



# Technical Papers

Number 25  
August 1983

---

THE NATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL REGISTRATION  
AND THE URGENCY OF ITS ADAPTATION  
TO A MODERN SOCIETY

International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics  
9650 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, Maryland 20814  
U.S.A.

FOREWORD

The present Technical Paper is a translation of the Spanish-language report, "Importancia Nacional del Registro Civil y Urgencia de su Adecuacion a una Sociedad Moderna" prepared by a committee of Latin American experts appointed by the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics and the Inter-American Children's Institute. The report makes an analysis of the status of civil registration and vital statistics in the Latin American Region, calls for rapid improvement, and advocates the appointment of a presidential committee in each country to recommend and implement necessary steps to achieve such improvement.

The original Spanish-language report was published by the Inter-American Children's Institute and distributed widely to top governmental officials in the Latin American Region by Dr. Rodrigo Crespo Toral, Director-General of the Inter-American Children's Institute. The report has been very well received by Latin American officials and, based on early reports, will have an important impact on governmental policies and actions regarding civil registration and vital statistics.

The early success of this report indicates that similar reports addressing the specific problems in other regions of the world would be most useful.

The program of the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, including the publication and distribution of this Technical Paper, is supported by a grant from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
FOREWORD . . . . .	Inside Front Cover
COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR A CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM IN LATIN AMERICA . . . . .	i
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
SUMMARY . . . . .	2
BACKGROUND . . . . .	4
GOALS . . . . .	6
THE DOCTRINE OF CIVIL REGISTRATION . . . . .	7
Legal Function . . . . .	7
The Family . . . . .	7
The Statistical Function . . . . .	8
The Vital Statistics Administrative System . . . . .	8
Other Functions of Civil Registration . . . . .	9
Civil Registration and the Community . . . . .	10
Interdisciplinary Nature of Civil Registration . . . . .	11
THE UTILITY OF CIVIL REGISTRATION . . . . .	12
The Family . . . . .	12
Human Rights . . . . .	12
Demography . . . . .	12
Housing . . . . .	13
Multidisciplinary Social Service . . . . .	13
Summary . . . . .	14
THE ORGANIZATION OF CIVIL REGISTRATION . . . . .	15
Civil Registration and Public Administration . . . . .	15
The Role of Legislation . . . . .	15
Structure and Organization . . . . .	16
Personnel: The Registrar . . . . .	18
Documentation of Civil Registration . . . . .	18
Summary of the Present Civil Registration Situation in Latin America . . . . .	19
INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION . . . . .	21
HOW TO APPROACH THE PROCESS OF CHANGE . . . . .	23
The Presidential Committee . . . . .	23
Modernization and Technology . . . . .	23

COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL  
REQUIREMENTS FOR A CIVIL REGISTRATION  
SYSTEM IN LATIN AMERICA

Members of Committee

From Countries of the Area

Dr. Jorge P. Seara, Presidente  
Asesor del Organismo de Coordinación  
Permanente de los Registros Civiles  
de la República Argentina  
La Plata, Argentina

Profesor Luis Marchant Cavieres  
Escuela de Salud Publica  
Universidad de Chile  
Santiago, Chile

Srta. Margarita Sotomayor Garay  
Jefe de la Oficina Central del  
Registro Civil  
México, D.F., México

Dra. Aída Lamos  
Instituto de Derecho Comparado  
Ministerio de Justicia  
Caracas, Venezuela

Sr. Eneu Garces dos Reis  
Servicio Federal  
Rio de Janeiro, R.J., Brasil

Ex Officio Member

Dr. Raúl F. Niño-Gómez  
Director del Registro de las Personas  
Provincia de Buenos Aires  
La Plata, Argentina

Sponsoring Organizations

Instituto Internacional de Registro  
y Estadísticas Vitales

Dr. Forrest E. Linder  
Director Ejecutivo

Dr. Iwao M. Moriyama  
Sub-Director Ejecutivo

Instituto Interamericano del  
Niño, OEA

Dr. Adolfo Gaete-Darbó  
Director, Proyecto FNUAP-IIN

Cr. Carlos H. Amado  
Especialista Principal



Dr. Linder (IIVRS), Dr. Seara (Argentina), Dr. Niño-Gómez (Argentina), Dr. Gaete-Darbó (IACI), Dra. Lamos (Venezuela), Srta. Sotomayor (México), Cr. Amado (IACI), Sr. Reis (Brasil) and Prof. Marchant (Chile). Not in photograph, Dr. Moriyama (IIVRS)

THE NATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND THE URGENCY  
OF ITS ADAPTATION TO A MODERN SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

All countries face the need for economic and social planning. This is particularly true of developing countries where resources are limited. Demographic information should be considered essential for this purpose.

Vital statistics are an important demographic component and are a by-product of civil registration. Due to deficiencies in civil registration in the developing countries, available vital statistics are, as a rule, incomplete, since they do not cover all vital events. Therefore, they have limited value for national planning purposes.

The present poor state of civil registration stems from the fact that both the general public and high ministerial officials are unaware of the value of civil registration and documentation of vital events. In view of this, a group of international organizations which met in July 1979, under the auspices of the Inter-American Children's Institute, requested the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics to draw the attention of high government officials to the need for providing adequate support to the functions of civil registration and the production of vital statistics. In response to this request, the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, in collaboration with the Inter-American Children's Institute, organized a small Committee of Experts in the Iberian-American countries, and charged it with the preparation of a suitable document specially directed to high government officials in Latin America. This Committee, under the Chairmanship of Dr. Jorge P. Seara, prepared the report herewith submitted for consideration. Dr. Seara and the members of the Committee are to be commended for the time and effort devoted to the preparation of this document.

It is hoped that this report will serve as a useful basis for discussion at various governmental levels and in national seminars. It is also hoped that discussion will constitute the first steps toward the modernization of the civil registration and vital statistics system in all the countries of the Americas.

Dr. Rodrigo Crespo Toral

Director General  
Inter-American Children's  
Institute

Dr. Forrest E. Linder

President  
International Institute for  
Vital Registration and Statistics

## SUMMARY

1. The extensive activities carried out at the international level towards the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics indicate the fundamental importance of this problem. The efforts made in many countries in this regard are well known, but the results have not been very productive and little progress has been achieved in the past few decades.

2. The purpose of this document is to underscore for the benefit of top-level authorities in the Governments of the Latin American Region the importance of civil registration and the need for the modernization of the civil registration system.

3. The modern doctrine in the field of civil registration has been formulated by international organizations. Civil registration is now recognized as a system with two basic functions, namely, the documentation of the family organization and the collection of statistical data.

