

Final evaluation of the Centre of Excellence  
for CRVS Systems

Final report  
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## Abbreviations

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APAI-CRVS	Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
CDC	US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
CoE	Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System
ConVERGE	Connecting Vital Events Registration and Gender Equality
CR	Civil Registration
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
EC	Executive Committee
EQ	Evaluation question
FY	Fiscal year
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GFF	Global Financing Facility
GPSDD	Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IT	Information Technology
IUSSP	International Union for the Scientific Study of Population
LMICs	Low- and middle-income countries
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MTE	Mid-term evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSO	National Statistical Office
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMF	Performance Measurement Framework
RMNCAH	Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health
Swiss TPH	Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute
UN	United Nations
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
VS	Vital Statistics
WHO	World Health Organization

# Executive summary: Final evaluation of the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems

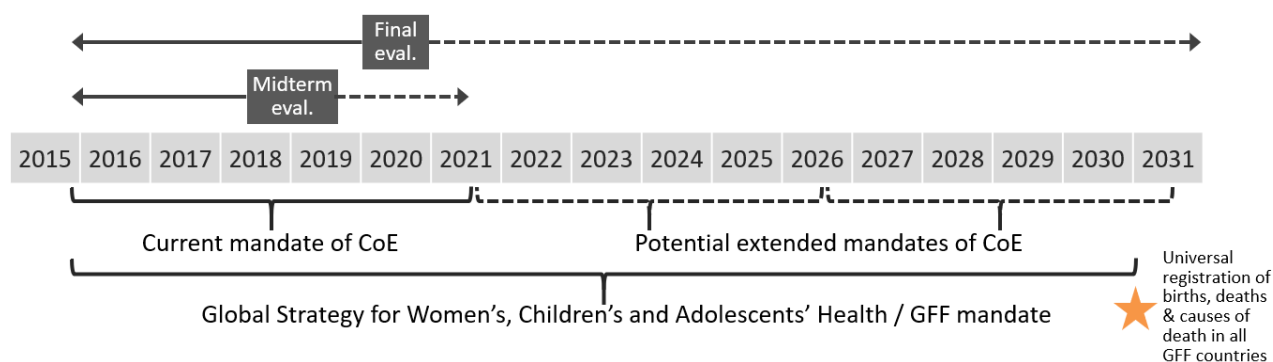
## About the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems, which register and produce statistics on births, deaths and cause of death, marriage, divorce and other life events as stipulated by national laws, are increasingly recognized as essential for both the attainment and the measurement of development goals. In 2015, the Government of Canada joined this global cause as part of its broader commitment to Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH). Much of Canada's efforts have been channeled through the Global Financing Facility (GFF, housed in the World Bank), a platform of multiple donors which also prioritizes the improvement of CRVS systems in its efforts to eliminate preventable maternal and child deaths in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). A funding partnership between the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) founded a Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems (known as the CoE), which works in close collaboration with the GFF to operationalize Canada's commitment to maternal and child health.






With an initial mandate stretching from late 2015 to late 2020 (recently extended to 31 July, 2021), the CoE was intended to be a global **hub for CRVS research, innovation, best practice, technical assistance, and expertise**. With this ambitious goal, and a \$16m CAD budget, the CoE created a complex web of interrelated program activities including providing direct and indirect technical assistance to governments of LMICs on CRVS improvement; nurturing and building a directory of CRVS experts; generating, synthesizing, and disseminating knowledge on CRVS; compiling an online Resource Library of CRVS evidence and guidance; and engaging with the broader development ecosystem as CRVS thought leaders, especially in the area of gender.

## About the evaluation

In 2018, the CoE commissioned an external midterm evaluation to identify lessons learned and help shape the remainder of the five-year mandate. In early 2020, the CoE commissioned Cathexis Consulting, Inc. to conduct **a final evaluation of the CoE to sum up the accomplishments and learnings of this first mandate**, and look towards the possibility of a future extension. The chart below shows where this evaluation is situated in the CoE's overall lifespan:



Evaluation questions focused on **outcomes** (improved CRVS systems, increased use of evidence by CRVS stakeholders), **strategy** (institutional establishment, niche, program model, adaptation, partnerships, enablers and barriers), and **scalability/sustainability** in the future. Answers to these questions were triangulated from five lines of evidence:

	Review of ~150 program documents
	Quantitative indicators from the CoE's Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) up to FY19-20
	44 interviews with regional-global stakeholders, CoE staff, GAC, GFF, and broader IDRC
	8 interviews and surveys with national CRVS implementers
	Ongoing consultation with CoE staff through biweekly meetings

## Key accomplishments of the CoE to date

### Gaining visibility and gathering steam

The CoE has reached an impressive **level of establishment, recognition, and credibility**. After some initial challenges in recruitment, the CoE was off to a quick start with a small but highly effective staff. After five years, the CoE has proven its credibility: major players in the CRVS arena (the UN's Population Fund, Children's Fund, UN Regional Economic Commissions) have sought to partner with it, it has been invited to join important CRVS-related groups, and it has attracted diverse and high-level participants to its conferences, meetings, and events. Moreover, the CoE is gathering momentum. Virtually all of the indicators show healthy year-over-year growth since the beginning, and many of the indicators show **major acceleration in the most recent fiscal year** (see table to the right), indicating that **the CoE is now truly coming into its own**.

Indicator	FY 15-17	FY 17-18	FY 18-19	FY 19-20
8. # of experts mobilized	6	9	10	45
15. # of participants attending events	33	94	59	433
23. # research outputs produced/commissioned	1	2	6	21
24. # of tools/guides/etc. developed/disseminated with CoE support	6	10	4	40
25. # of unique visits to CoE website	N/A	798	4,805	13,726
27. # of workshops/knowledge sharing events supported	5	7	6	24

“

*The Centre of Excellence became a gathering point for all these organizations who have a stake [in CRVS], and finally they have a platform and place to share information with each other and work on a common strategy.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

“

*Understanding how to do CRVS systems, what are lessons learned from past experiences – only CoE is doing this. That’s a huge gap they are working to fill. When you want to do research projects, it’s only the CoE listening.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

“

*[The CoE] is a remarkably constructively critical voice when it comes to the intersection of CRVS, gender, equity, identity, and development...in terms of the opportunity to give everyone a name, a nation, and a legal identity.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

### Finding its place in a crowded field

Stakeholders point to several critical and unique value-adds that the CoE now brings to the CRVS field:

- **Neutral convenor with a holistic approach to CRVS.** The CoE is the only organization in the world with a mandate that is both global and all CRVS-systems oriented. This gives the CoE an unusually holistic lens, in contrast to UN agencies with their more narrowly defined mandates, and allows it to be a unique neutral party with convening power. The CoE’s “life-course”<sup>1</sup> approach to CRVS spans the full spectrum of registration-worthy life events including the neglected areas of marriage and divorce. In addition, the CoE’s twin mandate of country-level support and global thought leadership creates powerful synergies, as national practice is turned into global knowledge and vice-versa.
- **Hub of CRVS research and development.** Although the CoE itself does not always market itself as research-focused, the CRVS field considers the CoE’s research function to be one of its greatest contributions to the field. The CoE has commissioned, supported, and disseminated many important research outputs on CRVS’s value, current state, challenges, pitfalls, and promising practices. This mandate is aided by the CoE’s placement at IDRC, and by its **bilingualism**, which has led to most of its knowledge products, dissemination activities, and capacity-building offerings being available to both French- and English-speakers (and some Spanish-speakers), in contrast to the predominately English language-centred literature.
- **Champion of the gendered dimensions of CRVS.** The CoE is considered the pre-eminent thought leader in this important, cross-cutting CRVS sub-topic. The CoE established itself early in this field, with a much-praised, first-of-its-kind global conference on gender and CRVS in February 2018 that marked a seminal moment for the visibility of the organization. Since then, it has remained relentlessly active in this arena, convening a second international conference in 2020, producing knowledge briefs, mainstreaming gender in most of its research grants and partnerships, and guiding global discussion on the gender gap in death registration and the importance of marriage registration for women’s empowerment.
- CoE has shown thought leadership in the equity dimensions of CRVS more generally, developing niches in **CRVS and identity management; CRVS and social protection; CRVS in conflicts, emergencies, and fragile settings; demand-side factors in registration; CRVS and COVID-19; and the production of vital statistics** from incomplete registration data.

