



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



Brief 1, Paper 2

Leaving No One Behind: CRVS, Gender and the SDGs

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KEY MESSAGES

- **Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) and ID systems matter (more) for women.** Gender inequalities contribute to the exclusion of the most disadvantaged women and girls from civil registration and national ID systems, exacerbating these inequalities. Civil registration and identity documents help to redress them by helping protect women and girls against child marriage, securing inheritance rights and fair divorce, and facilitating access to political participation and modern financial services. These benefits enhance the value of CRVS and ID for women when compared to men.
- **A gender lens should inform the development, implementation, and monitoring of vital statistics and identity documentation.** A gender lens is required because gender inequalities shape supply-side and demand-side constraints to civil registration and to ID documentation (including affecting registration of births by mothers), thus determining many of the gaps and challenges in vital statistics.
- **Women are uniquely poised to be agents of change for universal civil registration and ID systems that “leave no one behind.”** Women’s first-hand knowledge of vital events in the family and their preference to invest in family wellbeing makes them ideally suited for this role.
- **Disaggregated data show gender inequalities in CRVS and ID coverage.** Sex-disaggregated data shows that gender inequalities in registration rates can be masked by global and national averages; that unrecorded marriages and teen and unwed motherhood lead to unregistered births and intergenerational costs; and that women’s deaths may be systematically under-registered.

- **A CRVS and ID data, research, and action agenda informed by a gender lens** includes improving data on marriage registration and certification; improving death registration and recording with a gender lens; investigating inequalities in coverage of vital events within countries; investigating gender related supply-side barriers to registration, including legal restrictions; testing cost-effective interventions to increase coverage and reduce gender gaps; and designing programs with a human-centered design approach that seeks to benefit women and girls.

THE ROLE OF CRVS IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Civil registration is “the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording” of vital events, including birth, death, marriage, and divorce (UN Statistics Division n.d.). Fully functional universal civil registration systems provide vital statistics, which allow permanent and continuous real-time disaggregated data that are largely free of sampling errors and contain relatively few response errors. They add value to statistical systems by providing reliable, timely and granular data at relatively low cost, and can help close gender data gaps. Civil registration is also critical for social protection and inclusive development. It provides foundational identification through birth certificates and national IDs that individuals need to exert citizen rights and responsibilities and transact in the modern economy.

Further, a fully functional, universal CRVS system is a main requirement to achieve “leaving no one behind,” the goal of inclusive development and a crosscutting objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs commit countries to track progress towards 17 goals and

169 targets through 232 measurable indicators. CRVS systems contribute to achieving SDG targets and monitoring progress by providing the numerator or denominator for 67 of the indicators, spread across 12 goals (Mills, et al. 2017). Demonstrating CRVS’ centrality to the SDGs, “legal identity for all, including birth registration,” has been enshrined as Target 16.9. Other targets, such as reducing child marriage (5.3) imply the need for the improvement of CRVS systems (Mills, et al. 2017). CRVS data is the best source for the denominator of all population-based targets and indicators, such as those for SDG 1, which seeks to reduce extreme poverty, and populates the numerator of a majority of indicators under Goal 3 on health and wellbeing. In addition, Indicator 17.19.2 includes a specific aim to achieve 100% birth registration and 80% death registration by 2030.

THE STATE OF CRVS

Despite the importance of CRVS for governments and individuals, more than 100 low and middle-income countries lack functional CRVS systems and under-record or completely fail to record vital events of specific populations (World Bank 2018). The following are known gaps in the recording of these events:

- **Birth registration is far from complete.** Though it is central to any country’s vital statistics, globally there are an estimated 650 million unregistered births of children between 0 and 16 years of age (Gelb & Metz 2018). Using data from 197 countries, UNICEF (2017) calculates that 29% of the global population of children under 5 years old are unregistered (UNICEF 2017). As of 2013, one in seven registered children did not possess a birth certificate, but this proportion differed significantly across regions and countries (UNICEF 2013).

