

Vital statistics as a data source for defined target programs

The previous session, Session 4, focused on the use of CRVS data to inform SDG objectives and targets. However, because CRVS systems touch on or contribute to many domains of government and society, CRVS data are relevant for many programs that involve defined objectives or targets. Most relevant will be health-related programs, but CRVS data use certainly can be extended to programs in other subject areas, at the very least to provide required demographic information.

The more CRVS data are used to respond to such domestic or international programs, the more the CRVS system will be valued by government. In my experience in the US, international programs in particular catch the attention of ministers or senior-level ministry officials. Data systems that can respond to requests from the UN, OECD or others will be valued by government. The CRVS system can extend this enhanced awareness of CRVS by:

- *Promoting* the CRVS system across government ministries;
- *Emphasizing* to ministries that CRVS data will enable them to respond to high-level data requests;
- *Mentioning* the defined-target programs (SDG or other) in all CRVS reports, advertisements, proposals and other documents

You heard yesterday about the number of SDG objectives and targets that CRVS data can respond to. *Healthy People*, a decade-long health-related program in the US, typically uses CRVS data to satisfy about 50% of all program targets. There are various advantages of CRVS data that make them especially well-suited for defined-target programs:

- The fact that CRVS data are **comprehensive** means that in addition to providing national measures, CRVS data can be used to evaluate target status at the regional, state/province and local levels. In many countries, CRVS data and census data may be the only sources available at the local level. And for countries with limited completeness of reporting – good reporting only in selected areas - this means CRVS data can still be relevant in providing data for defined-target programs;
- CRVS data by their nature are **continuous**, which enables defined-target programs to evaluate progress – positive or negative – well before the end of the program period. Due to expense, most surveys are not repeated annually. In addition, CRVS data are **consistent** – changes in definitions of data items are rare. This improves the quality of CRVS time-series data;
- Because CRVS data are **contemporary** - collected at the time of the event - they do not require accurate memory of past events, the approach used by surveys in posing questions to respondents;
- Civil registration systems typically require extensive registration facilities and trained staff to obtain information required for identify documents (birth/death certificates). In effect, this means a *vital statistics system* is **low-cost**: the additional cost of including vital statistics is low compared to the costs of the civil registration system. The cost advantage of vital statistics can be further enhanced if the health care system is required – at no charge - to complete reporting forms on births and deaths and provide those to the CR system.

For all of these reasons, CRVS officials should be on the look-out for defined target programs that can benefit from CRVS data – and in turn can benefit the CRVS system.