Fiji Islands, November 2016

PSSC-13 Agenda Item

Meeting Paper Title: Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in the Pacific Islands (Paper presented by SPC on behalf of the Brisbane Accord Group)

1.   Purpose of Paper

This paper aims to update the Pacific Statistics Steering Committee (PSSC) members on the activities and priorities of the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (PVSAP); and to encourage all countries, that in recognising the importance of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems to national development, to ensure that:
- improvements to their CRVS systems are integrated into national statistical planning discussions;
- they have set targets for improving completeness, provision of official documentation, and reporting of vital statistics derived from routine registration in line with the commitments of the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Framework for CRVS;
- regional standardisation is supported where practicable: in areas such as legislation, infrastructure and IT development, and coding; in line with the principles of TYPSS.
- continued investment in CRVS is promoted at both the national and international levels, as a key foundation for building secure identity systems and more broadly in promoting good governance and national development.

The information presented in this paper builds on the information presented at both PSSC 11 and 12 on behalf of the Brisbane Accord Group (BAG).

2.   Introduction / Background

2.1.   As presented at the previous PSSC meetings, there has been growing recognition over the last several years of the importance of accurate vital statistics for the Pacific Islands. CRVS data will be essential for reporting against development frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Healthy Islands Framework. CRVS is also increasingly being recognised as a critical mechanism for supporting good governance (through data driven planning and accountability, links with electoral rolls and identity management systems), a tool for financial management (linkages with social security) and a key element in supporting human rights (through the establishment of identity and associated rights, and the accountability of measuring and monitoring mortality).

2.2.   Pacific countries have made a number of commitments over the past 5 or so years to improving CRVS systems and reporting - through previous meetings of the Ministers of Health, Heads of Planning and Statistics, and the Heads of Health, as well as through specific commitments under the Asia Pacific Regional Action Framework for CRVS. In addition – birth registration is central to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by all Pacific member states.

2.3.   Technical partners have been coordinating support for this work in the region through the BAG, since 2010; guided by the PVSAP. The PVSAP is a working document that is updated regularly based on country feedback and priorities derived from national assessments and plans. The BAG met

most recently in the last week of October in Suva, Fiji. The BAG is also represented (both formally and through individual members), on the Asia Pacific Regional Steering Committee for CRVS (along with representatives from three Pacific countries from the Statistics, Health and Registry sectors), and the Global CRVS committee (coordinated through the World Bank and UN Statistics) and collaborates with a broad group of other stakeholders and technical agencies through these mechanisms.

2.4. Significant progress has been made in improving the coverage, completeness and quality of data from CRVS systems in the region over this time, and there is much to be proud of in the region. Many of these success stories were shared at the Regional CRVS meeting in Noumea in February of this year, and can be found on the website (www.pacific-crvs.org). There is however much to be done. For example, only nine of 21 member states (updated since PSSC 12) have to date reported their national targets against the Regional Action Framework to the Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in line with their commitments to do so (member states had committed to provide their targets by December 2015).

2.5. As many countries have now completed national assessments and plans, and are now moving on to invest in the more structural issues they have identified such as decentralisation of registration services and improving access to registration, legislation and IT infrastructure for civil registration, there is significant scope to move towards the adoption of more consistent standards and systems across the region in these areas in line with the principles of TYPSS.

3. Brief update of Activities

3.1. Since the last PSSC meeting in June, there have been a number of key activities undertaken by the partnership in addition to ongoing technical support missions to member states by individual partners. Key amongst these activities were a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Regional Steering Group and the Data analysis and report writing workshop.

3.2. The Regional Steering Group met in Bangkok in September, with the Pacific well represented by the Fiji Islands, Vanuatu, and the Cook Islands, along with several partner agencies. Key items for discussion on that agenda were the important links between CRVS and the SDGs (http://www.pacific-crvs.org/82-news-and-updates/167-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-crvs-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs) and options for improved advocacy for CRVS as part of the SDG agenda, along with how to support countries to both address targets that have been set under the Regional Action Framework and to improve the measurement of the key indicators of coverage and completeness. The report from the meeting is available here (http://www.getinthepicture.org/event/second-meeting-regional-steering-group-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-asia-and). Improved methods for measuring coverage and completeness will also be the focus of two UN expert group panels in upcoming months.

3.3. The data analysis and report writing workshop was held in New Caledonia on 19th-29th September 2016, led by the Pacific Community (SPC) and supported by ESCAP and ABS. A representative from the data use stream of the Data4Health project managed by Vital Strategies; who are also working with the Solomon Islands and PNG, also attended the training, and will work with the team in providing ongoing support to these countries in completing their reports. This was third data analysis and report writing workshop conducted by BAG in the years (2014-2016), with all countries now having been offered at least one round of training. The workshop brought together 18 participants from six countries: Kiribati, Tuvalu, Samoa, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Participants were drawn from civil registration offices, the ministries of health and national statistics offices, with the emphasis on examining national datasets as a combined team.