- **Legal ID is crucial, but coverage is low**, particularly in low-income countries. A birth certificate is a “foundational document” and helps to establish legal ID which, in turn, enables access to financial services, social services and protection, and political participation (Dahan & Hanmer 2016). Despite the importance of such identification, survey data for 99 countries shows that close to 40% of the eligible population in low-income countries does not have one. In middle-income countries coverage gaps are smaller with fewer than 10% of the population lacking an ID, but they still exist (World Bank 2018).
- **Half of all deaths are not properly documented globally**, and accurate data on causes of death in low-income countries are largely unavailable (International Development Research Centre 2018). The task of registering deaths and recording causes of death accurately is challenging because most deaths take place outside of medical facilities and because health practitioners often have limited information to correctly identify the cause (WHO 2010), or lack the training to do so. Household surveys are not well placed to collect information on causes of death and therefore should not be relied upon as an alternative to a well-functioning civil registration system.
- **Of all the vital events, the recording of marriage and divorce registration is the most unreliable and unavailable**, especially in low-income countries, and has the lowest priority globally in terms of improvement. Registration of these events is especially problematic where marriage ceremonies are largely customary and where poorly functioning judicial systems are a major barrier to divorce. Another obstacle is the lack of a harmonized definition of marriage in international conventions.



Photo: Rama George-Alleyne/World Bank

CRVS, GENDER AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Civil registration should have universal coverage by definition; it should accurately capture the entire population of a country and follow this population through its life cycle, from birth to death. Yet in practice, as the data above shows, there is substantial exclusion across countries and across peoples within countries. This exclusion is not random. It unduly affects the most disadvantaged and distorts the measurement of their progress. Gender inequalities are reflected in the registration of vital events. A substantial number of women and girls affected by poverty and exclusion are left out of the administrative system; unable to be protected by the State, and unable exercise their rights or fulfill their obligations.

The gender inequalities affecting especially women and girls of disadvantaged groups in the registration of events are consequently reflected in vital statistics when compiled, contributing to entrenchment of these inequalities. These inequalities on their own and in interaction with other determinants of exclusion, such as income, geographical location, race, and ethnicity, help to explain why certain groups are not counted in vital statistics.

For CRVS to be truly universal, leave no one behind, and accurately measure progress, a gender lens should be incorporated into the legal framework, business process, and training related to the registration of vital events, the collection and compilation of vital statistics and the provision of legal identity, as well as in monitoring the universal execution of vital statistics and ID.

This paper examines the existing evidence on the interplay between gender and CRVS. It first details the benefits of this interplay for both women and CRVS systems, and then summarizes major themes that emerge in the empirical evidence. These themes help inform a gender lens approach. It concludes with recommendations for research and policy.

WHY CRVS MATTERS (MORE) FOR WOMEN

Civil registration and identity documentation, while often seen as separate, are both integral parts of a life-long trajectory from birth registration to service delivery and national ID, marriage registration and citizens' rights, and death registration. Although CRVS and identity documentation coverage are vitally important for both men and women, both are arguably more important for women. Fully functional CRVS systems can help redress pre-existing gender inequalities between women and men, enhancing their value for women. Conversely, the negative consequences of being left outside of registration and identity systems are worse for women than for men as they reinforce gender inequalities. The potential to redress or reinforce gender inequalities manifests in the following ways:

- **Birth registration protects against child marriage.** Birth registration and birth certificates, in addition to their link to IDs, help to ensure children's access to health care (e.g. immunizations) and education and can

help protect women from early marriage, a risk that uniquely impacts girls. The incidence of child marriage is still shockingly high, with an estimated 15 million girls married before age 18 every year ([Hanmer & Elefante 2016](#)). While gender inequalities in birth registration are small at national levels and girls have made substantial strides in closing gender gaps in health and schooling, the lack of birth registration for girls is linked to child marriage, with long-term detrimental consequences for women and their children. A study using data from 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 & Elefante 2016](#)).

- **Women are less likely than men to have national ID, reinforcing women's exclusion.** In low-income countries, on average, 45% of women do not have an ID versus 30% of men ([World Bank 2018](#)). The World Bank's Women, Business and the Law report found that married women cannot get an ID card in the same way as married men in 11 economies ([World Bank 2018](#)). In Afghanistan, almost twice as many men as women have an ID ([World Bank 2018](#)). In Pakistan, women aged 18 to 40 are 6% less likely than men to have an ID card, after adjusting for gender differences in education and marital status. This gap is widest in the poorer quintiles (between 8 and 11%) versus the richest (2%) ([Knowles 2016](#)).
- **ID can act as a gateway to improving women's political voice and agency**, both of which lag severely behind men's. Increasing women's access to individual IDs is a necessary first step to increasing their political participation, including their representation in parliaments: globally just 24% of seats in both upper and lower houses are held by women ([Inter-Parliamentary Union 2018](#)). A qualitative



study of an income support program in Pakistan showed that national IDs given to poor women to register with the program established their right to vote and boosted their social standing and political freedom (Yan & Kemal 2015).

