Civil Registration & Sample Registration System: Challenges and initiatives

Rakesh Kakkar, Pradeep Aggarwal
Department of Community Medicine, Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences, Swami Rama Himalayan University, Dehradun.

Vital registration of births and deaths (including, marriage, divorce, and adoption) is the important act of recording and documenting of vital events in a person's life and is therefore a fundamental function of governments. Registration of vital events contributes in administration and governance by giving every person with legitimate individuality and civilian identity and this population database can be used as the source of civil registries.

The vital statistics are invaluable for planning, monitoring and evaluating various programmes related to primary health care, family planning, maternal and child health, education and so forth. Vital statistics are also used for demographic purposes such as preparation of population estimates and projections, studies of mortality, fertility and construction of life tables.

Introduction

Civil registration captures reliable information on births, fertility and deaths that enable the calculation and production of timely and accurate population estimates, it also contributes to policy-making and long-term national planning. Well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems, including the timely and accurate reporting by civil registration systems to the national statistics system, enhance the credibility of national and local administrators and their capacity to deliver services. It helps them to identify what services are needed and by whom. As Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems include many stakeholders from a wide variety of backgrounds, coordination and communication of multiple agencies is essential for efficient system. Comprehensive and complete Civil Registration System (CRS) has multi-faceted implications on socio-economic development of a country. A complete and up to date CRS can provide reliable statistics on fertility & mortality at all level of aggregations, almost on a real time basis which is not possible from any sample survey. It is the key for evidence based planning and has no parallels alternatives. The levels of registration reflects the quality of governance.

Challenges

- Utility of birth and death certificate- the utility and awareness among the general public is low, a cause of concern.
- States/UTs are operational at diverse level of competence- which imitates the governance issues.
- Flow of registered vital events is not uniform across the states- a bottleneck in monitoring.
- Lesser reporting of home based still births, infant deaths and maternal deaths in high performing States- makes difficult to estimate IMR and MMR.
- Importance of vital utility data is lessened by delayed reporting by the states
- Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD) is only 20.0 per cent of total registered deaths.

Registration of Births and Deaths in India is mandatory with the enactment of Registration of Births and Death Act (RBD Act), 1969. Registration of Births and Deaths falls under the concurrent list of the
In India, more than 250 thousand of registration centers are involved in central registration system and estimated births per year is 26 million, and corresponding figure for death is 8 million. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Infant mortality Rate (IMR), Under Five Mortality Rate (USMR) and Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) are generated by Sample Registration System (SRS). The target of reducing infant mortality by 2015 was 28 while under five mortality rate and Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) were 42 and 109. There are huge regional differences in MMR, in low performing states MMR is 308 as compared to 127 in Southern states while life time risk in former states is 1.1 percent and 0.3 percent in latter.

“Level of Registration” is defined as the number of events (birth, death, still birth) registered in a given area per hundred of the events available for registration in that area during the year. It describes the extent to which registration of such event in that area is complete.

Registration scenario in India is improved during last five years. As per the registration data from CRS for the year 2012 , Level of Registration (LOR) for Birth in India is improving i.e. it increased from 62.5 percent to 84.4 percent - gain of + 21.9 percent ) and LOR (Death) increased from 55.0 percent to 69.3 percent - gain of + 14.3 percent. Seventeen States/UTs have achieved cent per cent registration levels for births ; Nine states/UTs have reached a level ranging between 80-99 percent and the remaining nine States/UTs have reported a level of birth registration in the range of 50-80 percent. In the case of deaths, eight States/UTs have achieved cent percent; nine States/UTs have achieved a level ranging between 80-99 percent, thirteen States/UTs are in the range of 50-80 percent and the remaining five States/UTs are below 50 percent. So Level of registration among states varies from 45 percent to 100 percent. Still every 15.6 percent birth and approximately every 3rd death goes un-registered.

The scheme of Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD) under the registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) ACT, 1969 introduced in early 1970s to provide insight on cause-specific mortality profile, a prerequisite to monitoring health trends of the population. The coverage of MCCD is limited to selected hospitals in urban area. Steps are taken by the states to expand the scope of MCCD to all the medical institutions. It is at various stages of implementation across different States. Based on the tenth revision of International Classification of Diseases (ICD 10), data received in prescribed forms are tabulated as per the National List of causes of Death. Present coverage of medically certified death to the total registered death is 20.2 percent and only 14.3 percent against total estimated deaths, moreover Garbage codes (R00-R99) are in use to the tune of 14 percent.

Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India (ORGI) has expanded the scope under MCCD to all Institutions including individual practitioners and the coverage, extended to rural areas as well. Goa, Kerala, Mizoram, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Puducherry have achieved cent percent registration for both birth and deaths. India is having national average of 85.6 percent for births and 70.9 percent for deaths. Corresponding rates for Uttarakhand are 76.6 percent and 54.5 percent while Bihar has the lowest birth (57.4 percent) and death registration (21.6 percent).

Sample Registration System was initiated in 1969-70 for want of complete registration from CRS. Genesis of data through SRS provided reliable annual estimates of birth, death and infant mortality rates at the State and National levels separately for rural and urban areas. It also provides Child Mortality Rate (CMR), Total Fertility Rate (TFR), Sex Ratio at Birth and 0-4 age, institutional deliveries, medical attention before death, etc. Since 2008 onwards under five mortality rate also generated annually. It is one of the largest demographic household sample survey in the world. Sample size determination is based on IMR. Permissible level of Relative Standard Error is 10 percent (bigger states). It covers 1.3 million households and about seven million population, covering only panel survey with dual recording. Panel is revised once in 10 years based on the latest available census frame.

**Initiatives to re-vitalise the system:**

- To enhance the utility, MOHFW has linked the delivery of services with registration e.g. cash incentive under Janani Suraksha Yojana etc.
- Provision for incentive to the States and to grass-root workers Anganwadi /ASHA for registration and delivery.
- Ministry of Health has made registration as one of the focus areas under National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)/ National Health Mission.
- To cover all institutional events, a database of Medical Institutions is being prepared.
- Provisions of the Act are being simplified for better implementation.
- Linking CRS at sub-district level is being emphasized to update NPR.
• Collaboration with various partners for further strengthening of the system.

Newer Initiatives
Uniform software application for registration of births and deaths: A software application for online and offline registration of birth and death has been developed. This application covers the entire gamut of the Civil Registration System – registration of events, generation of certificates and generation of statistical tables and reports. The application that is presently available in English is being customized in thirteen Indian languages.

Database of institutions: A nationwide database of medical institutions has been prepared. This comprehensive database has the address, telephone numbers and other contact details of the institutions where events occur. The plan is to electronically monitor the registration of events occurring in these institutions through an ICT enabled platform.

Application to monitor institutional events: An SMS based application called ‘Event Monitoring System for registration has been developed and is currently under pilot testing. This application attempts to track the events at the level of institutions and ensure their registration.

Capacity building of registrars: A standard training manual has been developed for training the registration functionaries in thirteen Indian languages. Regular training of registration functionaries has been introduced by providing financial assistance to the state governments.

Data digitization: Project to keep old records in easy to retrieve digital form has been started. This will help in storage of registers in electronic format and allow easy access to the records.

Advocacy and publicity: An intensive multi-modal publicity and awareness campaigns on birth and death registration is already underway. Plans are being formulated to expand this campaign in all regional languages in order to increase the coverage of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system.

Demand generation: Creating a policy environment for demand generation for birth and death registration is one of the basic needs identified by a national task force set up for the strengthening the CRVS. As per its recommendations, the registration of events has been linked to various welfare schemes of the government.

National Population Register: India is in the process of setting up a National Population Register (NPR). This is the first step towards the creation of a national register of citizens and the issue of a National Identity Card. The Civil Registration System has been linked to the NPR.

In order to promote CRS among community, government can link various welfare schemes with birth certificates. Universalization of mandatory registration of all institutional births and deaths through computers. Formulation of effective advocacy and monitoring system. There are still many challenges in improving vital registration as due to lack of awareness of the benefits for individuals and governments has contributed to a vicious cycle of underdevelopment of civil registration and vital statistics systems. There is low demand because of delinking of birth certificates from basic services and inadequate budget from state governments. Advocates are needed across a range of sectors to persuade governments to make CRVS a priority and to work towards a greater political commitment and allocation of resources for establishing and improving systems.

References