

2020 Asia–Pacific Statistics Week

A decade of action for the 2030 Agenda: Statistics that leaves no one and nowhere behind

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In-Depth Review and Needs Assessment of CRVS System to Develop an Action Plan for Overall Improvement of the System.

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Abstract:

Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) is the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events of the population. These records are the critical source of vital statistics. It is among prerequisites to measure compliance with the SDGs. Recognizing the significance, Pakistan is actively engaged in improving the functioning of CRVS system. Various milestones has been achieved but acknowledging that the systems are still underperforming in Pakistan, M/o PD&SI through its TSU-CRVS realized the need to assess the current situation of CR and VS in order to structure an action plan for the improvement of the system. An in-depth review and needs assessment of CRVS system has been carried out in the Punjab Province as a test case with the support of UNICEF to define key strategic issues and barriers that hinder timely and accurate registration of vital events.

The Punjab Province, with its 110M inhabitants (2017 Census), accounts for over half the population of Pakistan. The study included a desk review on reports and publications on CRVS in Pakistan in general, and Punjab in particular. To qualitatively address the barriers to universal and timely registration of vital events, a questionnaire was developed and applied in 800 out of 1,001 Union Councils in 10 out of 36 districts in Punjab selected by consulting most recent MICS.

The assessment has confirmed that people are not completely familiar with the registration routines and the importance of the CR. 67% of the respondents had encountered some degree of difficult in their interaction with the UC, and only 62 % of respondents understood the importance of having a birth certificate. The field experience shows that incorrect and inaccurate registration is a widespread problem and happens due to various reasons including bribery, insufficient skills, ignorance and insufficient maintenance of archives. The data collection and subsequent analysis depicted the barriers that citizens and public sector both face with respect to register vital events.

The study concluded that there must include the participation of all the key stakeholders to improve the procedures and with coordinated investments to modernize the civil registration system in line with international good practices, could rapidly improve functionality and more complete, higher quality vital statistics. There is need to strengthen the government's capacity to strategically manage CR & VS as well as ensure accountability and capacity to deliver 21st century registration services everywhere in Pakistan.

Keywords: Civil Registration, Vital Events, Sustainable Development Goals, Strategic Issues & Barriers, Government's Capacity

1. Introduction:

Around the globe there is a growing recognition of the importance of civil registration and vital statistics. Civil registration is defined as the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population, as provided through decree or regulation in accordance with the legal requirements in each country. Civil registration is carried out primarily for the purpose of establishing the documents provided for by law¹.

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Timely and continuous vital statistics can only be achieved with universal birth and death registration. Both civil registration and vital statistics are key features of an efficient and transparent governance structure.

Pakistan has signed and ratified a number of international conventions that underpin the right to an identity² including Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Ratified November, 1990), International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Accession March, 1996), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (Ratified July, 2011), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (Ratified June, 2010) and various others. The fact that Pakistan is a signatory to these covenants and conventions commit the country in a significant manner to ensure legal identity for all. UN Resolution 71/14 that proclaims the Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade resolved that the “sustained political commitment is crucial for the development and continuous functioning of CRVS systems”. In this context it is important to note that the Government of Pakistan has taken a holistic approach by prioritizing the achievement of the SDGs as an enabler “to join the league of upper middle class countries by 2030” (Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives) since civil registration and birth registration is a key condition to comply with the SDGs.

Pakistan Vision 2025 has “Putting People First – developing human and social capital” as its first pillar. Although identity or civil registration is not explicitly mentioned, it will be impossible to measure progress of Pakistan Vision 2025 without universal birth registration and a vital statistic organization that can measure progress. Since 2011 the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has been actively engaged in improving the functioning of the CRVS systems in the country by focusing on the registration of all vital events, but in particular on birth registration as the key entry point, both from an identity perspective, but also from the statistics point of view. However, a mere 42% birth registration rate of children under 5 years³ speaks of more structural and cultural problems, and is an indication that the system does not work properly.