- **Access to ID can also reduce gender gaps in the economy.** The Global Findex survey, in its third iteration over a seven-year period (2011 to 2017), shows that women constitute an unchanging majority (57%) of the 1.7 billion adults globally that lack access to a bank account, and that lack of ID is a main reason for this exclusion from modern financial services (World Bank 2018). In India, men were 20% more likely to have a bank account than women as of 2015. Thanks to a nationwide biometric ID initiative, today this gender gap has shrunk to 6% (World Bank 2018). In Rajasthan, India, this initiative increased women's access to bank accounts, from 34% before the advent of biometric IDs to close to 100% after (Gelb, et al. 2017).
- **Death certificates are required to assert widowhood rights.** The under-registration of deaths is a global problem, and non-possession of a death certificate is more of a problem for women, who outlive men globally. Without a death certificate, women may not be able to assert widowhood rights and claim inheritance. This is particularly onerous for widows in low-income countries given their greater economic vulnerability, and even more damaging for widows in conflict-affected countries, where the high incidence of widowhood among women is a predictable consequence of war (Gupta, et al. 2013; Milazzo & van de Walle 2018).
- **Marriage registration can prevent child marriage, ensure inheritance rights, and enable paternity recognition, fair divorce, and benefits linked to marriage.**

Marriage registration and certification add to the benefits of birth registration, providing a legal backing against and helping to prevent child marriage in countries where laws are effectively enacted. Marriage certificates are also required, alongside death certificates, for inheritance rights and social benefits in the case of widowhood. In Nepal, widows are only entitled to a widowhood pension if they can provide proof of the marriage, as well as the death and citizenship certificates of their deceased husband (Asian Development Bank 2007). A marriage certificate also helps with paternity recognition and the child's birth registration. Motherhood outside a legally recognized and registered marriage often triggers the intergenerational transmission of poverty between mothers and their children (see below under "Major Gender Themes in the Empirical Evidence"). In the event of dissolution of a union, filing for legal divorce (and the attendant splitting of assets and paying of alimony, where applicable) is not possible without a marriage certificate. Moreover, where tax regimes or social protection benefits are preferential for married couples, those in unregistered marriages are unlikely to benefit.

- **Vital statistics are the basic building blocks of good gender data,** and both the lack of data and biased or "bad" data is more of a problem for girls and women than for boys and men (Buvinic & Levine 2016). Gender data is critical for monitoring progress towards gender-related indicators in the SDGs. When complete and accurate, vital statistics help inform policies that seek to target and monitor girls and women in the most disadvantaged and hardest to reach groups, helping to ensure that they do not continue to be "left behind." Harbitz and Tamargo, for instance, have shown a strong correlation between poverty, ethnicity, rural location, and gender in Latin America, and

how these combined features lead to the non-registration of births and lack of legal ID that reinforce the social exclusion of these “left behind” populations (Harbitz & Tamargo 2009). In their most recent analysis of birth registration, UNICEF underscores that reaching the most disadvantaged of unregistered children will require taking an equity approach specifically targeting excluded populations (UNICEF 2016).

- **Complete CRVS data can be used to track and make visible those women and girls left farthest behind (UN Statistics Division n.d.).** Sample sizes in surveys are typically not large enough to allow analysis of specific sub-groups disaggregated by sex unless they are targeted for oversampling. Good CRVS data can be used alone or in combination with other sources of administrative data (including national ID information) to construct national population registers (Muñoz n.d.; WHO 2012).

Given the mechanisms through which CRVS systems may either redress or entrench gender inequalities, the push towards full coverage, particularly of birth certification but also marriage, divorce, and death registration, is disproportionately important to guarantee the wellbeing of women and their families (Knowles & Koolwal 2017).