### Adapting, improving, and innovating

The CoE has shown itself to be **nimble, responsive, and innovative** as an institution: it has responded effectively and creatively to each major recommendation in the midterm evaluation, as well as pivoting more generally in response to challenges, external forces, and the evolving needs of the field. Prime examples are given below:

<sup>1</sup> This approach ranges from birth to death, including marriage and divorce registration, and can serve as an important tool in advancing gender equality.

- **Learning to scale impact.** The CoE has an ambitious mandate compared to its small core team (four staff, of which just two are senior CRVS experts). The CoE has been experimenting with several models for achieving impact at scale despite these constraints, including working through large grants/partnerships with UN agencies, brokering expert consultants through a Directory of Experts, and supporting a multinational committee of African Registrars General.
- **Finding new models for country-level support.** The need for technical assistance to countries as they prepare and implement GFF Investment Cases was a major reason for the CoE's creation, and the CoE has provided such services to three Francophone African countries. But direct support of this sort proved to be too taxing on the CoE's limited human resources. In response, the CoE arranged major grants/partnerships with two UN agencies to indirectly provide country-level support (independent of the collaboration with the GFF), through an expert based in Africa and through Population Data Fellows stationed around the world, with great success. This coincided with an increasingly broad and opportunistic approach to country-level support, expanding geographically to the Middle East and Latin America and thematically to assistance unrelated to Investment Cases and even to some non-GFF countries. This shift was accompanied by some friction with the GFF Secretariat, which had expected the CoE to provide more GFF-specific country supports, but a renegotiation of expectations and roles over time has helped restore good working relations.
- **Evolving the Directory of Experts.** The CoE began building this roster of CRVS specialists early on, but the lack of a publicly accessible platform reduced uptake and put the CoE in the unwanted role of mediator. The CoE responded by revamping the system with a new, public-facing platform, a streamlined vetting process, and a reconceptualization as a professional network. The CoE is also investing in upskilling existing experts and nurturing new ones. Difficult questions remain and the Directory has not yet come into its own, but the CoE is actively experimenting to find the best approach.
- **Making the most of the online Resource Library.** The CoE's online hub of vetted knowledge products is one of its great assets, but stakeholders hope for a more easily searchable and user-friendly platform. The CoE is revamping the search function and user experience, exploring new approaches to vetting, and continuing to commission new products based on demand.
- **Adapting to COVID-19.** In addition to pivoting its operations to fit the new realities of social distancing, the CoE quickly established itself as a thought leader in CRVS and COVID-19, in particular through its partnership with UNECA. Activities have included convening a CRVS and COVID-19 Working Group, advocating for CRVS as an essential service during lockdown and leading thought on death registration as the gold standard for measuring the pandemic's human toll.

## Achieving results

Stakeholders report that the CoE is already achieving many of its intended outcomes and is poised to achieve more. Examples are given in the box below, and testimonials of impact are shown below.

### **Some examples of successes tied to intended outcomes**

#### Ultimate outcome: CRVS systems in low- and middle-income countries are improved

- ✓ The CoE's direct supports to Cameroon, Guinea, and Senegal in preparing their GFF Investment Case resulted in increased understanding and consensus among national CRVS implementers regarding CRVS best practices and priorities for improvement.
- ✓ CoE's supports to Burkina Faso through a research grant and partnerships with UN agencies contributed to a field trial of a mobile IT solution for civil registration.
- ✓ CoE, through a grant to UNECA, has helped Eswatini, Ghana, Nigeria, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau keep civil registration operational during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Intermediate outcomes: the CRVS field increasingly relies on the CoE as the go-to place for evidence-based CRVS solutions

- ✓ Steady year-over-year increases in requests for CoE support
- ✓ 17-fold increase in CoE's web traffic over the last 3 years, and 5-fold increase in document downloads in last 2 years.
- ✓ Two well-attended, praised and influential global conferences on CRVS and gender, and another on CRVS and innovation; gender/CRVS knowledge briefs consulted by 1,300 individuals online.
- ✓ Compendium of Good Practices in Linking CRVS and Identity Management, in widening use (almost 400 individuals have consulted it online).
- ✓ CoE/UNFPA's thought leadership on the importance of marriage registration led to its inclusion in the newest Demographic and Health Survey (DHS-8) to be administered in 120 countries in 2020 and 2021; this will provide the first comprehensive global picture of marriage registration completeness that has ever been available. Numerous countries are planning to include marriage registration questions in their national censuses as well, in part due to guidance provided to UNFPA country offices through ConVERGE.
- ✓ State-of-the-art CRVS Implementation Framework being piloted in four sub-Saharan African countries.
- ✓ Country-level CRVS case studies widely disseminated for South-South learning; three Latin American countries are being supported in adopting promising practices in using CRVS to address adolescent pregnancy.

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*We are inspired by [the CoE’s] reports – they reveal how other countries have strengthened their CRVS systems, and we capitalize on these experiences.... By this exchange, we are aware of the most recent knowledge, tools and approaches.*  
– National CRVS implementer

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*[The CoE/UNFPA partnership is] helping both with regard to the technical aspects of the [CRVS] systems as well as the social aspects of rolling this system out.... We are now collecting more refined information, for example the age of the mother.... This allows us to see if a young girl becomes a mother very young. We have this information, and we can take action.... Many of our citizens are displaced due to war. These individuals have no identity once they leave their region. They have no documents. This will not be the case in the future.*  
– National CRVS implementer

“  
*The first place I would go for information on CRVS would be the Centre of Excellence.*  
– Regional-global stakeholder

“  
*The knowledge briefs on gender and CRVS, and the Compendium of Good Practices on Linking CRVS and Identity Management Systems – these are useful to have in the forefront of minds [to ensure] we don’t under-register female deaths, and what are the measures we can take to make sure that doesn’t happen.... I use their work as a touchstone when I want to make sure CRVS policies and practices are as inclusive as possible.*  
– Regional-global stakeholder

## Ways forward

It is clear that the CoE has accomplished a lot in absolute terms, and a remarkably large amount relative to its small size and young age. It is equally clear that the CoE has an important role—several important roles—to play in the CRVS field. Unsurprisingly, then, stakeholders **universally agreed that the CoE should continue with a renewed mandate:** much work remains to be done in the CRVS field, and the CoE has a unique role to play as a convenor, researcher, gender champion, knowledge hub, and documenter and spreader of innovations. Given the importance of institutional continuity, some stakeholders suggested a 10-year mandate to see the Agenda for Sustainable Development through to its 2031 end.

Although positive statements have predominated in this evaluation, based on prevailing sentiments in the field and the evaluation team’s own appraisal of the CoE’s success, there is always ample room for improvement. Looking towards a new mandate, stakeholders gave many critical suggestions for making the most of the CoE’s unique positioning and potential. The box below summarizes key recommendations stemming from this; the main body of the report contains others.