The Punjab Province, with its 110M inhabitants (2017 Census), accounts for over half the population of Pakistan. The Planning and Development Department Punjab and Local Government Department of Punjab is focused on improving the CRVS situation in the province, and their efforts are being supported by UNICEF. Both Federal and provincial laws govern the registration of vital events, and the creation and maintenance of the civil registration records is the responsibility of the Union Councils. In the case of Punjab there are clear processes and procedures for civil registration, and while the timeliness and completeness of the civil registers, especially for birth registration tend to be better than in other regions, registration is not universal nor is it as timely as would be desired for vital statistical purposes. Currently the Local government offices obtain information of registration of vital events from the UC secretaries, and the reporting is mainly papers based and no frequency of reporting is instituted.

The Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives (M/o PD&SI), through its Technical Support Unit for CRVS being fully aware of the challenges around achieving universal birth registration and recognized the need to assess the current situation of CR and VS in order to structure an action plan for the improvement of the CRVS systems in Pakistan. To support the Technical Support Unit for CRVS, UNICEF provided assistance to carry out an in-depth review and needs assessment of CRVS system in the Punjab Province. The underlying objectives include;

- To define key strategic issues and barriers that hinder timely and accurate registration of vital events.
- Propose timeline of activities toward the overall improvement of the system.

2. Methodology:

The initial analytical work included a desk study on reports and publications on CRVS in Pakistan in general, and Punjab in particular. For the purpose of a systematic approach to qualitatively address the

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barriers to universal and timely registration of vital events, a questionnaire was developed and applied to collect data and carry out interviews with key stakeholders in 800 out of 1,001 Union Councils in 10 out of 36 districts randomly selected in Punjab. The fieldwork and data collection was carried out between October 21 and 28, 2019. The most recent MICS⁴ was consulted for the selection of the districts.

Systematic random sampling technique was used to select the respondents and the sample size was 1,600 respondents out of total 1,001 Union Councils. To get the more representative data, gender was given due consideration. The sample of the study includes 28% of the female respondents. Field Survey was used as the primary research technique and in-depth interviews and focused group discussions were conducted as per field situation to complement the information gathered.

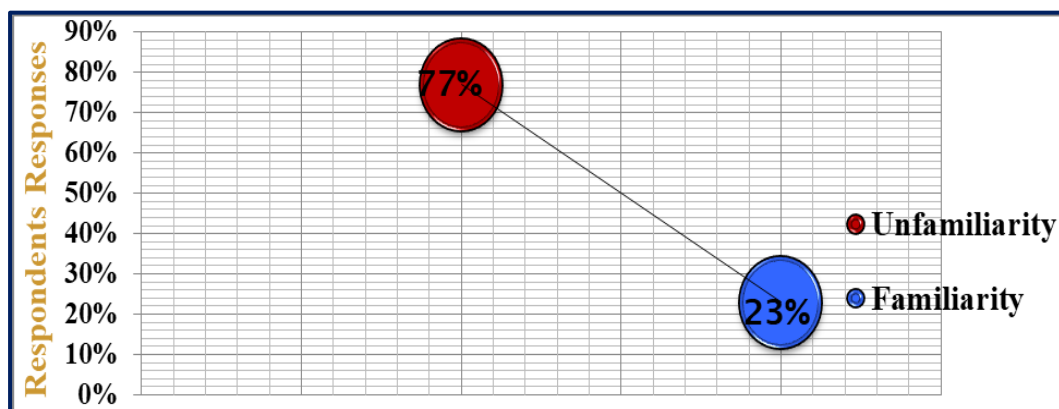
The data was collected at four levels, ranging from Deputy Directors Local Government, Union Council secretaries, Health Authorities and Community. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to evaluate the civil registration and vital statistics system. The collected data was entered in Statistical Package for Social Sciences 21. Version (SPSS) and then descriptive and inferential analyses were used to count percentage of the data. Concerns regarding data privacy were addressed during data collection process and the respondents were assured that the information collected from them would be treated as confidential.

