

Coordination - an imperative for complete and efficient CRVS system

Experiences in South Asia

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Introduction

The successful implementation and maintenance of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems in countries in a large measure hinges on systematic and active coordination among civil registration ministry/office and other ministries and departments that directly or indirectly support or benefit from system. The inter-dependent nature of civil registration functions of different organization in collection, registration and transmission of vital event records demands a close and continuous coordination and collaboration among these organizations at all levels of administration. Irrespective of whether civil registration organization in a country is centralized or decentralized, coordination must be an integral part of the system. Even within the civil registration office, close coordination between national and provincial/district and local registration offices are extremely crucial to ensure that the civil registration activities are delivered in a consistent, timely and efficient manner. It goes without saying that an efficient coordination mechanism would lead to high quality of delivery of services and production of vital statistics.

The Regional Action Framework for on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and Pacific identifies *Coordination* as one of the six Action Areas that *would serve as a basis for Governments and development partners to focus and organize efforts towards developing, implementing and supporting comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategies*. The Framework that was endorsed by the Conference of Ministers in Bangkok in 2014 further elaborates on coordination – *Since there are so many institutions involved in and benefiting from CRVS, effective coordination is a prerequisite for universal and responsive CRVS systems. Coordination must take place among all relevant responsible stakeholders in countries at all levels of government, among development partners and between Governments and development partners. Within countries, effective coordination among different local, provincial and national stakeholders involved in reporting, recording and registering the occurrence of vital events is essential, particularly for preventing duplication of functions and information and for facilitating the effective use of registration records for statistical purposes.*

The Principles and Recommendation (P&R) on Vital Statistics System revision 3 also highlights the importance of coordination to be built as an integral part of civil registration and vital statistics system regardless of the organization arrangement for CRVS system. It also emphasizes on the need for centralized and peripheral coordination among all relevant agencies to ensure consistency of concepts and definitions across the agencies and to eliminate duplication of responsibility. The P&R underscores the need for communication among various agencies as an important ingredient of coordination and suggests a few communication techniques that could be employed for ensuring effective coordination.

Types of coordination mechanisms and their scope

The type of coordination mechanisms that a country would need to deploy for implementing and maintaining a complete and efficient CRVS system will largely depend on the way the system is organized within the existing administrative structure of the country. The agencies that are responsible for day to day management and operations of various components of CRVS system at different administrative levels will necessarily constitute the core of the coordination mechanisms. The three main agencies that would generally constitute the core are Civil Registration Office (CRO), Health Ministry/Department and National Statistics Office (NSO). In some countries the responsibility of compilation of vital statistics lies with the

CRO itself and therefore, the NSO has no role to play and may not be required to be a part of the core¹. In some countries, civil registration has an organic interface with national id/population registration systems, in which case the national id agency has to be one of the key agencies in the coordination group². It would be important to note that most of the registration law provides for medical institutions to report or declare birth and death events (including certifying causes of death) occurring in these institutions for legal registration. In some countries the community health workers have also been roped in for reporting/notifying the events occurring within their jurisdictions. Therefore, the health agency should be an inalienable and permanent part of all coordination mechanisms regardless of the organization and administrative arrangement of the CRVS system in a country.

The other agencies that should be included in the coordination mechanisms are the police department which has the responsibility of reporting of medico-legal death cases and justice department which is involved in registration of divorce. The main user agencies such as national id/population registration, education, social welfare and other agencies of the government depending on the nature and extent of use of registration records and data should be participating in the coordination work at various levels depending on their nature and extent of involvement at these levels. Development partners and civil society organizations can also be included in the coordination group/committee or co-opted or invited in specific meetings.

It would be interesting to note that in some countries registration hierarchies may not be unilineal, which essentially means that the agencies responsible actual registration at the local level (including municipal level) may be different from the agency that manages and coordinates the civil registration system at the national or provincial levels. This poses management and coordination challenges as in such situations the local registrars are not under the administrative control of the provincial or national level registration functionaries which makes it difficult for latter to supervise and monitor the performance of the local registrars. Regardless of whether the law provides for clear reporting lines between the local registrars to the national level, it would be necessary to introduce an innovative approach in coordination across and within the responsible agencies that are involved so as to ensure smooth functioning of civil registration at local level.

The national level coordination is often carried out through an inter-agency coordination committee that is mandated to provide technical and management oversight and guidance to the CRVS system. In addition to taking stock of the progress and achievements in CRVS, the committee also identifies challenges/bottlenecks in implementation and maintenance of the system and takes decisions towards their resolution. The committee is also responsible for implementation of international standards on CRVS³. Such a committee has to go beyond the above-mentioned core and include several other agencies

¹ In India, the national vital statistics is compiled by the vital statistics division in the Office of the Registrar General, India and the Ministry of Statistics is not involved at all. In fact, India does not have any national coordination mechanism on CRVS.

² None of the South Asian countries has an integrated CR and national id/population registration system.

