Most African governments do not properly know the people they are accountable for. Most people in Africa are born and die without leaving a trace in any legal record or official statistics making it difficult for the public sector to manage and monitor its human capital. The Working Group on Monitoring Vital Events has called this “A scandal of Invisibility” because absence of reliable evidence and information on births, deaths and causes of death leaves most of the world’s poor, unseen and unaccounted for.

“We, as African leaders and scholars should be ashamed of seeing our citizens coming and going without leaving traceable records in the 21st century. We should be alerted by the urgency that Africa needs to have a legal system that registers every birth as soon as it occurs, …”

H.E Lawrence K. Masha (MP), Minister for Home Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania, June 2009

Very few countries have maintained the civil registration system to the international standards that would lend its services to building and supporting the nations’ multi-sectoral development endeavors.

The ability of countries to manage their human capital depends on the public administration’s capacity to keep and use the records of vital events - primarily births, deaths, marriages and divorces in a systematic, continuous and permanent basis.
Civil registration is the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population as provided through data or registration in accordance with the legal requirements of each country.

"It is important that countries recognize that civil registration is a development and human rights issue and our ability to monitor progress in this regard will depend on functional vital registration systems and availability of reliable and timely vital statistics."

Mr. Pali Lehlo, Chairman of the Statistical Commission for Africa and Statistics Canada, South Africa, June 2009

OBJECTIVES OF THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR CIVIL REGISTRATION

To set a regional agenda to mobilize and rally political commitment and leadership of national governments, civil registration authorities and national statistics offices in the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa.

To address the need for an enhanced regional commitment and partnership in the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa.

Most African Governments are making efforts to improve their civil registration systems in support of referring their justice administration, implementing decentralization programmes, improving efficiency of health and education services, national identification systems, passports issuance and other public service administration.

However, most countries are being challenged with the inadequate nature of birth, death, marriage and divorce registrations and incomplete vital statistics that are negatively affecting development indicators in building modern public administration, promoting democratization and democratic programmes and measurement and monitoring of development initiatives, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

"Emphasis is being placed on achieving measurable results on the ground, to evidence local planning and see putting mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating development results. This initiative has gained support at the centre of these development initiatives and in particular with regard to monitoring progress towards MDGs. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics play a critical role especially in between census years..."

Mr. Charles Loko Loko, Director of the Statistics Department of the African Development Bank Group, June 2009

"We do believe that civil registration should be developed with the objective of serving the people, especially the most disadvantaged and neglected, and the majority of the rural population. We also believe that civil registration is quite ensuring and safeguarding the basic human rights enshrined in the Constitution of the country."

H.E. Mr. Burkina Faso, Minister of Justice of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, June 2009

Benefits of Civil Registration: Major sectors and services that stand to benefit from complete and adequate civil registration systems include:

- Public administrative services
- Promotion of children and women from abuses and violations
- Administering civil matters and associated criminal cases in courts
- Promotion of health and education services
- Promotion of current and continuous health and demographic statistics
- Measurement and monitoring of MDGs
- Promotion of epidemiological and other research data inputs
Expected Accomplishments of the First Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration

- Create a high-level regional platform that would engage national governments, sub-regional and regional organizations in a continuous and sustainable dialogue, mutual support and partnership in promoting good practices between and among national governments.

- Enhance awareness and commitment of national governments in the operation and maintenance of civil registration systems.

- Endorse resolutions and recommendations that would lead and govern African civil registration and vital statistics systems for the coming years.

“Establishment and development of civil registration and vital statistics systems is one of the fundamental measures that African governments must take in addressing our challenges.”

H.E. Lawrence K. Masha (MP), Minister for Home Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania, June 2009

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