4. The family, as the natural and fundamental unit of society, is entitled to the protection of the State. The juridical system governing the relations between individuals organized within the family and its connection to the State depends on civil registration laws and procedures.

5. The family, as a social institution, shows little sign of atrophy, much less of disappearing. However, it has changed. We are living in a time when the extended family is being defined by the State and, within that, the nuclear family.

6. The civil registration process also involves the collection of data to produce vital statistics, an essential component of demographic statistics. They have multiple uses. Suffice it to say that the present day development planning cannot be conducted without adequate demographic data.

7. As a data collection system, the civil registration agency must work in close and continuous cooperation with the institution charged with processing and compiling vital statistics. Both comprise the so-called administrative system for which the strengthening, and, in some cases, the establishment of National Committees of Vital and Health Statistics has been recommended. The quality of vital statistics depends, to a great extent, on the appropriate functioning of both sectors of the system.

8. Social security, military draft, personal identification, voter registration and social welfare operate programs based on information provided by the civil registration system.

9. In order for the civil registration program to achieve its goals, particularly with respect to the completeness of registration of vital events, the civil registration system will have to rely on the members of the community. Registration is therefore an indicator of the public participation in the judicial system. In this way, civil registration contributes to the social effectiveness of the law.

10. The interdisciplinary nature of civil registration has not been sufficiently emphasized. This characteristic may be a barrier to the further study and improvement of the civil registration system.

11. Civil registration contributes in many ways to the normal functioning of society. If the State deems it important to improve family organization in order to guarantee social order; to guarantee human rights; to promote public health, and to make available better information on which to base development planning, it should also consider improvement of civil registration an important and pressing matter.

12. The international organizations have formulated the principles and recommendations relating to civil registration. No large investments are required to implement these recommendations. Yet, they offer a means of developing an efficient system capable of coping with the great changes in the social structure occurring in the Region.

13. The tenet that civil registration is working effectively in Latin America today is impossible to uphold. The system covers neither the whole territory nor the total population; there is serious underregistration of births, deaths and fetal deaths, even exceeding 50 percent in some areas; there are no suitable methods being used for the retrieval of records, and the statistical data collected are incomplete and inaccurate, thus reducing their statistical value.

14. It is suggested that the modernization process of civil registration be planned carefully. The reforms should be endorsed by all sectors concerned. With this in mind, the creation of an ad hoc presidential committee is an appropriate action.

## BACKGROUND

Extensive international and regional activities have been carried out in the last decades for the improvement of civil registration and the vital statistics systems in each country. Two Inter-American Seminars on Civil Registration have been held, the first in 1954 and the second in 1964. Ten years later, a Meeting of the Group of Experts for the Improvement of Demographic Statistics Information Sources took place in Buenos Aires, organized by the United Nations through the Economic Commission for Latin America and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, with the cooperation of the Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía. This meeting was attended by members of the Statistical Office of the United Nations; the United Nations Fund for Population Activities; the Technical Assistance Office of the United Nations; the Pan-American Health Organization; the Inter-American Statistical Institute and the Inter-American Children's Institute, the latter two specialized agencies of the Organization of American States; the Economic Commission for Latin America; the Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía; the University of North Carolina, United States; the University of Chile; the Registro Nacional de las Personas, and the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses and the Department of Health Statistics of Argentina.

In 1977, Montevideo, Uruguay, served as the site for a Meeting on Strategies for the Improvement of Civil Registration Data, which was attended by members of the Pan-American Health Organization, the National Center for Health Statistics of the United States, the Agency for International Development, and the Inter-American Children's Institute. And, in 1980, an Iberian-American Conference on Strategies for the Improvement of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System took place in Lima, Perú, organized by the National Statistical Institute, with the cooperation of the National Center for Health Statistics of the United States of America.

The United Nations has published the reports of the above-mentioned Inter-American Seminars on Civil Registration. In 1953, the United Nations also published the Principles for a Vital Statistics System and, in 1974, a review of said Principles entitled, Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System. In 1955, the Manual of Vital Statistics Methods was published. Modern doctrine in the field of civil registration and vital statistics is based on these documents. However, no country has yet adopted completely the principles proposed in these publications to set up or reorganize its civil registration system.

In order to complete the picture of international activities in this field, mention should be made of the creation, in 1974, of the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, as a worldwide organization devoted to promoting the improvement of civil registration in all countries; the formation, in 1979, within the Inter-American Children's Institute, of the Regional Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Unit devoted to this same end, to be accomplished through the discharge of other functions; the development of bilateral cooperative activities in this area in various countries of the world, and the renewed activity of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities in the last few years, through provision of direct and indirect technical assistance to countries in order to improve their civil registration services and the administrative systems in charge of vital statistics production at the national level.

Even more recently, at its Twenty-First Regular Session (February 1981), the Secretary General of the United Nations Presented a report on progress in

civil registration and vital statistics to the Statistical Commission of that organization. This report presents a review of the activities around the world on behalf of civil registration and vital statistics, stressing that, particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America, civil registration and vital statistics systems are still unsatisfactory, and a working program was proposed by the Statistical Office of the United Nations towards promoting improvements in this field. This proposal was adopted by the Statistical Commission, which is the principal branch of the United Nations working in the field.

During the above-mentioned regular session of the Statistical Commission, the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics which is recognized by the Economic and Social Council as having consultative status in the second category, presented a report which stressed the importance of civil registration and vital statistics. In that report, emphasis was placed on the fact that implementation of many human rights depends on the existence of civil registration records, and that numerous indicators of social progress are derived from vital statistics.

If the international activities outlined above are considered important due to their scope, the degree of expertise involved, and their cost, then it must be recognized that the subject they deal with--civil registration and vital statistics--is also important. Otherwise, the international organizations, and specifically the United Nations which is permanently dedicated to programs that enable it to fulfill its own goals, would not have concerned itself with the subject of civil registration and vital statistics.

In view of the position adopted in this field by the international organizations and in light of the efforts deployed in recent years, the question should be asked: what is happening at the national level, since little progress has been observed in civil registration and the vital statistics producing systems in the last decades and what difficulties and barriers are impeding their improvement?

The efforts of several countries on behalf of civil registration have not passed unnoticed, even though the original goals were not met completely.

## GOALS

This document has been specifically prepared for high officials of the governments of the Region, and particularly for those in charge of national development policy. Its aim is to place civil registration in the proper context of governmental activity, stress the importance of its contribution to the social and economic development process, and to emphasize the pressing need for improvement while determining basic organizational requirements.

