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for CRVS Systems

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# MOVING THE CRVS-GENDER AGENDA FORWARD



## Outcome Document from the Meeting *Making the Invisible Visible: CRVS as a basis to meeting the 2030 Gender Agenda*

February 26<sup>th</sup> 2018

Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems  
International Development Research Centre  
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This outcome report has been prepared for the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Systems at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The main authors were Shaida Badiee and Deirdre Appel (Open Data Watch), with contributions from Nomthandazo Malambo, Irina Dincu and Montasser Kamal (IDRC).

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

On 26 February 2018, the **Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Systems** at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) convened a one-day meeting on gender and CRVS, under the theme, “Making the Invisible Visible: CRVS as a basis to meeting the 2030 Gender Agenda.” Its goal was to inspire a global commitment to better integrate gender issues in CRVS systems. Close to 100 policy experts and practitioners from around the world gathered in Ottawa, Canada to: (i) discuss the status of the field; (ii) evaluate opportunities and challenges; and (iii) identify areas of research and priority action items to strengthen CRVS systems to better capture the vital events of women and girls.

This event was divided into two components: an opening plenary with a high-level panel, followed by technical sessions on research and strategy, as well as on planning and implementation. This document provides a summary of the meeting, organized by the objectives highlighted above, and concludes with recommendations to help strengthen CRVS systems through a gender lens.

The meeting included high level participation from elected politicians and senior UN representatives, including Celina Caesar-Chavannes, Parliamentary secretary to the Minister for International Development and La Francophonie, Canada; Jean Lebel, President of IDRC; and Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. A full list of speakers and panelists can be found at the end of this document.



## What was discussed

- **Prioritization:** CRVS systems need to be prioritized under national development plans, statistical plans, and global agendas (for example, Cape Town Global Action Plan, High Level Political Forum, High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).
- **Balance:** It is critical to strike a balance between investing in identity management (ID) systems and CRVS systems, as well as a balance between investing in all components of the CRVS system. In particular, death registration should be prioritized.
- **Funding and finances:** It is important to strengthen and better communicate the economic, political and social value of CRVS systems, leverage current initiatives and ongoing efforts, and find low-hanging fruits.
- **Partnership and collaboration:** Strong CRVS systems require participation from all parts of government (including civil registries; health ministries; ministries of justice; and statistical offices), civil society, and the private sector.
- **Knowledge and research:** More knowledge is needed on what works and why it works with regard to incentivizing registration and understanding the barriers women and girls face.

## What was accomplished

- **Convened** close to 100 civil registrars, statisticians, researchers, and gender experts from universities, civil society organizations and UN agencies to discuss the role and importance of CRVS systems towards meeting the 2030 gender agenda.
- **Recognized** the critical role CRVS systems play for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, in the lives of women and girls, and within human rights and legal frameworks.
- **Highlighted** commitments and action plans from national governments, UN and international agencies, and civil society organizations.
- **Reviewed** challenges and opportunities to make progress on gender and CRVS.





## Way forward

- **Ensure the results** of the meeting are brought to the international agenda through upcoming global conferences.
- **Continue to offer opportunities** for discussions on the subject and convene stakeholders to shape the future of the agenda.
- **Disseminate the outcome document** from the meeting, highlighting main discussion points, findings and recommendations.
- **Conduct research** on the effectiveness of incentives for registration as well as the barriers to functional CRVS systems.
- **Increase knowledge** on and improve availability of marriage and death registration data.
- **Produce and disseminate** knowledge products on gender and CRVS for countries to use in their programming.
- **Strengthen advocacy** on the importance of CRVS systems for monitoring progress towards gender equality intentions and the SDGs.
- **Support resource mobilization** efforts at national, regional and global levels.



## Discussion of the status of the field

CRVS systems record vital and civil events occurring in the life of individuals (such as birth, marriage and death), issue certificates, and compile, analyze and disseminate vital statistics, including causes of death. CRVS systems are particularly beneficial to women and girls for two reasons: first, vital statistics provide sex-disaggregated demographic data on key issues such as population distribution and maternal mortality; and second, civil registration ensures that women and girls can prove their own identities to access crucial public services such as health, education, social protection and political representation.<sup>1</sup>

### Birth registration

Birth registration — the official recording of a child’s birth by a government agency — is one of the most important events in a child’s life. It is a gateway to registering other vital events throughout the child’s life, and to securing a legal identity that will allow them to assert their right to vote, apply for a scholarship, or inherit property, to name just a few advantages. Together, these rights and access to services form a basis for women’s economic and political empowerment. Additionally, birth registration, and therefore accurate knowledge of a child’s age, can also contribute to reducing child marriage, particularly for girls.

