Knowledge Brief Series on **Gender** and **CRVS**

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Strengthening CRVS Systems, Overcoming Barriers and Empowering Women and Children

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROGRAM INFORMATION

About the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems

Housed at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Systems is a global knowledge and resource hub that actively supports national efforts to develop, strengthen, and scale CRVS systems. It collaborates with organizations and experts to broker access to information and expertise, including global standards, tools, research evidence, and relevant good practice. The Centre of Excellence was established with funding from Global Affairs Canada and IDRC and contributes directly to the work of the Global Financing Facility, a key financing platform of the UN Secretary General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and adolescents' health.

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Knowledge Briefs on **Gender** and **CRVS**

The Life-Course Approach to CRVS: A Crucial Tool to Advance Gender Equality

Photo: Mohamad Al-Arief / World Bank

KEY MESSAGES

■ **Excluding women and girls from civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems exacerbates gender inequality.** The three country case studies presented in this paper address the importance of CRVS and its impact on the visibility and legal rights of women in China and Morocco, as well as Syrian refugee women.

■ **Sex-disaggregated monitoring of vital statistics is a necessary tool for identifying gender inequalities.** Birth registration and legal identity facilitate access to basic rights such as health care, primary and secondary education, and social support. The under-registration of women hinders gender equality and adds barriers to social and economic opportunity.

■ **Marriage and divorce registration, which are too often neglected, also facilitate access to rights.** A marriage certificate provides legal proof of marriage, which women can use to secure property and collect an inheritance when their spouse dies. Similarly, divorce registration allows both individuals to remarry after a divorce, and provides a legal basis for the distribution of parental responsibilities at the end of a marriage.

■ **Death registration data is a critical source of mortality statistics.** The under-registration of female deaths relative to male deaths hinders the accuracy of evidence-based health programs for women and girls.

■ **Localized behavioural responses cause delays in registering female births.** The case studies illustrate how gender disparities can be clustered in geographic areas and local communities. This suggests the need for targeted subnational studies and interventions to address social gendered barriers to civil registration and legal identity.

INTRODUCTION

Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems are a crucial tool in advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls. Vital statistics, ideally derived from high-quality civil registration data, provide key insights to reproductive health outcomes such as fertility, perinatal and maternal mortality, and sex-disaggregated data on a population's demographic profile, demographic dynamics, and overall health (**United Nations 2014**). As a foundational component of a legal identity system, civil registration also ensures that women and girls can prove their own identities to access crucial public services such as health, education, and social protection throughout the life-course – from birth to death, including marriage and divorce.

Table 1: Overview of core international human rights declarations and conventions that underpin the norms and standards of CRVS systems

International human rights declaration/convention	Articles related to civil registration	Year of adoption	Year came into force	Number of state parties
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	6,15	1948	N/A	N/A
Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees	25, 27	1951	1954	145
Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons	25, 27	1954	1960	83
Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness	1, 2, 3, 4	1961	1975	61
Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages	3	1962	1964	55
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	5	1965	1969	179
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	24	1966	1976	172
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	15,16	1979	1981	165
Convention on the Rights of the Child	7, 8	1989	1990	196
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	29	1990	2003	54
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	18	2006	2008	177

Source: Author's compilation unless otherwise cited.

The importance of civil registration and legal identity are well established and clearly articulated in international norms and human rights standards (see Table 1):

■ The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* notes the right of all persons to have equal recognition before the law (**United Nations 1966**).

■ The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989) confirms the right to birth registration and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (**United Nations 1948**) sets out the right to a nationality, alluding to the importance of legal identity in ensuring equality before the law.

■ The *Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages*, which entered into force in 1964, established standards for the age of consent, parental consent, and rights-based procedures for the legal registration of marriages (**United Nations 1962**).

■ Specific international conventions explicitly recognize the fundamental rights of equal access to registration and non-discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race, refugee status, migrant status or disability status.

CRVS AND THE 2030 AGENDA

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly reference civil registration, vital statistics, and legal identity in two instrumental and complementary ways (**United Nations 2015**):

■ Civil registration and legal identity are recognized as a means of implementation in advancing health, economic, and social opportunities in target 16.9.

■ CRVS data are identified as fundamental to the monitoring and review of progress towards the SDGs in target 17.

The 2030 Agenda also affirms the principle of non-discrimination and gender equality, as reflected in target 10.3, which aims to "ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including through eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices," and to "end all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere." These principles are critical in ensuring that civil registration laws, administrative processes, public services, and resulting vital statistics are gender-sensitive and customized to meet the needs of women and girls in particular. Further, gender equality and women's empowerment are integral to achieving the SDGs and are explicitly recognized in SDG Goal 5. We cannot make everyone count unless women and girls are also counted. It is impossible to ensure equal opportunities and access to health, education, land, jobs, social services, and technology if specific segments of the population are invisible.
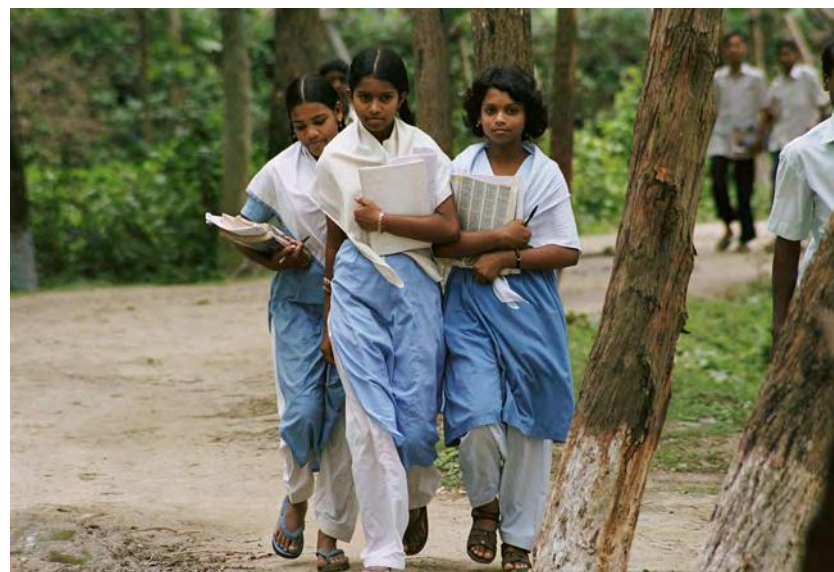

Photo: Scott Wallace / World Bank

A LIFE-COURSE APPROACH: THREE CASE STUDIES

This paper highlights the importance of integrating a gender lens into the assessment, improvement, and scale-up of CRVS systems. We emphasize the need for a life-course approach that ranges from birth to death, but also includes the often-neglected areas of marriage and divorce registration, by showcasing three country case studies.

China—The first case study revisits the recent debate about missing females in China and highlights new insights resulting from integrated gender analysis of ethnographic evidence on the birth registration process and data from three successive population censuses between 1990 and 2010.

Syrian refugees—The second case study focuses on the challenges and intergenerational consequences of barriers to vital event registration for Syrian refugees displaced in neighbouring countries between 2011 and 2017. It describes how under-registration of one type of vital event – for example, a marriage – can result in the under-registration of other vital events later in the life-course, such as a birth for a married couple. Such barriers to registration are likely to have disproportionately larger consequences on women when displaced Syrians return post-war. This is because assets and property are mostly registered in men's names. What's more, many vital events that prove family relationships before and during the conflict were not registered.

Morocco—The third case study documents the sex differential in death registration completeness in Morocco. We note that this phenomenon is concentrated in Morocco's rural areas and is strongly associated with reduced incentives to register female deaths. It is the result of customary norms around property and patrilineal asset inheritance, the passive nature of civil registration, and non-negligible travel distances required for rural communities to access a civil registration centre.

Ensuring legal identity for all is a crucial layer of protection against societal exclusion. This paper explains how the goal can be achieved through access to birth, marriage, and death registration across the life-course.

LITERATURE ON THE GENDER DIMENSIONS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION

In recent years, emerging research has identified several barriers for women to access civil registration across the life-course, despite strong international human rights norms and consensus on the centrality of legal identity to sustainable development.

- **National laws vs. tradition.** In their review of challenges faced by women in registering the births of their children, Plan International found that even with adequate national laws, women lacked functional opportunities to register a birth due to lack of implementation of those laws, prejudice, and traditional customs (**Plan International 2012**). For example, in some rural Kenyan communities, the traditional period of post-birth 'confinement' exceeds the legal period for timely birth registration. In at least 19 countries across Africa, the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and Latin America, women in some communities face substantial stigma and prejudice when giving birth outside of marriage, resulting in social impediments to registering a new birth.

- **Gendered barriers to registration.** In 2014–2016, Data 2X published a series of working papers highlighting selected gender dimensions of under-registration of vital events. This series revealed that women bear a large part of the burden for registering a birth, yet face access challenges and complex administrative requirements in many parts of the world (Koolwal 2017). In the Asia-Pacific region, there are notable data gaps and limitations when investigating the gender dimensions of birth, marriage, and death registration. However, the limited available data indicated that rural women were at much higher risk of under-registration of vital events than their urban counterparts – specifically citing recent evidence from Pakistan (**Knowles 2016**). Evidence from Asia-Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa highlighted the need to move beyond aggregate national and urban/rural statistics given that gender disparities are sometimes clustered within specific geographic areas and local communities. These findings indicate a need for targeted subnational studies and programmatic interventions to address gendered barriers to civil registration and legal identity (**Knowles 2016**; Koolwal 2016).

- **Birth registration, harmful practices, and adverse health outcomes.** Recent evidence on gender dimensions of the CRVS system in Indonesia is substantial and has shown clear linkages between under-registration of vital events, harmful practices, and adverse health and social outcomes, particularly for women and girls. A landmark study that included a household survey of 320,000 persons, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews across 17 of Indonesia's 34 provinces found overwhelming evidence that child marriage is linked to the lack of a birth certificate in Indonesia. It noted that 90% of girls in child marriages do not have a birth certificate. Thus, girls whose births are not registered are at greater risk of child marriage. The study also revealed substantial under-registration of divorces which, in turn, has a disproportionate effect on women. Only an estimated 24% of divorced women have a divorce certificate. This prevents them from obtaining a family card, which ensures their recognition as the head of the family and household, and means they cannot access social assistance for their family. These findings from Indonesia illustrate how under-registration of birth, marriage, and divorce events can shape the rights and opportunities for women and girls across the life-course (**Sumner and Kusumaningrum 2014**).

- **Making the Invisible Visible.** In 2018, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) convened a major conference titled, "Making the Invisible Visible: CRVS as a basis to meeting the 2030 Gender Agenda." This was the first international meeting to focus solely on the gender dimensions of CRVS systems and the barriers women and girls face when registering vital life events (**Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems 2018**). The meeting's discussions and report highlighted that, "CRVS systems are deeply rooted in politics, governance, and institutions; and are not just about technical know-how."

Understanding the gender dimensions of CRVS systems and their broader sociopolitical and economic context are fundamental to ensuring that the benefits of CRVS systems are fully accessible to women and girls everywhere.

Case Study #1: Delayed Birth Registration in China


Photo: Steve Harris / World Bank

Demographers and economists have written extensively about the phenomenon of missing women in China, India, and neighbouring countries in South and East Asia (**Sen 1990**; Coale and Banister 1994). Estimates of missing women and girls in China range from 20 to 50 million. These estimates are most commonly presented as evidence of large-scale practices of sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, and substandard healthcare and nutrition for female infants compared with male infants (**Sen 1992**; **Sen 2003**; **Coale 1991**; **Klasen and Wink 2002**).

Researchers have studied the phenomenon by assessing the sex ratio – or the number of males per 100 females – in a given population. In most stable human populations, a sex ratio at birth of between 102 and 108 is commonly observed – reflecting a slightly higher fetal mortality rate for females than males in humans. In contrast, the Chinese sex ratio at birth in 2010 was estimated to be 118, using that year's population and housing census.

Recent research highlights insights the Chinese civil registration system provides into the question of "missing women" when assessed alongside the available census data and ethnographic research. When available census and birth registration data is re-analyzed to account for mortality, migration, and adoption, the estimated number of missing girls in China is closer to 13.7 million. This analysis applied backward projection to the latest 2010 census data, and identified a notable

decline in the sex ratio between the timing of birth and the teenage years (**Shi and Kennedy 2016**). Figure 1 shows a notable age effect in the enumerated census data across successive birth cohorts – starting with the 2010 birth cohort, which was aged 0 in 2010, and to the 1990 birth cohort, which was aged 20 at the time of the 2010 census. This assessment revealed that the observed skewed sex ratio is all but eliminated during the later teenage years.

Figure 1: Estimated sex ratio by age based on 2010 Chinese Population and Housing Census data
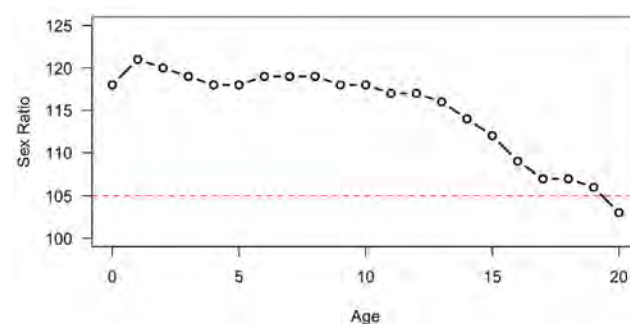
Source: Author's own data visualization, based on tabulations presented in Shi and Kennedy (2016)

Further analysis used the last three rounds of Chinese census data to track the 1990 birth cohort over time and estimate the sex ratio documented at birth, at age 10 years, and age 20 years for this cohort (**Shi and Kennedy 2016**). Figure 2 shows that the documented sex ratio for the 1990 birth cohort is skewed at the time of the 1990 and 2000 censuses, when the cohort is aged 0 and 10 respectively. By the time of the 2010 census, when members of the 1990 birth cohort are 20 years of age, the sex ratio of the enumerated population is no longer skewed. This recent evidence suggests that delays in reporting and registering female births are an important factor. Delayed registration needs to be studied in the context of the national population policy and laws, individual and localized behavioral responses to the policy and legal framework, and limitations of the available population data systems

Figure 2: Sex ratio for 1990 Chinese birth cohort, documented by 1990, 2000, and 2010 Population and Housing censuses
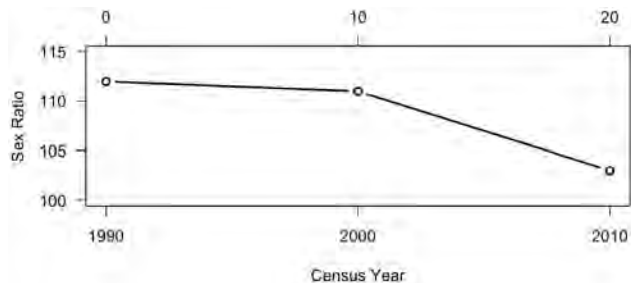
Source: Author's own data visualization, based on tabulations presented in Shi and Kennedy (2016)

Qualitative ethnographic fieldwork also helped identify five key reasons for delayed female birth registration. These likely explanations are associated with the behavioural response by Chinese couples to China's 1979 family planning policy and its enforcement by provincial authorities. The distortions in sex ratio data observed across successive Chinese censuses in 1990, 2000, and 2010 should be understood in light of the following household and provincial level factors that affect birth registration (**Shi and Kennedy 2016**):

- Rural couples waited for a son before registering the birth of a daughter.