The following pages contain an outline of a modern civil registration system based on international doctrine principles. A summary on the present situation in Latin America is provided and measures are suggested for implementation of the process of change.

## THE DOCTRINE OF CIVIL REGISTRATION

There is a distinction between the Latin American civil registration systems and those of other regions of the world. Due to the adoption of general principles taken from the Spanish legislation in some countries and from French legislation in others, the civil registration systems in Latin America were created primarily to take care of family organization. This fact has produced unique organizational characteristics. To that role others were later added, chief among them is that civil registration is the basic data collection system for national vital statistics.

The civil registration function is now considered as fulfilling two essential functions: documentation of family organization (legal function) and the collection of statistical information (statistical function). But this does not exclude the possibility of its undertaking other collaborative functions which often gain much importance.

Civil registration is, in essence, a method for collecting and storing information. The formalities surrounding the reporting of an event and the shape of the document in which it is recorded will depend on the nature of the information and the target sought when collecting it. If the information is of a legal nature and is of permanent interest, reporting is surrounded by certain formalities and the document must have certain characteristics to guarantee its permanence. In turn, if the information is of a statistical nature and it is passed on to other agencies to be further rearranged and summarized, the formalities for the reporting are less sophisticated and the document with which the data are recorded may have other characteristics.

### Legal Function

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that "...the family is the natural and fundamental unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State." The juridical function is precisely related to the legal organization of the family, composed of individuals linked by kinship bonds, and consists of registering the occurrences and events that constitute the source of the civil status of persons, i.e., according to internal recommendations, births, deaths, marriages, separations, divorces, annulments, adoptions, legitimations and recognitions. From the juridical point of view, this is the working field proper of civil registration. This means that the civil registration process contains the legal system regulating the relations among the individuals organized within the family and their bonds with the State. In order that this entire legal system can be organized and operated properly, it is essential that said events be recorded in authentic documents that prove their occurrence or execution. The exclusive purpose of their being registered is to produce official, full and permanent proof of their occurrence, so that they may be easily validated at any time.

### The Family

The family has been defined as a group of persons linked by marriage, descendance or adoption. Unlike the individual, mankind perpetuates itself so that if the laws protecting the individual are important, so much more so are the laws related to the preservation of the human species, because they protect greater interests. The propagating of the species takes place within the family based on the natural male-female association.

The family has changed. From male-female natural instinctive family, we have gone to a formal entity regulated by the State. And within this last category, a distinction is made between the patriarchal or extended family, and the nuclear family, also known as the modern family. The first is characterized by the presence of two or more generations within the family structure and several relatives. The second is formed by only two generations: parents and children. This evolution is not absolute. Nuclear families may be found in some primitive societies, and vice versa, patriarchal or extended families are found in industrialized societies. Sociologists and demographers eagerly speculate on the influence that various types of families have on industrial or economic development and, in turn, on the influence of development on the composition and number of each one of these types.

Although, as some authors have stated, this is a field of research rather than a branch of knowledge, one firm conclusion may be stated: the social institution of the family shows little signs of becoming atrophied, much less of disappearing, the high divorce rates of many countries notwithstanding. In those same countries, there are high remarriage rates which show that divorce is a rejection of a given person rather than of the marriage institution. Nor could arguments be made against the above conclusion based on the limited number of children, because the decrease of fertility implies that parenthood is rejected, not the family.

#### The Statistical Function

This function consists of collecting the necessary information to produce vital statistics, which are part of demographic statistics. The demographic information is obtained through two major methods: that of enumeration or census and that of registration.

Population censuses are normally carried out every ten years and, for this same reason, they may only furnish a static statistical picture of the population. That is their main limitation. Therefore, the census statistics do not meet the demands of sociologists and demographers and are of practically no use to public health specialists. Vital statistics, in turn, for which data are collected through civil registration as the events occur, furnish current and continuous demographic figures during the period between each census and permit the study of population trends.

Demographic studies based on vital statistics may cover three aspects: population estimates (number of inhabitants, composition and distribution for programs related to transportation, labor, housing, public health, agricultural production and distribution of commercial and consumer goods, etc.); population forecasts (number of inhabitants, composition and distribution on a future date to determine the needs in terms of housing, schools, teachers, etc.), and special analytical studies (knowledge of situations and trends in terms of marriage, legitimacy, fertility, relative and absolute importance of causes of death, etc.). Civil registration, as a basic data collecting function, has an indirect yet very important role to play in all of these aspects.

#### The Vital Statistics Administrative System

The functions described in the above paragraphs are closely related because they refer to the same events. In the performance of its legal function, civil registration records the occurrence of events related to the civil status of the

persons which in statistical terminology are known as vital events. About these, civil registration then collects additional data for the processing of the corresponding statistics.

It should be noted that, in compliance with its obligations as the source of statistical information, civil registration is only responsible for the collection of the basic data which are usually then turned over to a statistical processing agency. In Latin America, in 12 out of 18 countries, the processing rests with the Statistical Services; in six, this responsibility is shared between the Statistical Service and the Public Health Service. No Civil Registration Service participates in this process.

According to the above, in the Latin American Region, the production of vital statistics is vested in two or three administratively independent agencies which have to work in permanent cooperation to carry out this task for the collective good. In other words, in its capacity as a data collection entity, civil registration and the processing agencies constitute what in administrative science is known as an administrative system.

Depending on its stage of development, civil registration may also be part of several other administrative systems. It should be stressed that for an effective organization and operation of any administrative system, all component parts must achieve a minimum of proficiency.

A vital statistics system implies adoption of a set of administrative provisions so that the agencies involved can cooperate in their production. These provisions entail: a definition of the data to be collected; geographic coverage of the information; determination of the structure of the system as to its component agencies and a definition of responsibilities and lines of authority; the creation of a directing body composed of representatives from the participating agencies charged with establishing technical and procedural rules; the evaluation of the system, and determination of the coordinating procedures between the component organizations.

The above requires that public authorities recognize that the Civil Registration Office is part of a group of institutions which, at the national level, must cooperate with one another and work harmoniously with well defined goals to improve the living standards of all. That is the crux of planning which is considered so important in our time. This is not an easy undertaking because it requires that technical sectors, which have worked independently and separately for a long time, find the common language and reciprocal understanding that motivates them to match plans and actions.

#### Other Functions of Civil Registration

Because civil registration provides the main means for proving age, civil status and therefore kinship, it becomes a mechanism for the effective operation of institutions such as social security, military draft, voter registration, personal identification and social assistance services, among others. It should be mentioned, as an example, that payments to the disabled, life insurance, widowhood pensions and pensions to orphans and others, directly depend on proof of age, civil status and kinship. Likewise, military duties cover only a given period in the life of an individual, the beginning and end of which are determined by information from civil registration records. Also, the effective operation of an electoral system in general requires a minimum age for the granting

of the right and its timely termination in case of death. In both cases, proof of the event is furnished by civil registration records.

