systems in the rural areas of many African countries have been neglected for a long time. At the same time, urban areas have received a disproportionate share of resources. For progress to be achieved in the future development of national systems, particular attention must be paid to the special problems of rural areas. These include difficulties of terrains, distances, transportation and communication. Moreover, here the benefits of vital records are not now self-evident, as in these socio-economic environments they have virtually very few, if any, uses.

Several suggestions have been put forward on how to make registration effective in these areas. Authors like Blacker, Cantrelle and Podlewski propose experimentation with the system of active registration. The other suggested strategy, which

could be tried along with the first proposal, is the use of full-time (rather than part-time) registration personnel, each put in charge of a number of scattered localities. The official should visit his allotted area periodically, say, monthly, to investigate what vital events have occurred since his last visit.

Another related suggestion is to make chiefs, school teachers, midwives and other government functionaries living in rural areas, informants. They would canvass all the vital events that have occurred within their areas and report them to the itinerant registration officer or the nearest registration centres.

TABLE 1

Date of institution of civil registration systems and extension of compulsory registration — Twenty-nine African countries

Country	Year	Extension of compulsory registration	
		Year	Coverage
Algeria	1882	1882	Moslems in North
		1905	Moslems in South
Benin	1933	1933	Certain categories of French subjects
		1950	Inhabitants 10 kms. from registration centres
Botswana	1939	1969	Principal towns, e.g. Caborone
Burundi	1922	1922	All the indigenous population
Cameroon	1917	1917	Western Cameroon
	1935	1935	Eastern Cameroon
Central African Republic	1940	1940	French subjects
		1966	Entire population group
Congo	1922	1922	All the indigenous population
Gabon	1940	1940	French subjects
		1972	Entire population group
Ghana	1888	1888	Accra, Christianborg*
		1912	Principal towns
		1965	Entire population group
Ivory Coast	1933	1933	Some French subjects
		1950	Inhabitants 10 kms. from registration centres
		1964	Entire population group
Kenya	1904	1904	Europeans**
		1906	Europeans*
		1906	Asians*
		1929	Asians*
		1971	Entire population group
Lesotho	1880	— —	— —
Madagascar	1878	1878	Entire population group
Malawi	1904	1904	Europeans**
		1905	Europeans, Asians
Mali	1933	1933	French subjects
		1950	Inhabitants 10 kms. from registration centres
Mauritania	1933	1933	French subjects
			Inhabitants 10 kms. from registration centres
Mauritius	1793	1793	The free population
		1805	Slave population
Niger	1933	1933	French subjects
		1950	Inhabitants 10 kms. from registration centres

Nigeria	1867	1867	Lagos Island
		1901	Island of Iddo; part of mainland Ebute Metta
		1903	Southern Nigeria
		1926	Some towns
Rwanda	1922	1922	All population groups
Senegal	1916	1916	French citizens of quatre-communes
		1933	Some French subjects
		1950	Inhabitants 10 kms. from registration centres
Seychelles	1893	1893	Entire population
Sierra Leone	1801	1801	Freetown, Granville town
		1914	Some chiefdoms and towns
		1960	Some towns
Somalia	1904	1904	Europeans**
		1912	Europeans*
		1953	Municipalities in South
		1956	Other areas in South
Swaziland	1900	1927	Non-natives
Tanzania	1917	1917	Europeans
		1923	Asians*
		1966	Certain townships e.g. Arusha, Dar es Salaam
Togo	1923	1923	Certain urban centres
		1962	Entire population
Upper Volta	1933	1933	Some French subjects
		1950	Inhabitants 10 kms. from registration centres
Uganda	1905	1905	Europeans**
		1907	Europeans*
		1915	Asians
		1973	Entire population

*Death Registration only
**Birth Registration only

Source: R.R. Kuczynski *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire* Vols. 1 & 2 (OUP, 1948, Royal Institute of International Affairs); Ministère de la France d'Outre-Mer, "Etude critique du fonctionnement de l'état-civil et des registres de population", *Documents et statistiques,* March 1954; and Frank Lorimer, *Demographic Information on Tropical Africa* (Boston: University Press, 1961).