- Violating the family planning policy attracted large fines, so couples delayed registration until they can pay.

- Birth registration for a family only becomes critical in rural areas once parents enroll children in junior high in a neighbouring district, which requires a birth certificate as proof of age.

- In order to apply for a marriage certificate, couples must provide a birth certificate. This occurs during the mid to late teens years, as individuals prepare for adulthood and possible marriage. This coincides with the most dramatic increase in the sex ratio at birth when analyzed by age.

- Local officials conceal family planning policy infringements to demonstrate effective administration of government policy to provincial officials and to advance their careers.

There is also a related phenomenon of under-reporting of female first births in Chinese household surveys (**Merli and Raftery 2000**). There is strong evidence of implausibly long female birth intervals and second births being replaced with first births in full birth history reports in Chinese demographic surveys. Data from successive censuses reporting patterns in household surveys and ethnographic research into how couples and provincial authorities navigate official family planning policy show the importance of considering delayed birth registration alongside the data from successive censuses when investigating skewered sex ratios.

Delayed registration of female births may account for as much as 73% of the observed skewed sex ratio in China, while sex-selective abortion and infant mortality accounts for around 27% (**Shi and Kennedy 2016**). Complementary research on the Chinese *hukou* household registration system found that children born in violation of China's one-child policy have lower rates of registration in the hukou system (**Vortherms 2018**).

Birth registration and legal identity facilitate access to life-saving child health care including immunizations, primary and secondary education, and social support. Sex selective delays in birth registration pose social protection risks for women and girls and hinder their empowerment in critical early years of childhood and adolescence. Civil registration and survey data are important factors in understanding the effect of delays in birth registration and assessing the consistency of census data.

Case Study #2: Interdependence of Marriage and Birth Registration for Syrian Refugees

Photo: Dominic Chavez / World Bank

Marriage and divorce registration are critical tools for empowering women and protecting their basic human rights. However, marriage registration and its importance for gender equality and women's empowerment have been neglected and are under-studied, as compared to birth and death registration (**Courey Pryor 2016**).

Along with a birth certificate, a marriage certificate can facilitate transparency around a marriage, provide proof of age, and therefore help to counter child marriage (**Hanmer and Elefante 2016**). Marriage registration provides a married couple with legal rights, protections, and responsibilities, which are critical tools in ensuring women's empowerment. It also provides authentication of the spousal and parental relationships to local, provincial, national, and international authorities. Further, a marriage certificate provides legal proof of a marriage, which women can use to secure property and inheritance entitlements if their spouse dies, or in the event of a divorce and dissolution of the marriage. Divorce registration is also crucial in facilitating the right for both individuals to remarry after a divorce, and provides a legal basis for the distribution of parental responsibilities after the end of a marriage.

Despite the critical importance of birth and marriage registration, it can be challenging to secure and provide these types of legal identity in times of conflict. This is the plight of more than 5 million Syrian refugees displaced due to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria since 2011. The Norwegian Refugee Council has estimated that 43% of the 700,000 Syrian refugee children under the age of four in neighbouring countries

such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq have been born in exile (**Norwegian Refugee Council 2017**). Over half of married Syrian couples do not have marriage certificates, and 70% of Syrian refugees do not have national identity documentation. These sobering statistics point to chronic protection risks and barriers to sustainable livelihoods for Syrian refugees throughout the region in the context of protracted conflict and displacement.

The civil registration system in Syria was one of the most comprehensive and robust systems in the Mashreq sub-region prior to 2011. As with other critical infrastructure during times of conflict, it has been heavily damaged and its operations in many parts of the country severely impeded. Further, many Syrians who cross international borders do so without their original civil registration and identity documents, and enter neighbouring countries in which the laws, norms, and procedures around civil registration of vital events are markedly different. Syrian law requires births, marriages, and deaths to be registered in the country where Syrian nationals currently reside. However, Syrian refugees are unable to register vital events during periods of asylum in neighbouring countries for several reasons, such as an unfamiliarity with vital event registration procedures in the host country. They may also face prohibitive costs to navigating the registration process, language, and cultural barriers, and difficulties in adhering to the time limits stipulated by national civil registration laws of the host country (**Norwegian Refugee Council 2015**). Hence, those who are born, marry, and/or die during times of conflict or during periods of displacement face challenges that may prevent the timely registration of vital events.

THE RISKS OF UNDER-REGISTRATION

The largest impediment for Syrian refugees to registering vital events that occur while they are internationally displaced is the inability to produce the supporting documentation required by national civil registration authorities in the host country (**Norwegian Refugee Council 2015**). During times of conflict and displacement, the civil registration and legal identity documents of refugees are often lost, destroyed, or confiscated. This creates a series of short- and long-term risks.

In the short to medium term, registering vital events can be particularly difficult for displaced Syrians given the interdependence between the registration process for each event. For example, in Lebanon, birth registration requires legal entry and stay documentation, a valid passport, a marriage certificate of those registering the birth, and sometimes a family booklet (**Norwegian Refugee Council 2014**). In Jordan, the supporting documents required for birth registration include a hospital birth notification, passport of the person registering the birth, and proof of the parents' marriage. The Jordanian Sharia courts require five supporting documents to obtain a marriage certificate (**Norwegian Refugee Council 2015**):

1. Proof of identity for the bride and groom from a recognized national authority;

2. Proof of identity for the bride's guardian and the two witnesses from a recognized national authority;

3. Health certificate issued by the Jordanian Ministry of Health verifying that the bride and groom are not carriers of the genetic disease thalassemia;

4. Petition for a marriage contract addressed to the court; and,

5. Approval letter obtained from the Jordanian Ministry of Interior, required when one or both individuals are foreigners.

As a result, if one vital event goes unregistered, this can lead to non-registration of other vital events and a lack of legal identity for newborn children. For example, marriage registration is particularly important, as marriage certificates are required for birth registrations in the host country. Yet, Syrian refugees who married in Syria may not have their marriage certificates on hand. They may be unwilling to seek a copy of the marriage certificate from an embassy or consulate due to fear of repercussions, or they may have difficulty having their marriage certificate recognized by local authorities in the host community. And those who have newly married in a host country may simply not have been able to successfully register their marriage.

The gender dimensions associated with Syrian national law, the Syrian conflict, and birth registration are particularly important. Syrian national law makes provisions for Syrian fathers to pass Syrian nationality to children born in another country. However, there is no such provision for Syrian mothers. This raises additional challenges for Syrian women who are heads of households, or Syrian women who are displaced across an international border without their husbands. In particular, it raises the risk of statelessness for children born to Syrian women outside of the country during recent years of conflict (**Albarazi and van Waas 2015**).

In the long-term, the lack of birth registration of Syrian refugees may impede the eventual post-conflict return to Syria of Syrians born in Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan through official border crossings (**Norwegian Refugee Council 2013**). Further, many births, marriages, and deaths have not been officially registered since 2011, which poses a number of challenges for post-war reconstruction and post-conflict community relations. In particular, it creates an increasing disconnect between an individual's identity documents and property records in Syria, which could make reclaiming of property and land upon return to Syria difficult for refugees (**Clutterbuck 2018**). Further, Syrian women whose spouse has died during the conflict and whose family property is registered in their deceased spouse's name will face particular challenges without a marriage or death registration certificate. The inability to authenticate recent vital events and produce proof of identity will likely shape the future rights and livelihood prospects of Syrian women.

There have been promising recent initiatives to improve the accessibility of civil registration and legal identity both by local authorities in countries hosting Syrian refugees and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (**Clutterbuck et al. 2018**). For example, some countries have introduced more flexible arrangements to allow Syrian children born in Syria and who lack a birth certificate to use their UNHCR-issued documentation to obtain a residency permit. Similarly, authorities in Turkey have relaxed the need for a marriage certificate to obtain a birth certificate for Syrian children born in Turkey.

More coordinated and system-wide approaches are needed. The newly-launched West Africa Unique Identification for Regional Integration and Inclusion (WURI) Program is an example of enhanced coordination in fragile and high-mobility regional settings. This initiative seeks to facilitate interoperability of foundational identity systems across borders in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-region, an area characterized by seven times as much as migration than other regions of sub-Saharan Africa (**World Bank 2018**).

Case Study #3: Under-Registration of Female Deaths in Rural Morocco

Photo: Curt Carnemark / World Bank

Death registration is important for multiple reasons, both at the individual and broader societal levels. For individuals, death registration ensures that their identity is securely closed out from the CRVS and legal identity system. This protects against identity theft and fraudulent accessing or misappropriation of health or pension benefits (**Schwartz 2009**). At the societal level, death registration is the preferred source of data for constructing accurate mortality statistics (**United Nations 2014**). Death registration helps guide the improvement of public health interventions to empower women and improve their health. It also ensures that any benefits and entitlements accrued to a deceased woman throughout her life-course are not misappropriated.

Analysis undertaken in consultation with the Moroccan Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP) identified a notable sex differential in death registration completeness in Morocco (Silva 2016). Indirect methods of estimating death registration completeness between the 1994 and 2004 censuses revealed that nationally, approximately 65% of male deaths are registered compared with approximately 35% of female deaths. These indirect estimates – commonly referred to as death distribution methods in the demography literature (**Moultrie et al. 2013**) – estimate death registration completeness by comparing the age distribution of intercensal registered deaths with the age distribution of the population in which the deaths occurred (usually using the two census enumerations that envelop the available death registration data).

Other administrative data, relevant scholarly literature, and consultations with the staff of the HCP's Vital Statistics Unit confirmed the sex differential in death registration implied by indirect estimates and highlighted that this was mostly a rural phenomenon. In the 1994–2004 period, just over half of Morocco's population resided in rural areas. In the early 1990s, based on raw civil registration data, more than twice as many male deaths were registered in rural areas as female deaths (Figure 3) (**Al Youbi and Warit 1995**). This is despite an approximately similar numbers of births being registered for females as males by the civil registration system at the time. This is consistent with indirect estimates that, on average, rural male deaths were twice as likely to be registered as rural female deaths in this time period (**Silva 2016**).

The Moroccan *Civil Status Act* states clearly that the registration of births and deaths is mandatory for all citizens. Further, the law clearly states that the, "son, spouse, parents, brother, grandfather, and family" are responsible for registering birth and death events (Law 37.99 of Civil Status 2002). Yet, officials from the HCP Vital Statistics Unit confirmed that under-registration of deaths in rural areas of the country and under-registration of deaths of people lacking national ID cards are substantial – particularly disadvantaging women in rural parts of the country (**Al Youbi and Warit 1995**).

According to academic literature, the Moudawana (or family code) dating back to Moroccan independence treated women as minors via marital tutorship, which imposed male supervision and authority over all aspects of their lives, including participating in the labour force, accessing civil registration and legal identity documentation, and leaving the house (**Maddy-Weitzman 2005**). Further, traditional customs alongside the 1958 Moudawana essentially ensured that asset and property inheritance had to strictly followed patrilineal lines in Morocco – making the registration of female deaths a de-facto lower priority than male deaths. This is especially the case in rural areas, given the passive nature of death registration, the process of notification, registration and certification of a death being a multi-step nature, and the geographic distance

to the local civil registrar's office. In contrast, the burial of human remains in urban areas is highly regulated and requires that a death certificate be presented to cemetery officials to obtain a burial permit.

The under-registration of female deaths relative to male deaths in Morocco has largely been a rural phenomenon. Despite civil registration law requiring that all vital events, including the deaths of rural women, be registered, there are several barriers and deterrents to registration. These include legislative barriers that limit woman's autonomy in public and private life, cultural norms around patrilineal inheritance, and accessibility challenges to civil registration services in rural areas. Given that death registration data serve as the preferred source for mortality statistics, the under-registration of female deaths relative to male deaths hinders accurate and timely evidence-based policy and program development in the service of women and girls.

Figure 3: Sex ratios for registered births and deaths by rural/urban region, 1991–1994
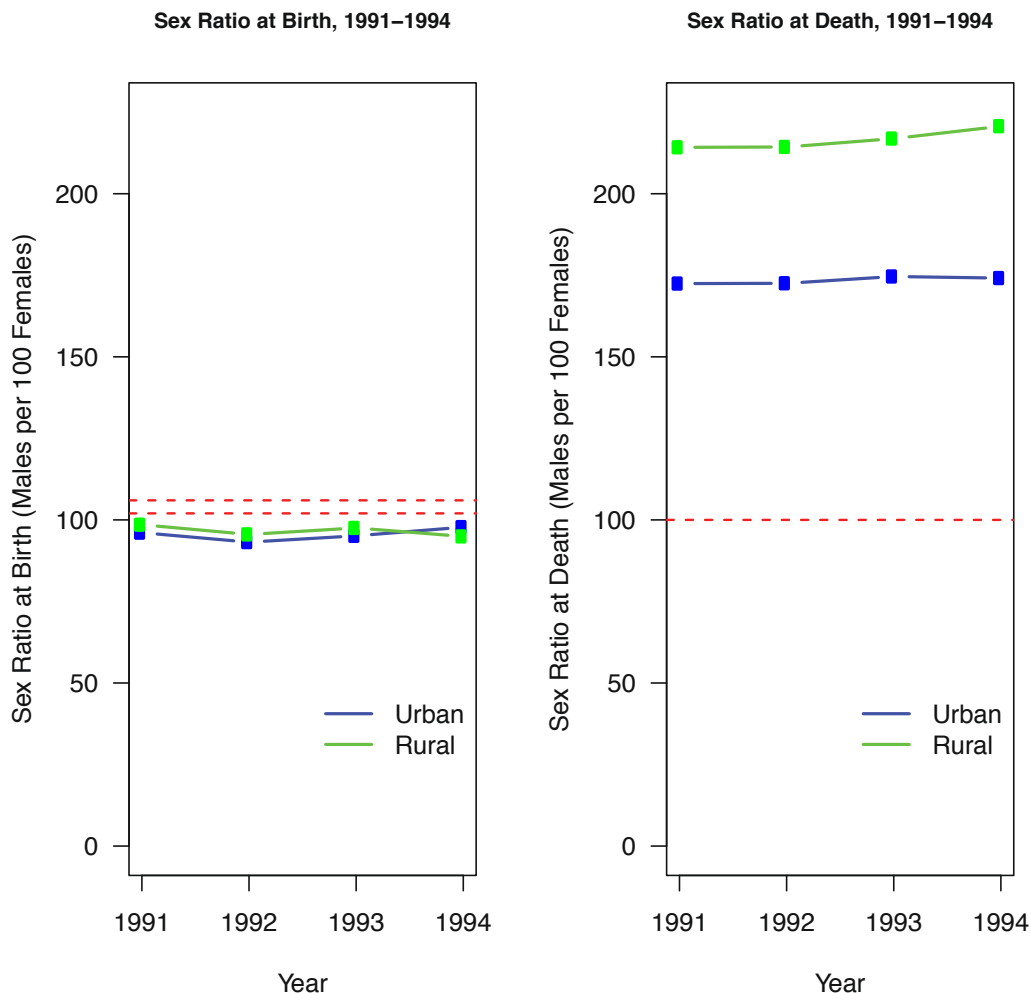
Source: Tabulated data presented in Al Youbi & Warit (1995)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Delays in registration and under-registration of births, marriages, and deaths are important, yet under-studied, factors that affect gender equality and women's rights, social status, and economic opportunity throughout their life-course. International human rights norms and the 2030 Agenda recognize the transformative power of civil registration and legal identity. However, a deeper understanding of gender dimensions of civil registration is required to improve access to proof of legal identity for women and girls. There are a number of areas that can disproportionately affect the ability of women and girls to access civil registration systems:

■ Inadequate national legal frameworks;

■ Insufficient access to civil registration centres;

■ Outdated civil registration procedures, cultural norms, and stigma associated with the post-pregnancy period and non-marital childbearing; and,

■ Contextualized disincentives to register or delay registration of a vital event.