The collaborative functions vary according to the country but, in any case, the fact should be underscored that if they are performed inadequately or incompletely they will not allow the benefiting agencies to meet their own goals. It is essential that civil registration be fully developed and comply with its own basic vital and statistical functions. For this reason, the assignment of collaborative functions to this service should be undertaken gradually, consistent with its development, maturity, the training of its officials, and the cooperation received from the community.

It should also be noted that inter-institutional relations such as those outlined above, far from representing organizational defects in the public administration of a country, should be considered a natural consequence of the evolutionary development of a State.

#### Civil Registration and the Community

The social science concept includes all those disciplines which are devoted to the scientific study of man's behavior. Among them is sociology which studies man as "...component of a mass, of a group of individuals, to determine the way in which the groups behave and how that behavior can be modified." The global study of man requires certain tools that will allow for quantitative measures of the problems. Such tools are precisely demographic statistics, which include vital statistics.

Civil registration is not indifferent to man's behavior neither in isolation nor as a group, because, in order for vital statistics to portray reality and serve their purposes, they must be as complete, as accurate and as timely as possible. This implies that civil registration depends on the community and on the community's behavior. For this reason, the availability of complete, accurate and timely demographic data, together with the measurement of demographic events, reflect the extent to which the population has been effectively incorporated into society.

It should be remembered that modern civil registration must be an official, eminently technical, activity serving all of society without distinctions. At the same time, it needs societal help to achieve completeness of registration, which is one of its most difficult targets. In turn, the Government's position influences the trust of the public in civil registration, and the degree of completeness directly affects the documentation of family organization, the representation of vital statistics and the quality and operation of the organizations which customarily receive the information provided by civil registration. If registration is difficult for some sectors, due to inability of the registrar to reach the population in his area, faulty organization and operation, the existence of unsuitable legal provisions or excessive fees for the registration of occurrences of events, these sectors will inevitably be left out of the civil registration system more or less permanently.

The timely and voluntary registration of the occurrence of events is considered by sociologists as an indicator of the integration of people and groups to the prevailing juridical system, namely, the extent of man's integration into social life. From this angle, civil registration contributes to the social validity of the law, that is, it contributes to the application of the judicial

rules in force, in lieu of their falling into disuse after repeated violation. Conversely, noncompliance with compulsory registration of events may be interpreted as persons or groups who are not formally incorporated into the social system and become a certain kind of marginality. These may be the focus of social disruption by not sharing in the rules accepted by society as a whole, creating their own rules and resulting in stressful relationships.

Such marginality may be voluntary if it originates in and depends solely on the position adopted by persons or groups; or forced, if caused by faulty organization of the service proper or by legal difficulties in registration. This last consideration underscores the importance that civil registration be organized and operated in such a way that it offers to society a new image and motivation which should be different and more appealing than the present ones. For this reason, the modernization of civil registration should not be considered complete if, once the change process takes place, it is not accompanied by specific programs to win over the community, and to bring the community and civil registration together effectively and permanently.

### Interdisciplinary Nature of Civil Registration

There is still a dearth of literature on civil registration. The most important publications originate from international organizations. There are very few texts of national origin devoted specifically to the study of this topic. It is no wonder, therefore, that its complex interdisciplinary nature has not been sufficiently stressed, an important fact because this characteristic may constitute one of the major barriers hindering study and improvement.

Its legal function links registration to family law which provides the substantive bases. Much of its modus operandi can only be explained through this branch of the law. Sometimes progress is expected from civil registration, while forgetting its subordination to legal provisions difficult to modify, especially those contained in the civil code. That is why the study and approval of new legislation must be sufficiently flexible as to allow for adjustment to the ever-changing civil registration needs of society.

Its statistical function relates to demography and public health, with the agencies in charge of data processing and also with vital statistics users. On the other hand, at a time in which civil registration is expected to adopt fundamental changes, the application of the most modern administrative principles gains particular importance and relates it to administrative science. For the adoption of suitable reforms it is necessary to use the resources that such a science provides.

## THE UTILITY OF CIVIL REGISTRATION

### The Family

As stated earlier, the family as a social institution is not showing any signs of atrophy or of disappearing. If mankind is living in an era of regulated family, the State must set up and maintain an organization to effectively register the occurrences of events within families. It has also been said that the voluntary practice of civil registration constitutes a sign of acceptance of the prevailing juridical system and of the incorporation into social life. It contributes, therefore, to the social validity of the law and social peace, which is an indispensable feature for development. On the other hand, it is well known that children who grow up and develop in the midst of a legally constituted family attain a far better emotional balance, suffer fewer social maladjustment problems and present fewer public health problems. More recently, sociologists, psychologists, and special education specialists have proven that early stimulation of the newborn produces favorable results not attainable later and lasting throughout the individual's life, and, what is most important, it has been determined that the active interaction of the parents with the baby, not only the mother but both mother and father, is one of the most important features of such early stimulation. Consequently, and once again from this standpoint, facilitation of family organization is of vital importance.

### Human Rights

The achievement of some of the most important human rights that appear in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child depend on civil registration. Those States which have endorsed these declarations assumed the obligation of maintaining an organization to provide for such rights. The existence of inefficient civil registration or the non-existence of a civil registration service makes many of these rights practically illusory, e.g., the right of the child to be registered immediately after birth, and to have a name and a nationality; the right to be protected by his parents (support); the right to education; the right of the child (and juvenile) offender to special treatment; the right of the family to be protected, etc.

### Demography

The use of demographic statistics as basic information for the formulation of governmental policies, either in the field of economic development or in the so-called social sectors, is spreading more each day. The increasing demand for demographic statistics is mostly an indicator of the progress achieved in development planning, namely, of the progress achieved in replacing subjective opinions by objective observations based on reliable information of social events, that is, statistics. The data they provide are essential to define problems, propose solutions and measure progress. The measurement of living standards and the establishment of essential services such as housing, education, health and others, depend mostly on the availability of demographic information.

Vital statistics data which are collected by civil registration find their broadest field of application in public health, because they are the only ones capable of providing the information as soon as the events occur. The agencies in charge of the protection, treatment and promotion of health use the information at the local level for individual purposes: in mother-child programs, in the timely control of epidemic outbreaks and for several other purposes.