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*I definitely think that they should continue to exist. If they don’t there is something wrong in the system, because much less important initiatives are funded. There are huge inequalities in registration, and groups of people that are really left behind. It’s 2020 and people are not being counted. Lots of these issues are being politicized, and foundational systems like CRVS need to be strong in countries. There is no one-size fits all approach. Researching, being a watchdog, convening different groups – it’s fundamental for the development agenda, and for human rights.*  
– Regional-global stakeholder

### Key recommendations

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>1a.</b> The CoE should receive a renewed mandate.</p> <p><b>1c.</b> In any future mandate of the CoE, ensure that the PMF allows for an adaptive, organic, demand-driven approach. In particular, ensure that the PMF captures country-level impacts beyond contributions to GFF Investment Cases.</p> <p><b>2a.</b> Keep the CoE's broad mandate. This breadth includes its global remit; its lifecourse approach that includes all registration types; and cross-fertilizing combination of country-level and regional-global activities.</p> <p><b>2b.</b> Find ways to more clearly communicate to stakeholders what the CoE does. In particular, a chart illustrating the many interconnections between the CoE's main activities and offerings would be helpful.</p> <p><b>2c.</b> Continue to place a heavy emphasis on commissioning and producing original CRVS research.</p> | <p><b>3a.</b> In a new mandate, continue the core partnerships with IDRC, GAC, and GFF.</p> <p><b>4d.</b> Explore possibilities for showing thought leadership in the other neglected types of registration: adoption, recognition, and legitimation.</p> <p><b>5c.</b> Prioritize efforts to better organize the Resource Library.</p> <p><b>5b.</b> Consider translating knowledge products into Spanish, Portuguese, and/or Arabic, in addition to French.</p> <p><b>5d.</b> Invest in brief versions of key knowledge products.</p> <p><b>6b.</b> Have open discussions as a team about the vision for the Directory of Experts.</p> <p><b>7b.</b> Find ways to connect governments to the financial resources they need; this can be through GFF, through other funders, or through implementation grants from the CoE itself.</p> | <p><b>7c.</b> Offer more guidance to countries on the technological side of CRVS.</p> <p><b>7d.</b> Make sure to engage with stakeholders who are not yet convinced of the value of CRVS.</p> <p><b>7e.</b> Explore possibilities for offering country-level support in Asia and the Caribbean and more widely in Central and South America and the Middle East/North Africa.</p> <p><b>7f.</b> Revisit the possibility of partnering with additional UN agencies, in order to reach countries in new regions or address additional topical areas.</p> <p><b>7g.</b> Redouble efforts to work at the regional level to spread CRVS innovations and best practices between countries. Explore possibilities for convening analogues of the Committee of African Registrars General in other regions of the world.</p> <p><b>8a.</b> Consider hiring an additional Senior Program Specialist who speaks at least two languages of countries that the CoE is supporting.</p> <p><b>8b.</b> Consider hiring an internal leader for the CoE.</p> |
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# 1 Introduction

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## About CRVS and the CoE

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems, which register vital events throughout the life course, according to national legislation, and produce statistics on births, deaths and cause of death, marriages, and other vital events in a country's population, are increasingly recognized as an essential part of the development equation. **Civil registration** and civil status certificates give people proof of their legal identity, age, and social relationships. These vital documents enable them to access public services, such as healthcare and education, and to exercise their rights, such as voting or claiming an inheritance. **Vital statistics** provide real-time, reliable data disaggregated at the lowest level by sex, geography, and other locally relevant characteristics. Governments can use this data to identify problems and make effective policies, including programs to address the unique needs of women, girls, and other vulnerable groups.

The UN Secretary General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030) envisions a future in which all births, deaths, and causes of death are registered. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development similarly includes explicit reference to CRVS and legal identity, with target 16.9 calling for legal identity for all, including birth registration, and target 17.19, calling for the use of CRVS data in order to measure progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government of Canada has joined this global effort in a major way as part of its broader investment in Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health. Much of Canada's efforts have been channeled through the Global Financing Facility (GFF), a platform of multiple donors that invests in efforts to eliminate preventable maternal and child deaths in LMICs, including through the improvement of CRVS systems.

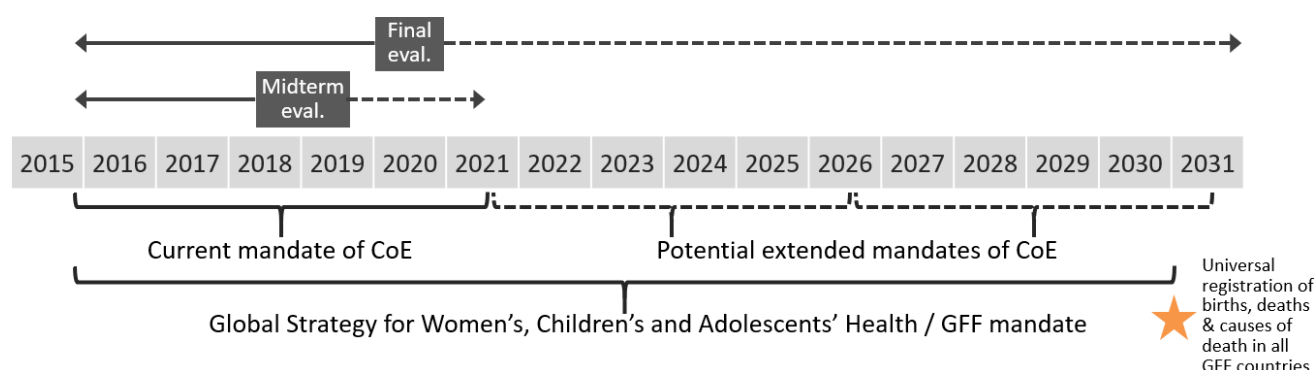
The Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems (referred to as the CoE in this document) is one way in which Canada's commitment to maternal and child health has been operationalized. The CoE is funded largely by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) (\$15 million) with a smaller contribution by IDRC (\$1 million), and works in close collaboration with the GFF. The CoE was established in late 2015 with an initial mandate reaching to late 2020, recently extended through July 2021. The CoE is intended to be a global resource hub, knowledge broker, connector, and facilitator for all things CRVS, and has engaged in a number of interrelated activities to date, including providing country-level technical assistance, acting as a knowledge hub, building a Directory of Experts, engaging as thought leaders globally and regionally, and conducting research.

This is accomplished by four CoE staff based in IDRC's headquarters in Ottawa (with one based in Amman, Jordan), as well as through a worldwide network of partners and grantees, including those implementing CRVS systems in specific countries and those who research and advocate for CRVS systems at regional and international levels (e.g. CRVS experts and researchers, UN agencies, international NGOs).

## Purpose and scope of the evaluation

In 2018, the CoE commissioned an external formative evaluation (the midterm evaluation, or MTE) of the CoE to identify lessons learned and to help shape the remaining years of the mandate. In early 2020, the CoE commissioned Cathexis Consulting, Inc. to conduct a final evaluation of the CoE, for three purposes: 1) As a backward-looking summative assessment of the total accomplishments and lessons learned of the CoE during its 5-year mandate. 2) As follow-up to the MTE (2018-2019), to assess how the CoE has evolved in response to the MTE's learnings and recommendations, and other emerging priorities. 3) As a forward-looking investigation of CoE's sustainability/scale-up going forward, and lesson learned that could inform its direction if its mandate is extended.

The timeline below gives a sense of where the present evaluation stands in the CoE's overall history.



The box below lists the evaluation questions; Annex A outlines areas of interest within each question.

## Evaluation questions

### 1. Outcomes

- 1a. **PMF ultimate outcome.** How likely is it that the CoE will contribute to improved CRVS systems to track progress on women's, newborns', children's and adolescents' health in GFF countries that are implementing or have implemented GFF Investment cases?
- 1b. **PMF intermediate outcome #1.** To what extent has there been increased use of the CoE as a facilitator of technical assistance, knowledge, standards, and guidance on CRVS by CRVS stakeholders (national, regional and global)?
- 1c. **PMF intermediate outcome #2.** To what extent has the CoE contributed to increased use of evidence, global tools and standards in planning and implementing CRVS systems improvements in countries that are developing or implementing GFF Investment Cases?
- 1d. **Unanticipated outcomes.** What, if any, outcomes have been achieved that were not predicted in the PMF or CoE logic model?