Feedback from the evaluation was very positive and all countries were able to produce a first draft of their vital statistics reports by the end of the training. BAG partners will continue to support participants and their national CRVS committees as they complete and ready their reports for publication. Participants have been encouraged to share both their draft findings and lessons learnt regarding their systems with national CRVS teams, and to incorporate these into their ongoing plans for CRVS improvement. All countries are encouraged to publish available vital statistics data from their CRVS system regularly and to incorporate this into the routine publication schedule for the NSO. Reporting guidelines and a template to assist countries in these endeavours will shortly be uploaded to the website (www.pacific-crvs.org).

3.4.   We are also increasingly supporting south-south technical assistance as countries make progress with their own plans and solutions. In addition to the opportunities for sharing lessons learnt at the regional workshop at the beginning of the year, two specific south-south activities have recently been completed. In the first of these the Tuvalu registrar visited the Cook Islands to learn from the registry procedures and systems in their office, after which a follow-up visit to Tuvalu was conducted by one of the Cook Islands registrars to assist the Tuvalu office in implementing lessons learnt during the visit. In the second program, registry and education representatives from the Solomon Islands spent a couple of weeks with the registry office in Vanuatu (including a community outreach trip) to learn about their "catch-up" campaign and engagement with other sectors such as education and health to improve registration rates.

3.5.   In addition, BAG has also been working with external partners such as the World Bank to identify potential additional support for key CRVS improvement activities, noting that many countries have made a number of the easier changes to their system following national assessments and plans and are now facing the broader challenges of upgrading system architecture and infrastructure (which require resources beyond the current capacity of the program). The World Bank has identified some support for the next 12 months (with the assistance of Korea), specifically focussing on legislation and IT systems (discussed below), but will require countries to prioritise CRVS at a national (political) level in order to mobilise additional funding for the following years.

4.   Regional solutions for national challenges

4.1.   While national situations are no doubt unique, a number of issues have been identified across the region as common to multiple countries. In these cases, a move towards greater standardisation of both the underlying principles and the systems and tools themselves bring a number of advantages to countries including: greater sustainability of efforts through having a broader customer base and a greater capacity for support from regional institutions (and other countries through developing a broader pool of experts), improved ability to stay "up-to-date" with best practices through the ability to update and learn from experiences beyond national borders, improved cost efficiency through shared development and approaches, improved reporting support for international and regional reporting requirements, and increased ability to benchmark national progress and therefore monitor and drive improvements for national outcomes. BAG has been working on a number of these issues, in line with the principles recognised under the TYPSS.

4.2.   Legislation: Many of the countries in the region have identified outdated or inflexible legislation as a key issue in improving their CRVS systems. Even countries with relatively complete and recent legislation frequently lack specific provisions for data protection or data sharing that would support a flexible modern CR database that can grow and adapt with country needs or to act as the foundation for a national identity system (with a number of countries subsequently separating these functions). At the February Regional CRVS meeting, participants overwhelming noted that updating legislation was a critical first step before further investments in areas such as IT infrastructure. BAG

has produced a working document of "best practice guidelines and examples" of CRVS legislation in the Pacific, circulated at the last PSSC meeting (Annex 1) and has been working with countries to support national legislation reviews in a number of countries (particularly through UNICEF). These working guidelines have been incorporated into work currently underway internationally on the review of the UN Principles and recommendations for CRVS (Legislation) due next year. It is proposed that the work with the World Bank will build on the existing BAG program to further review and update the guidelines to ensure they address the data sharing elements required to support a common regional platform for IT and data sharing on off-island events. The World Bank will also work with BAG to support countries to review their existing legislation against this framework in order to guide national revisions.

4.3. IT infrastructure for CRVS: IT has been identified by many countries in the region as a key priority for their CRVS systems, with many either seeking support for system upgrades, or currently considering building or purchasing systems for identity management. BAG circulated a working document of IT guidelines for the Pacific early in 2016. These "minimum standards" outline the basic functionality that all CR systems in the region should have in order to support core CR and VS functions. It is proposed that with the support of the World Bank – a common regional platform is developed for national implementation – that would allow both a person-based registry systems (linked birth, death and other vital events) and ultimately support the development of national ID systems that are built from a foundation of up to date identity data from the civil registration system. As noted earlier, this approach has a number of advantages over stand-alone systems and is encouraged for countries that are at the development / upgrade stage of planning for their systems.

4.4. Data Sharing: The Pacific Civil Registrars Network (PCRN), as part of its Strategic Plan 2015-2026, is trialling the sharing of death and name change information between countries. Data sharing agreement have been reached between New Zealand and the Cook Islands, and New Zealand and New South Wales, Australia. Initially the data will be used to update birth registration records and in future could be used for health statistics. Discussions have recently commenced between NZ, Tokelau, Niue and Samoa to extend the approach. The first data exchange is expected by the end of 2016 and to be updated quarterly.