More research and better data are needed. In particular, sex-disaggregated assessment of vital event registration for births, deaths, and marriages is crucial to understanding where current CRVS systems are weak and inadequate. The current 2020 census round, which began in 2015 and runs through to 2024, provides a key opportunity to undertake comprehensive and systematic assessments of civil registration completeness. This must be coupled with improved understanding of the incentives and disincentives to registering births, and particularly marriages and deaths, across diverse contexts and settings. Integrated analyses that also draw on mixed methods research and analysis of vital statistics can be particularly informative. These data and evidence need to be channeled into ongoing efforts to improve CRVS systems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Civil registration is a fundamental vehicle to increasing the visibility, legal rights, and human agency of women. Under-registration of vital events throughout the life-course prevents women and girls from reaching their full capabilities and prevents societies from fully benefiting from their potential. Reducing barriers and differential access to civil registration is crucial to ensuring that women and girls are not left behind.

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Knowledge Briefs on **Gender** and **CRVS**
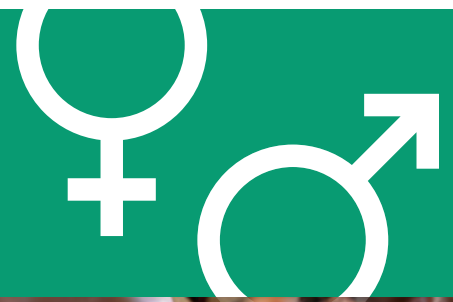
Brief 2, Paper 2

Gender Equity in Guinea: How Social Norms Affect the Civil Registration of Women and Girls in West Africa

Photo: Dominic Chavez / World Bank

KEY MESSAGES

- **High quality data from civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems is crucial for women.** CRVS data helps identify and address inequities that prevent women and girls from accessing services and benefiting from civil rights.

- **Inefficient CRVS systems deprive many women of their civil and political rights.** Because civil registration systems do not operate efficiently in Guinea, many women cannot register a birth, marriage, divorce, or the death of their husband. Without this validation, they are unable to provide the proof the government needs to establish their identity, age, or marital status. As a result, they are not eligible for civil and political rights.

- **Inherited traditions and perceptions affect a family's decision-making, including a woman's access to civil registration.** In Guinea's patriarchal society, men have traditionally been responsible for communicating with authorities, ensuring any legal or official proceedings, and preserving documentation for all family members. This is perceived as a means of control in a family. Although women are not legally prohibited from registering vital events, this traditional perception robs women of the power to do so.

- **Women face major logistical and cultural obstacles to registering vital events.** In Guinea, many women must travel great distances to register vital events. Yet they often lack the means to travel and cannot leave their neighbourhood without their husband's permission or consent.

- **Gender equity in Guinea requires strategic changes to influence social norms.** The process of identifying target groups should pay attention to equity and gender issues. This may require a separate analysis to reflect the needs of underserved and most deprived groups.

INTRODUCTION

Registration of births, marriages, divorces, and deaths in West Africa is a key concern on the international agenda. Despite significant efforts and investments made by regional and national authorities and international partners, the civil registration of girls and women remains a challenge.

Guinea's economic reality

Located in West Africa, Guinea is classified by the United Nations as one of the Least Developed Countries, despite its great economic potential.

Guinea's population was over 11 million in 2016, with a natural growth rate estimated at 2.8%. On average, women have 4.8 children. Although the legal minimum age for marriage is 18 for women and 25 for men, 21% of women are already married by the age of 15, while only about 5% of men are married by the age of 18 (**National Institute of Statistics 2016**).

One of Guinea's greatest challenges is persistent poverty. Data from 2010 indicates that 55.2% of the population lives below the poverty line (**World Bank 2017**). This particularly affects basic social sectors and makes it difficult for the state to provide adequate, efficient health and civil registration services.

This paper outlines the gaps in Guinea's civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems and the sociocultural barriers that women must overcome to access their civil and political rights. To research existing social norms and identify deterrents to civil registration, focus groups were organized in four Guinean communities, including two rural (Mambia and Friguiagbe) and two urban (Kindia and Dixinn). In-depth interviews were also conducted with various stakeholders. The data collected were based on responses from the focus groups and interviews, rather than gathered from a CRVS database.

These responses serve as the basis for this paper.

THE STATUS OF CRVS SYSTEMS IN GUINEA

Guinea appears to have made considerable progress in the area of birth registration. In 2012, 58% of children under 5 were registered at birth (**National Institute of Statistics 2012**). This rate rose to 74.6% in 2016, although only 35% were able to show a birth certificate. No distinction was made between boys' and girls' birth registration (**National Institute of Statistics 2016**).

Although birth registration rates appear to be higher at the national level, this is not the case in the communities that were surveyed, where birth, marriage, and death registration rates were consistently very low.

Overall, marriage registration has recently seen an important increase, which can be attributed to the fact that although many young people have migrated to urban areas and are more educated, they prefer to celebrate their marriage in their home communities.

In the village of Mambia, 27 marriages were celebrated in the civil registration centre over a one-year period, while in Kindia, the number was much higher, with 110 marriages celebrated over the course of 2 months. In the commune of Dixinn (Conakry), 87 marriages were officially registered, which represents a great improvement.

The registration of deaths remains problematic. In the communities visited, the registration of deaths is almost at level 0.

There is currently one source of death registration estimates, which reported that only 0.1% to 0.5% of deaths were recorded in 2017 (National Institute of Statistics 2017). For example, of the 15,169 expected deaths in Kindia in 2016, only 44, or 0.3%, were registered. Further, men's

deaths are more likely to be registered than women's, with 86% of recorded deaths in Kindia in 2015 being men, of which 80% were married, and mostly civil servants.

THE IMPACT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION ON GENDER EQUITY

Inefficient CRVS systems and conflicting legal norms can result in discrimination against girls starting at birth. Later, this can impede access to education, official identification, travel, employment, health, or inheritance, and prevent them from exercising their civil and political rights.

Because Guinea's civil registration system does not operate efficiently, many women are deprived of the right to prove their birth, marriage, divorce, or the death of their husband. This leaves them lacking the proof required by authorities to establish their name, age, and marital status, which affects their eligibility for civil and political rights.

Safeguarding the right to civil registration protects human rights

Quality CRVS data can identify and address inequities in accessing services and benefitting from civil rights. Maintaining an effective CRVS system can have positive benefits for women and girls, allowing them to exercise their rights. For example:

- A legal document can help women retain their share of assets and other protections in the event of divorce.

- A marriage certificate can provide legal backup for a widowed woman to exercise inheritance rights.

- Birth and marriage registration can reveal early and forced marriages and allow women to seek legal recourse.

Preventing child marriage

Birth registration, birth certificates, and their link to identification help ensure children's access to education and healthcare, such as immunizations. Birth registration can also help protect against early marriage, a risk that uniquely impacts girls (**Bransky, Enoch and Long 2017**).

Civil registration of vital events throughout the life cycle is particularly problematic for women and girls in Guinea, which has the 8th highest prevalence rate of child marriage in the world, according to UNICEF.

Although the legal age for marriage is 18, the incidence of child marriage is still shockingly high. Over half of all girls in Guinea are married before their 18th birthday and 19% are married before the age of 15 **(Girls Not Brides 2018)**. The following table illustrates the prevalence of child marriage by region.

Prevalence of child marriage in women before the age of 18 in Guinea
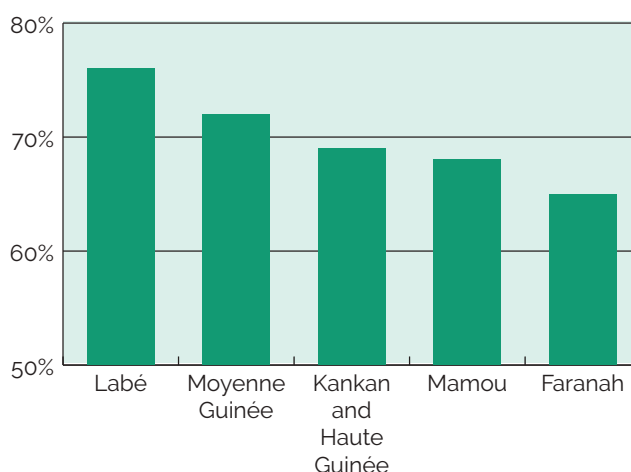
At a national level, gender inequalities in birth registration are small, and girls have made substantial strides in closing gender gaps in health and schooling. However, given the link between birth registration and child marriage, the lack of birth registration for girls has long-term detrimental consequences for women and their children.

There are currently no official statistics showing birth registration rates among girls and women, and the national averages do not show the full picture. Some pilot regions of Guinea have shown great progress in civil registration, while other regions still face big challenges in building a viable civil registration system. A study of 106 countries, including countries where child marriage is prohibited by law, shows a strong correlation between lower incidence of child marriage and higher birth registration rates (**Hanmer and Elefante 2016**).

BARRIERS TO CIVIL REGISTRATION

Guinean women and girls face a large number of socio-cultural barriers to registering vital events. These range from the physical location of registration centres to traditional roles and responsibilities.

Legal inconsistencies

The Guinean CRVS system currently suffers from infrastructure problems, difficulties in organizing and managing registrations, and resource constraints.

Civil registration in Guinea is based on several laws that govern the organization and functioning of the civil registration system, including the *Civil Code*, the *Code of Local Communities*, and the *Children's Code*:

- *Civil Code* defines the conditions for births, marriage, divorce and death registration (**République de Guinée 2016**).

- *Code of Local Communities* defines the powers of local authorities and recognizes the civil registration as a prerogative of the community. It also specifies the conditions for exercising the function of civil registrar (**République de Guinée 2006**).

- *Children's Code* acknowledges the importance of birth registration as a fundamental right of the child (**République de Guinée 2008**).

These overlapping legal provisions can result in inconsistencies and misunderstandings among stakeholders (**UNICEF 2019**).

Logistical challenges

Complex processes

Focus group participants described the complex marriage registration process. Marriage registration requires:

- Birth certificates for both partners;

- Certificate of residence;

- Parental consent;

- Photos of each partner; and

- Handwritten request to the town halls to announce the wedding day.

These documents must be provided at least 10 days in advance. The marriage announcement must be posted in a public space within the community for at least 10 days to allow anyone to oppose the marriage. A marriage can only be officially celebrated if no objection has been received.

Given Guinea's low literacy rate of 32% (**World Bank 2014**), this practice of posting an advertisement publicly for the entire community excludes a large part of the population.

The registration of deaths is also a very difficult process. Respondents did not have a clear sense of where or how to report a death. Even registrars lacked clear information on exactly what to do when a person dies to ensure proper death registration.

Difficult access to services and information

Distance is a major barrier to registering vital events, especially for registration of births and deaths, which are linked to strong cultural practices. According to authorities, there are currently 342 primary and 6 secondary civil registration centres in Guinea. This limits geographical access to people who live near these centres.

Focus group respondents complained of a significant distance to reach the civil registration centre. Although there is currently a plan to create secondary civil registration centres, the extension of secondary centres has not been fully implemented. Average distances to civil registration centres vary by community, as illustrated in the table below.

Community	Distance to civil registration centre
Mambia	40 km
Kindia	7 km
Dixinn	5 km

Distance limits access for many women who do not have a means of transportation and who cannot leave their neighbourhood without permission or consent from their husband.

The process is further complicated by the fact that obtaining a certificate of registration requires two visits to the civil registration centres: a first visit to bring all the necessary documents, and a second to retrieve the certificate within a maximum of 3 days. This process makes women dependent on their husbands or other men, particularly for birth registrations, as it is difficult for women to travel to civil registration offices after delivery and with a newborn. In addition, women are charged with a large number of household and childcare responsibilities, which limits their time, and makes civil registration fall to the end of their list of priorities.

Photo: Dominic Chavez / World Bank

Other logistical challenges to civil registration include difficult physical access to civil registration centres during rainy seasons, and unequal and inequitable distribution of household and childcare work, which means women often have lower literacy levels and little ability to implement change.

Lack of awareness

There is currently no public pressure on people to officially register their vital events, and there is little understanding about why registration matters among community members, health workers, and even registrars. Several registrars confirmed that they had not registered their own marriages or the death of their parents because they did not see the importance of registering.

- **In the commune of Mambia in the region of Kindia,** only 51 births were registered in April 2018. However, health centre records show that 630 births took place in the centre and a few hundred more occurred in health posts, although the exact number is unconfirmed. The community's registration rate is therefore less than 10%.

- **For the urban district of Kindia,** with 171,000 inhabitants, only 144 births were recorded during the first 2 months of 2019, with a total of 10,000 births per year in health facilities (about 2,000 during the reference period of 2 months). In this case, the registration rate is even less than 10%.

- **In the municipality of Friguiagbe** from 2017 to 2019, only 103 births were recorded, with a total of about 3,000 children born in health facilities during the same period.

- **In the urban municipality of Dixinn,** birth registration rates are higher, with 269 births registered between January 1 and February 14, 2019. The total number of planned births per year in Dixinn is about 6,200, which translates to about 550 registered births per month.

Focus group discussions and interviews identified the following information gaps:

- **Registration centre workers—**People working in civil registration centres (often volunteers or community agents) lack basic information about how to operate, which legal provisions relate to their duties, and how to raise awareness.

- **Local leaders—**Mayors lack information about the importance of birth, death, and marriage registration and do not have clear written instructions on their role in registering vital events.

- **Community partners—**Health workers, educators, informal community leaders, and religious leaders lack basic information and communication skills to encourage the registration of vital events. These partners also share misconceptions and stereotypes about the registration of vital events, particularly with respect to which family members should be involved in the process.

- **Public—**The general population does not receive any information on the need to register vital events. When parents receive a birth notification, health workers rarely explain what to do with it.

- **Focus group participants—**There is little to no awareness about the need to register deaths and marriages. Focus group participants unanimously confirmed that they were not aware that a death or marriage certificate was required, especially because religious ceremonies had already taken place.

In general, women showed a greater awareness about birth registration than men, as they receive information during immunization campaigns and other health-related activities in the community. However, they are unconvinced of the need for birth registration.

Men, on the other hand, are largely uninformed about the registration process. Further, men do not trust information women bring home, preferring instead to receive confirmation from another man in the community.

Providing information to community members could help ensure access to civil registration services. For birth registrations, it was generally perceived that a birth notification received by the health centres replaced the birth certificate issued by the registrar. Health workers do not inform the mothers and fathers of the procedure to follow once they have received a birth notification. For deaths, respondents reported that they did not realize they had to record deaths and did not know where or how to do it.

