A well-organized Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system is essential for gathering and utilizing information vital to providing services to any population. When effectively implemented, CRVS can play a crucial role for institutions and individuals requiring specific data, remarked Jean Claude Musabyimana, Rwanda's Minister of Local Government (MINALOC), during an event honoring Gakenke District. The district was recognized for outperforming others in delivering civil registration services.

The remarks were made on Tuesday, August 27, as Rwanda joined the rest of Africa in celebrating Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Day, an event dedicated to promoting accurate civil registration and recording of vital statistics across the continent.

Minister Musabyimana attended the event in Kivuruga Sector, Gakenke, where he praised local officials and residents for their commitment to civil registration. The day also marked the launch of a national week-long campaign aimed at raising awareness about the importance of civil registration.

"The information obtained from an optimal CRVS system is crucial for tracking individual births, profiling mortality and causes of death, and monitoring key demographic indicators. These data play a fundamental role in planning and monitoring public health outcomes, as well as in other policy areas," stated Musabyimana.

Vital event registration systems involve multiple business processes and actors, including those responsible for notification, registration, and certification. Rwanda has established a strong foundation for managing vital events and maintaining accurate civil registration records.

Gakenke Mayor Vestine Mukandayisenga emphasized the importance of citizens taking ownership of this achievement and fully utilizing the opportunities it offers. "The system addresses the challenges of cost, time, and distance that previously hindered access to vital services. Continuous and effective awareness campaigns are necessary to ensure that people understand the benefits and are encouraged to use the system fully," she said.

The standard operating procedures have been designed to establish clear process

paths by incorporating the ten CRVS steps recommended by best practices. The involvement of multiple institutions and stakeholders requires guidance on sharing, producing, and accessing civil registry information.

Muhire Paterne, who oversees civil registration in Kivuruga Sector, highlighted the numerous benefits of having a comprehensive digital civil registration and vital statistics system. He explained that it makes services more reliable, accessible, cost-effective, and faster for citizens.

“The system addresses issues related to cost, time, and distance when seeking vital services such as birth registration, marriage, divorce, and adoption. The impacts are far-reaching, contributing to the overall development and governance of the country,” said Muhire.

Florence Manirakiza, a 35-year-old resident of Kivuruga Sector, shared her experience with the previous system. She noted that long distances, a complex process, and a cumbersome paper-based system had prevented many families from registering civil status events. “I am happy that the government decided to digitalize and integrate civil registration services into the health sector, and to decentralize registration services to bring them closer to us, the local citizens,” she said.

Manirakiza Florence, a resident from Kivuruga sector in Gakenke District

Despite the care taken in drawing up civil status records, errors or omissions still occur and must be corrected. Samuel Hakizimana explained that while some errors are clerical and do not alter the substantive value of the record, others can have serious consequences. “For example, a date error on a birth certificate could turn an adult into a minor,” he noted.

Rwanda’s civil registration and vital statistics system has recently undergone major changes to ensure it adheres to high-performance standards. These changes include revising the legal framework, digitalizing, decentralizing, and integrating systems to ensure optimal coverage and exhaustive recording of civil status events, such as live births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and adoptions.

As of February 17, 2020, all civil registers are available only in electronic format, three years after the publication of Law No. 06/2020 in the Official Gazette of the

Republic of Rwanda. Before 2020, Rwanda had 446 local registration sites across 416 sectors and 30 embassies abroad. Following the upgrade to a digital system, there are now 3,220 civil registration service points across the country.

According to statistics from MINALOC, Gakenke District achieved the highest score in providing quality civil registration services, with a score of 99% in the last financial year. Nyarugenge District came in second with 98.8%, followed by Muhanga with 94.8%, Huye with 94.6%, and Nyabihu in fifth place with 94.4%.