While the births of boys and girls are registered almost equally worldwide, legislation or custom often requires the father or male representative of the family to register the birth. This poses a serious barrier for women to register the births of their children, particularly women who are unmarried, have been victims of violence, have fled conflict, or are on the move. Birth registration, by right, should be independent of the marital status of the parents or identity of the father, but the reality on the ground is often different. As a result, the most vulnerable women and children are further disadvantaged by outdated legal dispositions that no longer reflect the social dynamics or the rapid social changes we are witnessing.

<sup>1</sup> [https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/assets/files/EN\\_2018%20Gender%20and%20CRVS%20Conference\\_Concept%20Note.pdf](https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/assets/files/EN_2018%20Gender%20and%20CRVS%20Conference_Concept%20Note.pdf)



## Marriage and divorce registration

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

## Death registration

It is, however, in death registration that women are the most invisible. Death registration closes an individual's legal identity. When deaths are not registered, the dead remain legally alive, making it impossible for spouses, children, and families to inherit, or for the surviving spouse to legally remarry – depriving them of assets, reducing family income, and increasing poverty. It also artificially inflates a country's population, compromising effective governance and policy planning. Less than half of all deaths in the world are registered, and even fewer are registered with accurate cause of death information. More troubling is that male deaths are more likely to be registered than women's deaths. If the deaths of women and girls go unregistered, it compromises governments' abilities to identify preventable causes of death, and to develop and implement targeted policies and programs to reduce the deaths of women and girls.

## High demand, weak systems

Despite the many benefits CRVS systems confer to governments and individuals, they are weak globally, resulting in limited data on registration, and the gender dimensions are often overlooked. More than 100 developing countries still do not have functioning systems that can support complete registration of births, marriages, divorce, and death.<sup>2</sup> The births of about 230 million, or 35 percent of children under the age of five, have never been registered, and most of these children are in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup> And globally, two-thirds (38 million) of 56 million annual deaths are still not registered.<sup>4</sup> Taken together, poorly functioning and gender-blind systems make it difficult for governments to create appropriate policies and programs to support women throughout their lives.

2 <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health/brief/global-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics>

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

4 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs324/en/>

There was a strong recognition at the meeting that strengthening CRVS systems is not only an issue of improving the data, but also includes improving the systems and processes that produce the data to ensure more use and impact. CRVS systems are deeply rooted in politics, governance, and institutions; and are not just about technical know-how. A consensus emerged that bringing stakeholders together to debate and discuss the agenda is a useful method for solving or understanding non-technical issues, specifically increasing the use and impact of the data. In this regard, the Centre of Excellence can play a catalytic role in convening and creating spaces to discuss and debate the current status of the field, as well as identify the challenges and promising avenues to improve CRVS systems and ensure the data they produce result in use and impact, particularly for the most vulnerable.



## Evaluation of opportunities and challenges

The meeting also included a review of challenges and opportunities to strengthen CRVS systems, with particular attention to the needs of women and girls. The following were highlighted:

### **Harnessing opportunities: the data revolution for the SDGs and strong partnerships**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the momentum for data to achieve the SDGs present a strong opportunity to strengthen CRVS systems worldwide, while ensuring the gender dimensions are not overlooked. CRVS systems are essential for population data as a denominator for population-based targets and indicators. Specifically, as of March 2017, 67 indicators of the final list of proposed SDG indicators can be measured effectively by using data derived from well-functioning CRVS systems.<sup>5</sup> These indicators cover 12 of the 17 SDGs (i.e. Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, and 17). Some targets and indicators are directly related to CRVS, such as measuring the “proportion of children under 5 years whose births have been registered with a civil authority” or “by 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births.”

But the data from CRVS systems do not only inform the measurement of the indicators; well-functioning CRVS systems are targets and indicators in their own right. Take for example, SDG target 16.9, “By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration” and indicator 17.19.2, “proportion of countries that have conducted at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years and have achieved 100 percent birth registration and 80 percent death registration.”

The centrality of both CRVS systems and gender equality within the SDGs is a key opportunity. Celina Caesar-Chavannes, Parliamentary Secretary to Canada’s Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, reminded the audience of the importance of gender inclusivity in all aspects of development: “If you want to eliminate poverty, empower women. If you want to achieve peace, involve women. And if you want to achieve economic growth, invest in women.” Relevant stakeholders should take advantage of the recognized importance of CRVS systems for both gender equality and sustainable development as outlined in the SDGs.