3. Result:

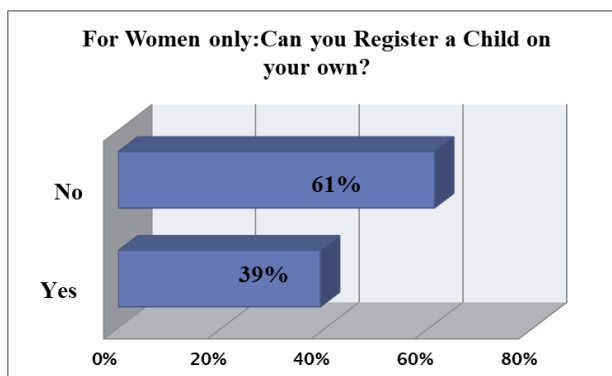
The administrative structure for civil registries is complex not at least because of geographically dispersed organizational set up. This in turn leads to non-uniformity of registration practices, such as non-standardized records; lack of adequate supervision; capricious interpretations of laws, regulations and rules; corruption; discriminatory practices; or simply lack of compliance. Punjab Province has a comparatively high incidence of birth registrations according to the latest HDS; almost 72%. However, in actual numbers that still leaves millions of individuals un-registered and un-documented.

The assessment has confirmed that people are not completely familiar with the registration routines and the importance of the CR. 67% of the respondents had encountered some degree of difficult in their interaction with the Union Councils, and only 62 % of respondents understood the importance of having a birth certificate. This number may have been misleading in the sense that many did not pick up the birth certificate after registering, but only came for it, or registered late when a birth certificate was required by another public sector entity. Familiarity with registration requirements and procedures is shown below in Graph 1

Figure 1: Familiarity with Registration Requirements and Procedures



The direct cost for registering a birth is 100 rupees. Travel cost, which is considered an indirect cost, can in many cases also amount to 100 rupees. Another indirect cost is the traditional gift giving to UC members and other prominent community members when registering births, in some cases up to 1,000 rupees are expected. The study depicted that 37% paid only the 100 rupees, whereas 63% had paid more. It was also highlighted that about 4 in 10 women had experienced difficulties or denial to register a child without the child's father or another male relative present (See Graph). Moreover, 72% respondents explained that there is no law or regulation in place that regulates the collections and management of vital statistics data.



There exists a significant difference in capacity between the Union Councils when it comes to registration routines and document issuance routines. The field experience shows that incorrect and inaccurate registration is a widespread problem and happens due to various reasons including bribery, insufficient skills, ignorance and insufficient maintenance of archives. At the UC level it was observed that NADRA's digital CRMS systems functions in parallel with the UC secretary's civil registration system. However, NADRA's system (CRMS) concerning birth, marriage and divorce did only occur on the request of the concerned citizens, when they applied for the related NADRA document. Furthermore, the registration in NADRA's system together with the issuance of the NADRA certificates was subjected to a fee of 60 rupees. Several sources highlighted the problems associated with storage of the hardcopy records at most Union Councils. It was explained, that documents often are stored in archives unsuitable for documents where they can be exposed to dust, humidity, wind, fire, sun, rain and/or floods.

The consulted sources disagree when it came to the legal requirements related to changing personal information in the Union Councils' handwritten registers. According to one respondent, it is a requirement to present an affidavit stamped by relevant legal authority (notary public or commissioner) to the Union Council if one's personal information (name) has to be changed. The NADRA officers underlined that if a person changes his/her name, NADRA will still maintain a record of that person's old name. This presupposes that the changes made in the Union Council handwritten register are also added to the CRMS at the Union Council computer. When data is amended in the handwritten registers at the Union Councils this information is not automatically updated in NADRA's digital CRMS.