Photo: Curt Carnemark/World Bank

WHY WOMEN MATTER FOR CRVS

To be universal, CRVS systems need to focus on and include women. First, because gender inequalities determine many of the gaps and challenges in vital statistics, building a universal CRVS system requires a focus on capturing the life events of women and girls and a gender lens in the design of solutions and tracking of progress.

Second, women are uniquely positioned to be agents of change. A growing body of research shows that women singularly invest in the wellbeing of their children. For instance, their greater control over the household budget can result in a change of spending patterns that benefits children, making them ideal agents for CRVS action and advocacy (World Bank 2012; Knowles & Koolwal 2017). This means that women can be key, powerful partners in building more inclusive CRVS systems. Women's organizations and grassroots groups also have an important advocacy role to play in strengthening overall CRVS systems at national and sub-national levels.

And third, women have first-hand knowledge of vital events in the family, including births and deaths, so including women as change agents in CRVS systems could improve child birth registration. In Latin America, mothers are commonly expected to register their children. Brito, et al. document that in the Dominican Republic having a mother without legal ID increases the chances of children not being registered by 32%; further, mother's secondary schooling is associated with an 8% lower probability of non-registration of births in Bolivia and 12% in the Dominican Republic (Brito, et al. 2013). In addition, more reliance on women's knowledge of family events may contribute to more accurate recording of deaths.

MAJOR GENDER THEMES IN THE EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

At least five main themes emerge when reviewing the empirical evidence on access and coverage of civil registration or identity documentation for women and girls. These themes are common across countries and cultures; they help define main features of a gender lens in CRVS and ID.

Averages mask gender inequalities in birth registration and access to legal ID

Globally, there is no gender gap in birth registration and national level gaps in birth registration between girls and boys are small. Only 8 of 94 countries show lower coverage for girls than for boys (Bhatia, et al. 2017). However, averages can mask inequalities by gender, income, and other characteristics of excluded groups, and these inequalities can leave these children further behind even in countries such as Peru, with model civil registration and national ID systems. It is therefore important to measure and address inequalities in coverage by subgroups within countries, including by gender (Bhatia, et al. 2017).

In sub-Saharan Africa, while the aggregate national level data does not reveal gender gaps in birth registration, analysis of data at subnational level shows under-registration of girls in particular settings (Koolwal 2017). In five (Burundi as of 2010, Guinea as of 2012, Kenya as of 2009, Rwanda as of 2010, and Namibia as of 2013) out of the 26 African countries analyzed by Koolwal, girls are less likely to be registered than boys when they belong to polygamous households (Koolwal 2017). In these countries, polygamy widens the gender gap in registration after controlling for other variables, suggesting that cultural factors trump economic forces in explaining observed gender gaps in registration. A study of India's birth registration at district level also found large differences in registration rates

in favor of boys (Dahan & Hanmer 2016). Gender gaps in birth registration may also be effectively masked by sex selective abortion, present in geographical sub-regions in countries in Asia, including China, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam (Knowles & Koolwal 2017).

Global gender inequality in ID coverage is small (less than 2%), but here inequalities already emerge at a national level for low-income countries and even larger inequalities, including by wealth groups and gender, emerge among excluded population subgroups within countries. This gap is particularly large in countries like Afghanistan, Benin, and Pakistan, where legal barriers exist to women's access to identity documents. In Indonesia, only half of all women in poor households have an ID card (Sumner & Kusumaningrum 2014).

Unrecorded marriages and teen and unwed motherhood have intergenerational costs

Recognition of paternity in many countries around the world is linked legally or de facto to legal marriage. Shame or stigma from not having a marriage certificate can prevent mothers from registering their children, even if there are no laws on the books preventing this (Fisher 2015). Women in religious or customary marriages as well as teen and unwed mothers often don't register the births of their children, both male and female, transmitting disadvantage between generations.