TABLE 2

Registration coverage of vital events: 50 African Countries

Country	Year	Quality of registered data
Algeria	1975	Death registration is regarded as being between 40% and 60% complete
Angola	1973	Birth statistics are based on baptisms recorded in Roman Catholic church registers
Benin	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Botswana	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Burundi	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Cape Verde	1975	Birth and death registrations represent at least 90% coverage of the events occurring
Central African Republic	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Chad	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Comoros	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Congo	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Djibouti	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Egypt	1975	Birth and death registrations represent at least 90% coverage of the events occurring (reliability of infant registration is unknown)
Equatorial Guinea	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Ethiopia	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Gabon	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Gambia	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Ghana	1974	Birth registration is regarded as around 26 percent complete and death registration about 22 percent complete
Guinea	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Guinea-Bissau	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Ivory Coast	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Kenya	1977	Birth registration is regarded as around 43 percent complete and death registration about 24 percent complete
Lesotho	1979	Birth and death registration currently incomplete
Liberia	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Libya	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Madagascar	1972	Birth registration considered to be 70 percent complete and death registration 50 percent complete
Malawi	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Mali	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Mauritania	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Mauritius	1976	Birth and death registrations represent at least 90% coverage of the events occurring
Morocco	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Mozambique	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Niger	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Nigeria	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete

Reunion	1973	Birth and death registrations represent at least 90% coverage of the events occurring. (Infant death registration is incomplete)
Rwanda	1974	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Sao Tome and Principe	1974	Birth and death registrations represent at least 90% coverage of the events occurring
Senegal	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Seychelles	1979	Birth and death registrations represent at least 90% coverage of the events occurring
Sierra Leone	1979	Birth registration is regarded as 23% complete and death registration about 26% complete
Somalia	1979	Birth registration is regarded as 23% complete and death registration about 26% complete
Sudan	1979	Birth registration is regarded as 23% complete and death registration about 26% complete
Swaziland	1979	Birth registration is regarded as 23% complete and death registration about 26% complete
Togo	1979	Birth registration is regarded as 23% complete and death registration about 26% complete
Tunisia	1979	Birth registration represents at least 90% of the events occurring; death registration estimated to be 70 percent complete
Uganda	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
United Republic of Cameroon	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
United Republic of Tanzania	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Upper Volta	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Zaire	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete
Zambia	1979	Birth and death registrations currently incomplete

Sources: UN, Population and Vital Statistics Report, Statistical Papers, Series A, Vol. 30, No. 1, Jan. 1978; D.C. Mehta and J.B. Assie, A programme for measurement of life and death in Ghana. Accra mimeo. 1976.

TABLE 3

Indices of Accessibility to Registration Centres: Twenty-one African countries, 1970s

Country	Area (km²)	Length of roads (km)	Number of registration units	km² per registration unit	Registration unit per 1000 km²	Arriaga accessibility index[a]
Benin	112,750	7,000	227	496	2	125
Botswana	600,372	7,812	12	50,031	1	1
Cameroon	4,754,442	47,000	926	513	1	193
Central African Republic	622,984	21,300	183	3,464	1	10
Chad	1,284,000	30,800	350	3,669	1	4
Gabon	267,667	6,100	48	5,579	1	4
Ghana	238,533	33,264	374	676	2	218
Ivory Coast	322,463	36,000	1,295	249	4	448
Libya	1,759,540	5,900	48	36,657	1	1
Malawi	118,484	10,873	24	4,936	1	18
Mauritius	2,045	1,900	50	41	25	10,000
Madagascar	587,041	34,400	783	750	2	16
Morocco	446,550	25,400	903	494	2	114
Niger	1,267,000	7,000	312	4,060	1	2
Rwanda	26,338	8,000	141	186	7	145
Senegal	196,192	15,422	823	238	4	6,650
Seychelles	280	133	4	70	4	6,650
Togo	56,000	7,300	428	131	8	305
Tunisia	163,610	17,786	1,271	129	8	848
Uganda	236,036	27,728	665	355	3	331
Upper Volta	274,200	17,000	746	368	3	168