³ The Handbook on Management, Operations and Maintenance of CRVS systems (Revision1) has identified a number of areas that should be included in the scope of the Inter-Agency Committee of CRVS. These are – to develop and maintain instructions regarding definitions of vital events, coding schemes, generation of the unique identifier, content of the form, statistical definitions of characteristics of the event and the persons involved, training curricula for informants, registrars and statisticians, quality control mechanisms, field visits, procedures for reporting and recording events, content and format of certificates, transmission protocols, content and periodicity of statistical reporting and all other standardized activities as necessary. This committee is the coordinating body for data items

that contribute or benefit from the CRVS system such as Law and Justice, Education, Social Welfare, IT, and others. It is usually strategic decision to include Ministry of Finance as part of the committee as it helps the Ministry to better understand and appreciate the importance of CRVS and the need for adequate budgeting. The committee is usually constituted through a government notification/order with specific Terms of Reference (TOR)⁴, which inter-alia would include list of member-institution including the designated chair, objective and scope of the committee covering management and technical aspects, the proposed frequency of the meeting of the committee and preparation and submission of meeting minutes/reports. Similar inter-agency committees are can also be constituted at provincial levels and even local level with relevant agencies as members. However, the scope of these committees is limited to operational matters.

A country may choose to establish two committees at the national level - a High level Coordination Committee chaired by the Minister with a mandate to provide oversight and guidance for strengthening the CRVS system in the country; and a Technical Coordination Committee that is responsible for implementing and coordinating the operational and technical aspects of the system.

In addition to external coordination, internal coordination within each of the agency (intra-agency coordination) requires particular attention as each office engaged in collection, registration and activities related to production of vital statistics needs to reach a level of understanding of the other components' needs and responsibilities. Such internal coordination also helps in uniform and consistent process across different administrative levels. Coordination between different agencies can also be informal in nature particularly at the local level for immediate resolution of bottlenecks. Such coordination do not necessitate formal meetings but hinge on effective communication through various means such as e-mail and phone calls.

Given below is a typical example of the types of coordination committees in a country, their composition and main scope.

<i>Administrative level</i>	<i>Coordination committee and proposed frequency of the meeting</i>	<i>Composition of the committee</i>	<i>Main scope</i>
<i>National Level</i>	<i>High-level Coordination Committee on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics⁵</i>	<i>Chair: Minister of Interior Members: Permanent Secretaries of Planning and Finance, Health, Education,</i>	<i>Provide oversight and policy guidance to the work of civil registration and vital statistics Review progress of work</i>

and definitions, collection and monitoring, access and utilization, and the legal and administrative functions needed to manage the programmes effectively.

⁴ Some countries may have specific provisions in the law for establishment of such inter-agency committee at national level.

⁵ Bangladesh has constituted a high-level committee namely 'CRVS related Steering Committee'. The Committee is convened by the Cabinet Secretary and comprises of 22 members from various agencies and two special invitees. The roles and responsibilities of the inter-agency Steering Committee include the coordination of activities related to CRVS development, providing direction for ministries responsible for CRVS-activity implementation, and revising/reviewing/disseminating CRVS-related national plans and documents. To realize the proper implementation of CRVS, the Steering Committee established the CRVS Secretariat at the Cabinet Division.

	<i>To meet once a year</i>	<i>Justice, ICT and Social Welfare</i> <i>Secretariat: Registrar General's Office</i>	<i>Review fund requirement and approve funding if necessary</i>
<i>National Level</i>	<i>Technical Coordination Committee on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics</i> <i>To meet once every six months</i>	<i>Chair: Registrar General</i> <i>Members: Director General of National Statistics Office, Directors' General of Health, Justice, Education, ICT and Social Welfare, Chief Executive officer of the capital city</i> <i>Special invitees depending on the nature of the meeting: Relevant UN agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders</i> <i>Secretariat: Registrar General's Office</i>	<i>Review progress of annual action plan</i> <i>Review completeness of registration at the national and province level</i> <i>Review transmission of statistical data; and production and dissemination of vital statistics</i> <i>Ensure international standards and concepts</i> <i>Discuss and administrative and technical challenges and propose steps to resolve them</i> <i>Identify coordination bottlenecks at various levels and propose definite action for their resolution; donor coordination</i> <i>Prepare half-yearly report for the High-level coordination committee and identify issues and prepare action points for its consideration</i>
<i>Province level⁶</i>	<i>Provincial Coordination Committee on Civil Registration</i>	<i>Chair: Provincial Registrar</i> <i>Members: Provincial heads of departments of Health, Justice, Education, Social Welfare⁷</i>	<i>Review status and progress of registration, transmission of registration records at the province and district level (local level) in terms of completeness of registration</i>

Pakistan also has also established a high-level coordination mechanism namely, National CRVS Steering and Coordination Committee, which is headed by is headed by Federal Minister, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms (MOPDR) while membership drawn from multiple provincial departments and multiple stakeholders.