### 2. Strategy, implementation, and lessons learned

- 2a. **Institutional establishment.** To what extent has the CoE achieved institutional growth and consolidation to establish itself as a credible global partner?
- 2b. **Niche.** What needs and gaps has the CoE filled in the international efforts to strengthen CRVS systems?
- 2c. **Model and strategy.** How appropriate are the choices the CoE has made towards achieving its intended outcomes?
- 2d. **Evolution and adaptation.** To what extent has the CoE responded appropriately to the recommendations in the MTE (specifically on gender, country-level support, resource library, and Directory of Experts) and to strategic priorities that have emerged since the MTE?
- 2e. **Partnerships.** How appropriate and successful has the partnership between GAC, GFF, and IDRC been for delivering intended results? What lessons have been learned that could be applied to future partnerships?
- 2f. **Enablers and barriers.** What are the major external or internal factors that have promoted or constrained the attainment of program outcomes by the CoE?

### 3. Sustainability and scalability

- 3a. **Scale-up efforts.** To what extent has the CoE oriented programming to scale-up solutions and global thought leadership? What have been helping or hindering factors, and what has been learned?
- 3b. **Prospects for the future.** What are the prospects for sustaining the CoE in the future, and scaling up the solutions that it offers? How might an extended mandate best be leveraged?

The findings in this final report are organized according to these evaluation questions, while recommendations are grouped into cross-cutting categories.

## Evaluation methods

This evaluation followed a mixed-methods design that combined qualitative and quantitative data collected from multiple stakeholder groups. The data collection methods are summarized in the following table.

Method	Source/stakeholder group	Details
Document review and data mining	CoE documents	~150 documents, including the PMF, MTE, annual workplans, reports to GAC, EC meeting minutes country mission reports, internal strategy documents, grant-specific documents, key knowledge products, presentations.
	Trackify (PMF) data	All indicators from FY15-17 <sup>2</sup> to FY19-20.
Interviews	Regional-global CRVS stakeholders involved in the CoE	n=28 (26 English, 2 French), including CoE grantees, consultants, collaborators, and others working in the CRVS space <sup>3</sup>
	National CRVS implementers engaged directly by the CoE for development of GFF Investment Cases	n=4 (2 English, 2 French), from three countries. <sup>4</sup> (Note: these were surveys rather than interviews.)
	National CRVS implementers engaged in other ways by the CoE or by the CoE's grantees	n=4 (3 English, 1 French), from four countries.
	CoE staff	n=5 (all English). This includes one temporary support staff who has since left.
	Core partners (GAC and GFF)	n=5 (all English). Three were with GAC and two with GFF.
	Broader IDRC staff	n=6 (all English). This includes individuals who helped found the CoE but are not staff, IDRC's representative on the CoE's EC, and those with no direct involvement in the CoE but who could provide broader perspectives.
Ongoing consultation	CoE staff + Program Leader of IDRC's Maternal and Child Health team	Biweekly meetings to obtain updates on the CoE's activities and evolving thinking, and to co-interpret evaluation findings

<sup>2</sup> In line with the CoE's own reporting, this evaluation report conflates FY15-16 and FY16-17 into a single fiscal year (FY15-17), as the CoE began near the end of FY15-16.

<sup>3</sup> One stakeholder was interviewed twice, once with regards to his role in one CoE grant/partnership, and again with regards to his role in another CoE grant/partnership; this is counted as two interviews. A few interviews were conducted with two stakeholders at the same time; each of these is counted as one interview.

<sup>4</sup> This includes one emailed survey received by the present evaluation team, as well as three surveys received by the MTE evaluator in 2018-2019, which were reanalyzed for this final evaluation.

The **strength** of this methodology is that findings could be triangulated from multiple sources, including those with close involvement and a large stake in the CoE's success (e.g. internal staff, grantees), as well as those with a more independent stance (e.g. CRVS experts who are not under contract to the CoE, national CRVS implementers). In this way, the intimate knowledge of insiders could be combined with the objectivity of outsiders to paint a complete and accurate portrait of the program's successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Interview target numbers were met for all stakeholder groups except one (see next paragraph).

The main methodological **limitation** is the relatively small number of country-level stakeholders who were consulted. A target of 15 was initially set, and all efforts made to reach this, but the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic near the beginning of the evaluation, and its continuance throughout the period of data collection, made it difficult to secure the participation of busy and overwhelmed Civil Registrars, statisticians, and others in LMICs as they struggled to cope with this global health crisis. Extraction of country-level activities and perceptions from documents and from global and regional stakeholders with knowledge in this area helped to compensate for this difficulty; two interviewees classified as "regional-global stakeholders" also spoke from a country-level perspective, which expands the total number of country-level interviews/surveys to 10, from 8 sub-Saharan African countries.

## 2 Findings: Outcomes

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**EQ 1a PMF ultimate outcome.** How likely is it that the CoE will contribute to improved CRVS systems to track progress on women's, newborns', children's and adolescents' health in GFF countries that are implementing or have implemented GFF Investment Cases?

Evidence indicates that **the CoE is likely to contribute to the PMF's ultimate outcome, which is the improvement of national CRVS systems.**

The most direct way to measure the attainment of this outcome is by tracking registration completeness over time in countries that the CoE has assisted. Indeed, the CoE's PMF includes three such indicators, namely the percentages of live births registered, deaths registered, and registered deaths that indicate a cause of death, by year and country. Unfortunately, **multiple issues prevent this registration completeness data from being useful for determining the CoE's impact.** Firstly, much of the data is missing or unreliable.<sup>5</sup> Second, the data is collected only from the three countries that the CoE has directly supported with GFF Investment Cases, and not the numerous other countries that the CoE has assisted in other ways and/or assisted indirectly through partnerships. Third, the indicators provide no evidence of the CoE's contribution to any improvements that can be seen. Fourth, these are a *lagging* indicator of the CoE's success; stakeholders consider it unrealistic to expect the CoE to have made this kind of impact within a matter of a few years, as concrete change that would result in increased registration coverage can take a decade or longer.

A better, leading indicator of the CoE's likely contribution to CRVS improvement is the perceptions of external stakeholders. The story here is a positive one: all stakeholders who answered the question thought that the CoE was somewhat or very likely to contribute to the ultimate outcome, with the bulk of opinion weighted towards the "very likely" side. Stakeholders reported that the CoE's documentation and promulgation of best practices, its capacity building for national CRVS implementers, and its direct supports to some countries and indirect supports (through UN partnerships – see EQ 3a) to many other countries will ultimately result in increased registration coverage in GFF and other countries. This is particularly likely if the CoE continues to work through global-, regional- and country-level partners, if it helps to connect national stakeholders to sources of financial support through the GFF or other donors, and if it is granted an extended mandate from GAC to continue building momentum. (See EQ 3b for more detail on maximizing the impact of country-level supports.)

The evaluation also uncovered a number of concrete examples of the CoE's positive influence on national CRVS systems in GFF countries. A complete list is in Annex B; highlights are given below.

- ✓ The CoE's direct supports to **Cameroon, Guinea, and Senegal** in preparing their GFF Investment Case resulted in increased understanding and consensus among national CRVS implementers regarding CRVS best practices and priorities for improvement.
- ✓ The CoE's supports to **Burkina Faso** through a research grant on the causes of under-registration, as well as partnerships with UN agencies, contributed to a field trial of a mobile IT solution for civil registration.

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<sup>5</sup> There are just two instances in which data on civil registration completeness is available at more than one point in time. Senegal has data on birth registration completeness from the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) over multiple years, and this shows an increase from 68% in 2015 to 70% in 2016 and 77% in 2017; but the CoE's support to Senegal only began in FY17-18, so it seems unlikely that this upward trend could be attributable to the CoE's influence. Guinea has data on birth registration completeness from two years, but from multiple and conflicting sources (the DHS and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS]), so stakeholders do not consider it possible to use this data to assess change over time. In all other cases, there is data available from (at most) one year; in the case of cause-of-death completeness, there is no data at all.

CoE staff point out that this data is missing partly because of underinvestment in the "VS" side of CRVS: even when civil registration coverage improves, countries often fail to produce vital statistics based upon the expanded registration. In addition, the lack of data on death and cause of death is unsurprising given the difficulties that many CRVS systems, even quite advanced ones, have with this kind of registration.