<sup>5</sup> For more details about the links between CRVS and the SDGs, please visit: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/979321495190619598/pdf/115150-WP-CRVS-for-Monitoring-the-SDGs-web-version-May-18-2017-PUBLIC.pdf>

More specifically, partnerships across government ministries and between international and national stakeholders were highlighted as a key for success. Josie B. Perez, of the Philippines Statistics Authority, highlighted the importance of partnerships in her remarks. Low registration rates characterized the Philippines in the past. However, with strategic and trusted partnerships with local governments, they now have a 98 percent birth registration rate, 90 percent marriage registration rate, and 88 percent death registration rate.

But it is not only partnerships within governments or agencies that are needed. Local partners and civil society organizations are critical for properly understanding local contexts. Strong CRVS systems require participation from all parts of government (civil registry; health ministries; ministries of justice; and statistical offices) as well as the private sector. More work is needed at the country and regional levels to strengthen partnerships and improve CRVS systems. Part of the success of strengthening CRVS systems and ensuring gender dimensions are not overlooked hinges on the ability to harness partnerships.

### **Overcoming challenges: Prioritizing CRVS among competing data interests; lack of available sex-disaggregated data; low capacity and financing**

The numerous competing interests – big data for development, use of advanced analytics, household surveys, the onset of digital ID and biometric tools for registration – remain a challenge to ensuring CRVS systems are prioritized as a foundational and integral administrative system fundamental to the monitoring of the SDGs as well as a nation's own development planning. To be successful in the prioritization and implementation of CRVS systems in the data for sustainable development agenda, there is a need to make better use of the current funding and finances for data and statistics. It is also essential to better articulate the long-term benefits and value of CRVS systems – economically, politically and socially – in order to make the case for more and better financing. As governments, organizations, and agencies aim to scale up efforts to strengthen CRVS systems worldwide, they must strike a delicate balance between investing in household surveys and CRVS systems and the system's subcomponents – birth, marriage and divorce, and death registration and data.

Another challenge in improving the gender sensitivity of CRVS systems is the lack of available data at both national and subnational levels. Major data gaps exist on marriage registration and death registration by sex as well as subnational disaggregation of registration rates. Additionally, there remains a knowledge gap on the proximate constraints women may face (cost, physical access, complex procedures, etc.), the underlying factors (economic status, education, location, ethnicity, and religion), and the interdependence of registering of different vital events. More detailed and systematic research on the benefits of CRVS systems, assessments of CRVS systems, and the factors influencing access to registration are needed to develop an appropriate knowledge base to support effective policymaking and impact.



## Identification of areas of research and priority actions to strengthen CRVS systems

In addition to hearing current action plans from national governments, UN and international agencies, and civil society organizations, the meeting included a review of challenges and opportunities needed to make progress on the CRVS and gender agenda. Based on the meeting, priority actions include:

### Research on the effectiveness of incentives for registration as well as the barriers to functional CRVS systems

Women still face many financial, cultural, and legal barriers to realizing the benefits of civil registration, including the cost of registration; requirements of the husband's presence; a failure by the system to capture customary marriages; burial practices; and inheritance laws. More understanding is needed on how to overcome these barriers, specifically looking at how to do so within a country's unique political and cultural contexts. There is a dearth of strong case studies which explore the success or failures of interventions aimed at increasing the registration of vital life events for women and girls. Such work should be prioritized and shared widely to inform actors working in the space of good practices and can serve as a resource for countries to translate findings to their own context.

### Increase knowledge on and improve availability of marriage and death registration data

According to Romesh Silva's (United Nations Population Fund) research, marriage and death registration are important yet under-studied factors that impact gender equality. Stakeholders working in the field of gender could extend help to fill this knowledge gap. Proper marriage registration has a disproportionately positive social and economic effect for females, while accurate death registration provides insight into infant and maternal mortality and can inform the design of preventive policies. When the deaths of women and girls go unregistered, governments cannot identify preventable causes of death. Conversely, when deaths are registered with accurate cause of death information, it can reveal diseases for which women bear a disproportionate burden, helping policymakers develop targeted public health interventions. The lack of high-quality sex-disaggregated marriage and death registration data is a major challenge to understanding critical development issues facing women and girls, as well as tracking progress towards SDG targets on decreasing maternal mortality and child marriage.



## Increase access to CRVS data

The existing research from Data2X highlights the need for more data on CRVS access.<sup>6</sup> Improvements in data collection, including requiring verification of birth registration, could improve data quality. Additional survey data on birth, death and cause of death, marriage, and divorce registration – paired with demographic information – could help policymakers understand the connections between different forms of registration and outcomes for women, girls and vulnerable populations. Finally, the expanded use of GPS in surveys to identify communities can help in understanding how registration varies by geography and access to facilities, and inform targeted registration programs. This data could also be used in support of the “Leave No One Behind” agenda and better link the CRVS agenda to the 2030 Sustainable Development agenda.