As causes of Death (CoD) Statistics is concerned, it is not clearly mandated how CoD statistics should flow, and who is responsible for compiling, analysing and disseminating the official statistics. In many countries, for example, the health sector compiles and processes the statistics and the national statistics office disseminates aggregate information (the Local Government Department does not compile, process, use or disseminate CoD information). CoD statistics are inadequate because medical certification and coding procedures are weak due to lack of standardized training, resulting in a large majority of deaths that are not medically certified and assigned a valid cause.

4. Discussion and Conclusion:

Recognizing the multiplicity of barriers to timely registration there is no one way to improve the functionality of the civil registration procedures in Pakistan. The process to improve the civil registration procedures must include participation of and buy-in by all the key stakeholders. The data collection and subsequent analysis depicted the barriers that citizens face with respect to register vital events, their own or that of a family member. The public sector on the other hand, has to content with limitations and barriers of a systemic nature (Table 1). The onus for improvement rests for the main part with the government authorities as the sovereign recorder and guarantor of identities.

Table 1: Barriers to timely Registration

CITIZENS	PUBLIC SECTOR
<p>Economic barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Access (distance) • Time 	<p>Institutional barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited administrative capacity • Inadequate or lack of ICT • Limited Geographical Presence
<p>Legal barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to understand procedures • Lack of knowledge of time limits for registration 	<p>Legal barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlapping jurisdictions • Convoluted legal framework for CR and VS
<p>Cultural barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language, customs • Distrust • Discrimination against women and minorities. 	<p>Budgetary restrictions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of resources for investment in staff, infrastructure and ICT

Many of the economic and legal barriers citizens identified as impediments can be overcome fairly easily with better information, streamlining and uniformity of registration procedures, and linking the obtaining of identity and identification documents with access to benefits in the form of pension schemes, social safety net programs or health services. The role health service providers should be further analysed, especially those birth attendants and health service providers that work closely with the community as they have an important role to play with regards to timely registration of vital events. The above does require changes in Pakistan public policies for identity management as well as investments in the institutions charged with registering identities. The cultural barriers are less easily removed, it will take time as well as concerted societal changes to alter customs, create a trusted environment and do away with discriminatory civil registration practices.

The role of the state and its public sector agencies and entities is to be a partner, catalyst and enabler for citizens to reach their potential as part of a national whole. In the case of Punjab there is overlap between institutions, and many of the interviewees did not clearly understand the different roles of UCs and NADRA, for instance. In order for a modernization effort to succeed, it is fundamental to provide and enforce clarity in the role and complementarity of the service each of the institutions provide. The political commitment and leadership at both provincial and national levels cannot be understated with respect to institutional reforms. Another determinant for success is transparency and communication, both inside the institutions and to the civil society as a whole. Before launching a modernization effort it is critical to assess risks associated with program, such as financial needs, financial sustainability, administrative capacity, human resource needs, bureaucratic resistance, to mention a few.

Citizens and the civil society must be able to understand and trust the value of CR as well as the institutions involved in registering vital events and issuing the relevant certificates. The value of civil registration is that it underpins the trustworthiness of a person’s identity credential such as the birth certificate. The state – and its citizens - needs to rely on complete, correct and available records of vital events, the timely production of vital statistics for informed decision-making registration for informed public policies and programs. In the case of Punjab the records are not complete, and vital statistics are not produced in a meaningful manner.

Because each country and each socio-cultural setting is unique, there is no blueprint for introducing and managing changes for CR and VS, as well as find the optimal balance between efficiency and coordination among public sector agencies that have a role in CR and/or VS. However, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, and its Technical Support Unit for CRVS has shown the leadership and the potential to leverage, promote and mediate the process to modernize CR and VS in Pakistan. Since there are a number of different administrative levels and agencies involved in civil registration,

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there is the potential of competition between jurisdictions. The kind of political support that is required to modernize both CR and VS needs to come from the highest levels to ensure that cross-jurisdictional challenges can be mitigated to the benefit of the agencies and citizens in general.

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