Social and cultural norms

Registration of vital events is usually influenced by social norms and constructs related to many issues: births, deaths, marriages, power relations within the family, importance of state documents, role of official and religious authorities, expectations, and beliefs.

Although governments and international partners have invested financial resources to modernize CRVS systems in Guinea, social and cultural norms and generalized behaviours are still very prevalent. Inherited social norms position Guinean women on a lower social level, which encourages disparities in civil registration rates between men and women.

Social norms, perceptions, and the personal beliefs of government officials, local authorities, civil registration employees, and the general public are among the key barriers to advancing civil registration and to decreasing inequalities between men and women. However, this statement is not supported by evidence, as research in the field of social norms and drivers of behaviour related to civil registration was never conducted in Guinea. This should be further explored to better shape the interventions.

As Guinea has a large Muslim population, religious considerations are very strong. All vital events have specific ceremonies held in mosques.

The generalized perceptions and social norms in Guinea are:

- Religious ceremonies of birth, death, and marriage prevail over all civil proceedings.

- Registration of deaths or marriages are done by wealthier people and civil servants, particularly as they relate to inheritance.

- After the death of a loved one, people should mourn and not run for documents.

- Children need a birth certificate to go to school, but there will be time to register the birth later.

- Because everyone receives a birth notification at the health facility, other documentation is unnecessary.

- Only men can record vital events.

Although inefficient civil registration affects both men and women, not being registered puts women at a greater disadvantage. For women, no marriage registration means no right to inheritance and no rights after a separation. Without a death registration for her husband, the wife must remain dependent on her husband's family with no inheritance rights.

Social norms are behavioural rules that individuals prefer to follow conditionally based on the belief that:

- Others follow the rule (also called *empirical expectations*), and/or

- Others expect the individual to follow the rule (known as *normative expectations*).

Social norms exist when both types of expectations are satisfied.

(Bicchieri 2006; Bicchieri 2016).

Position of power within the family

Guinea has a number of inherited patriarchal traditions that influence civil registration rates. Traditionally, men have been responsible for communicating with authorities, ensuring any legal or official proceedings, and keeping the documents of all family members. This is perceived as a method of control within the family, as the person who keeps the documents maintains full control over all potential official proceedings. All links and relationships with authorities are strictly ensured by men. This is because most authorities are men (**Terriennes, Vallerey, and Braibant 2018**) and women have very low literacy rates compared to men (**UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2014**).

Legally, women are permitted to approach registration centres to register vital events. However, due to traditional perceptions, they are not empowered to do so. Although they bring pocket money to the family that can be used to pay for registration documents, women lack confidence and awareness about the process.

Registrars in all four civil registration centres confirmed that men are responsible for registering vital events. Not one could remember a single case of registration by a woman.

Photo: Dominic Chavez / World Bank

The process of birth registration

After giving birth, women generally stay in a health facility for about 6 hours and are accompanied home by an older female relative. Although the birth notification must be offered in the health facility at the time of birth, a mother does not know the name of her child before baptism, as the father is responsible for choosing the name. If the father is not present, this decision is passed on to a male relative or a friend of the father.

When a woman returns from the hospital, she gives her husband the birth notification she received at the health centre. For 7 days following the birth, the child has no name and the mother is not allowed to leave the house. On the 7th day, the child is baptized and given a name, and the mother is free to go out. Children who do not survive the first week of life are buried anonymously, often without a birth or death registration.

Usually, the birth is celebrated at the baptism during a religious ceremony. Guests bring a small financial contribution as a gift for the newborn. If properly advocated, some of this money could be used toward civil registration.

Marriage registration

In general, men initiate the civil registration of marriage. Unfortunately, uneducated men and women are unfamiliar with marriage registration and do not see the need for it. Many men resist official marriage registration, as it is perceived as giving too many rights to the woman. Men fear that registration will make the wife more confident about her position in her family and her marriage. As one interviewee explained, this would make her "too sure her husband will not leave her, and she will not make additional efforts to please her husband."

Men also resist marriage registration because they fear their wife will inherit their assets in the event of a separation. In addition, an official certificate represents a very strong commitment between husband and wife, making it "impossible for the man to have relationships with other women."

Traditionally, marriages are celebrated religiously, and usually the imam offers a marriage confirmation. As a result, people do not see the need to officially register the marriage. Even after a religious ceremony, a couple must have a civil ceremony and complete the marriage registration, which involves additional fees.

Death registration

Death registration rates are very low. In Kindia, no deaths were recorded in 2019, while in Dixinn, only 3 deaths were recorded. In Mambia, only 100 deaths were recorded for a period of 8 years. It is important to note that citizens must register a death within 3 days. After this period, all deaths must be declared in court.

Death registration is complicated, as it is linked to a large number of practices and cultural beliefs. As burials are meant to take place between two prayers, people are usually buried within a few hours of their death. During this time, family members are grieving and do not have time to obtain a confirmation of death and comply with the official deadline for registering a death.

Death registration is subject to the following beliefs and practices:

- You never speak of the deceased after their death. You let them rest in peace.

- If a child dies, he will be an intermediary between the parents and God and may ask favours for his family. Parents and relatives should not cry or suffer.

- Applying for a death certificate is a painful process for relatives of the deceased.

- There is no need for such a document, except in the case of inheritance or property issues.

- A cemetery burial costs about 100,000 francs (US$10). As a result, many people tend to be buried around their home.

- There is no obligation to bury in specific places and no documents are required, even for burial in cemeteries.

- Death registration is not mandatory.

Perceived value and importance of registration

Registration is unnecessary

The general perception of civil registration is that it does not matter to citizens but is rather a state requirement. Focus group respondents confirmed that, aside from the birth certificate, which can be used to register a child in school and obtain identification, government-issued documents are considered to be totally useless.

It is important to note that in general, Guineans religiously celebrate births and marriages, and organize religious funerals. For Muslims, religious traditions related to birth, death, or marriage are much more important than civil registration. Further, mosques keep records of all vital events and some offer documentation, which hold a higher emotional value than government-issued certificates.

Some focus group participants felt that issuing birth certificates in large numbers during an ad-hoc campaign did not increase the value of registration and perpetuated the generalized idea that the State and international projects need it. In general, citizens do not understand the need to record their vital events.

The official registration of marriage is considered unnecessary. Most focus group respondents did not see the value of the official ceremony after the religious ceremony. In civil registration centres, marriage is perceived as a ceremony in itself, and it is impossible to declare the marriage without a ceremony.

The registration of deaths is considered a useless process.

Registration is costly

Currently, registration of vital events is a paid service, although some campaigns offer free birth registration. Focus groups in rural areas confirmed that parents usually wait for registration campaigns to register the birth of their children because they are unwilling to pay. This means that many parents exceed the birth registration deadline and would need to declare a birth in court.

For a long time, the Guinean government imposed a per capita tax. Although this tax has now been canceled, citizens fear that registering all their children will mean additional payments to the state.

In Guinea, costs for civil registration services can vary greatly, as fees are established by the council of each community. Rural communities have higher prices for registration services, with birth registration ranging between 3,000 francs (US$0.30) and 10,000 francs (US$1.10).

In urban areas, such as Kindia and Dixinn (Conakry), prices range between 3,000 francs (US$0.30) and 5,000 francs (US$0.50). In rural communities (Mambia and Friguiagbe), birth registration costs 10,000 francs (US$1.10).

The registration of deaths costs even more, ranging between 5,000 (US$0.50) and 20,000 francs (US$2.20). Additional costs are related to obtaining confirmation of death from a health facility or health worker. If you invite someone to confirm the death, additional costs can reach 60,000 francs (US$6.50).

Marriage registration is the most expensive, ranging between 30,000 (US$3) and 50,000 (US$5) in urban areas, and up to 100,000 francs (US$11) in rural areas.

It should be mentioned that religious ceremonies are considered more important than civil ceremonies and that people spend at least 50,000 francs (US$5) for ceremonies held in mosques, such as baptisms, marriages, and funerals. Civil registration fees are an additional burden for families, as they will not replace religious ceremonies with civil ceremonies.

Most focus group respondents said a trip to the registration office costs at least 10,000 francs (US$1), and that at least two trips are required to complete the civil registration process.

Other considerations

The cost of registration is quite high, considering that much of the country is poor. Any additional expense must be carefully planned and prioritized. Although some families obtain a birth certificate for all children, time and circumstances may mean that they may record the birth of some children, but not others.

Boys are usually privileged in this sense, as a birth certificate is more of a priority for boys than for girls. Although there is no big difference in birth registration rates for boys and girls, there is a greater chance that a girl will be registered later during the 6-month official registration period. It is not uncommon that in the same family, a boy will have a birth certificate, while his sister will not. This is due to the perception that education and other rights are not important for girls, who are destined to become wives and mothers.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Women in Guinea are well-placed to communicate important social messages to their families and relatives. The next step in promoting birth, marriage, and death registration is to empower women, explain their role, and offer the tools they need to take action and be the key drivers for change.

Efforts are being made to make civil registration free of charge for all in Guinea and to employ officials who are properly trained and able to provide services effectively.

This would allow centres to provide information to women and their spouses. A joint strategy for social change, where each concerned stakeholder has a role and specific areas of intervention, would help change the perceptions of the population in general, but also of those directly or indirectly involved in the delivery of services (civil registrars, health workers, educators, mayors, village chiefs, district leaders, religious leaders, NGOs).

The Intersectoral Coordination Commission for Civil Registration Reform and Modernization has been created as a coordination mechanism that meets quarterly. This group has the authority to endorse policies related to civil registration and present proposals or joint approaches.

With the Strategy of Reform and Modernization of Civil Registration validated by all stakeholders, the National Directorate of Civil Registration plans to convene the committee more often and develop similar mechanisms at the regional level. Although this will ensure a better coordination, at this stage, no women's organizations are represented.

The Strategy is the result of this process of consultation with all the stakeholders at the central level as well as at the decentralized (regional, prefectural, communal, and community), public and non-state level as well as the development partners. In this context, it should be emphasized that this strategy constitutes the framework of reference for all interventions in the field of civil status in Guinea over the next five years.

Photo: Dominic Chavez / World Bank

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

The following actions are required to address obstacles to vital event registrations and promote gender equity in Guinea:

RESEARCH —In-depth research on current social norms, practices, and beliefs to identify and address bottlenecks in the CRVS process. This will require formative research.

STRATEGY —A strategy to influence social norms in Guinea. This means identifying target groups that consider equity and gender issues. To this end, groups that are underserved and most deprived may require a separate analysis. For instance, communication with a minority religious group will most probably count on their local and national leaders, while religious factors may not have a significant influence for the rest of the population. A gender empowerment program may provide an excellent gateway to reach women with information and counseling on marriage and divorce registration.

WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT —Active participation by women and women associations in strategy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Women's associations should be included in all consultation groups and coordination mechanisms to boost civil registration in the country.

INCLUSION OF WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS —The involvement of women's associations to decrease registration gaps and empower women to take action in civil registration is important. Particular attention should be focused on members of groups and organizations where the bulk of the active membership is made up of women, such as home and school associations (or their equivalents).

PROPER PLANNING —An operational plan that clearly identifies participants for each specific region. This is critical, at least in priority areas where grassroots level approaches will be implemented to reflect the landscape of individual local settings. Research and consultations may uncover other influential priority groups, like traditional massagers for pregnant women, community health committees, or strong community-based groups concerned by broader development issues that may have a link with registration.

DIALOGUE —The inclusion of civil registration as an important element in discussions about health, human rights, women's rights, child protection, governance, etc.

GROUP MEETINGS —Community meetings held throughout the country separately with men and women that have been hard to reach, such as cultural or traditional ethnic groups and the rural poor. These should take place before developing measures to counteract conditions that serve as deterrents to registration. This work should involve research to identify cultural beliefs and other conditions that deter registration. It is important to ensure that the people who attend these meetings are truly representative. Women should be fully included, with their concerns and opinions noted.

COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH —The use of social and behavioural change communication should be employed to:

- Stimulate community dialogue and raise awareness about the problem among women;

- Increase knowledge, for example, about the importance civil registration both among women and men;

- Promote attitude change, for example, about the need for marriage registration and about who in the family can interact with authorities to ensure civil registration;

- Reduce stigma;

- Create demand for information and services;

- Advocate with policymakers and opinion leaders for effective approaches to increase civil registration rates;

- Promote services for registration of all vital events; and,

- Improve skills and feelings of self-efficacy, for example, by teaching women why they should register divorces.

TARGET RURAL COMMUNITIES —It is important to include rural areas in any campaign that aims to inform, educate, and communicate about civil registration to women. A national Registration Month, Week, or Day should be considered, with information booths in local markets to reach rural women. Often, market day is their only contact with the outside world. For this initiative, local radio stations should broadcast messages about the requirements and benefits of registration. They should also announce where and when information booths will be set up. If possible, the local registrar should attend, so recent births can be registered on the spot. While this process may be intensive, it can be extremely effective in reaching rural women and women in poor urban areas who previously did not register vital and civil events in their families.

MEDIA OUTREACH —Another valuable approach is to air information and educational programs on community radio at key times during the day – ideally, when women can listen to them while doing housework, or while working in the fields or outdoors.

It is important to obtain the involvement and commitment of tribal chiefs, village elders, religious and spiritual leaders, traditional birth attendants, community leaders and opinion makers, women's groups, politicians at all levels, persons who perform marriages, educational institutions, and others to help ensure the success of the Registration Improvement Programme, particularly at the community level.

A strong focus should be made on empowering women to take action in civil registration.

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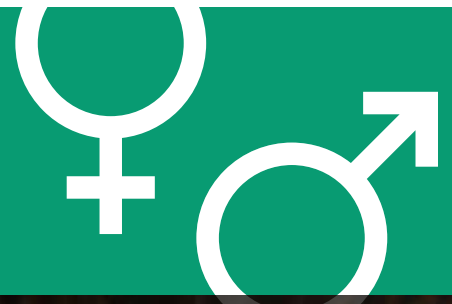
Brief 2, Paper 3

Linking National ID and CRVS Systems: An Imperative for Inclusive Development

Photo: Dominic Chavez / World Bank

KEY MESSAGES

- **More than 1 billion people do not have any proof of identity (ID).** Many countries use paper-based, decentralized systems that are often incomplete.

- **Identification is a critical factor for gender equality and the empowerment of women.** In low-income countries, poor women are less likely to have ID documents, which deprives them of the ability to claim their political, social, and economic rights.

- **Linking national ID registers with data from civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems can help create a universal, inclusive ID system.** Most countries have established a CRVS system, which registers vital events occurring in its territory on a continuous and permanent basis.

- **A robust and complete national ID system can be built and sustained only with a modern, efficient CRVS system.** The national ID system must be supported by appropriate legal and institutional frameworks.

- **National ID systems should provide coverage rates disaggregated by gender to help understand the gender differentials in identity registration.** This will provide insights into the use of the national ID system by women compared to men.

INTRODUCTION

More than 1 billion people worldwide do not have an official proof of identity (ID), which means they cannot prove who they are. This creates serious barriers in accessing health, education, and other social services. Providing officially recognizable ID to every resident is fundamental to achieving a number of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. If these goals and targets are to be achieved by 2030, countries need to redouble their efforts to meet the SDG target 16.9 on "legal identity for all, including birth registration."

