CRVS and Population data in Vanuatu

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to give an overview on the progress made by Vanuatu as part of the Expert Group Meeting on Monitoring implementation of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development 23 and 24 September 2019 in Bangkok.

The document attempts to outline the underlying efforts to ensure better coverage and better monitoring of national and SDG goals in ensuring no one is left behind

Background

The Republic of Vanuatu is a country of more than 80 islands spread across 612,300km² of the Pacific and ranks 138th on the Human Development Index. In 2020, Vanuatu will graduate from its LDC status to a Developing country.

The last Mini Census counts in 2016 puts our country with 270,000 but projection models estimating the country to surpassing the 300,000 mark in 2019. The growth rate of 2.3 percent per annum is one of the highest in the region.

We have a population density of 25 persons per square kilometre. A quarter of the population is living in the “urban” defined areas. The rural urban movement has been one of the highest in the region resulting in the doubling up of the urban population in only 2 decades.

Vanuatu has a young population, with the median age of around 20 years, and this is common amongst the pacific islands.

There has been considerable improvement in population and health indicators with declining mortality and increasing access to essential services. This has been confirmed by the 2009 Census where infant mortality (IMR) has fallen from 45 in 1989 to 21 deaths per 1000 live births in 2009, with similar declines in child mortality. Life expectancy has also reached relatively high levels over 70 years for both males and females.

The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is still something we’re struggling with. The total fertility rate (TFR) has fallen but only by small margin, from 4.6 in 1999 to 4.1 in 2009.
Our contraceptive prevalence has steadily increased from 28% in the 1990s to 38% in 2007, although there is considerable variation between provinces, rural and urban, poor and less educated women as well as adolescents and women over the age of 40 years.

Population and development challenges

1) Population policy

Vanuatu launched its Population policy in 2011, with the aim of addressing population issues in the areas of:

- Accelerating the fertility transition, strengthening family planning and reproductive health programmes;
- Verifying maternal deaths and improving the reliability and completeness of data collection by strengthening the vital statistics systems, including the health information system;
- Improving access to safe motherhood and emergency obstetric care;
- Investigating and addressing increased infant mortality in urban areas;
- Addressing high teenage fertility by improving access to youth-friendly services

2) Voluntary National Review (VNR)

Vanuatu is one of the 47 countries that presented its Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), in July 2019. The report provides the overview of Vanuatu’s progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and aligning our planning with the 17 SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3) National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP)

The report also highlighted the Vanuatu 2030: The People’s Plan which is the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) as our localized version of the SDGs. The Plan is guided by our National Vision which is “A stable, sustainable and prosperous Vanuatu”, which outlines the national development goals and policy objectives to translate this National Vision into priorities to be actioned as well as providing the framework to monitor progress. Just to add that the national priority plan, has for the first time, recognised the importance of data and incorporated a policy objective to ensure strengthening systems and improve data for research and decision making.
A national NSDP baseline integrated survey is currently being conducted. The survey integration and mixed question is an effort to have efficient collections while being mindful of costs and time for data availability.

4) The National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS)

In 2016, we launched our National Strategy for the Development of Statistics, with the support from Paris21, in our aim to address the gaps in data, resources and capacities to meet the increasing demand for data. The strategy is renewing the government’s commitments to improving official statistics for policy, planning and decision making as the foundation for social and economic development of the nation, in which the national statistics office and the national statistical system is struggling to meet the increasing demand.

5) The Indicators Database

The NSDP and SDGs Indicators Database is an online portal and an national initiative aimed to improved process for centralised storage of national data used in ADR and UNVR reporting (and other reporting too). It includes proxy indicators and has an institutionalised approach for regular updating by producers who are custodians of the data. The database is maintained and housed by Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO) with key users being national planning office and line ministries

6) CRVS

As far as CRVS is concerned, Vanuatu has experienced improvement in birth registration in the last few years by:

- registering children through schools as part of their initial enrolment processes
- registering new births at hospital prior to discharge
- “catch up days” in remote areas that do not have regular contact with government.

In 2014 birth registration rates for children aged under 1 increased from 35% to 57%. In 2016, it was estimated that around 14% have yet to be registered. In conformity reports by Unicef that at least 80% of the population have registered their births.

7) Partnerships

The Department of Civil Registry has established partnership with the Ministry of Education through an MOU outlining cooperation between both departments with the goal of increasing birth registration through schools. This system benefits both departments; it encourages birth registration by improving access, and allows the Ministry of Education to track student progress by using birth certificate numbers as unique identifiers.
The same partnership was established with the Ministry of Health by introducing on-site birth registration in the main hospitals to register on-site births. Birth registration rates for children under age 5 have significantly increased in a short period of time.

This year, the roll out of National ID cards and linking it to the Voter registration will see a further increase in the coverage of birth and voter registration. We still have struggles with improving registration of other vital events including the causes of death using the ICD classifications.

8) National initiatives

The establishment of CRVS committee and the Statistical Advisory Committee (SAC) can be seen as a sustainability and monitoring mechanism to ensure efforts to address issues pertaining to data collection, as far as national and international SGD monitoring is concerned. In addition, Vanuatu is in the process of finalising its first ever National Human Resources Development Plan (NHRDP). This Plan ensures that human resource development respond to the needs of the labour market.

A lot of changes happening but relevant provisions is the legislations are still lacking. Policies have been developed to fill in the gaps but revisions of legislations are underway to cater for the changes, at least this is the case for CRVS legislations with the Statistics Office considering another review to take on board the current requirements of data availability, access, utilisation and dissemination of information.

I believe Vanuatu is heading in the right direction in effective monitoring, with more indicators to measure and that more targets are likely to be achieved given the areas that I have discussed here.

Thank you very much