Subsequently, rearranged and summarized in statistical tables and graphs, this information is used in the planning, execution and evaluation of all its programs. Today, no study related to public health can dispense with statistics. It has been stated, as an example, that statistical information shows that child morbidity and mortality during the first year of life is closely related to living conditions of the family group in which it is born. Moreover, it has also been possible to assess, from a quantitative point of view, the complete dependence of the life, illness and death of the child on the level of economic development of the community as a whole. Consequently, child mortality is an indicator of the high cost of life that people pay for the forms of organization they have brought upon themselves, which are not always efficient and just.

On the other hand, some 36 out of the 149 social indicators appearing in the United Nations publication Social Indicators: Preliminary Guidelines and Illustrative Series are contingent upon vital statistics. Their importance in the evaluation of progress achieved is evident from the fact that such indicators have been selected for the evaluation of programs as important as the World Population Plan of Action and the World Plan of Action for the Attainment of the Goals of the International Women's Year.

### Housing

On the surface, there is no relation between civil registration and housing. Yet the need to build continuously arises from the fact that demographic changes are also continuous. A number of families are formed each year who demand housing and, consequently, it is necessary for the building industry to produce the required units. As stated in a document of the Economic Commission for Latin America, the formation of new families is doubtlessly the most dynamic factor in determining the need for new homes which can be subjected to most effective statistical control.

It should be borne in mind also that each day Latin America produces greater concentrations of population; urban centers are growing up to 5 percent each year, implying that the urban population doubles every 14 years. On the other hand, the rural population is growing more slowly. The gradual shifting of the rural population to towns implies a new form of life for migrants, with new demands and in many cases their incorporation into life within society requires their having available civil registration documentation, which they would not have needed in the rural milieu.

### Multidisciplinary Social Service

Of all the technical services that compose the public administration of a country, none give as much importance to the family as the social services. Their ultimate goal is human welfare, which is common to all the agencies that compose the public administration of a country, because that is also the ultimate goal of the State. When dealing with individuals, they attempt to achieve the total development of their potential, a concern which they share with educational services. But their essential features are that they look upon the individual as a member of a family and the family as the means through which individual well-being is achieved. This explains why the strengthening of the family is included among their most important immediate goals.

The above-mentioned commitment demands judicial recognition of the family as an irreplaceable social unit and of the (civil) status pertaining to each one

of its members. Both recognitions are obtained by means of civil registration. Moreover, if social service and social security are to be considered as a right to which the individual is entitled rather than a charitable function of the State, then the judicial determination of a person's existence constitutes a prerequisite to enjoying the benefits of such services.

In particular, from the point of view of such services, the registration of births, marriages and deaths facilitates the determination of the rights and duties of each member of a family as related to others, and of the family in relation to the society it composes.

In the field of child protection, the legal proof of the age of the child, which relies almost exclusively on civil registration, is important to avoid all forms of exploitation that occurs at an early age, such as, child slave trade, child labor, etc.

### Summary

It is no overstatement to say that if expansion and improvement of the civil registration services are not consistent with the great modifications of the social structures foreseeable in the Region, the inability of this service to meet the new requirements will become an obstacle to the achievement of the essential goals of social and economic development.

In accordance with the above, the question arises on whether the modern State can disregard the legal organization of the family; whether it can justify the non-existence or faulty operation of the organization which implements most human rights proclaimed by the United Nations; whether it can justify that public health agencies have no reliable vital statistics available as these are the most important tools for screening the principal health problems and for the planning and evaluation of programs, and whether, in sum, it can justify that its social and economic development plans ignore basic information provided by demographic statistics.

If the answers to all previous questions have been negative, then the modern State cannot manage with an efficient civil registration system.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF CIVIL REGISTRATION

The following paragraphs describe the most important features of the organization of a modern civil registration system, as set forth by international doctrine. A brief outline is also presented on the current situation of civil registration in Latin America concerning each feature.

### Civil Registration and Public Administration

It is understood that a civil registration service responsible for the legal organization of the family, the collection of information for the production of vital statistics and of several other cooperative tasks should be placed at the center of public administration, because it serves various State institutions including those in charge of national development planning. It is obvious that an agency of this type requires a given structure, organization and operation. The decisions to be adopted in this respect will make an important difference because they will have a direct influence on the system's efficiency.

When realizing the need for a structure, it is important to consider first the definition of the service's aims, because without this definition it is impossible to specify the functions that the agency is expected to perform. It will be possible to think about structure and organization only after these functions have been defined. In any event, the objectives should be fitted into the general goals of the economic and social planning of the country, so that civil registration may be one of the group of services that contribute to their implementation.

The goals of civil registration have undergone some changes in recent years. At the onset, it was only responsible for the legal organization of the family, but later the statistical or health laws added the statistical function, and other laws have entrusted cooperative tasks to it on a permanent basis.

The inclusion of the definition of objectives into civil registration law is favored, not only because such a definition will orient the sense of most provisions within that law, but also because in countries which are not yet administratively mature, as is the case with nearly all the countries of the American Region, the law reinforces and gives support to administration. From which it follows that an inadequate law provides weak support to the officials responsible for the management of the service.

### The Role of Legislation

Civil registration law, which determines organization and operation has a decisive bearing on the service's efficiency.

The registration of vital events occurring within the country's territory should be made compulsory by law for the population as a whole. Therefore, provisions should also be made for sanctions for non-compliance. The basic law should also include provisions related to the administrative systems in which civil registration participates, and particularly the administrative system for vital statistics, which is mentioned in the statistical laws of some countries, but is not always clearly outlined. When this happens, many of its provisions are inconsistent with those of the civil registration law and seldom favor the operation of the system, because they do not treat civil registration as an

institution which is useful and contributes valuable information, but as a subordinate and dependent agency that may be misused.

Approval of statutes that do not leave room for "discretionary authority," and that may annul administrative actions or hamper the organization's adjustment to the ever-changing needs of society, should be avoided.

It is also important that the registration system be uniform throughout the country, even in federal-type countries. This can be achieved through the approval of a single civil registration law; and in those cases where the prevailing judicial system demands approval of a law for each state or province, it should be borne in mind that nothing prevents their content to be uniform.

We cannot possibly strive for civil registration laws of the several countries of the Region to be identical, because they have to be consistent with the characteristics of each. However, in their essentials and in their basic concepts, they may be identical or at least of a similar nature. In this regard, the gist of the international principles and recommendations may be of great value.