The importance of legal identity

Although, there is no universally acceptable and applied definition, it is widely recognized that legal identity (**González López et al. 2013**):

- is inherently valuable as a human rights instrument;

- helps every person prove her or his legal existence before the law; and

- unlocks access to basic services.

Following the principle of human rights and the right to basic services, legal identity should be provided to all of a country's residents regardless of citizenship status. Several countries provide separate ID documents to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens. Countries must boost their efforts to establish and maintain systems that provide ID to all residents within the context of their respective legal, official, and administrative requirements.

In 2018, 177 out of 198 countries had established some form of identification system (**World Bank Group 2018**). These systems provide ID credentials, such as birth certificates and ID cards, and assign unique numbers that residents or citizens can use to access social and financial services.

In countries with no established form of ID system or where systems provide insufficient coverage, documents such as voter cards, passports, and tax identification cards are widely used as alternative ID credentials. For example:

- In Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which have no nationally established ID system and incomplete CRVS systems, citizens use paper-based voter identification cards as ID documents.

- In Ethiopia, ID cards are issued by local administrative offices (kebele) based on the family registers they maintain. These cards, issued to people 18 and older, include information on residence in a particular kebele and are widely used to prove identity and access basic services across the country.

This type of ID system excludes non-citizens and only covers people over a certain age. Many countries use paper-based, decentralized systems that are often incomplete, which could result in people possessing more than one ID document.

The impact of legal identity on gender equality

A number of countries focus their ID registration on men and people of a specific income, excluding women and the poor. Although the global gender gap in identity coverage is less than 2% (on average) between men and women in low-income countries, the gender gap among unregistered populations is much larger (**World Bank Group 2018**). In addition:

- Close to 40% of the eligible population in low-income countries has no ID document.

- 45% of women surveyed in low-income countries do not have an ID document, compared to 30% of men.

- 45% of the poorest 20% lack a proof of identity in these countries, compared to 28% of the richest 20%.

In low-income countries, poor women are less likely to have ID documents, which deprives them of their political, social, and economic rights.

Identification is a critical factor for gender equality and the empowerment of women across multiple policy areas. Having a legal ID helps women access social and economic opportunities, broadens their scope of political participation, affects their decision-making power within the household, and raises their self-esteem.

Linking with CRVS systems can greatly contribute to creating a universal and inclusive ID system. This makes it easier to reach marginalized populations that often do not have ID. Lack of ID can affect women of different ages and social groups in different ways. For example, an older woman with no ID who lives alone could face significant economic hardship without family support. A woman with no ID may not be allowed to open a bank account, depriving her of the child support money she is entitled to receive as a mother.

LINKING ID SYSTEMS TO CRVS

Ideally, a person's identity should begin at birth and end with death. However, the mandatory age to issue national ID is 16 to 18 years in 51 out of 76 low- and middle-income countries. (**World Bank 2018**). In the majority of these countries, ID registration begins much later than birth. This not only affects delivery of child-related services, but also increases the risk of identity theft and fraud, particularly in countries with high child mortality and those with vulnerable borders.

Although there is currently no data available on the number of countries that have linked their ID systems to death registration, this is another critical deterrent to identity theft and fraud.

Biographic information is information collected at the time of birth registration that uniquely identifies a child at birth. It includes:

- Name

- Date of birth

- Parents' names, ID numbers, and place of birth

The measure of success for a national ID system is not limited to universal coverage, but also depends on the system's robustness and trustworthiness. This can be achieved by linking national ID systems with CRVS systems, either by integrating the two systems in an organic way, or by creating two functionally distinct but interoperable systems.

Botswana's integrated system

Botswana has successfully integrated its CRVS and national ID systems. Users can simultaneously enter a child's birth in the birth registration record and the national ID register. The number generated from the national ID register is used as a birth registration ID number and is printed on the birth certificate.

Before the age of 16, the birth certificate is used an ID credential. When children turn 16, they visit the national ID registration centre to provide biometric information and obtain a national ID card. Similarly, a dead person is automatically removed from the national ID register when a death registration has been completed. This is a perfect example of an interoperable system, where the national ID register is automatically updated in real-time.

Creating universal, linked systems

Each country's CRVS system legally provides for the registration of vital events occurring within its territory on a continuous and permanent basis. A CRVS system is therefore universal, as it covers events related to all populations residing in the country. This includes non-citizens, refugees, and other disadvantaged populations. When linked, a CRVS system can greatly contribute to creating a universal and inclusive ID system.

A well-functioning CRVS system also allows for an event to be registered only once. For example, registering a child's information at birth with a birth serial number provides unique, reliable identification. Although this helps ensure security, the approach can be further strengthened by using digitally maintained ID systems to collect children's biometric information once they reach a certain age, such as at adulthood. Death registration information from a CRVS system can also be used to update the ID register when a person dies.

CRVS registers and the documents that are extracted from them, such as birth certificates, have legal sanctity. Therefore, a CRVS system is not only the foundation of an inclusive, robust, and trustworthy national ID system, but is also the first step towards providing people with a legal and secure identity. An individual ID system should be considered a logical extension of a CRVS system, which is the only mechanism that provides registration, identification, and statistical functions for the entire life course (**AbouZahr 2015**).

Reducing duplication and multiple identities

Building an ID system as described above can help eliminate multiple functional identities, or credentials issued by different government departments or agencies, for voting, paying taxes, or accessing social benefits. Further, data on target beneficiaries from a complete and reliable ID register can be shared with select departments or agencies to ensure the efficient and inclusive delivery of social and economic services at different levels of administration.

Finally, a government may choose to update its ID system using a CRVS system, given its continuous and permanent nature and overall cost effectiveness. Once built, a CRVS system is inexpensive to maintain. According to estimates developed by the World Bank for their CRVS Scaling Up Investment Plan, the recurring cost of maintenance was $0.50 per capita (**World Bank 2014**).

Almost all countries have an established CRVS system, although each operates at different levels of maturity. It is therefore difficult for a government to justify building another system to update an ID register when existing CRVS systems already provide the necessary basic information in a continuous, permanent, and inexpensive way.

Conceptual framework for linking national ID and CRVS systems

The linking mechanism between national ID and CRVS systems varies between countries and depends on three main factors (**World Bank 2018**):

- **Scope of population coverage**—Some countries cover the entire population (also known as national population registers), while others set a predetermined age threshold (for example, 15 years).

- **Organization**—Some countries maintain and update a single ID register at the national level, while others, like Ethiopia, have a decentralized ID system.

■ **Digitization**—77 of the 84 low- and middle-income countries maintain a national ID system, with 68 of them using a digital platform. The mandatory age for national ID for 54 of the 68 digitized systems is 15 years and older.

Various countries have adopted different approaches and business processes to successfully link their CRVS and national ID systems. Figure 1 below offers a visual representation of a national ID system as a water tank with inlet and outlet taps used to update information on births and deaths. In the interest of completeness, national ID systems should also include people migrating in and out of the country.[1]

Figure 1: Visual representation of a national ID system with update mechanisms

Source: Author's compilation

Although the diagram depicts two systems that are digitally linked, these flows may be intermittent in countries where the CRVS data is entered offline.

A few countries such as Botswana, Thailand, Kyrgyzstan, and Peru have successfully linked their CRVS registers and national ID registers in an organic way based on interoperable digital platforms. Therefore, the inlet and outlet taps in these countries, as shown in the figure above, are kept permanently open to allow updating of the national ID register in real-time.

In contrast, birth registration is offline and optional in India's Aadhaar system, and there is no mechanism for removing the dead from the database. Therefore, it falls short on 2 out of the 3 tests of robustness – namely security and accuracy. The Aadhaar system is also vulnerable to potential fraudulent use, such as direct cash transfers that are made into the bank accounts of people who have died.

BUILDING AND OPERATING AN INTEGRATED NATIONAL ID SYSTEM

Merely linking an ID system with a CRVS system doesn't guarantee that it will be robust and inclusive in all situations. There are other issues and challenges that need to be recognized and addressed. First, the CRVS system itself has to be complete, accurate, and efficient. Second, the business processes adopted in linking these two systems must be efficiently supported by adequate human resources, digitization and ICT infrastructure, institutional mechanisms, and legal frameworks.

Although an integrated national ID system may seem intuitive, it can be extremely complex to build. Countries seeking to develop this type of system must decide how to take stock of the existing population (filling the tank for the first time), and when to update the register (opening the inlet and outlet taps, as per Figure 1 above).

Although there is no global consensus on these issues, country case studies are more readily available. However, these case studies focus mostly on the status of integrated national ID systems, their completeness, and operating issues and challenges. There is still little information on how these systems were built in the first place.

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1 The discussion on the possible ways to link national ID systems and immigration services, and the related challenges and issues, are beyond the scope of this paper.

BUILDING A NATIONAL ID DATABASE

Countries can use one of two strategies to build their initial national ID register:

- Use existing databases

- Register the eligible population through mass registration

There are pros and cons to each approach, and each has its own complexity.

Extracting data from existing databases

Generally, governments can build their national ID register by using data that already exists in voter ID databases or through a combination of other databases.

The voter ID database holds basic ID data, including biometric information (photograph and fingerprint) for each registered voter. These are also usually required for a national ID register. Bangladesh and Malawi are examples of countries that have used voter ID registers to build their initial national ID register.

Photo: Simone D. McCourtie / World Bank

There are, however, limitations to using a voter ID database:

- **Lifespan**—Voter ID databases are prepared with the specific purpose of accurately identifying voters during an election. As a result, they have a short lifespan.

- **Representation**—Voter registration is limited to people aged 18 and over (or in some countries, aged 16 and over). If a country decides to use the voter register as a starting point for a national ID register for its entire population, it will have to introduce a one-time registration process to register the remainder of the population (children aged 0 to 17 years) immediately after the election exercise is completed. This information will be combined with data from the existing voter ID register to build the baseline stock of population.

- **Inclusivity**—Voter registration is voluntary and is limited to citizens of a country. Therefore, using a voter ID database to build the initial database will automatically exclude non-citizens. A separate exercise will need to be undertaken to make sure that non-citizens and those left out are included in the integrated national ID database.

- **Eligibility**—Voter registration is allowed only with proof of ID, such as a birth certificate, to prove age and citizenship by birth. This is disadvantageous to women, particularly in countries where the birth registration levels are very low. In Burkina Faso, for example, a woman seeking to obtain a birth certificate needs two witnesses from the village or town where she was born to vouch for her birth in the country. This process involves physical travel and other associated costs. The situation can be even worse in countries that are in conflict, where the movement of people into conflict zones is restricted.

Finally, using a voter register to build the initial integrated national ID database can pose practical challenges for countries, given its exclusionary nature and the complex additional undertakings required to create a complete and robust database of the resident population.

Other types of existing databases that countries can use to build their initial national ID register are social service registries, taxpayer registries, or a combination of these.

When social registries are universal, they can act as a launching pad for development of the national ID system. Under a four-year Public Administration Modernization Project, the World Bank is supporting the Government of Djibouti to build and maintain an e-ID system. The initial database is being built through a mass enrolment campaign. They are also leveraging the work and data gathered by the National Social Security Fund and the national social registry of people. By the end of the project, the goal is to enroll half the population in the e-ID system, including women, who are significantly underrepresented.

On the other hand, using a taxpayer database to initialize a national ID register may not be inclusive. This is because taxpayers are predominantly male in low- and middle-income countries, and a significant proportion of women do not have formal employment.

Integrating different databases to produce an unduplicated list of people for a national ID register poses matching challenges, as these databases use different identifiers. In addition, the spelling of names is not uniform across registers.

Building a database through mass registration

Another option is that governments can choose to build their initial national ID register through a one-time enrolment of the resident population. This is usually accomplished through a mass public campaign that encourages people to register at the nearest enrolment centre. There is usually a set timeframe so the exercise can be completed quickly.

Several countries have adopted this approach. For example:

- **Malawi**—Over a six-month period in 2017, 9.2 million Malawians aged 16 years and over were registered in the National Registration and Identification System and received ID cards.

- **India**—The country's Aadhaar system has an open-ended registration system with no closing date. The de-duplication process deployed at the time of registration ensures the uniqueness of data in the database.

- **Philippines**—Philippines is planning to adopt a phased approach to register the population. The registration process will begin by targeting 1 million beneficiaries of the government's Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) program. They will be the first ID documentation recipients. After this trial run, a full national ID registration will be rolled out to cover the entire population by 2023.

Despite best efforts, some people may not register for a variety of reasons, including access to registration centres. Countries may have to undertake more than one round of registration to capture people who have been missed.

Regardless of which process is used for the initial registration, there is a significant risk that older citizens may not be registered, as many of them may not have or may not be able to obtain the documents needed for enrolment, such as a birth certificate, marriage certificate, proof of address, or previously issued ID documents. In particular, older women tend to have lower rates of documentation, as they have not needed documents for most of their lives.

The newly enacted law on the Philippines Identity System requires married women who adopt the husband's surname, but present an ID document with their maiden name, to present their marriage certificate as proof. A large number of women may not have registered their marriages, particularly those who are poor, old, or who live in remote areas. Obtaining a certificate for a marriage that was solemnized in the past would be a lot to ask of a woman, and in some cases, may be impossible to obtain.

UPDATING THE NATIONAL ID REGISTER

Once the national ID register has been created, it must be updated through a process of continuous registration to include new entrants and anyone who was missed during the building phase. A few considerations:

- **Real-time registration**—Countries that create their initial ID registers in real-time by deploying a de-duplication process at the time of registration must start updating the register immediately after the cut-off date. For example, Malawi started updating its initial register a day after the cut-off date for its mass registration exercise.

- **Phased-in systems**—Countries adopting a phased approach to creating the initial ID register may need to implement a similar approach when updating the database.

This can pose administrative challenges, particularly when the phases are based on population groups rather than administrative regions.

- **Manual registration**—Countries that are unable to enroll citizens in the initial register in real-time due to poor information technology infrastructure or inadequate registration points must register people manually and follow up with offline data entry. In such cases, they must limit the time between these two exercises to minimize backlog and the possibility of exclusion.

One of the essential features of an integrated national ID system is to use birth and death registration records from the CRVS system. Countries often require that individuals present their birth certificate as proof of basic ID, date of birth, and place of birth to enroll in the national ID register. In most European countries, birth information and records are automatically transferred to update the national ID register in real-time.

Challenges to updating systems

In some cases, registration may be denied to people whose births have not been registered or who are unable to present a birth certificate. Lesotho and Brazil, for example, will only accept a birth certificate for registration in the national ID register. In these situations, people must register their birth and obtain a birth certificate, regardless of their age. This can be an arduous task for women and the elderly, in particular.

Countries with poor or incomplete registration levels may allow people to submit alternative documents if they do not have proof of birth registration. This ensures that individuals are not denied the opportunity to exercise their right to identity when they are unable to obtain a birth certificate.

Retiring identities based on information from death registration records from a CRVS system is an essential step to ensuring the robustness of a national ID system. With the exception of countries where a national ID is organically linked to civil registration and vital statistics at a systems level, national ID registers become inflated, inaccurate, and may even result in fraud.

Countries may depend on families to travel to national ID offices to report a death, which is highly unlikely. In most low- and middle-income countries, levels of death registration are extremely low, and deaths are never flagged for deletion.