[a]Arriaga index = Dp × Dr, where

$$Dp = \frac{\text{Number of registration centres} \times 1,000}{\text{Area (km}^2\text{)}}$$

$$Dr = \frac{\text{Kilometers of roads (kms)} \times 1,000}{\text{Area (km}^2\text{)}}$$

Sources: ECA, *African statistical yearbooks for 1974;* L'OCAM, *La situation de l'état civil dans les pays de* l'OCAM.

TABLE 4

Registration units and personnel: Selected African countries

Country	Registration Units	Registration personnel
Benin	Centres principaux Centres secondaires	Registrars (public attorney, who delegates power to the mayors of communes and sub-prefects of a sub-prefectures); clerks
Botswana	Central registry District registry	Registrar of births and deaths; Towns clerks and district officers
Cameroon	Centres normaux d'état civil, centres speciaux d'état civil	Municipal officials (i.e. mayors, govt. representatives in the communes or chairman of the area council); clerks
Central African Republic	Centres principaux Centres secondaires	Registrars (mayors, deputy mayors or councillors of municipalities), clerks
Chad	Centres de l'état civil Centres principaux Centres secondaires	Registrars (sub-prefects, chiefs, admin. officers etc.); assistant registrars; clerks
Gabon	Centres principaux Centres secondaires	Registrars (mayors of communes, prefects of districts, sub-prefect for arrondissements); clerks
Ghana	Central registry; registry offices; primary centres	Registrar, district and assistant registrars; (part-time) registration assistants
Guinea Bissau	Region, secteur	Administrative secretary; président of état du secteur
Ivory Coast	Centres principaux; Centres secondaires	Registrars (mayors, prefect-mayors and sub-prefects); clerks
Kenya	Central registry district registry	Registrar, assistant registrar; deputy registrar
Libya	Municipal civil;	Civil registrar
Madagascar	Communities	Registrars (mayors or their deputies), clerks
Mauritius	Civil status office	Registrar-general, civil status officers
Morocco	Communes	The president or deputy of communes
Niger	Centres principaux	Registrars (mayors, sub-prefect and deputies); clerks
Nigeria	Townships registry offices	Medical officer of health; administrative officers
Rwanda	Centres d'état civil	Registrars (mayors); secretaries; agents
Senegal	Commune; centres Principaux; centres Secondaires	Registrars (mayors, chiefs of arrondissement or their deputies; local notables), clerks;
Seychelles	Central office; local registration office	Civil status officer; sub-accountant; police officer
Sierra Leone	Registration centres	Registrar, deputy registrar, district registrar
Swaziland	District office	Ast. district registrars
Togo	Bureau central; Bureau secondaire	Registrars (the chief of admin., the mayor); agents
Tunisia	Commune, delegation, secteur	Registrars (Mayor, delegate and Ombas), clerks

Uganda	Gombola (sub-countries); town registries, hospital	Registrars (Gombola clerk, town clerk; hospital superintendent); clerks
Upper Volta	Communes, sub-prefecture arrondissement; canton centres secondaires	Registrars (the commandants of cercles, the chiefs of sub-divisions or their deputies); clerks

TABLE 5

Requirements for current birth and death registration: 18 African Countries[1]

(1 = Fee, 2 = Doctor's or midwife's certificate, 3 = Witness(es))

	Births	Deaths
Botswana	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3
Cameroon	3	3
Central African Republic	1, 2	1, 2
Chad	1, 2	1, 2
Congo Republic	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3
Ghana	— —	— —
Guinea-Bissau	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3
Ivory Coast	3	3
Kenya	2	2
Libya	2	2
Mauritius	3	3
Senegal[2]	3	3
Seychelles	— —	3
Sierra Leone	2	2
Swaziland[3]	1, 2	1, 2
Tunisia	2, 3	2, 3
Uganda	2	2, 3
Upper Volta	1, 1, 3	3

Source: UN questionnaire on vital registration practices; and OCAM, *La Situation de l'état civil dans les pays de l'OCAM*

[1] (a) The fee charged is usually for the initial proof of registration.
(b) Doctor's or midwife's certification feasible only in areas with hospitals and for health centres.