The legislative panorama of the Latin American Region has negative characteristics. By and large, civil registration services of the Region have not obtained the legal support they need in order to provide efficient services to the community. Sometimes, the legal standards appear only in the civil law, in which case the organizational aspects are hardly dealt with because they do not come under the purview of that code. In other instances, standards appear in the civil or in family laws. In others, in a special law which may or may not be effective. In some cases, certain provisions may be found in civil or in family law, and others in the law governing the institution in charge of civil registration, such as the electoral tribunal, the municipalities or notary offices. On the other hand, the prevailing civil registration laws are markedly old fashioned as regards content, since even the most recent ones have just repeated concepts of previous laws, particularly concerning structure and organization, without incorporating modern principles. Besides, none of the prevailing laws include a good definition of the objectives of civil registration, taking into account all the functions that doctrine has assigned to it for years. It should also be stressed that in many countries the proliferation of laws, decrees and regulations concerning civil registration has become a drawback which is seriously hampering their study and application.

It may thus be concluded that the legal basis of civil registration in the Latin American Region is in urgent need of revision.

#### Structure and Organization

International organizations have also made recommendations as to the structure and organization of civil registration services. According to these suggestions, these agencies should be national in character, so that their actions may have country-wide coverage; they should be independent from the administrative point of view, so that they can operate separately from any other organization at the same governmental level; they should be administratively centralized in the sense that they must depend on a central body which should guide, direct and regulate their actions, and they should be functionally decentralized, since the registration of the occurrences of vital events must take place directly and exclusively at the local offices. These should cover the entire national

territory. All this favors the improvement of legal standards, facilitates the uniformity of procedures and methods, standardizes instructions and general documentation, and advisory services to and control of officials and offices are also enhanced.

In other words, it is expected that civil registration will consist of a directing body and a group of local offices with national coverage. It is also expected that a central file be organized including one of the two copies of each of the certificates or records issued by the local offices. This central file is deemed necessary to protect the documents against loss. It also permits copies of the records to be issued, at both local and central offices, an important benefit for the community.

It is crucial to divide the country's territory into registration areas (each one under a single registrar) and stipulate that the events are to be registered in the place where they occur, in order to facilitate a posteriori the placement of records. Latin America has a long way to go in this field. Civil registration has not yet achieved a suitable organization, seemingly because it has not had sufficient attention of the leadership. Civil registration services organized in accordance with the prescribed model are very few. Administrative evolution is at mid-point. Apparently, the desire to take advantage of the administrative organization of other institutions in the country rather than economic reasons have caused civil registration to be closely linked with municipalities, the courts, or notary offices, a procedure which greatly hampers the development of the civil registration function and recognition of its primary technical quality.

A public service may not be expected to work effectively if lacking a directing body. Out of 18 countries in the Inter-American Region, 15 have a unitary-type organization and only 3 have a federal-type organization. No legal or administrative difficulties in the first group preclude the existence of a central office of civil registration, such a body can be found in only 6 and is non-existent in the remaining 9 countries where administrative development has been lagging. It is understandable that in the countries with a federal-type organization, inter-state or inter-province coordination is more difficult. In none of the three is there a nationwide central office of civil registration. In all the countries, this office is in effect missing and solutions have been sought or are being sought. In fact, it should be recognized that the civil registration function is federal in nature, like many other functions which are of similar interest to the community. The approval of a national law would be a very significant step; and then, in order to ensure its uniform interpretation, a coordinating office, with legal support and well-defined functions, could be considered a start so long as the federal status of the function is approved and the creation of a central office is achieved.

It is discouraging to add that in Latin America the situation has not undergone any changes in the last 30 years as far as the existence of central civil registration offices is concerned.

In summary, it may be said that as long as present conditions of organization and operation of civil registration remain unchanged, the services delivered to the community will continue to be inadequate. There is a pressing need for an effective modernization process of the legal provisions which must create a particular organizational framework, thus simplifying and making documentation more suitable; facilitating registration and the correction of registration

procedures, and providing in the local civil registration offices and in the central file an effective index system for the retrieval of records.

#### Personnel: The Registrar

In the civil registration personnel area, all international recommendations make reference to the "registrar," that is, the officer who is directly responsible for the registration of occurrences of vital events at the local level. This reveals the importance assigned to this officer. But the recommendations are also applicable to the rest of the staff.

The registrars are the most important staff members of the whole agency because they are permanently in charge of compliance with the civil registration function. They are technical servants to the whole community. Stability and permanence in office and the guarantee of an administrative career, with possibilities of promotion, must be part of the conditions of the appointment. Duties must be clearly defined in the respective laws in order to facilitate compliance. The salary of the registrar must be paid by the State. In civil registration, a remuneration by fees is considered inadvisable since it develops a tendency of better serving those who pay and it is precisely in this sphere that those who cannot pay are also those who are most in need of assistance, attention and counsel by the registrar.

In keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of civil registration and the technical nature of the function, the registrar should be an adequately trained official. Completion of a specific training course should be a prerequisite to appointment.

The registrars should have local prestige, be persons of standing in the community, and reach such a position as to let them easily manage the recording of vital events occurring within the limits of their territorial jurisdictions.

In spite of the fact that the above-mentioned recommendations were, as a general rule, approved in Latin America over two decades ago, the personnel status is unsatisfactory, even as compared with that of the officials of other public services within the same country. Their salaries are inadequate, lack stability, and they need a continuing and intensive training process. In this respect, the situation in rural areas is particularly serious, because most frequently the registration function is the responsibility of people alien to civil registration whose basic training is incompatible with the task.

#### Documentation of Civil Registration

The basic documentation of civil registration has a direct influence on its organization, operation and efficiency. However, it has received little attention.

Civil registration requires certain basic documentation because, from a legal point of view, such documentation constitutes proof of the occurrences of vital events on which family organization rests; therefore, the reported events should be recorded in documents which must be permanently stored. And from the statistical point of view, registration is also based on certain documentation which provides the basic structure without which it cannot function.

There are three fundamental documents used by civil registration. In the vital statistics system, a distinction is made between data collection and data processing for all the countries of Latin America: the original document, the registration document and the statistical report. From the point of view of civil registration, the most important is the registration document, i.e., the book or card on which the occurrence of a vital event is recorded for legal purposes. It is permanent and it is used exclusively for legal purposes.

From the point of view of its format, there are two types: the book and the individual record (loose sheet) or card. For historical reasons, the book is still used in most countries of the Region, but this does not mean that presently the book is the best type of registration document, nor the most suitable to achieve an efficient civil registration operation. For technical reasons which are not pertinent to this document, there is now a tendency to replace it by a card.

It is expected that there will be only three types of registration: of births, of marriages and of deaths, and that the rest of the occurrences can be entered in the margin of the pertinent records. Thus, linkage of the records is facilitated and the operation is simplified. Special attention should be given to the choice of the format and content of each one of those records, in order to avoid unnecessary work and retain the attention of the public.