In Indonesia, half of all married couples in the poorest regions do not register their religious marriages, while paternity requires a legal document. As result, between half and three-quarters of children do not have a birth certificate, partly because of the stigma associated with having a certificate only in the mother's name (Fisher 2015). In response, the current government has established integrated service centers that help with legalizing

marriages and producing birth certificates (Hanmer & Elefante 2016). However, this does not seem to be the case in Southern African countries where, in some cases, 50% of the births are registered without the name of the father, primarily due to the fact that these births are outside of marriage. For example, in Botswana 76% of mothers who registered births in 2012 were single (Statistics Botswana 2015). It is therefore important to examine whether the stigma of single motherhood may be impeding registration in particular countries or communities.

Analysis of Demographic and Health Surveys (circa 2000) showed that children of teen mothers were significantly more likely to be unregistered in three out of five countries in Latin America. The probability of a birth being unregistered increased by 7% in Bolivia, 5% in Colombia, and 10% in Peru when mothers were in their teens (Duryea, et al. 2006). In this region, teen motherhood is strongly linked to the transmission of poverty between mothers and children and this transmission often begins with not registering the child's birth.

In countries in Middle East and North Africa (MENA), laws, civil registration requirements, penalties for adultery, and societal attitudes prevent unwed parents from registering their children's births. Most countries convey nationality by default through the father, and mothers can only pass nationality to the child when the father is unknown. Stigma and fear of discrimination are behind not registering these children's births.

Gender inequalities in death registration can be large and further entrench these inequalities

Maternal mortality and maternal morbidity are a principal cause of women's death and disability in low-income countries. Every day,

approximately 830 women die globally from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth (globally, the maternal mortality ratio stood at 216 per 100,000 live births in 2015, the most recent year for which data has been compiled), with 99% of all maternal deaths occurring in developing countries (WHO, et al. 2015). However, vital registries in these countries fail to accurately capture the number of maternal deaths. The failure to record causes of death is even more severe. Poor data and bad health go together, and poor data on maternal deaths and disability contribute to the high rates of maternal mortality and disability observed in low income countries.

There is little information on the extent of gender inequalities in death registration, but the little data we have suggests that gender gaps can be large. Countries where vital statistics show "missing girls" are likely to under-record women's deaths more than men's deaths. "Missing girls" is a phenomenon in which there is a lower proportion of infant girls in the population than would be expected from average survival rates of boys and girls, the consequence of a marked societal preference for boys and the neglect of infant girls. Registration data from China and from the Indian state of Rajasthan, two regions with "missing girls," indicate that women's deaths are less likely to be registered than men's deaths (Chalapati, et al. 2005; Abouzahr, et al. 2014).

A study that estimated deaths by sex in MENA countries found possible systematic under-registration of women's deaths relative to men's in all four countries studied (Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, and Morocco). Some of the possible causes include a patrilineal inheritance tradition and a burial permit process that incentivizes more accurate registration of male versus female deaths (Silva 2016).

Gender intensifies constraints to civil registration and national ID

Gender interacts with supply-side and demand-side constraints to civil registration and national ID, shaping and intensifying these constraints as follows:

- **Discrimination against women is an important supply-side constraint to CRVS and adult identity documentation coverage** and can lead to the under-registration of both male and female children (Asian Development Bank 2007; Cody 2009; Plan Ltd. 2015). It is sometimes enshrined in law and often targeted at vulnerable groups of women, such as widows, divorced women, single mothers, migrants, and women from minority ethnic or religious groups. In Burundi, children must be registered within 15 days of birth, must be witnessed by two witnesses, and identification of both the mother and father must be offered (UNICEF n.d.). Where registration centers are far from the place of birth and/or a father's identification cannot be proven, this represents a significant barrier to women to register their children. In Cameroon, a married woman must present her marriage certificate when applying for an ID card, a requirement that is not applied to married men (Hanmer & Elefante 2016). In Indonesia, married couples without a marriage certificate must first obtain one (a process involving three separate steps) to then obtain a birth certificate for their child that includes both parents' names. Possession of a birth certificate with only the mother's name is stigmatizing. In Bhutan and Nepal, if the father is unknown the child cannot be registered, while in Nicaragua, women in consensual unions need the father's signature on the birth record (UNICEF 2013). Similarly, only fathers can register a child in Barbados, Iran, Swaziland, and Syria, effectively preventing mothers from recording their children's births (Hanmer & Elefante 2016).