- ✓ CoE's grant to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has led to technical assistance to **Uganda, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone** that is supporting implementation of these countries' GFF Investment Cases.
- ✓ CoE's grant to UNECA has led to support for **Eswatini, Ghana, Nigeria, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau** in keeping civil registration operational during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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*Thanks to the teachings received during the workshops, seminars and conferences organized by the Centre of Excellence...[my country] has the main strategic documents likely to lead to the modernization of its CRVS system. These include the Strategic Plan for the rehabilitation of civil status, the master plan for the computerization of the national civil status system, [and] the national strategy for the production and dissemination of civil status statistics.*

– National CRVS implementer engaged directly by the CoE

The evaluation also uncovered stories of the CoE's positive influence in non-GFF countries, such as work in **Ecuador** and **Peru** to use CRVS to address teenage pregnancy, and a commitment from **Jordan** and **Tunisia** to cooperate regionally to advance CRVS. While these countries are not GFF-eligible and so are not technically included in the PMF's ultimate outcome, they are included here as the evaluation team considers the PMF's exclusion of non-GFF countries to be unnecessarily restrictive (see EQ 1d).

**EQ 1b** PMF intermediate outcome #1. To what extent has there been increased use of the CoE as a facilitator of technical assistance, knowledge, standards, and guidance on CRVS by CRVS stakeholders (national, regional and global)?

Evidence indicates that **the CoE is achieving this intermediate outcome**.

Data collected as part of the PMF indicates increased use of the CoE as a facilitator of technical assistance, knowledge, standards, and guidance. There has been a **steady year-over-year increase in requests for CoE support** (8 in FY15-17, 12 in FY17-18, 14 in FY18-19, and 20 in FY19-20), exceeding the target of 20% annual increase overall, and driven in particular by an increase in requests to support technical meetings, training activities or workshops. Most of these requests have been fulfilled, with the 80% target for fulfillment of requests being exceeded each year. There has also been a **very large increase in traffic on the CoE's website**, from less than 800 in FY17-18 to about 4,800 in FY18-19 and almost 14,000 in FY19-20 – an increase by a factor of more than 17. Correspondingly, **document downloads from the website saw a large increase** from 513 in FY18-19 to 2,647 in FY19-20, and there were nearly 15,000 views of the CoE's YouTube videos.

Statements in interviews echoed the numbers. Most regional-global interviewees reported that **they and others have already used and benefitted from knowledge products created and commissioned by the CoE**, and/or learning opportunities (conferences, meetings, training sessions, etc.) organized by the CoE. The knowledge products most often mentioned as useful by interviewees were the **knowledge briefs on CRVS and gender** (which were consulted by over 1,300 individuals online) and the **Compendium of Good Practices in Linking CRVS and Identity Management Systems** (which was consulted by almost 400 individuals online). The learning opportunities most often mentioned

were CoE's international conferences in Ottawa, two on CRVS and gender (see EQ 2d-1 for more information), and one on CRVS and innovation.

Stakeholders' recommendations for maximizing the utility of the CoE's knowledge products are summarized in EQ 2d-3.

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*They are an R&D leading-edge agency, which is not evident anywhere else in the CRVS field....[Their] work on gender had never been done before.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

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*The first place I would go for information on CRVS would be the Centre of Excellence.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

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*The knowledge briefs on gender and CRVS, and the Compendium of Good Practices on Linking CRVS and Identity Management Systems – these are useful to have in the forefront of minds when it comes to registration of death, [to ensure] we're especially concerned we don't under-register female deaths, and what are the measures we can take to make sure that doesn't happen....I use their work as a touchstone when I want to make sure CRVS policies and practices are as inclusive as possible.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

#### EQ 1c PMF intermediate outcome #2.

**To what extent has the CoE contributed to increased use of evidence, global tools and standards in planning and implementing CRVS systems improvements in countries that are developing or implementing GFF Investment Cases?**

Evidence indicates that **the CoE is achieving this intermediate outcome.**

Similar to the ultimate outcome, PMF data sheds little light on the CoE's success in this area. The relevant indicators are collected only for the three countries that the CoE has directly assisted with GFF Investment Cases. Moreover, most of the indicators are collected only at the time of a CoE mission to the country, so year-over-year data is rarely available. Some evidence for achievement of this outcome comes from Indicator 9a, which captures national CRVS implementers' perceptions of how helpful the CoE was in supporting CRVS improvements. Cameroon stakeholders rated the CoE's supports as fairly helpful when asked in FY17-18 and very helpful when asked in mid-2020, and Guinea stakeholders rated the CoE's supports as very helpful when asked in FY17-18. This suggests that **the CoE's supports, which bring evidence, tools, and best practices to bear at the country level, are largely successful.**

Interviewees shared similar sentiments, with most stating that **the CoE is achieving this outcome or is poised to achieve it in the near future.** Particularly helpful, according to stakeholders, are the CoE's efforts to document promising CRVS practices, as well as pitfalls, risks, and trade-offs, from around the world and share these learnings among countries. This knowledge exchange, which is largely South-South in nature, empowers countries to make evidence-based decisions when they are planning improvements to their CRVS systems, and allows them to do so flexibly according to their particular needs and capabilities. This is in contrast to the one-size-fits-all approach of defining global standards, which is not the CoE's prerogative in any case,<sup>6</sup> or a patronizing North-to-South knowledge flow. The CoE's approach is much more flexible and contextual, and stakeholders greatly appreciate this.

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<sup>6</sup> Despite the reference to “standards” in the CoE's logic model, the CoE has not sought to define formal international standards for CRVS, nor have stakeholders wished for them to. Stakeholders made it clear that standards are the province of the UN system organizations, and it would be inappropriate for the CoE to venture into this terrain.

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*We are inspired by [the CoE's] reports – they reveal how other countries have strengthened their CRVS systems, and we capitalize on these experiences....The popularization of this knowledge is excellent....There have been meetings that the Centre has organized [where] we exchanged directly with people from the Centre. By this exchange, we are aware of the most recent knowledge, tools and approaches.*

– National CRVS stakeholder

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*We learned from the [research] project that was funded by the Centre of Excellence that we need an IT model...We should digitize the CRVS system which was paper-based in our country....The program officer on our project, I took her to the Director General's office of our civil registration system and she had a discussion with the DG. We shared what we thought in this program to the DG, and that influenced the actual work in the civil registration system in our country.*

– National CRVS implementer engaged by the CoE through a grant

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*The Centre of Excellence is summing things up for themselves at the holistic level....They collect experiences and everything that other countries have done across the globe, and they put it on a plate for everyone. Other countries can compare, see what other countries have experienced, what might work for them, what challenges other countries have faced, what solutions they've come up with, and make an informed choice. I think informed choice is the key part, and the Centre is providing that.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

Some concrete examples of increased use of CRVS knowledge at the country-level that the CoE has contributed to are below; more can be found in Annex B.

- ✓ The CoE's partnership with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has led to the inclusion of marriage registration questions in the newest Demographic and Health Survey (DHS-8); this will be administered in about **120 countries** and provide the first comprehensive global picture of marriage registration completeness that has ever been available. Many countries also plan to include marriage registration in their national censuses. This represents the translation of a research finding—the importance of marriage registration for women's empowerment and children's protection—into change at the country level.
- ✓ The CRVS Improvement Framework, developed by the CoE with several partners, is an evidence-based document that is now being piloted as part of assessment/strategic planning processes in **Ethiopia**
- ✓ The CoE is assisting **Guatemala, Ecuador, and Peru** in using CRVS data to address teenage pregnancy, inspired by innovative practices that the CoE documented in Costa Rica and Uruguay.
- ✓ The CoE's grant to UNECA supported the adoption in **Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia** of the WHO's Rapid Mortality Surveillance System during COVID-19; this represents country-level implementation of the CoE's thought leadership on the importance of death registration during the pandemic.
- ✓ As part of the CoE's partnership with UNECA, the CoE's mission to **Cameroon** resulted, according to local stakeholders, in awareness-raising of best practices in CRVS systems, and the country now reports that it has all of the necessary evidence-based planning documents needed to modernize its CRVS system.
- ✓ The CoE's capacity building events helped national CRVS implementers in **Burkina Faso** better understand the role of gender equality in CRVS systems and convinced them of the value of adding census questions on birth, death, and marriage registration – all of which stems from the CoE's research on these topics.