Ensuring system success

Currently, the most commonly used indicator to measure the successful implementation of a national ID system is coverage rate. This is defined as the number of residents registered in the national ID register as a percentage of the total resident population of the country.[2] The coverage rate calculated by countries that do

not have efficient systems to remove residents from national ID registers after their death would invariably have an upward bias. More data is needed to explore the extent of inflated records that have not been retired from the national ID register.

Some countries, such as Rwanda, update their national ID register based on records received directly from civil registration offices, rather than depending on voluntary reporting by families. These records are either transferred through offline electronic media (such as pen drives) or in hard copy, resulting in intermittent updates to the national ID register. In some countries, like Botswana and Sweden, these transfers are automatic and occur in real time.

Figure 2 presents scenarios to demonstrate the method used to integrate national ID systems using country examples. There is very little literature available on how national ID registers are updated using CRVS records. The scenarios are for illustration purposes only.

Figure 2: Scenarios of linkages between CRVS and digitized national ID systems

Country	Digitized national ID register: Population coverage threshold (from birth or later)	CRVS system: Manual or digitized	National ID update method: Digital transfer or manually submit certificate
Botswana, Sweden	Since birth	Digitized	Digital transfer
India	Since birth	Partially digitized	Submit certificate
Malawi (proposed)	Later	Digitized	Submit certificate
Mozambique	Later	Manual	Submit certificate

Source: Author's compilations

2   This paper presumes that the national ID register covers all resident populations and is not limited to citizens only.

A COMPLETE AND MODERN CRVS SYSTEM IS FUNDAMENTAL

Even with a perfectly built digital ID register that is updated using CRVS records, countries with paper-based or inefficient digital systems and poor levels of birth and death registration will not be able to successfully build a robust and complete national ID system.

Further, in several countries, updates to the national ID register depend entirely on active reporting by families. This can result in very low reporting rates, particularly death registration. Therefore, the only way to maintain a complete, robust, and trustworthy national ID system is to establish an organic linkage between the CRVS and national ID systems by integrating them or making them interoperable at the individual record level. This is only possible when both CRVS and national ID systems are maintained on digital platforms. In most low- and middle-income countries, CRVS systems are paper-based, whereas national ID systems are electronically maintained using sophisticated technology and high levels of security.

Figure 3 illustrates the uneven pace of modernization of CRVS and national ID systems in most of the African countries used for this study. It is likely to be true for other regions as well.

Photo: Sarah Farhat / World Bank

Figure 3: Use of technology for CRVS and national ID systems in selected African countries

Country	CRVS records	National ID register records
Botswana	Electronic	Electronic
Cameroon	Paper	Electronic
Chad	Paper	Electronic
Cote d'Ivoire	Paper	Electronic
Kenya	Electronic	Electronic
Namibia	Electronic	Electronic
Nigeria	Electronic	Electronic
Madagascar	Paper	Paper
Morocco	Paper	Electronic
Rwanda	Paper	Electronic
Sierra Leone	Paper	Electronic
Tanzania	Paper	Electronic
Zambia	Electronic	Paper

Source: Author's compilations

The need for complete registration of births and deaths

The levels of birth and death registration in several countries are far from complete. In fact, they are highly deficient. In 2017, the percentage of children under age 5 whose births had been registered was as low as 40%. This contrasts with the global average of 70% (**UNICEF 2017**). According to the 2018 Global SDG Report, 148 countries or areas worldwide had a 75% or more completion rate on death registration data. In sub-Saharan Africa, this was the case in only nine countries (**United Nations 2018**). Further, gender biases in the CRVS system are likely to be reflected in the national ID system, making it less inclusive.

Although there are only few steps involved in completing a registration and issuing a certificate, building a CRVS system is complex. There are several barriers to registration that countries must address and overcome in a more holistic and coordinated way.

Some of the common challenges to maintaining CRVS systems include:

- Lack of political commitment;

- Inappropriate business processes;

- Outdated legal frameworks;

- Lack of coordination and monitoring;

- Inadequate capacity;

- High cost of registration;

- Lack of demand;

- Lack of awareness among people; and

- Resource constraints.

Although this paper does not discuss these challenges detail, it is important to note that improving CRVS systems requires predictable and sustained funding for long- and short-term technical assistance and capacity building programs. This will allow countries to create efficient and complete CRVS systems, which will serve as the true foundation of a robust and comprehensive national ID system.

There is also a need for a more coordinated approach to funding CRVS systems, particularly in African countries. Although massive investments have been made to establish state-of-the-art national ID registers in recent years, there has been no equivalent support for CRVS systems. Countries are claiming success by showcasing their newly built national ID systems and sophisticated credentials. However, these successes will be short-lived unless immediate steps are taken to strengthen their CRVS systems. After all, only a modern and complete CRVS system can sustain a robust and complete national ID system.

Statistics and monitoring

Generating statistics from an integrated national ID system is often overlooked. A national ID register that covers a country's entire resident population can provide continuous data on population and vital statistics, disaggregated by gender, geography, and other criteria. In 2010, 18 countries in Europe had conducted their population census using population registers rather than traditional methods of census-taking (**Valente and Paolo 2010**).

Countries that have established mechanisms to update address records of people moving within the country can compile data on internal migration. However, they may require specific legal clauses to use, produce, and publish statistics based on data collected in the national ID register. In implementing rules and regulations of the recently proclaimed *Philippines Identification System Act*, Philippines has made provisions for generating aggregate data or statistical summaries without reference to or identification of any specific individual. This is a good practice worth emulating.

It is important to regularly monitor the performance of an integrated national ID system using data collected by the register itself. For example:

- Gender disaggregated data on coverage rates can help understand the gender differentials in ID registration.

- The percentage of individuals who have obtained ID credentials compared to the number of people who have registered will highlight gaps or inefficiencies.

- Case statistics on authentication services provided by the national ID system can measure its effectiveness.

- A review of data disaggregated by gender will provide insights into women's use of the system compared to men.

Legal and institutional frameworks

Legal and institutional frameworks are key to the efficient functioning of a country's national ID system.

Legal frameworks

Countries need an adequate legal framework to operate and regulate a modern national ID system. Governments must ensure that the process of information sharing respects individual rights and consents regarding the use of personal information.

In most countries, information maintained in CRVS registers is confidential and data sharing may be limited to the provision of government services. Although many countries have established protocols for sharing information from registration records, not all countries that have built or are planning to build digital ID systems have made adequate legal provisions to deal with the collection and maintenance of electronic records. This exposes them to the risk of legal scrutiny. Any violation of privacy and confidentiality could jeopardize the system's integrity.

Although Botswana has one of the most modern integrated ID systems in Africa, it does not have any laws around the creation and maintenance of electronic records or any legal provisions for sharing data. When linking CRVS and national ID systems, there are a few potential legal scenarios, as outlined in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Legal provisions for linking CRVS and national ID systems – country scenarios

Country example[3]	Legal structure	Linkage
Bangladesh, India	Separate laws governing CRVS and national ID systems	Birth certificate is required but optional for registration in the national ID register. No provision for retiring identities of the dead from the national ID register.
Philippines	Separate laws governing CRVS and national ID systems	Birth certificate is required but optional for registration in the national ID register. Death certificate is required to retire the ID of the dead from the national ID register.
Brazil, Lesotho	Separate laws governing CRVS and national ID systems	Birth certificate is compulsory for registration in the national ID register.
Ethiopia	Integrated law governing CRVS and national ID systems	Transfer of records from CRVS authorities to national ID authorities. No provision for electronic transfer.
Uganda (from any government database), Kenya (underway)	Integrated law governing CRVS and national ID systems	Auto-update of national ID records based on CRVS records.

Source: Author's compilations

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3   The country examples are limited, as legal documents are not easy to find. Sometimes, they are only available in the local language, which limits the scope of research.

The scenarios in the table above represent a range of common practices across countries. An integrated law that provides for automatic updates of the national ID register from CRVS records goes a long way towards ensuring that the national ID system will be complete and robust. Botswana has successfully implemented effective, real-time linkage between its two systems, despite having separate laws with no provisions for linkages between them.

Institutional frameworks

The institutional structures surrounding CRVS and national ID systems and the way they interact can affect the functional efficiency of the linking mechanisms between the two systems. In recent years, there has been an increasing trend to combine the CRVS and ID functions under one agency or within the same ministry. Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda are the latest examples of this trend. This reduces and even eliminates the need for coordination, which has proven to be one of the biggest bottlenecks in implementing an integrated ID system.

However, in some countries, the national ID and CRVS offices are housed in different ministries or in different departments within the same ministry. For example, according to the ID4D Global dataset (**World Bank 2018**):

- Of the 37 countries where the national ID system is housed in the Ministry of Interior or Home, 29 of those also house the CRVS system. In the other 8 countries, the CRVS system is housed in other ministries, namely the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Local Administration.

- In Tanzania, the CRVS agency is housed in the Ministry of Justice, while the National Identification Authority is an agency under the Ministry of Interior.

- Kenya's Ministry of Interior and Ethiopia's Ministry of Peace offices are housed in different departments or agencies, but within the same ministry.

- In some countries, the same agency implements both systems. For example, in Botswana, the Department of Civil and National Registration at the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs is mandated to implement both systems.

- The Philippine Statistics Authority manages both systems and has the additional responsibility of compiling vital statistics based on civil registration data. The actual national ID and CRVS registration takes place in local centres and lower levels of administrations.

In countries where CRVS and national ID systems are housed in different ministries, local registration offices will invariably be separate and often in different areas. This can create significant coordination problems at the national and local levels, particularly when paper-based registration records must be transferred to national ID offices.

Countries that house both systems within the same agency use the same local office to provide both registration services, quite often through different client windows. This facilitates the linkage of records, even with paper-based CRVS systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper highlights some of the main challenges in linking national ID and CRVS systems. Although recent and ongoing global and regional initiatives are yielding improvements to both systems, there is still much to do. To develop robust and complete national ID systems that are based on modern, complete, and efficient CRVS systems, governments and key stakeholders must:

- **Showcase the benefits**—Craft simple and appropriate messaging that highlights the benefits of establishing organic links between CRVS and national ID systems, as well as the importance of doing so for inclusive development and gender equality. Separate messaging should be crafted for the different types of clients, such as government policymakers, development partners, and the general public.

- **Use case studies**—Promote case study based practical research on the gender implications of building and implementing an inclusive, integrated national ID system.

- **Provide guidance**—Urgently provide more operational guidance for implementing a robust and complete integrated national ID system. This should cover the legal framework, management and operations, and business process for linking CRVS and national ID systems. It should also include provisions for the protection and privacy of data, advocacy, and communication. This guidance can be developed using country-based practices and wider consultations with various stakeholders.

- **Offer expertise, training, and materials**—Provide technical assistance and capacity building support to countries. This can be achieved by building a pool of regional experts to provide long-term technical assistance based on standard tools and operational guidance. This includes developing materials for online and in-person training, as well as train the trainer content. This material could be introduced as part of public administration curricula in academic institutions and in institutions that offer in-service training to civil servants.

- **Establish indicators**—Develop a set of appropriate indicators for monitoring and measuring the quantitative and qualitative aspects an integrated national ID system.

- **Set guidelines for statistics**—Develop guidelines on producing statistics from integrated national ID systems and encourage countries to make the necessary legal provisions.

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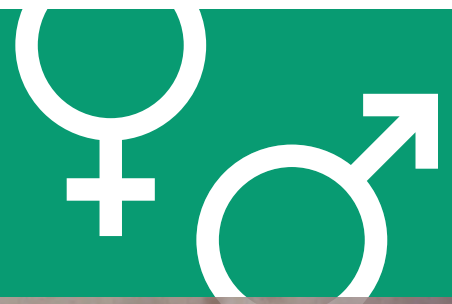
Brief 2, Paper 4

Empowering Women and Girls through Civil Registration Systems

Photo: John Isaac / World Bank

KEY MESSAGES

- **Women and children, particularly girls, face a vicious cycle of exclusion from civil registration.** Lack of birth registration leaves women and children vulnerable throughout their lives. When marriages are not registered, they face barriers accessing spousal or widowhood rights. Then, when their deaths are unregistered, public health authorities do not have the information they need to support health related decision-making.

- **The global community can draw from initiatives that rebalance CRVS systems for women and children.** Overcoming the gender-based barriers to birth and death registration will enable them to benefit from the legal, social, and economic protections that civil registration offers

- **Sex-disaggregated data will improve decision-making.** This requires greater attention to disaggregating civil registration data by sex and other relevant indicators at the global, regional, and country levels.

- **Women can help strengthen CRVS systems.** Community health workers, most of whom are women, have the potential to help ensure that births and deaths that occur in the community are reported to the civil registrar.

- **There is a need to work with communities, and with women and girls, to raise awareness of the benefits of civil registration.** However, registration services must be available, not too far away, free, and welcoming.

INTRODUCTION

A birth certificate is "a small paper …. [that] establishes who you are and gives access to the rights and privileges, and the obligations of citizenship." – Archbishop Desmond Tutu (**Episcopal Church 2011**)

The value of vital documents

A birth certificate is the first legal identity document people possess: it provides evidence of their name, age, sex, parents (where known), and place of birth. Having a birth certificate makes it easier to access services such as health, education, social benefits, other identity documentation, electoral participation, and inheritance. It supports claims to citizenship or nationality by place of birth or familial descent.

A marriage certificate is evidence of legal ties between spouses. It helps people exercise their spousal rights and privileges; a divorce certificate is evidence of the ending of those mutual ties. A death certificate is needed by surviving family members to claim inheritance, land and other assets, pensions, and social protection for widowed spouses and orphans.

Why civil registration matters

The primary purpose of civil registration is to provide people with legal documentation on vital events, notably births, deaths, marriages and divorces (**United Nations 2014**). Civil registration should capture and register all vital events for the entire population living in a country or territory. Without civil registration, people are particularly vulnerable to deprivation and exploitation (**UNICEF 2013**; **The Loomba Foundation 2015**).

In addition, civil registration benefits the State. The information from civil registration records is collated to generate demographic data on a continuous basis for even the smallest administrative areas of a country, something that no other data source can achieve. These data are needed for national and subnational policymaking, planning, and monitoring across many sectors.

Knowing the location and number of vital events is essential for organizing health and education infrastructure and for monitoring progress in health, education, and economic and social development. The ambitious SDG agenda requires this information to achieve its targets – notably SDG3, SDG5 and 16.9. Moreover, data on births and deaths provide both numerators and denominators for monitoring key indicators.

CRVS systems and gender

Although many sectors and institutions are involved in strengthening civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems, our focus is on the gendered nature of interactions between CRVS systems and the health sector. We pay particular attention to gender disparities in relation to registration of deaths and causes of death, an aspect of CRVS that remains poorly understood and researched.

Women and girls are key protagonists at the moment of birth and are often the main caregivers when a life ends. Many births and deaths occur in the presence of health-care workers, the majority of whom are women. Yet women and girls face major barriers when it comes to civil registration. In this paper, we describe the gender aspects of these barriers and suggest ways in which they can be overcome.

CRVS SYSTEMS ARE FAILING TO ACHIEVE THE PRINCIPLE OF UNIVERSALITY

A key principle of a functional CRVS system is universality. That is, a CRVS system should register all vital events that occur within a defined geographic area in a continuous and timely way to generate complete and accurate statistics for the entire population. However,

- approximately 25% of the world's children under 5 have not had their births registered (**UNICEF 2017**),

- half of all deaths (50%) are never registered (**GBD 2016 Mortality Collaborators**),

- birth registration levels are lowest in the world's poorest countries (**UNICEF 2013**),

- four countries out of ten in the world have no or very poor quality data on mortality; (**World Health Organization 2017**),

- fewer than 10% of low-income countries register all births and deaths (**World Health Organization 2017**).