- **Physical access to registration sites (including the time required) is also more of a barrier for women than for men.**

Women have many more demands on their time and, in some settings, cannot travel freely outside their village. This was acknowledged to be a reason for the under-registration of women for ID cards in Pakistan, where 73% of women were accompanied when traveling to obtain an ID card compared to only 31% of men (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2013). Special measures were adopted to make registration more accessible for women, including mobile registration services staffed exclusively by women (including female drivers) and reserving Fridays at all registration sites as days when services were available only for women. However, these measures were only partially successful, in part because 65% of women were unaware of the special services available to them (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2013).

- Analysis of demand for civil registration documents finds that economic status and parents' education (mother's education, in particular) are almost always positively related to birth registration of both female and male children in countries with less than complete coverage (Knowles & Koolwal 2017; Bhatia, et al. 2017; UNICEF 2016; Brito, et al. 2013). These strong and consistent relationships suggest that lowering cost barriers and ensuring that parents, especially mothers, have adequate information and knowledge about the benefits of registration would be effective methods for tackling demand-side constraints. They also highlight the potential role of women as agents of change.

Financial incentives help close gender gaps in CRVS and ID coverage

Two documented ways of overcoming demand-side constraints to families' registration of vital events are: 1) increasing parents' knowledge of the benefits of registering their children and how to register, and 2) removing the costs of birth registration. In recent years, financial incentives have been added as a third potentially powerful strategy to encourage parents, and especially mothers, to register their children and obtain national IDs. Most of these initiatives are linked to the widespread implementation of government-led conditional cash transfers to protect vulnerable populations and have, by design, linked cash payments to mothers' role as agents in promoting child welfare. Emerging evidence shows that financial incentives are an especially promising strategy for closing birth registration and ID gaps and helping overcome gender inequalities when they exist. Financial incentives have reduced gender gaps in birth registration in both India and Nepal and helped close most gaps in birth registration in Latin America.

In the Majoni scheme in Assam, India, all girls born after a certain date received a fixed deposit (Rs 5,000) into a bank account under some conditions, including registering the child's birth. During the year prior to the scheme, birth certificates were requested for 24.5% of between

6,000 and 7,000 hospital births, with a female-to-male ratio of 1.06. In the year following implementation of the scheme, formal requests were received for 39.1% of a similar number of hospital births, with a female-to-male ratio of 1.34 ([Baruah, et al. 2013](#)).

The Nepal cash grant program was intended to cover the entire country, but fiscal constraints limited its implementation to targeted sub-populations. A survey conducted in 2012-2013 indicated that the program covered a total of 551,916 children, or about one in five children under five years of age. Children needed a birth certificate to enroll. As a direct result of the program, birth registration coverage increased quickly and dramatically in the targeted population, compared to the rest of the population. A significant pre-program gender gap in birth registration was eliminated in the targeted population, while it persisted in the rest of the population ([Knowles 2016](#)).

In Latin America, the expansion of cash-based social protection programs in the past two decades has substantially increased the supply of and demand for birth registration, benefiting most children ([Hunter & Sugiyama 2018](#)). Having achieved majority coverage, financial incentives now need fine tuning to reach "those left behind," and their design should seek to empower women in these "left behind groups" to become agents for registering their children. Initially in response to political conflict, the government of Peru undertook a vast program integrating civil registration with national ID, including performance-based financing, a gender focus, and granting IDs to children. It then used ID to give access to the government's conditional cash transfer program ("Juntos"). This approach expanded Juntos coverage to children with ID outside the program, but also may have compounded exclusion risks, since marginalized, undocumented, and vulnerable populations (indigenous peoples, migrants, and rural girls)



Photo: Rama George-Alleyne/World Bank

could be excluded from the cash transfer program if they did not have access to ID. A proposed solution is to rely on mother's ID as the gateway to identifying the child rather than using the child's ID (Reuben & Carbonari 2017). For this gateway to work, however, mothers themselves should be empowered to overcome their own exclusion.

Suggestions have also been made about the improvement of mortality and cause of death registration, such as the Countrywide Mortality Surveillance for Action program in Mozambique and Sierra Leone. This program incentivizes improved cause of death recording by health practitioners to avoid misclassification and encourages family registration of deaths (International Development Research Centre 2018).

