

#COUNTINGEVERYONE

# CRVS Leadership in Rwanda



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Rwanda's civil registration programs are providing the country's population with increasingly accessible services to record vital events such as births and deaths. The success of its programs is possible through strong leadership and intra-governmental coordination, occurring at the national and sub-national levels.

Robert Gakire and Alypio Nyandwi are two champions of coordination and collaboration across government departments for Rwanda's civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system. Gakire serves as the Director General of Governance and Decentralization in the Ministry of Local Government, and Nyandwi is the Monitoring & Evaluation and Reports Specialist at the Ministry of Health.

Both cite Rwanda's 2020 Birth and Death Act as instrumental in setting the stage for additional registration points, allowing for civil registration to happen across diverse settings, including in all health facilities and at the lowest administrative unit—the Cell level. This has removed significant barriers to registration services and brought them closer to communities.

As Gakire has expressed, "Civil registration is like any other human right. We decided to come up with the Act of 2020 to improve quality of service delivery, but also to make services more reliable and more affordable to every citizen."

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The act allowed Rwandans to register births and deaths at medical facilities and at decentralized registration points—expanding from about 400 birth and death registration points across the country to 2,788. According to Nyandwi, “People used to go to administrative entities or agencies to register birth and death. It was very uncomfortable to make [people] travel many times to seek services. Government stakeholders in those agencies thought it could be better to have the services integrated in the existing settings in the health sector, to allow people to access services as a one-stop service center.”

By leveraging existing government structures for more decentralized CRVS service provision—as well as enhanced coordination and efficiency gains—the country’s CRVS system experienced accelerated improvements. Champions of these improvements within the Rwandan government successfully increased buy-in at all levels, and encouraged strong collaboration and shared understanding of roles and responsibilities throughout the system.

Gakire notes the need to engage stakeholders across multiple levels of government, from policy and law makers to those individuals who can register vital records. “There should be a working relationship between not only the central government and local government, but also engaging the legislature, as people who enact laws. So you can create a framework where you can work together to solve the issues of CRVS.

## Key Success Factors

- In 2020, the Government of Rwanda passed the Births and Deaths Act to decentralize birth and death registration in health facilities and at the Cell level, bringing services closer to the population.
- This has led to an increase in registration points from 400 to 2,788; with more access to registration services for Rwandans, this will improve CRVS completeness and coverage to achieve universal birth and death registration in Rwanda by 2030—in line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- Birth registration completeness has significantly increased from 56% in 2016 to 86% in 2020.
- Death registration completeness was 30% in 2020—three times the average of other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. What’s more, quality control and improvement of hospital cause of death data meant a significant reduction in the number of deaths coded to unusable causes—from 60% in 2018 to 35% in 2021.
- The introduction of an institutionalized training program on correct medical certification of cause of death for both in-service and pre-service physicians is being led by the clinical practice regulating body, Rwanda’s medical and dental council. Eighty-seven percent of physicians have now completed this required course as part of the licensure process. This has played a vital role in improving the quality of mortality data.
- Through political support, coordinated integration within existing government structures and clear communication to the population, Rwanda has accelerated desired change within six months and created opportunities for the government to drive participation and expand the program.