According to interviewees, continued success in this area depends on ensuring that the evidence and tools generated are solution-focused, implementation-ready, and demand-driven, and that the CoE works closely with national stakeholders to champion and guide use; see EQ 2d-3.

**EQ 1d Unanticipated outcomes. What, if any, outcomes have been achieved that were not predicted in the PMF or CoE logic model?**

In one crucial respect, **the CoE's logic model (see Annex C) does not anticipate the outcomes that the CoE has achieved**, or is working to achieve: the ultimate outcome, one of the two intermediate outcomes, and one of the immediate outcomes restrict country-level outcomes to ones in "countries that are developing or implementing GFF Investment Cases." This excludes several non-GFF-eligible countries to which the CoE has provided technical assistance (namely Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Jordan, and Tunisia). It also implicitly excludes technical assistance that is not focused on the GFF Investment Case itself, thereby leaving out much of the support that the CoE has provided (see Annex B).

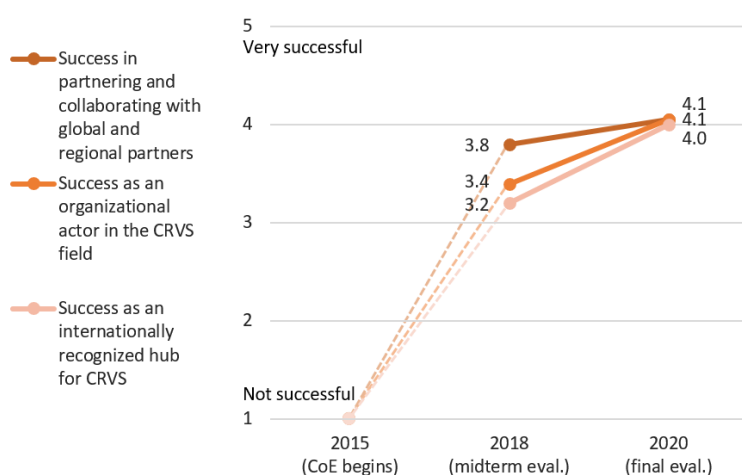
What this represents is not underperformance or mission drift on the part the CoE, but a deficiency in the PMF itself. The PMF and logic model **reflect an incomplete and outdated understanding of the breadth of what the CoE is trying to achieve**. The inadequacy of the PMF for understanding the CoE's intended and actual impacts is illustrated, as well, by limited utility of the PMF's indicators for measuring country-level outcomes (see EQ 1a and 1c). It is to the CoE's credit that it has remained innovative and responded to needs on the ground than limiting itself to what was conceived in the early documents and in the PMF. Clearly, in any new mandate of the CoE, a revamped PMF will be needed to adequately capture what the CoE does and to avoid stifling innovation and a demand-driven approach through an overly narrow definition of success.

### 3 Findings: Strategy, implementation, and lessons learned

#### EQ 2a Institutional establishment. To what extent has the CoE achieved institutional growth and consolidation to establish itself as a credible global partner?

The original 2015 funding proposal to GAC set out an ambitious goal for the CoE: that it would, by the end of its 5-year mandate, “have established its reputation as the go-to place for a comprehensive body of approaches, evidence and expertise” related to CRVS. Evidence shows that this goal is rapidly being achieved, and that **the CoE has reached an impressive level of establishment and recognition.**

**The CoE is increasingly established in the CRVS field**  
(average score given by global-regional stakeholders)



The graphic to the left charts the CoE’s growing reputation. By the time of the midterm evaluation in 2018, regional-global stakeholders were reporting that the CoE was having some success as an internationally recognized hub for CRVS, an organizational actor in the CRVS field, and (especially) as a partner and collaborator with other players in the CRVS space. By mid-late 2020, perceived success on each of these fronts had increased further. The CoE’s perceived success as an internationally recognized hub of expertise saw the largest increase.

Regional-global stakeholders contextualized these ratings by pointing to three key challenges that the CoE has faced in its effort to make a name for itself. 1) The CoE’s young age – just five years, as

opposed to UN agencies which have existed for 50 years or more. 2) The CoE’s small staff of just four members, as opposed to thousands of staff in UN agencies. 3) The increasingly noisy and crowded CRVS space, occupied with powerful UN agencies (and other organizations) with staff, budgets, and histories orders of magnitude larger than the CoE’s. The consensus from these global-regional stakeholders is that, **given these challenges and limitations, the extent to which the CoE has managed to establish visibility and credibility is remarkable.**

Some signs of the CoE’s considerable, and growing, credibility in the field are the following:

- The CoE has been invited to join important CRVS-related groups, including the UN-led Global CRVS Group, the GPSDD’s technical advisory group, the APAI-CRVS regional core group, the UNESCAP CRVS partnership, and the OECD Group on Data for Development.
- The CoE has proven that it can attract participants from all of the most important CRVS-related organizations to its events. Just over two years after its launch, the CoE was able to draw almost 100 policymakers and experts, including high-level representatives from the UN and the Government of Canada, to its 2018 gender and CRVS conference in Ottawa. CoE staff and other

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*With all the players within the field and related fields, CoE has quickly become recognized. I attended their conference this winter [2020] which really brought it home to me – the vast array of actors from country level, people working in statistics, to organizations that are working with data or working on specific projects in specific countries. It’s amazing the variety of people they brought together.”*

– Regional-global stakeholder

stakeholders cited this conference as a pivotal moment for the CoE, demonstrating that it had truly entered the CRVS stage.

- Established and reputable UN agencies (UNFPA, UNECA, UNICEF, UNSD, WHO, UNESCAP, UNESCWA) have been interested in collaborating with the CoE on conferences, workshops, and knowledge products, and even in building major partnerships (see EQ 3a).

The CoE generally earns high marks from its grantees and partners for the effectiveness of collaboration. The CoE is generally seen as responsive, involved, proactive, supportive, and (crucially) able to bring unique and valuable technical expertise to the table. The CoE earned high scores from interviewees (3.8 on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the best) for this in 2018, in the midterm evaluation, and this has increased in 2020 to 4.1.

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*They try to involve us in every project or initiative where we could provide some added value, and we definitely call them when we think that they could add something to the activity, and they always answer. It's a great collaboration.*

– Grantee/partner

“

*The staff are very, very knowledgeable about CRVS and have enormous credibility and field experience around the world...When we talk about [the project], we always say it is a joint initiative with the Centre. The Centre isn't a donor, it's a partner.*

– Grantee/partner

All of this indicates an impressive degree of institutional establishment as the CoE turns five years old. There are many signs, as well, that the CoE is poised to achieve even greater recognition in the future. Virtually all of the indicators in the PMF show healthy year-over-year growth. Even more strikingly, as shown in the table to the right, many of the indicators show **major acceleration in the most recent fiscal year (FY19-20)**, indicating that **the CoE is gaining momentum and truly coming into its own**. As one Regional-Global Stakeholder noted, “The CoE is very young...but it is headed in the right direction.”

Indicator	FY 15-17	FY 17-18	FY 18-19	FY 19-20
8. # of experts mobilized	6	9	10	45
15. # of participants attending events	33	94	59	433
23. # research outputs produced/commissioned	1	2	6	21
24. # of tools/guides/etc. developed/disseminated with CoE support	6	10	4	40
25. # of unique visits to CoE website	N/A	798	4,805	13,726
27. # of workshops/knowledge sharing events supported	5	7	6	24

## EQ 2b Niche. What needs and gaps has the CoE filled in the international efforts to strengthen CRVS systems?

Due to the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals and the increased focus on CRVS as a tool of international development, CRVS has recently become a crowded space. It is therefore important for the CoE to define a clear value-add (or value-adds) and avoid duplicating the work of other organizations. Some of the CoE's intended niches were built into the design from the beginning, while others developed organically over time and still others are tentatively emerging. This represents a healthy dose of nimbleness on the part of the CoE as it defines and discovers its unique roles over time.