WAYS FORWARD: SUGGESTIONS FOR DATA, RESEARCH, AND ACTION

Universal, fully functional CRVS and ID management systems will require coordinated data production work, research, and action, internationally, nationally, and locally, and at different levels. Below are highlighted a set of suggestions based on the empirical evidence summarized above. These suggestions utilize a gender lens and mostly are directed to women and girls. Alongside them, a clear advocacy and communications strategy is required to ensure that a gender lens is introduced in CRVS system development and assessment.

- **Investigate inequalities in coverage of birth registration and other vital events by subgroups within countries.** Research that breaks down national level averages in registration of vital events by sex, wealth, urban/rural differences, race and ethnicity and other features that result in social exclusion is urgently needed to more accurately identify excluded groups, as the basis for the design of more effective measures to include all.
- **Explore in-depth, gender-related, demand-side and supply-side barriers to CRVS and ID coverage.** The above research should pay special attention to supply-side barriers these excluded groups face, including implicit and explicit gender biases and discrimination in access to civil registration and ID, with a view to reducing these barriers through improved supply-side design. This should include using technology and data linkage to reduce the burden of reporting on individuals and easing physical access to registration sites as much as possible in a human-centered design approach to system-building (International Development Research Centre 2018).
- **Document legal restrictions to registration for women.** The World Bank's "Women, Business and the Law" has launched a pioneer effort to document legal restrictions to the registration of births and access to ID based on gender. This effort should be expanded to include the full range of vital events and be paired with actively encouraging governments to enact legal reforms to overcome these gender constraints and complement their enacting with public information campaigns.
- **More generally, take advantage of opportunities to improve CRVS data and interoperability with ID management systems.** Transitioning from manual to digital CRVS systems can offer opportunities to improve data collection and coverage. Birth registration and the issuance of identity documentation should be part of a common process, rather than occurring as separate, distinct events. The process of building National ID systems can also surface shortcomings in CRVS systems, and both can be reinforced when their interoperability is pursued with due regard to data protection.

- **Ask about marriage registration and certification in regular household survey instruments** (e.g. Demographic and Health Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys). Knowledge about what happens within households is very scant and unreliable, starting with crucial information on marriage and marital status. Accurate recording and certification of these life events are urgently needed.
- **Improve death registration and recording of causes of death with a gender lens.** This includes identifying and combating social or cultural reasons for the under-registration of female deaths, as well as recognizing and relying on women's first-hand knowledge to more accurately report on deaths and probable causes of death within households. It also entails encouraging the uptake of WHO's verbal autopsy protocol for asserting causes of death, with a special focus on better capturing causes of maternal death ([WHO n.d.](#)).
- **Produce hard evidence on cost-effective interventions to increase coverage of vital events and inclusion of "left-behind" women and girls.** There are significant opportunities to build and conduct natural experiments alongside actions designed to strengthen CRVS systems and increase ID coverage, including to further test the efficacy of financial incentives for increasing coverage and reducing gender gaps through social protection schemes.
- **Programs to expand coverage of CRVS should take a human-centered design approach to deal with constraints to registration that particularly impact women**, such as examining distance and routes to registration sites. For example, mobile registration programs may be helpful, particularly to reach remote communities. Simplifying procedures, removing cost barriers, and using information and communications technology (ICT), where appropriate, to allow for online registration would also be helpful. Digitization of CRVS systems (transitioning from manual processes to ICT-based systems) may also offer an opportunity for overall improvement and should particularly focus on highlighting and closing gender gaps ([International Development Research Centre 2018](#)).
- Lastly, **programs seeking to improve CRVS systems should ensure that benefits accrue to women and girls** (access to services, voice, resources). Improvements to CRVS systems cannot be expected without corresponding improvements to government transparency, accountability, and service provision ([International Development Research Centre 2018](#)). This would create a virtuous cycle in which women, families and communities understand the importance of and seek out registration.



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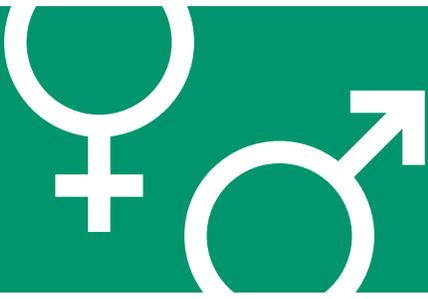
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