[2] Witnesses only needed for vital events in rural areas.

[3] Affidavit also required if person died at home.

TABLE 6

Maximum time allowed for current registrations of live birth and death: 23 African countries

Country	Birth	Death
Benin	2 months	30 days
Botswana	3 months	30 days
Cameroon	15 days	15 days
Central African Republic	30 days	30 days
Chad	2 months	2 months
Congo	30 days	no legal requirements
Gabon	30 days	48 hours
Ghana	21 days	24 hours
Guinea-Bissau	30 days	24 hours
Ivory Coast	15 days	15 days
Kenya	6 months	6 months
Libya	7 days	24 hours
Madagascar	12 days	12 days
Mauritius	45 days	24 hours
Morocco	30 days	3 days[1]
Niger	2 months	2 months
Senegal	30 days	45 days
Seychelles	30 days	36 hours
Swaziland	12 months	12 months
Togo	1 month	15 days
Tunisia	10 days	3 days
Uganda	3 months	30 days
Upper Volta	2 months	2 months

Source: United Nations, Questionnaire on vital Registration practices and OCAM, *La situation de l'état civil dans les pays de l'OCAM, mai,* 1974.

[1] 4 days for remote areas.

TABLE 7

Agency of Government reported to be responsible for Civil Registration function at local and national levels: Twenty African countries, 1976

Country	Responsible national agency	Responsible sub-national agencies
Botswana	Ministry of Home Affairs	Township & district registries
Central African Republic	Ministry of the Interior	Centres principaux & secondaires
Chad	Ministry of the Interior and Security	Centres principaux & secondaires
Gabon	Ministries of the Interior and Justice	Centres principaux & secondaires
Ghana	Ministry of Economic Planning	Central Registry Registry Reporting centres
Guinea Bissau	Civil Registration and State Justice Commission	Regions Sectors
Ivory Coast	Ministries of Interior and Justice	Centres principaux & secondaires
Kenya	Ministry of Justice	Local registry offices
Libya	Ministry of Municipalities	Registration offices
Malawi	Ministry of Justice	Districe offices
Mauritius	Ministry of Justice	Civil Status Office
Madagascar	Ministries of Justice and Interior	Urban & Rural communes
Morocco	Ministry of the Interior	Commune, Arrondissement, Village
Senegal	Ministries of the Interior and Justice	Communes, Centres principaux & secondaires
Seychelles	Immigration and Civil Status	Civil Status offices
Sierra Leone	Ministry of Health	Registration Offices
Swaziland	Ministry of Justice	District Office
Tunisia	Ministry of the Interior	Communes, Delegations, Secteurs
Uganda	Ministry of Justice	District Registration Offices: Gombolas (sub-countries) & Townships
Upper Volta	Ministry of the Interior	Communes, Sous-prefectures, Centres secondaires