⁶ In Nepal, the District Development Committee have tasked to coordinate the CRVS functions at the local level registration centres located in Village Development Centres and Municipal wards. However, there no inter-agency coordination committee has been established at the district level.

⁷ It is presumed here that the country does not have any statistics office at the province level

	<i>To meet once every quarter</i>	<i>Secretariat: Provincial Registrar's office</i>	<p><i>Discuss administrative and technical challenges in registration faced by the district (local) registrars and propose steps to resolve them</i></p> <p><i>Identify coordination bottlenecks at province level and propose definite action for their resolution</i></p> <p><i>Prepare quarterly report for the Technical Coordination Committee and identify issues and prepare action points for its consideration</i></p>
<i>District (local) level</i>	<i>District Coordination Committee</i>	<p><i>Chair: District Registrar</i></p> <p><i>Members: District Officers from Department of Health, Education, Social Welfare and Chief Medical Officer of the major health facility in the district</i></p> <p><i>Secretariat: District Registrar's Office</i></p>	<p><i>Review status and progress of work of registration in the district in terms of completeness of registration, transmission of registration records, stock of registration forms and other aspects related to day to day work of civil registration</i></p> <p><i>Identify coordination bottlenecks and propose definite action for their resolution and follow up</i></p> <p><i>Prepare monthly report for the Provincial Registration Office and highlight issues for its consideration/decision</i></p>

Communication in coordination

Coordination without communication is half the work done. Clear and systematic communication links, both forward and backward, have to be established as an integral part of CRVS coordination mechanisms. For example, decisions made in committee meetings at different levels, recorded in form of minutes or reports are required to be communicated to appropriate agencies for follow up and subsequently monitored for action taken based on feedback reports. Periodic workshops and conferences at national and province levels that are normally organized through the inter-agency committees, are good way of communication of the important decisions of these committees and provides a good opportunity to the member institutions to learn and discuss about the administrative and technical challenges faced at the

field level⁸. National level workshops/conferences are not limited to participation of member institutions of the coordination committees and field functionaries only but can include other stakeholders, who would provide important feedback as users of civil registration records and data. The outcomes of these workshops/conferences have to feed into the agenda of the committee meetings for further discussions for follow-up action including resolution of the field challenges. The Civil Registration Office may want to create a separate section on coordination in its website, where the coordination committees at all levels can upload the documents related to their meetings. This real time communication helps in speedy resolutions of challenges and also provides an opportunity to the field offices to learn from each other.

Informal coordination through informal communication between different responsible agencies at the field level on day to day basis is extremely important. This would help in overcoming various operational challenges faced in the field that need immediate action. For example, when compilation of monthly report on registration of report is held up in the province level because some local registrar has not submitted the report for his/her centre in time, a phone call (in addition to e-mail communication) from the provincial registrar to the local registrar may be necessary.

Monitoring coordination

The Handbook on Management, Organization, and Maintenance of CRVS System (revision 1) states – *The quality assurance evaluation should verify the presence of an interdepartmental coordination committee that involves all major stakeholders. The evaluation should also verify the nomination of a chairperson of the committee (which could be on a rotating basis between agencies). There should be a specific charter of duties for the committee, with certain roles and responsibilities for different institutions (e.g. Ministry of Health to be responsible for coding and analysis of causes of death). Also, there should be a specified timeline and schedule for committee meetings (e.g. semi-annual, annual meetings). Finally, the committee should require the preparation of annual overall reports on the performance of civil registration and vital statistics at local and national level.*

However, mere presence of coordination committee (s) may not be a good enough measure for process quality assurance. The counties have to set up a mechanism for monitoring the efficient functioning of coordination committees. The effective functioning of coordination mechanisms should be considered as an important domain for inclusion in the list of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) of the functioning of CRVS system⁹. For example, 'Coordination efficiency' calculated as percentage of meetings held to total expected number of meetings can be a good KPI. This can be calculated for the national level and also for each province on a half-yearly or yearly basis. Ideally, there could a sperate KPI on the quality of decisions and follow up. However, these can be introduced in a phase manner when the high level of coordination efficiency is achieved in the country. However, in the interim a process can be established to review the

⁸ The National CRVS Steering Committee in its 4th meeting held in January 2018 decided to establish provincial level steering, coordination and implementation committee and also proposed a list of agencies to be included in such committee. This was included as in the report summary with a clear instruction as to how this information will be communicated to the province.

⁹ In India, although there is no national coordination committee, each state has constituted Inter-Departmental Coordination Committee and almost all among them have established District Level Inter-Departmental Committee. The Chief Registrars of the States in their annual report provide information on the number of meetings held by these committees, which is compiled by the Registrar General India's Office and presented in its Annual Report on the Working of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act.

reports/minutes/summary proceedings of some of the meetings sampled randomly and provide a general assessment of the quality and communicate them to the provincial or local committees for future improvement. Such review can also form part of the internal or external audit functions.

Country experiences

This section will be developed after the workshop.

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