Not only are there differentials in registration levels between countries, there are also important differentials in registration within individual countries, with some population groups less likely to be registered than others. Significant differentials in civil registration of vital events arise as a result of legal, economic, cultural, and social factors that interact with and increase gender-based barriers, including:

- poverty;
- distance from registration offices;
- direct and indirect costs of registration;
- customs that restrict women's autonomy and agency;
- lack of knowledge about the value of civil registration;

- disability;
- discrimination on ethnic, religious, or cultural grounds;
- conflict (**Buvinic and Carey 2019**) (**Silva et al. 2019**).

Birth registration tends to be lowest in the poorest households, in rural areas, and in families where the mother has the fewest years of formal education (**UNICEF 2013**). In some countries, particularly low levels of birth registration are found in some ethnic or religious groups.

The absence of one type of civil registration can affect a person's ability to register other vital events, resulting in cumulative, intergenerational effects. For example, families may be unable to register their infants if they do not have, or cannot get, the required official documents such as marriage and divorce certificates, birth certificates, or national identity documents.

THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM CRVS SYSTEMS

Many obstacles to civil registration affect both men and women, including poverty, distance from registration services, unemployment, limited education, ethnicity, disability, and lack of knowledge about the benefits of civil registration. However, women and girls in particular face a vicious cycle of exclusion from civil registration due to way these barriers interact with and reinforce social and cultural factors, such as a lack of autonomy, limited agency, power imbalances, and harmful practices. Some of these obstacles are built into a society's social fabric and taken for granted which makes them hard to change.

Socio-economic factors

Registration offices tend to be located in administrative centres that are far from where people live, especially in rural areas. This makes registration particularly inaccessible to women who may have restricted autonomy and whose ability to travel is limited by lack of resources, household responsibilities, and local customs, especially following pregnancy.

Laws and regulations

Other restrictions may be imposed by civil registration law and regulations. For example, the law may prioritize the infant's father or a male relative as the legal informant for registering a birth with the civil registrar (**UNICEF 2017**). In some settings, there are laws requiring that the father be named in the registration documentation, or that prohibit birth registrations in the name of an unmarried woman. As a result, women may not be able to register the birth of their children. Children are less likely to have their births registered if their mother:

- is under the age of 19;
- is unmarried;
- has limited education;
- is poor;
- has a disability;
- lives in a rural area, particularly in disadvantaged ethnic or religious communities (**UNICEF 2013**; **Dake and Fuseini 2018**).

Likelihood of birth registration by sex

Girls are less likely to be registered than boys in some settings, such as in Timor Leste and Nigeria (**General Directorate of Statistics 2017**) (**Olusesan et al. 2016**). Lower birth registration among girls compared to boys has also been documented in the following countries (**Bhatia et al. 2017**):

- Armenia;
- Costa Rica;
- Guinea Bissau;
- Namibia;
- Niger;
- Sudan;
- Tajikistan;
- Thailand.

Higher coverage of birth registration among girls has been documented in Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone and Vanuatu (**Bhatia et al. 2017**).

The role of CRVS systems

Lack of birth registration leaves women and girls vulnerable throughout their lives. CRVS systems must protect girls through universal birth registration to establish proof of age. This proof of age should later be required for marriage registration to uphold the rights of children and women.

Girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage, and an estimated 12 million girls under the age of 18 years are married each year. This leaves many young women at risk of death or ill-health associated with early childbearing. Compared to women in their twenties, teenage girls experience higher maternal mortality rates and their babies are more likely to die in the first month of life (**UNICEF 2018**).

GENDER IMBALANCES IN DEATH REGISTRATION

With few exceptions, the proportion of all births that are registered is generally considerably higher than the proportion of registered deaths. For example, in Indonesia, where significant efforts have been made to strengthen birth registration, death registration is almost non-existent (**Kusumaningrum, S et al 2016**).

Women whose spouses die and who do not have the marriage and death certificates are vulnerable to loss of income, spousal pension and social insurance. They face multiple complications in claiming property, inheritance, custody of their children, and the right to remarry. Many of these women become de facto heads of households and face a downward spiral of poverty that rebounds across the generations. Widows often face discrimination, blame, and hostility, even when the husband's death was the result of natural disaster or war (**The Loomba Foundation 2015**).

When women die, their own deaths may also go unregistered. If registered, women's deaths are less likely than men's to have a medically certified cause of death (**Office of the Registrar General, India 2015**). As a result, public health authorities lack information on the levels and causes of female deaths that is required to support health related decision-making.

Why deaths are not registered

There are several reasons why deaths remain unregistered. In many areas, most deaths take place at home, often without any medical care. There are few incentives to report the death to the civil registration authorities, especially if the deceased person had no resources to pass on to the family. This is more often the case for women, who generally hold fewer assets than men. A study in three areas of Indonesia, where over 80% of deaths occurred at home,


Photo: Simone D. McCourtie / World Bank

found that only two percent of families that had experienced a death in the previous five years registered the deaths, and only half successfully received a death certificate. Families reported that the main reasons for not registering deaths were cost and distance, as well as lack of knowledge about the need for registration.

In some countries, people need to register a death before they can obtain permission to dispose of a body. While this requirement is intended as an incentive to death registration, it does not work in areas where:

- permission to dispose of a body is not required (e.g. Bangladesh);
- there are local, informal ways of burying a body, including family burial plots (e.g. Ghana, Indonesia);
- there are unregulated cemeteries (e.g. Brazil, Ghana, Liberia);
- permission to bury is given by local cemetery managers who are not required to report burial details to the civil registrar.

Although the data are sparse, there is evidence that the non-registration of deaths is more common for women than for men. Adult males tend to have higher mortality rates than females, but large differentials indicate that female deaths are underreported (World Health Organization 2008). Under-registration of female deaths has been observed in Kenya (**USAID 2013**), Zimbabwe (**Stoneburner and Greenwell 2017**), and Niger (**Republique du Niger 2014**) as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Ratio of male to female death registration, Niger 2007-2011

Males per 100 females
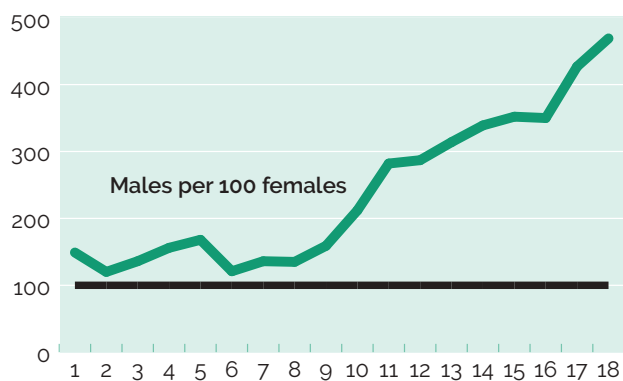
Source: Republique du Niger 2014

Of the total 6.35 million deaths registered in India in 2016, 55.4% were males compared to 37.9% females (over 7% were recorded as "of unknown sex"). In some States and Union Territories, almost twice as many male deaths were registered compared to female deaths (**Office of the Registrar General, India 2016**). However, the Office of the Registrar General does not report registration completeness by sex. Further statistical analysis is warranted to determine the extent to which these differences reflect skewed sex ratios and higher male mortality or significant under-registration of female deaths (**Thomas 2018**).

Overcoming the general reluctance of families to register deaths will require innovative approaches that incentivize demand, improve supply, and facilitate death registration. Making death registration easier requires broad-based strategies, such as:

■ conducting awareness campaigns to communicate how and where to register, and why registration matters.

■ creating incentives to register deaths, such as a contribution to funeral expenses.

■ working with health personnel and morticians who are present at the time of death or who become aware of a death shortly after it has occurred in the community.

Gender-based differentials in determining causes of death

Even when a woman's death is registered, the cause of death may not be determined according to international standards. Only 23% of deaths reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) have precise and meaningful information on their cause (**World Health Organization 2017**). Moreover, deaths in males are more likely to have reliable information on cause of death than deaths in females (**World Health Organization 2017**).

In order to address the specific needs of women and girls through evidence-based health decision-making, female deaths must be registered and medically certified using the WHO medical certificate of cause of death.

In 2015, only 22% of total registered deaths in India were medically certified, of which 62% were males and 38% females (**Office of the Registrar General, India 2015**). In other words, the Indian government has information on the medical causes of only 14% of the estimated annual 10 million deaths in the country, and the majority of these are among males.

Even when deaths are medically certified by physicians, causes may be misclassified due to the stigma associated with certain causes of death such as abortion and HIV, reputational risks (especially for women and girls), or conscious or unconscious biases held by the certifying physician.

There is evidence that women are more likely than men to have a cause of death attributed to invalid or undetermined causes of death according to the standards of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) (**World Health Organization 2017**). A study in Kenya found that invalid cause-of-death codes were mostly concentrated in women between the ages of 10 and 25, and within two ICD chapters, namely 'maternal conditions' and 'conditions arising in the perinatal period" (**USAID 2013**). Further research is needed to explain the underlying reasons for such failures in accurate cause-of-death determination, and more attention needs to be paid to potential gender-based biases that may underline them.

There is also evidence of gender disparities when the cause of death is determined using verbal autopsy (an interview with family members using a structured questionnaire). In India, where verbal autopsies are conducted as part of the Sample Registration System, a higher proportion of deaths of females than males are assigned to "symptoms, signs, and ill-defined conditions" (**Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India 2016**).

Unnatural deaths of women and girls

Misclassification of cause of death is particularly prevalent in cases of unnatural death which should be classified as accidental, non-accidental, or due to suicide or homicide, and for which is it necessary to establish culpability (**Brooke 1974**). This requires the involvement of the police and judicial system. But as Brooke has

observed, the classification of unnatural deaths involves many people – physicians, pathologists, district health officers, coroners, police officers, magistrates, public prosecutors, judges, and morticians (**Brooke 1974**) – professions in which women are generally underrepresented and where gender-related causes of death may be overlooked.

In India, where deaths due to burns are more common among women than men, studies have examined the multiple social, familial, and legal influences on the attribution of causes of deaths (**Daruwalla 2014**). Despite legislation designed to protect vulnerable women from dowry-related violence and abuse, determining cause of death is influenced by "motivated accounting processes representing the interests and resources available to the doctors, victims, families of victims, the victim's husband and his family, and ultimately, the police" (**Belur et al. 2014**). Especially in situations where women and girls have inferior social and economic status, these complex interactions can result in gender-based biases in the determination of cause of and culpability for deaths in females (**Belur et al. 2014**).

Photo: Mohamad Al-Arief / The World Bank

Gender disparities extend to all settings

Gender disparities in determining the cause of death are not limited to low- and middle-income countries. In several high-income settings, women are less likely than men to have their deaths investigated by a coroner and a pathologist (**Bloor et al. 1987**). This implies that their deaths may not have an accurate determination of cause.

Unconscious biases may influence apparent gender differences in cause of death reporting. For example, women are less likely than men to be diagnosed and treated for a heart attack (**Alabas et al. 2017**). This would lead to an incorrect cause of death on the death certificate should they die. A study in Florida hospitals between 1991 and 2010 found that women were less likely than men to survive traumatic health episodes like acute myocardial infarctions when treated by male physicians (**Greenwood et al. 2018**). In contrast, male and female patients experienced similar outcomes when treated by female physicians, suggesting that unique challenges arise when male physicians treat female patients. Further research is needed to explain the socio-structural drivers of these gender biases.

Photo: Dominic Chavez / World Bank

BUILDING CRVS SYSTEMS THAT WORK FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

If decision-makers are to ensure that CRVS systems work for women and girls, they will need more evidence about the extent and impact of gender inequities in civil registration and how they can be addressed. Several initiatives are under way to rebalance CRVS systems and facilitate the registration of vital events for women and girls and other disadvantaged populations.

Bringing civil registration closer to women

Distance to registration offices and registration costs are among the most frequently cited barriers to birth and death registration (**Sumner and Kusumaningrum 2014**). These can be challenging for anyone who must register a vital event, but they are often insurmountable for women who:

- lack access to transport;
- have limited cash;
- have other children and family members to look after;
- cannot take time away from work in the formal or informal sectors;
- are bound by customs that prevent them from moving beyond the immediate environment.

The most obvious opportunities to increase birth registration occur within the context of health-care provision to women and infants. Around the world, increasing numbers of women and their babies receive health care thanks to a widely dispersed network of facility and community-based health-care provision.

In Ghana, for example, health workers in community health planning and service facilities provide primary care, including antenatal and postnatal care services, at the community level. This is the lowest level of a health administration hierarchy. These community health workers – most of whom are women – can reach mothers and their newborn babies, even when their births did not take place in a health facility.

Figure 2 shows the coverage of antenatal care (ANC), which includes at least four visits and institutional delivery, compared to the coverage of birth registration in selected countries (**UNICEF 2019**).

Birth registration can be increased by adopting a proactive approach that links the provision of care through the health sector at the facility and community levels to the civil registration of births, stillbirths, and pregnancy related deaths. This approach shifts the burden of registration from women to health administrators, who are well placed to interact with civil registration offices.

Health workers who provide antenatal and maternity care services, such as newborn care, child growth monitoring, and immunization routinely collect information that can be used to facilitate birth and death registration (**World Health Organization 2014**; **World Health Organization 2013**). A variety of health facility registers record pregnancy outcomes such as live births, abortions, stillbirths, and maternal deaths. Where supportive legal, regulatory, and information technology systems are in place, key information items required for legal purposes can be shared with the civil registrar so that these events can be included in the CRVS system.

Figure 2: Opportunities for increased birth registration through linkages with health-care provision
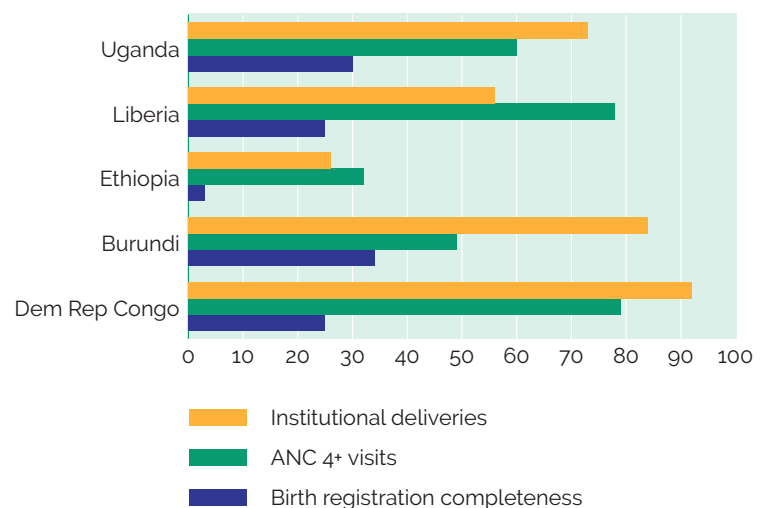
Source: UNICEF 2019

A similar approach can be adopted to facilitate the registration of deaths. Health care facilities routinely collect information on deaths through a variety of health registers, such as hospital admissions and discharges, mortuary records, and disease-focused mortality surveillance (for example HIV, notifiable diseases and cancer registries). For deaths that occur in health facilities, key information elements required for death registration can be shared with the civil registrar to facilitate timely registration. This pro-active approach to death registration is currently being implemented in Bangladesh and Rwanda. For deaths that occur at home, community health workers can counsel families on the importance of death registration. In some settings, community-based health workers are collecting the minimum information needed to permit death registration and notified registration offices when deaths occur (see below).