The CoE offers several unique values. The CoE has always branded itself with these qualities, and other stakeholders frequently cite them. These unequivocal areas of added value are as follows:

- **Global, holistic, CRVS-specific mandate.** The CoE is the only organization in the world with a mandate that is both global and CRVS-specific. There are some regional organizations devoted solely to CRVS (e.g. APAI-CRVS for Africa), and many global and regional organizations that have taken an active interest in CRVS, but no organization other than the CoE that is *both* global and all CRVS systems oriented.<sup>7</sup> This is crucially important, as, according to stakeholders, it gives the CoE an unusually **holistic lens** and allows it to be a unique **neutral party with convening power**. Stakeholders point to the fact that the UN system is fragmented into many agencies, each with a particular mandate for a specific component within the CRVS field: WHO for death registration and causes of death, UNICEF for birth registration, and so forth. The CoE is unique in its ability to bring these disparate actors and agendas together and call attention to themes like gender, identity management, and social protection which cross-cut registration types and regions of the world. Prime examples of this are the CoE's two conferences on gender and CRVS, which attracted large and diverse attendance across regions and sectors; another example is the recently established CRVS and COVID-19 Working Group (see EQ 2d-5). The CoE itself sometimes describes its uniquely holistic mandate as a **"life-course" approach**, which consider the full spectrum of vital life events including birth, death, marriage, divorce, and adoption.

“ Other organizations that have a stake in CRVS are interested in only part of the CRVS systems that is important for the fulfillment of their mandate....They all recognize that CRVS should be something that is all-encompassing, but they are limited by their mandate...So the Centre of Excellence became a gathering point for all these organizations who have a stake, and finally they have a platform and place to share information with each other and work on a common strategy....Before the Centre of Excellence there were many attempts by well-known actors, but they struggled to find a convening platform.  
– Regional-global stakeholder
- **Thought leadership in gender and CRVS.** The CoE is, without a doubt, the pre-eminent organization currently championing this important, cross-cutting CRVS sub-topic. It is the niche that stakeholders most frequently cited, and several noted that the topic had received almost no attention until the CoE took it up. More details on this area of the CoE's work can be found in EQ 2d-1.

“ Most of the actors are focusing on implementation, but understanding how to do CRVS systems, what are lessons learned from past experiences – only CoE is doing this. That's a huge gap they are working to fill. When you want to do research projects, it's only the CoE listening.  
– Regional-global stakeholder
- **CRVS research and knowledge translation.** This niche is often mentioned by CoE staff, and other stakeholders strongly agree that the CRVS field needs more research and the CoE's capacity in this area is a great asset to the field. This niche is, of course, greatly aided by the CoE's

<sup>7</sup> The CoE is the only [listed member](#) of the Global CRVS Group that has a CRVS-specific mandate and is global in focus.

placement at IDRC. It also goes hand-in-hand with the CoE's neutral position: the CoE can conduct research from an impartial perspective.<sup>8</sup>

There are other niches and value-adds which the CoE emphasizes in its marketing and self-description, but which other stakeholders rarely mention. Each of these does appear, to the evaluation team, to be an important contribution to the CRVS field. This means that the CoE's task is simply to better convince stakeholders of the value of these offerings:

- **Bilingualism.** The CoE has often touted its capacity in French as a value-add, especially in comparison to the mainly Anglophone, US-based GFF/World Bank. This is undoubtedly a great asset in the CoE's engagement with sub-Saharan African countries, and the CoE has "walked the talk" of bilingualism by supporting many Francophone countries (see Annex B) and offering most of its major outputs (conferences, website, Directory of Experts, knowledge products, capacity building workshops, etc.) in both English and French.<sup>9</sup> While other stakeholders rarely point to this asset, it is unlikely that stakeholders who do not have bilingual needs would find this value-add personally important; *usage* of bilingual outputs may be a more helpful measure. It is worth noting that while the CoE as an organization is bilingual, not all individual staff members are bilingual and only half of experts on the Directory of Experts are Francophone, while over 97% speak English. If the CoE sees bilingualism as a major value-add over other players in the CRVS space, it may need to make the case for this more persuasively, and/or hire more bilingual staff and recruit more Francophone experts to the Directory.
- **Emphasis on vital statistics production.** The "VS" side of CRVS has often been neglected by organizations that promote CRVS: the emphasis is on increasing registration rates, without considering how to produce statistics from registration data and then analyze and use those statistics. The CoE has been working to fill this gap through the UNFPA grant/partnership (see EQ 3a), and in particular by training individuals to produce and use VS even from incomplete registration data. Training in vital statistics production has been completed in Jordan, Morocco, and Burkina Faso. As a result, Morocco has produced its first vital statistics report in 20 years. This is undoubtedly an important contribution and one that the CoE has begun to advertise more explicitly, but other stakeholders rarely mention it.
- **Specialized CRVS sub-topics.** External stakeholders are well aware of the CoE's thought leadership in the gender area, but several other of the CoE's topical niches are less well known. Note that these areas have in common a focus on equity, which emerged from the CoE's work in the gender area, so they are thematically coherent. **1) CRVS and identity management:** the CoE produced and launched a Compendium of Good Practices in Linking CRVS and Identity Management Systems, co-organized a side event with GPSDD and UNSD on this topic at the UN General Assembly in September 2019, and is developing a paper on "Establishing the Foundations of Legal Identity." **2) CRVS and social protection:** in 2020, the CoE published "The Nexus between Civil Registration and Social Protection Systems," which includes case studies of five countries that have made great progress in linking civil registration with access to social services. The CoE also organised two webinars on social protection, each with over 100 participants. **3) CRVS in conflict, emergencies, and fragile settings:** the CoE has collaborated with Open Data Watch to develop a knowledge brief series on this topic, provided a grant to Addis Ababa University to study this among internally displaced women and children in Ethiopia, and engaged extensively with the intersections of CRVS and COVID-19 (see EQ 2d-5). **4) Demand side factors in CRVS:** this is the topic of a research grant to UNFPA and is incorporated in several other knowledge products (e.g. Handbook on CRVS and Identity Management Systems) and research projects (Addis Ababa University's research; Swiss TPH's grant to build an economic case for CRVS systems; socio-cultural research as part of the UNFPA partnership). The CoE also commissioned a literature review on the subject, and is developing webinars on social and behavioural change to upskill experts in sensitively addressing demand-side factors in registration.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the CoE does not usually emphasize research in its marketing and self-descriptions. CoE staff have sometimes portrayed the CoE as having only a minor foothold in research. But this is true only relative to other IDRC programs, which focus *entirely* on research and knowledge translation. Without a doubt, the CoE has conducted, commissioned, and supported a great deal of original CRVS research (see EQ 2d-3), and global-regional stakeholders emphasize this as one of the CoE's major contributions to the field.

<sup>9</sup> Some outputs are also offered in Spanish.

A final niche to mention, one which is just emerging but may prove to be an important part of the CoE's legacy, is the CoE's interest in **marriage and divorce registration**. These types of registration have received far less attention in the CRVS community than birth and death, but are critically important to gender equality as they allow women to inherit from their deceased husbands and can help them escape abusive relationships. The CoE has put great emphasis on this topic in its partnership with UNFPA, and indeed one of the CoE's most impressive impacts to date has been in this area: see EQ 3a. This is an emerging niche to watch, and a good concrete example of the CoE's "lifecourse" approach in action.