4.5. Coding: These are specialist skills (that differ from health morbidity coding) that require constant practice and review to ensure high quality data outputs. Many countries in the region struggle to maintain high quality cause of death coding for a range of factors including the volume of work, ability to separate the work from morbidity coding, and maintaining a specialised workforce. BAG (led by ABS and QUT) has been working to develop a more sustainable regional approach to coding, including trialling the use of automated systems (IRIS) in countries with the appropriate infrastructure and volume of events. There remains a need for regional support both for outliers that do not fit these systems and for countries where the volume of deaths simply does not support automated coding or routine practice for manual coding.

4.6. Operational research: Documentation of the lessons learned and sharing of experiences is a critical public good in supporting system improvement across the region. BAG works with a range of external partners and countries to facilitate operational research in areas that are of interest to the Pacific. Current examples include:

- Work by Dr Nancy Vu on the attitude of doctors to medical certification in FSM (in order to better inform training needs and the prioritisation of support in this area.
- Work that is currently in planning with Dr Stuart Kinnear at Griffith University on mortality among ex-prisoners and populations at-risk, (for which we are currently seeking funding).

- A recent publication by Prof Richard Taylor and colleagues at UQ on some very important research on the classification of diabetes mortality in the region (http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1753-0407.12447/epdf)

The need to support more country participation in writing up lessons learnt in the development of their CRVS systems has also been flagged as a key priority under the PVSAP.

4.7 CRVS for disasters: Work has begun by the Pacific Civil Registrars Network to strengthen regional CRVS disaster planning and response. Donor support and funding is being sought for an event, in conjunction with the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA), to be held in Fiji in September 2017.

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5. Key Recommendations

The recommendations below build on those adopted by PSSC 11 and 12; and call on members specifically to work with their national CRVS committees to:

5.1. Set national targets in line with the commitment to the goals of the Asia Pacific Regional Action Framework for CRVS and report these to ESCAP where not already done.

5.2. Include CRVS as a priority in the NSDS and national development plans and actively seek appropriate resourcing for these.

5.3. Include publication of key indicators derived from civil registration and routine health reporting of births and deaths in national publication schedules for the NSO.

5.4. Engage with regional work to improve standardisation for legislation and IT for CRVS through the adoption of regional best practice standards, and where possible, the development of standardised approaches and systems.

6. Annexes

Annex I: CRVS Pacific RAF status (as reported to ESCAP)

Overall Progress

- 9 countries from the 21 member countries of the ESCAP Pacific Region have submitted CRVS baseline reports (Australia, Cook Islands, New Zealand, Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati, Fed, States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands and Samoa):

Country	Conducted a standards-based comprehensive assessment	Developed a plan for monitoring and reporting on the RAF	Reporting against indicators complete?
Australia	Yes	Yes	Complete
Cook Islands	No	No	Complete
New Zealand	No	No	Complete
Tonga	No	No	Incomplete
Fiji	Yes	No	Complete
Kiribati	Yes	No	Complete
Micronesia	Yes	No	Complete
Samoa	Yes	Not reported	Incomplete
Solomon Islands	Yes	Yes	Incomplete

- Baseline data was provided for all countries for goal 1A (birth registration), and coverage generally seems to be above 80%, with the exception of Fiji, Samoa and the Solomon Islands.

- Although each country has reported on coverage of birth registration (goal 1A), data concerning coverage of death registration (1D) and particularly those with a medically certified cause of death (1E), perhaps require more attention as coverage is either sparse or data is incomplete.

- Registration records are not always used as the main source of vital statistics, for example Fiji uses administrative data to estimate vital statistics, to achieve goal 3A.

- A recurring theme in all available reports seems to be the lack of available data that can be disaggregated by hard-to-reach or marginalized populations, which was especially emphasised as a problem in Australia and Kiribati (coverage of outer island data).

- It seems to be clear that official certification of birth and death registration seems to go hand in hand with the registration itself, highlighting that sufficient coverage of birth and death registration, ultimately leads to the achievement of Goal 2 (issuance of certificates) simultaneously. However for some countries, the data concerning civil registration remains incomplete and in the case of countries such as Fed. States of Micronesia, there is less focus on the issuance of official documentation, with mention of these records being held by the CR office for later use, rather than by the individuals themselves.

Implausibility

- There seems to be some confusion concerning the calculation of target 1C . The target stipulates that this percentage should include all individuals in the territory and the jurisdiction that have had their birth registered, which includes the late registration of adults. Therefore, the denominator for this calculation should be the total population as this indicator covers those of any age group. A number of countries reported implausible results for this indicator, and clarification has been sought.

Annex II: Best Practice Guidelines – Legislation for CRVS in the Pacific (final draft for publication)

Annex III: Best Practice Guidelines – IT standards for CRVS systems in the Pacific (draft for working publication)