## Strengthen the links between CRVS-gender and other global agendas

Relevant stakeholders should take advantage of the current momentum around CRVS systems to highlight and prioritize this work under national development and statistical plans that include strategies for domestic and international resource mobilization. The critical needs for better CRVS systems in many countries should also be better reflected in global agendas such as the Cape Town Global Action Plan, the High Level Political Forum, High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Davos World Economic Forum, and strategic gatherings such as the World Data Forum among others. The discussion should not be limited to the data and statistics community but rather engage actively with other actors, including the private sector, parliamentarians, journalists, and policy makers.

With the increasing global attention on national IDs, it would be advisable to develop a narrative on the links between ID and CRVS-gender related areas. This could include examining the gender dimensions and potential gender biases within digital ID tools, for example, to what extent certain innovations have considered women’s points of view in their design. Many international and regional development agencies are responding to the capacity development needs of developing countries to strengthen their data systems for monitoring and implementation of the SDGs. Guidance on CRVS system improvement plans could suitably fit within some of these capacity building structures. For example, there could be a training module on CRVS and gender added into the comprehensive and rapid assessment tools used to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of current CRVS systems.



## Next steps for the Centre of Excellence

The meeting was the first of its kind to focus solely on the gender dimensions of CRVS systems and the barriers women and girls face when registering vital life events. The Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems brought the results of the meeting on gender and CRVS to the global agenda through meetings such as the CRVS Innovations Conference (February 27-28, Ottawa, Canada), the 49<sup>th</sup> United Nations Statistical Commission (March 6-9, New York), and will bring the conversation to the United Nations World Data Forum in October 2018. The Centre of Excellence will continue to offer opportunities for discussions on the subject and convene stakeholders to shape the future of the agenda.

The Centre of Excellence plans to assemble relevant knowledge resources on CRVS and gender by working with other partners in the field and publicize and promote research and attention on the topic, through blogs, key-note speeches, and special sessions at international conferences. The Centre of Excellence will also build on the opportunities presented by the CRVS Innovations Conference held the following two days at IDRC.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the Centre of Excellence will work to ensure that the gender dimensions of CRVS systems are well-represented in the agreed upon action items of the innovations conference, and in the development of the monitoring and evaluation framework for CRVS systems.

Based on the feedback received from this first meeting on February 26, 2018, the Centre of Excellence will plan to periodically hold consultations or meetings on CRVS and gender with experts and partners to take stock of progress and formulate further action plans. Follow the [Centre of Excellence website](http://crvssystemsc.ca)<sup>8</sup> for news, updates, resources and more as these action items are implemented.

<sup>7</sup> <https://crvssystemsc.ca/news-and-events/conference-innovations-crvs-systems>

<sup>8</sup> <http://crvssystemsc.ca>



## ANNEX: List of speakers and panelists

### Opening Plenary

Jean Lebel, President of IDRC

Celina Caesar-Chavannes, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Canada

Shamshad Akhtar, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Josie B. Perez, Assistant Secretary, Deputy National Statistician, Censuses and Technical Coordination Office, Philippine Statistics Authority, the Philippines

Jean Louis Ville, Head of Unit for Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance, International Cooperation and Development, European Commission

### High-Level Panel

Chair: Montasser Kamal, Program Leader, Maternal and Child Health, IDRC

Rachel Snow, Chief, Population and Development Branch, United Nations Population Fund

Francesca Perucci, Chief, Statistical Services Branch, Statistics Division, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Haishan Fu, Director at the Development Data Group, the World Bank

Oliver Chinganya, Director, African Center for Statistics, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Jamie Bulande Guta, National Director of Registry and Notary, Directorate of Civil Registration and Notaries, Mozambique

## Technical Session 1: Research and Strategy

Moderator: Irina Dincu, Senior Program Specialist, Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems, IDRC

Mayra Buvinic, Senior Fellow, Data2X

Josie B. Perez, Assistant Secretary, Deputy National Statistician, Censuses and Technical Coordination Office, Philippine Statistics Authority

Papa Seck, Chief Statistician, UN Women (not present; statement read on his behalf)

Martin W. Bratschi, Deputy Director, Technical Implementation for CRVS Improvement Program, Vital Strategies

Romesh Silva, Technical Specialist, United Nations Population Fund

## Technical Session 2: Planning and Implementation

Moderator: Shaida Badiie, Managing Director, Open Data Watch

Jenna Slotin, Senior Director for Policy and Strategy, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

Tanja Suvilaakso, Director, Program Technical Quality, Plan International Canada

Sarah Hendriks, Director, Gender Equality, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Kristen Wenz, Child Protection Specialist and Global Civil Registration and Legal Identity Technical Lead, United Nations Children's Fund









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