The case summary below details Tanzania's approach to providing birth registration services alongside maternal and child health care, thus alleviating women of the burden of attending the civil registration office in person.

Case Study 1: Birth registration in Tanzania

Photo: Scott Wallace / World Bank

The United Republic of Tanzania inherited a highly centralized CRVS system from the colonial era that involved multiple visits to district registration offices, high direct costs for registration, and indirect costs for travel.

In 2012, the Registration Insolvency and Trusteeship Agency developed a strategy for overcoming barriers to the existing CRVS system in an effort to address very low levels of birth and death certification. At that time, fewer than 13% of children under 5 years of age had a birth certificate, and less than 10% of all deaths were registered.

The government dispensed with the formal process of notification. Instead, antenatal cards or mother and child health cards are now used as proof of birth. They contain all the relevant details to uniquely identify a birth.

In Tanzania, more than 98% of mothers have these cards, and they keep them safe. Others get a recommendation letter from the Ward Executive Officers. Registration and certification happen simultaneously at the health facility or the nearest Ward Office. This eliminates the need for multiple visits to the registry office. The system aims to register all new births within six weeks.

Since the start of the initiative, registration rates for children under the age of 5 in the project districts have jumped from 12.9% to 34.5%. Key elements for the success of this approach include:

- Developing functional links between the health and registration authorities.

- Promoting a supportive, forward-looking legal and regulatory framework (Bhaskar 2019).

- Eliminating registration fees and issuing the first copy of a certificate.

- Using mobile technologies to overcome distance barriers and facilitate data capture and validation.

- Creating interoperability across sectors that are active and close to the community. The health system and Ward Executive Officers work with:

  – the health system responsible for registering a birth and clearing the backlog for children aged 1–4 years;

  – education for clearing the backlog for children aged 5–17; and,

  – the national ID system for those aged 18 years and over.

- Delegating simultaneous registration and certification to local health facilities and Ward Executive Officers – the "one step, one visit" approach (**UNICEF Innovation 2016**).

To support this new strategy, the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that delineates the new roles and responsibilities. The lessons learned from the new system have fed into the national CRVS strategy and a legal review of the CRVS system.

Making registration free of charge

The cost of registering a vital event and obtaining the related certificate is frequently cited as a major barrier to civil registration. This is particularly problematic for women, who are often unable to raise the cash needed for registration or who prioritize feeding their family rather than going to the civil registration office.

The United Nations Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics Systems recommend that "when registration of a birth, marriage, divorce, foetal death, or death occurs within the time period prescribed by registration law, no fee be charged" (**United Nations 2014**). The UN has also suggested that "issuance of the first certificate should be provided to the public at no cost" (**United Nations 2018**). However, many countries charge fees for late or delayed registration, which may vary according to the length of the delay. A UNICEF study in sub-Saharan countries found that there were fees for birth registration and certification in many countries and that most countries also applied fees for late or delayed registration (**UNICEF 2017**).

While fees for late registration are intended to encourage timely registration, they may have the perverse effect of making registration less likely, especially when registration delays are associated with difficulties in reaching the registration office, multiple visits are required to gather the documentation for registration, and witnesses must be present at the declaration of a vital event.

A 2016 study of birth registration in Indonesia found that difficulties in reaching registration offices and complex application procedures that require multiple visits resulted in "crippling costs." The study recommended that late registration fees be waived, especially for the poor and vulnerable (**Kusumaningrum, S. et al 2016**). Kusumaningrum reported that following legislative change to remove application fees

in 2013, "people flocked to services" and the demand for birth certificates increased. The impact of fees for death registration is likely to be similar, as families already dealing with the trauma of a recent death and the costs associated with funeral arrangements. As a result, families are understandably hesitant to take on the administrative hassle and economic costs of death registration.

Removing registration fees can help eliminate a culture of blaming the public for non-compliance, an attitude that is likely to further alienate communities and be ineffective in increasing civil registration. It also signals a change in mindset within CRVS systems, whereby civil registration is provided as a public service rather than being an imperative with which people must comply.

Removing legal and regulatory impediments to civil registration

Legal requirements that unmarried women disclose the identity of the child's father can be another major barrier to registration. Stigmatizing conditions on the registration of children "born out of wedlock" is a powerful disincentive to registration, yet they are characteristic of civil registration systems in many settings (e.g. Indonesia, Philippines).

The UN argues that births born out of wedlock should only be labelled as such for statistical counting purposes, social care, and planning (**United Nations 2014**). However, this information can become public knowledge and result in stigmatizing both the mother and child. Therefore, the UN recommends that information on a mother's marital status at the time of birth should not be included in a legal document unless there are compelling reasons to do so (**United Nations 2014**).

In cases where sensitive information is included on the legal portion of a vital record, the UN advises providing two types of copies: a full

certified copy containing all items on the document, or a "short form," which only attests to the basic details associated with the event, such as names, dates, geographical locations, etc. The short form might often be the form of choice for providing copies, except in circumstances where the entire form is required for a specific legal or administrative use.

The case summary below outlines the negative impact of including information on the infant's legitimacy status.

Case Study 2: From problem analysis to legal reform in Indonesia

A 2014 study in Indonesia documented a cycle of non-legal marriage and divorce in the poorest 30% of households, with different forms of religious or informal marriages. In principle, people should register these marriages with the local civil registrar, as children can only obtain a birth certificate with both parents' names on it if a valid marriage certificate is presented to the civil registry office (**Sumner and Kusumaningrum 2014**). Among the poorest households, 55% of couples did not have a marriage certificate and 75% of their children did not have birth certificates.

There is considerable stigma to having only the mother's name on the birth certificate. This is a strong disincentive for single mothers or unmarried parents to obtain a birth certificate for their child. Widowed or divorced women also face many obstacles to securing their rights and the rights of their children if they do not have the required marriage, divorce, and death certificates. Although limited, available data indicate that poor women and women in remote rural areas are less likely to have these types of documents.

Evidence from this study found that girls under the age of 1 were less likely to have had their births registered than boys. By the age of 18 years, the differentials had almost disappeared. Unregistered children who die before having a birth certificate are unlikely to have their deaths registered, resulting in underreporting of child mortality, especially among girls. The study found that in the poorest households, one-quarter of girls were married by the age of 18, and only 1 in 4 of their children had a birth certificate, thus perpetuating a cycle of exclusion across generations.

Following this study, the Government of Indonesia introduced measures to tackle barriers to birth registration including the removal of administrative fees, the provision of legal identity services through integrated and mobile services (Integrated Service Centres) in villages, and the provision of legal identity services through child and maternal health services in certain districts across Indonesia (**Hanmer and Elefante 2016**).

Integrated Service Centres can be located in village meeting houses or schools and rotate on a schedule based on the demand for legal identity documents in different locations. Through these centres, couples can legalize and register their marriage or register their child's birth and obtain a birth certificate. Couples can receive services from three different agencies:

- Religious or General Court legalizing the marriage;
- Office of Religious Affairs or Civil Registry issuing a marriage certificate;
- Civil Registry issuing the birth certificate.

The Indonesia experience provides evidence of the positive impact of a number of interventions to improve birth and death registration:

- removing costs associated with civil registration;
- devolving registration procedures as close as possible to the community;
- streamlining and simplifying the requirements for a birth certificate;
- eliminating discriminatory information from birth certificates;
- ensuring close collaboration between the government ministries responsible for civil registration and for health (**Sumner 2015**).

GENERATING AND USING RELIABLE SEX-DISAGGREGATED DATA

Knowledge is a prerequisite for action, but our knowledge about the gendered aspects of civil registration remains woefully inadequate. A key indicator of CRVS system performance is registration completeness, measured by the number of registered vital events as a percentage of total expected vital events. Although many vital statistics reports include estimates of overall completeness of birth and death registration, few provide separate estimates for females and males.

The UN Statistics Division, the global custodian of CRVS, does not report on differentials in registration completeness between males and females (United Nations Statistics Division 2019).

Relying on household surveys to provide evidence of gender differences in birth registration may induce a sense of complacency (**United Nations Children's Fund 2013**), as household survey sample sizes are rarely large enough to detect such differentials, and asking families about the registration status of their children is prone to bias and misunderstanding, as shown by the study in Indonesia (**Sumner and Kusumaningrum 2014**).

Uncovering the dimensions and location of gender differentials in birth and death registration requires greater attention to disaggregating all civil registration data by sex and other relevant dimensions at the global, regional, and country levels.

Putting women at the centre of civil registration

The challenges that many women face in registering their own infants is all the more shocking given that women are at the centre when births and deaths occur. Not only are women primarily responsible for procreation, but they are also central to the provision of care at the start and end of life.

Globally, women represent 67% of the formal health workforce and are the most common providers of informal health and social care. Most health-care workers are women, who are nurses, midwives, and other carers, such as community health workers, who are close to the people they serve. By contrast, physicians are more likely to be male and to be working at secondary and tertiary hospitals (Boniol et al. 2019).

The potential for strengthening CRVS systems by building on the roles of women in health-care provision at community level is being explored (**Mony et al. 2011**). There is potential for community health workers, most of whom are women, to help ensure that vital events that occur in the community are reported to the civil registrar. In Bangladesh (see below) and Rwanda (Hagenimana, M. 2019), health workers not only notify the civil registrar of deaths, but also help determine probable causes of these deaths by conducting verbal autopsies.

Introducing a new approach

Bangladesh has no routine national system for registering deaths and determining their causes. Therefore, empirical data on levels and patterns of mortality are available only from health and demographic surveillance in parts of the country and household surveys that generate limited information on causes of death. Of the approximate 900,000 deaths that occur annually, some 15% happen in health facilities and 85% in communities where medical supervision is limited (Uddin et al. 2019).

However, community-based health workers have been actively providing family planning and maternal and child health services to women and children for many years. More recently, they have assumed broader responsibilities, such as in the prevention and management of malaria and other infectious diseases.

The Government of Bangladesh is currently working with Health Assistants and Family Welfare Assistants to identify births and deaths and report them to the local civil registrar for official registration. In addition, following an appropriate mourning period, these health workers also conduct a verbal autopsy – an interview with a deceased person's family members or carers using a standardized questionnaire on handheld devices. Responses are analysed using automated algorithms and generate cause of death distributions for the population (Uddin et al. 2019).

Results from the pilot phase are encouraging. For example, official registration of deaths and registration completeness have increased significantly in districts targeted for the intervention. For the first time, empirical data on cause of death distributions is becoming available for populations in rural areas. The Government of Bangladesh plans to scale up this intervention to a nationally representative sample of areas across the country to generate population level cause of death distributions for the whole country.

Providing support to health workers

The challenge remains how to facilitate links between community-based health care and the registration of vital events, without adding burdensome new tasks for health workers who already have many responsibilities.

In many instances, verbal autopsy is an additional responsibility that community health workers take on without necessarily receiving additional support or compensation. This raises broader issues of gender-based power relations. Women generally have limited power to navigate cultural, caste, religious, and gender norms and collect sensitive data, especially for deaths associated with stigma such as HIV, tuberculosis, suicide, violence, and sexual abuse.

Experience in Indonesia (**Kusumaningrum, S. et al. 2016**) shows that it is important to establish mechanisms for emotional support and compensation for the verbal autopsy interviewers to avoid high turnover (**Gouda et al. 2016**). In Rwanda, interviewers described having to deal with emotional stress expressed by family members, especially when the deaths involved spouses or children (**Hagenimana M. 2019**). Verbal autopsies pose particular challenges when deaths are due to intrafamilial violence (**Houston et al. 2015**).

Integrating routine verbal autopsies into CRVS systems shifts the purpose of a verbal autopsy from a tool primarily designed to generate cause of death data on a population basis to an approach that has implications at the individual level for both interviewers and interviewees. This raises important gender, social, cultural, legal, and ethical issues that should be considered. It also identifies the need for supportive supervision and regulations (**Gouda 2017**).

CREATING DEMAND FOR BIRTH AND DEATH REGISTRATION SERVICES

There is little point in raising awareness and creating demand for civil registration if services are unavailable, too far away, too expensive, or too intimidating to be accessible to the community. However, there is an evident need to work with communities and with the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, including women and girls, to raise awareness of the benefits that civil registration can bring.

To date, most awareness raising campaigns have focused on the advantages of birth registration for children in terms of facilitating access to health, education, and other services. Many of these campaigns target mothers, yet few highlight the need for mothers themselves to be registered, and even fewer mention the importance of death registration, including when

death occurs in childhood. This can be attributed to the widespread desire of women and their families to 'move on' when faced with the trauma of the death of a child. In some settings, where women are often blamed when such deaths occur, they understandably see little point in going through a harrowing, bureaucratic process of registration when their child has died.

The many initiatives currently working to support CRVS systems should work closely with communities and women's groups to overcome blame and victimization, and to integrate the civil registration of deaths in infants and children into the mourning process. This would serve to improve policies and programs that help avert these deaths in the future.

Agencies and initiatives that are working to improve CRVS systems should allocate resources to advocacy for CRVS, and support communication campaigns targeting women and men alongside the technical or supply side aspects.

It is important that messaging is clear and universal to ensure system strengthening efforts are readily adopted by the communities they serve. Addressing gender disparities in CRVS requires holistic approaches to develop advocacy and communications in conjunction with solutions to technical issues.

CONCLUSION

CRVS systems are failing women and girls. While many CRVS strengthening efforts draw welcome attention to the need to reach vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, few specifically include the gender dimensions of inequalities in birth and death registration.

Efforts to strengthen CRVS systems often target vulnerabilities related to poverty, lack of education, migrant status, and ethnicity. These are important, but it is equally essential for policies and research to address gender-based

norms, supply-side constraints, structural inequalities, and their underlying social and economic determinants.

The SDG agenda for "leaving no one behind" is fuelling greater awareness within the global development community of the importance of ensuring that all births and deaths are acknowledged by the state and included in CRVS systems. This recognizes the value of all people and their rights to access the means to reach their full potential.

Overlooking gender norms and inequalities in the design and monitoring of CRVS systems results in poor service design and delivery, which ultimately affects everyone. The Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems' knowledge brief series on CRVS Gender aims to stimulate the global community into effective actions to acknowledge the gender-based inequalities that permeate the civil registration system. It also strives to tackle restrictive gender norms and gender inequalities that intersect with other social inequalities – including those related to age, race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status – to undermine health and development.

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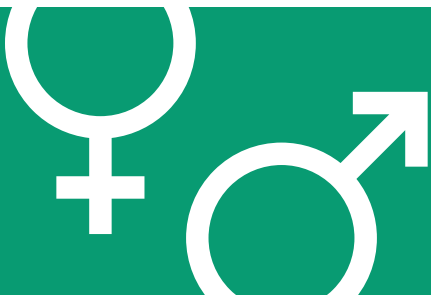
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