Table 8: Contents of birth registration forms: Twenty African countries

TOPICS	Algeria	Botswana	Cameroon	Central African Republic	Benin	Ethiopia	Gabon	Ghana	Ivory Coast	Madagascar	Malawi	Mauritius	Senegal	Seychelles	Sierra Leone	Swaziland	Togo	Tunisia	Uganda	Upper Volta
Date of birth of infant+	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Date of registration+		x	x		x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Place of birth of infant+	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Type of birth+	x					x		x		x		x					x	x		
Attendant at birth+								x									x			
Hospitalization+	x	x						x		x		x					x			
Sex of infant+	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Legitimacy status+	x	x					x					x		x		x				
Weight at birth+	x																	x		
Age of mother+	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x					x	x	x	
Age of father+	x		x	x	x	x			x	x		x	x				x	x	x	
Children born alive to mother+	x	x						x				x					x	x	x	
Duration of marriage of mother+												x						x		
Education of mother								x												
Education of father								x												
Literacy status: mother	x																	x		
Literacy status: father	x																	x		
Ethnic (national group) mother	x					x				x	x	x					x			
Ethnic (national group) father	x					x				x	x	x								
Citizenship (nationality) mother	x		x	x			x	x											x	
Citizenship (nationality) father	x	x					x	x										x	x	
Type of activity: father	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Occupation: father	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Occupation: mother	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x

Table 8 (continued)

TOPICS	COUNTRY	Algeria	Botswana	Cameroon	Central African Republic	Benin	Ethiopia	Gabon	Ghana	Ivory Coast	Madagascar	Malawi	Mauritius	Senegal	Seychelles	Sierra Leone	Swaziland	Togo	Tunisia	Uganda	Upper Volta
Place of usual residence: mother		x	x	x	x1/	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x
Place of usual residence: father				x	x1/		x			x	x		x2/	x	x		x	x	x	x	x1/
Place of birth: father				x			x			x	x			x			x				
Place of birth: mother			x	x			x			x	x			x			x				

+ UN Priority collection topics

1/ Place of usual residence of parents

2/ District of residence of the child

Source: Births and Deaths Certificate for each country.

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Table 9: Contents of Death Registration forms: Twenty African countries

TOPICS	Algeria	Botswana	Cameroon	Central African Republic	Benin	Ethiopia	Gabon	Ghana	Ivory Coast	Madagascar	Malawi	Mauritius	Senegal	Seychelles	Sierra Leone	Swaziland	Togo	Tunisia	Uganda	Upper Volta
Date of death+	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Date of registration+	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x		x			x	x	x			x
Place of occurrence of death+		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x
Age of deceased+	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Age of surviving spouse+																				
Sex of deceased+	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Marital status+	x		x	x				x		x		x	x				x	x		x
Educational attainment								x												
Ethnic (national group)							x			x	x	x				x	x		x	
Citizenship			x				x	x		x			x					x		
Children born alive (female)												x								
Occupation			x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Activity																		x		
Place of usual residence		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Place of birth	x		x	x	x		x		x	x			x	x			x	x		x
Causes of death+		x				x	x					x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Certifier+		x				x						x						x		
Hospitalization		x					x					x	x				x	x	x	
Religion												x		x						
Place of birth: father			x																	
Place of birth: mother			x																	
Occupation: father										x										
Occupation: mother										x										
Usual residence: parents			x				x	x												

Source: Births and Deaths Certificates for each country.

+ UN Priority collection topics.

TABLE 10

Basic and other useful topics for inclusion on the registration form for Birth

Basic topics	Other useful topics
• Sex of infant	• Legitimacy
• Date of birth of infant	• Children born alive to mother
• Age (or date of birth) of mother	• Duration of marriage (of mother)
• Age (or date of birth) of father	• Weight at birth of infant
• Date of registration	• Type of activity of father/mother
• Place of birth	• Educational attainment of father/mother
• Place of usual residence of mother	• Place of birth of mother/father
• Nationality (or citizenship) of father	• Ethnic or national group of father/mother
• Nationality (or citizenship) of mother	
• Occupation of father	
• Occupation of mother	

TABLE 11

Basic and other useful topics for inclusion on the registration form for Death

Basic topics	Other useful topics
• Sex of the deceased	• Cause of death
• Age or date of birth of the deceased	• Certifier
• Date of death	• Education of the deceased
• Date of registration	• Literacy of the deceased
• Place of occurrence	• Marital status of the deceased
• Place of usual residence of the deceased	• Type of activity of the deceased
• Nationality (or citizenship) of the deceased	
• Occupation of the deceased	
• Place of birth	

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