As regards documentation, the Latin American situation has not changed in the last decades, with some exceptions of minor modifications. As a general rule, the documentation used by the local registrars is complex, rudimentary, poorly designed and contains excessive detail which makes it unreliable and of limited use to the community. The filing systems, if any, are also notoriously deficient. The role of each one of the basic documents is often confused, due to lack of clear definitions of their objectives.

There have also been some cases where recent reforms created new types of records instead of adhering to the three above-mentioned ones, which implies that such reforms are not based on intrinsic merit. Sometimes, such changes result from entrusting civil registration with responsibilities that have nothing to do with its sphere of action.

#### Summary of the Present Civil Registration Situation in Latin America

It cannot be asserted that civil registration works effectively in Latin America. Many countries accept the fact that civil registration does not cover the whole national territory and the total population. That is, there are sectors of the population still not covered and there are sections of the national territory which do not have local civil registration offices. Under-registration of births and deaths is still serious. In some places it exceeds 50 percent. There is a large number of late registrations and many of them are several years in arrears.

The procedures for retrieving records are inadequate and sometimes they are inexistent; therefore, it becomes very difficult to obtain certificates or copies. For this reason, in some countries the vicious habit of double registration has spread. Consequently, the image of civil registration among the community is poor, and cooperation is poor. It is imperative to change that image. Otherwise, no active participation may be expected from the community, and, because of it, the goal of completeness of the registration will never be achieved.

The statistical data stemming from civil registration are not only incomplete inasmuch as registration is incomplete, they are also inaccurate because of the inadequate training of local registrars.

If the State deems it advisable to improve the organization of the family, strengthen social peace, facilitate the implementation of human rights, reduce public health problems, and have available better information which can serve as the basis for social and economic development planning, it should also deem it important and urgent to improve civil registration.

## INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

Civil registration involves various administrative systems. The most important is the vital statistics system. The following comments refer to that system although it is applicable to other systems as well.

The relationship between agencies of an administrative system does not only imply the fulfillment of a procedure or the exchange of documents. Experience shows that statistical agencies can prove very valuable to civil registration agencies, these in turn may be of service to health agencies, and the latter to the statistical agencies, in a network of interactions of mutual benefit which in the long run benefits the community. As a rule, no close attention has been paid to the nature of the relationships between the organizations composing the administrative system, and, for this reason, some services erroneously claim greater importance than others. They should all participate on an equal footing and have the same opportunity to discuss the extent of their cooperation and the expected form and periodicity of such joint efforts. This principle yields, among other benefits, the possibility of determining control on the quality and quantity of work from each of the agencies involved.

Taken as such, coordination is the orderly placement or systematic arrangement of joint efforts to reach a common goal. It is a procedure of a practical and methodological nature, excluding any idea of subordination.

Controversies have arisen on who is responsible for coordination, and the conclusion has been that every official should feel responsible for it. There is what may be known as a coordinating attitude which, if non-existent, may preclude all efforts in this sense.

In order to facilitate and develop suitable working relationships between agencies, the creation of committees composed of representatives of each one of the institutions concerned has been consistently recommended. A National Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Committee may serve as liaison to achieve the efficiency required by the vital statistics system of each country. Some conditions are necessary to ensure success in the performance of these committees:

- a) in principle, the representatives of the participating institutions should be the leading authorities of each agency involved; if not, the officials appointed should have sufficient authority to conclude agreements for their respective institutions;
- b) the committees should be comprised only of the agencies directly involved, in order to avoid an excessive number of members, delay studies, make discussion difficult, and hinder the adoption of agreements;
- c) it is important that the participants develop a sense of "inter-institutional loyalty" in their common status as technical officials who pursue the accomplishment of the State's purposes, putting these before those of their own institutions, and
- d) preferably, the officials composing the committee must be technical officials who have knowledge, or at least a general knowledge, of the nature and extent of the problems they must solve.

It is also advisable to remember that in this field, as well as in others, the genuine willingness of fostering and implementing initiatives is far more important than the availability of resources, a pretext that is commonly used. Better utilization can always be obtained from existing resources thanks to the inventiveness or application of administration techniques; in turn, if that genuine willingness is lacking, any action undertaken will be unsuccessful.

Such inter-agency coordination, which is crucial for the production of vital statistics, is virtually non-existent in Latin America. As a rule, the processing agencies, (statistics, health) which are better equipped with more highly trained officials, have limited themselves to instruction to civil registration officials on what to do and how to record the data without giving them the necessary background information to perform their function well. The outcome has been disastrous.

All the countries have at some time set up National Vital and Health Statistics Committees but practically none have yielded valuable results, and they have perished. None have fulfilled the requirements mentioned above. First, they turned into merely bureaucratic agencies, whose studies and conclusions were futile because the members did not have sufficient authority to compel their respective institutions to enforce them. Then they just simply ceased working. At the time of the formation of these Committees, several institutions expressed their interest in participating, perhaps as a way of gaining importance, but, later on, lacking a genuine interest in the work to be performed, they hampered the functioning of the Committee through repeated absenteeism. In none was the sense of "interinstitutional loyalty" mentioned above developed; a feeling which was frequently replaced by institutional jealousy. As a rule, the representatives of the member agencies lacked the necessary credentials.

The formation and operation of such committees is still very important in order to obtain high quality vital statistics. It is difficult to find a better way to ensure the efficiency of the system. Therefore, their formation, or the revision of the prevailing statues is deemed urgent in order to incorporate the mentioned recommendations.

## HOW TO APPROACH THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

### The Presidential Committee

Modernization of a complex organization such as a civil registration system must be carefully planned. Strategy should be planned to ensure success. The disciplines and sectors involved and concerned are many. It seems indispensable that the reforms include modifications to civil law or to those laws which include the substantive provisions governing the organization and operation of civil registration; the vital statistics system has points of view to express and interests to protect. Therefore, they should also participate in the process; the agencies and officials in charge of economic and social planning policy who constantly require demographic information, should also be included. Insofar as there exists a system of personal identification or one is planned, officials responsible for that sector should also participate.

In sum, the restructuring of a civil registration service is not, nor can it be one man's work or be restricted to a single sector of public administration. If there are several interested sectors, then the suitable step is to appoint an ad hoc commission or committee at the presidential level to take responsibility for planning the strategy of legal, organization and operative modernization of the civil registration and the vital statistics system. Among other things, the degree of incorporation of technological resources, personnel training, schedule of registration fees, and the study of an adequate budget for the new agency, are matters which deserve priority attention by the committee.

In those countries where there is a committee, the secretary of the committee should be the national director of civil registration. When it is a unitary-type country and does not have a national director, then the secretary of the committee could be the person or official that the Government is planning to appoint as national director of civil registration; and, if it is a federal-type country, the person or official the Government plans to appoint, either as national director, or a director of the organization coordinating the State or Provincial civil registration services should be appointed.

The proposal of an ad hoc commission or committee for this purpose might at first seem disproportionate. However, such action is justified through experience, because in the last few decades several attempts on the restructuring of civil registration from just one sector have been studied and even proposed and none have achieved either approval or implementation.

The presidential level is also justified by the political and administrative support that the commission needs for compliance with its function. The above leads to the conclusion that the study and proposal for change should have the soundest and broadest possible support. Therefore, it is necessary to set up a commission composed of representatives of all sectors interested in a new civil registration service.

### Modernization and Technology

The urgent need for modernization of the civil registration services of Latin America is indisputable. It is evident that this modernization should be shaped differently and bear distinct characteristics for each country. The question is how to modernize.

Mankind is close to entering the third millennium. Thus, it is absurd to close our doors to modern technology. Perhaps an axiom of administrative science will help: "First rationalize the system and then mechanize."

Rationalization is an extensive process consisting of measures to increase output and reduce costs and necessarily involves a primary decision on the utilization of technological resources. Such a decision, in turn, may be useful in guiding the whole process.

The weight of the axiom is evident if one considers that modern technology, while offering solutions to the most varied problems, adds new administrative problems which need to be solved, such as those related to the development of a new system which should meet the needs of the agency which will implement it; the adequate training of personnel in sufficient numbers who will assume responsibility for the management of the new technology, and the retention of specialized personnel who, as a general rule, receive salaries which are not inconsistent with those paid to the rest of the officials within the same agency. It has happened that shortcomings in the development of the system have turned it wholly inoperable, and it has also occurred that poor performance by employees in the application of a new system turns the investment that the technological tool represents into a pointless expense.

Therefore, in preparing for the incorporation of modern technology, it is advisable to go through the following analytic stages beforehand: new definition of the goals of the service; updating of the legislation distinctive for the country; proper structure and organization; massive and intensive training of personnel who should be given proper status and remuneration; simplification of the documentation in use and preparation of alphabetical indexes for efficient records, as well as of the rest of the procedures necessary to guarantee better service to the community. In any case, once this process has been accomplished, the incorporation of technological resources will become simpler.

On behalf of technology, it should be said that in the last few years costs have been considerably reduced and that seemingly this trend will continue in the immediate future. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to warn that manpower, when duly trained, has not followed the same line. On the contrary, the salaries demanded are so high that they often constitute a very difficult problem to overcome.

On the other hand, international recommendations indicate that administrative systematization may furnish civil registration with the efficiency it needs. That is the most pressing and vital task. The incorporation of modern technology could thus be considered optional and be carried out only insofar as it is justified and the conditions prevailing in the country so warrant. Studies undertaken in several countries indicate that administrative systemization may be considered as self-financing, based on an appropriate fee schedule which encourages timely registration and does not penalize the poor. As to the initial cost of the reform, there are several ways of obtaining international, multilateral and bilateral assistance, which may contribute to their financing.

Attempts for change made so far in the area of civil registration show that in the countries there is still much bewilderment on how to proceed. Indeed, none has promulgated a general structural reform. There are countries where civil registration has access to a large computer and where no benefit is derived due to ignorance of the new system. In some others, the wrong technology

has been thoughtlessly chosen. After enormous efforts and considerable cost, the use of the tool has been or is being discontinued. The point is that civil registration has special features which should be understood in depth before attempting the adoption of any given technology.

Finally, given the present situation of civil registration in the Region, it is advisable to think of only one structural reform, in lieu of a number of partial reforms, and the careful planning of that one reform in all its aspects should be considered essential.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE IIVRS TECHNICAL PAPERS

1. *A Programme for Measurement of Life and Death in Ghana*, D.C. Mehta and J.B. Assie, June 1979
2. *Vital Statistics System of Japan*, Kozo Ueda and Masasuke Omori, August 1979
3. *System of Identity Numbers in the Swedish Population Register*, Karl-Johan Nilsson, September 1979
4. *Vital Registration and Marriage in England and Wales*, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, London, October 1979
5. *Civil Registration in the Republic of Argentina*, Jorge P. Seara and Marcelo E. Martin, November 1979
6. *Coordinating Role of National Committees on Vital and Health Statistics*, World Health Organization, Geneva, January 1980
7. *Human Rights and Registration of Vital Events*, Nora P. Powell, March 1980
8. *The Organization of the Civil Registration System of the United States*, Anders S. Lunde, May 1980
9. *Organization of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System in India*, P. Padmanabha, July 1980
10. *Registration of Vital Events in Iraq*, Adnan S. Al-Rabie, September 1980
11. *Generation of Vital Statistics in Mexico*, General Bureau of Statistics, Mexico, November 1980
12. *Age Estimation Committee in Qatar*, Sayed A. Taj El'Din, December 1980
13. *The Development of the Vital Statistics System in Egypt*, Gamal Askar, January 1981
14. *Vital Statistics Data Collection and Compilation System: Hong Kong*, Donna Shum, March 1981
15. *Major Obstacles in Achieving Satisfactory Registration Practices and Vital Events and the Compilation of Reliable Vital Statistics*, IIVRS, May 1981
16. *Methods and Problems of Civil Registration Practices and Vital Statistics Collection in Africa*, Toma J. Makannah, July 1981
17. *Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in El Salvador*, Enrique Olmado Sosa, July 1982
18. *Recommendations from Regional Conferences and Seminars on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics*, IIVRS, September 1982
19. *Potentials of Records and Statistics from Civil Registration Systems for Health Administration and Research*, Iwao M. Moriyama, September 1982
20. *Improving Civil Registration Systems in Developing Countries*, Forrest E. Linder, October 1982
21. *Social Indicators Derived from Vital Statistics*, Nora P. Powell, November 1982
22. *The Operation of the Vital Statistics System of the United States of America*, Anders S. Lunde, April 1983
23. *Demographic Information from Vital Registration Offices in México, 1982*, Juan Carlos Padilla, José García Nuñez and Jaime Luis Padilla, June 1983
24. *General Description of Population Registration in Finland*, Hannu Tulkki, July 1983
25. *The National Importance of Civil Registration and the Urgency of Its Adaptation to a Modern Society*, Committee on Legal and Organizational Requirements for a Civil Registration System in Latin America, August 1983