Clearly, **the CoE is filling many important gaps in the CRVS field**. But this positive statement has a less-positive corollary: **the CoE's portfolio is so broad, and its value propositions so numerous and ever-evolving, that no one outside the core staff can fully understand the full scope of its work**. The CoE has struggled to communicate a clear, simple, consistent value proposition over time, or even to describe the full range of its activities in a concise and understandable way. This is not for lack of trying. The CoE has invested heavily (9% of its budget) in communications and branding; early on, it hired a communications firm, developed a visual identity system, and published accessible content such as a brochure, infographics, blogs, and social media posts. Yet stakeholders (and this evaluation team) have still found it enormously challenging to understand the full scope of what the CoE does and what it is trying to achieve.

To some extent, this challenge is inevitable, and reflective of the CoE's strengths. The CoE is still young and its identity *should* still be solidifying; the CoE is to be praised for evolving organically in response to the field's needs rather than predefining a rigid role. Likewise, the CoE should maintain its holistic stance, and its dual role of research and country-level support, even though that broad mandate makes it harder to come up with a simple statement of what it does (see EQ 2c). Some brand confusion may be unavoidable and even commendable at this stage of the CoE's life, but going forward, if there is a second mandate, **the CoE needs to find ways to communicate its complex and multi-stranded nature in a more understandable way**.

“*Marriage and divorce are very much the illegitimate fifth cousins of the CRVS world....When I deal with partners in the CRVS world, no one wants to talk about marriage or divorce, they want to give it lip service, but no one wants to dig in and do the work. The CoE has been, to me, a big leader in that.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

“*I still do not know exactly what is their area of specialization....They have been able to do very good work but spread across different themes.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

## EQ 2c Model and strategy. How appropriate are the choices the CoE has made towards achieving its intended outcomes?

The CoE's program model can be boiled down to three core principles:

1. The CoE is a **lean organization**: it has a small core staff and no country offices.<sup>10</sup> This has been a deliberate strategy since the beginning (it was declared in the original 2015 funding proposal to GAC) though it has also been forced to some extent by the CoE's small budget (compared to UN agencies) as well as challenges that the CoE faced in recruiting for even its small number of staff positions, due to the highly specialized nature of CRVS. **The MTE recommended increasing the staff from 4 to 7 or 8**, so that the CoE could achieve more, but the CoE's management response to the MTE stated that this would not be possible due to both financial limitations and recruiting challenges.
2. The CoE has a **broad mandate**, encompassing civil registration as well as vital statistics; all types of registration (birth, death, marriage, etc.); **both country-level and global/regional-level activities**; both research and implementation; and, potentially, all regions of the world. The birth of the CoE as a partnership between a Canadian research grantmaker and a Canadian federal department, founded with the expectation of alignment with a multilateral donor platform, virtually guaranteed that the CoE would be pulled in many directions. But this is not necessarily a bad thing: the CoE was designed to play the holistic, convening role that no other organization could occupy, and stakeholders pointed out the **synergies and cross-fertilization between the CoE's country-level/implementation mandate and its global-level/research mandate** (see quote to the right – also see EQ 2e and 3b).

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*It's a unique position: CoE, engaged in country supports, identifies a gap or problem or issue. As an organization, you have the mandate to support that country in addressing that issue, and in that process, you pull out lessons learned, write up, and publish a case study for others to learn from. In that one country, you have done country support, knowledge synthesis, evidence for action, and by putting this out there for others, you're engaging the global community. It's a powerful and unique model – grounded in country supports, engaging globally, and building the evidence base.*  
– CoE staff
3. The challenges of delivering on such a broad mandate with such a lean staff leads to the third core element of the program model, which is **scaling through partnerships with other organizations**, and more generally **strategically outsourcing human resource needs through grants and contracts**, while providing high-level guidance and technical input. The largest example of this is the UNFPA partnership, which involves a grant of 20% of the CoE's entire budget. Combined with the grants to Swiss TPH, Data2X, UNECA, IUSSP, Addis Ababa University, Open Data Watch, and Vital Strategies, this totals a third of the CoE's entire budget. This significantly expands the CoE's humanpower without expanding its staff. Stakeholders almost universally and whole-heartedly support this strategy. With the same money, it might have been financially possible to hire several more internal staff, but that would miss out on, for instance, the country-level presence of the UNFPA (there are 132 UNFPA country offices); the trust that African governments place in UNECA; and the specific skills and networks of individual contractors and grantees. The partnership-based approach is also a major enabler of nimbleness, as the CoE can quickly hire specialized experts when particular needs arise.

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*Given the context of a team of four, the impacts we have managed to scale have been almost entirely because of the partnerships we've built. In terms of our ability to provide support at country level, without our partnership with UNFPA, I don't see how we would have done that. Without Open Data Watch and Data2X, I'm not sure how we would have accomplished so much on gender....[Without partnerships] we just would not be as successful or as big.*  
– CoE staff

<sup>10</sup> One staff is based in Amman, Jordan, so the CoE does have some on-the-ground presence in the Middle East.

Overall, **this strategy is working well**, and is likely a big part of the reason that the CoE has been able to accomplish such a wide array of activities within the narrow confines of four staff, five years, and \$16 million. It is not without its challenges, of course. Managing the various partnerships, grants, and commissioned projects, and providing the kind of leadership and guidance that makes them CoE projects rather than external ones, itself occupies a great deal of the internal staff's time and stretches the CoE's resources. The CoE's mandate and the expectations of it, especially around country-level support, remain extremely ambitious: it is a sign of the program model's wisdom that the CoE has been able to come anywhere close to meeting these ambitions and expectations. More consideration of this point can be found in EQ 2e and 2f.

**EQ 2d Evolution and adaptation. To what extent has the CoE responded appropriately to the recommendations in the MTE (specifically on gender, country-level support, resource library, and Directory of Experts) and to strategic priorities that have emerged since the MTE?**

Four of the MTE's key recommendations were the following:

- Deliver on the promise to be a champion of gendered dimensions of CRVS
- Enhance supports to national CRVS implementers
- Expand the online Resource Library and better curate its resources
- Expand and nurture the Directory of Experts

The CoE's responses to these recommendations are explored, in turn, in the sub-sections below. Following that is a sub-section on the CoE's adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic, an important priority area that has emerged since the MTE.

**EQ 2d-1 Gender. Response to MTE recommendation to deliver on the promise to be a champion of the gendered dimensions of CRVS**

The CoE has established itself as a (perhaps the) global thought leader on the intersections of gender and CRVS. This work began early in the CoE's life: in February 2018, just over two years after the CoE launched, it organized the first ever global conference on gender and CRVS ("Making the Invisible Visible: CRVS as a basis to meeting the 2030 Gender Agenda") at IDRC's headquarters in Ottawa. This one-day event was attended by close to 100 policymakers and experts including high-level representatives from the UN and the Government of Canada, with results published as a technical report and disseminated in highly visible venues such as the 49th UN Statistical Commission meeting.

The MTE recommended that the CoE “double down” in this area, delivering on its promise at the 2018 conference to champion the gendered dimensions of CRVS. It is abundantly clear that the CoE has done exactly that, delivering an **impressive array of gender-related content and activities** (see box to the right). Notably, in February 2020, the CoE convened (with Open Data Watch and UNFPA) a second global conference on gender and CRVS (“ConVERGE: Connecting Vital Events Registration and Gender Equality”) in Ottawa, attended by over 200 stakeholders from 30 countries representing National Statistics Offices, NGOs, academia, and donors, as well as high-level representation from the UNFPA and the Government of Canada.

Gender has had a central place in most of the CoE’s major grants. Four out of six reference gender in the title, five out of six are considered at least “gender responsive” in IDRC’s terminology<sup>11</sup>, and all are considered to have “significant” or “very significant” potential to help achieve IDRC’s development outcome of enabling gender quality. These grants can also be understood as partnerships, and **it is through these partnerships—in particular with Open Data Watch, Data2X, and UNFPA—that the CoE has been able to achieve so much in the gender space**. The partnership with Open Data Watch (rated as “gender transformative” by IDRC) gave rise to both global conferences on gender and CRVS as well as the knowledge brief series on gender and CRVS. The partnership with Data2X, to build an advocacy platform for gender-sensitive CRVS systems, resulted in the 2019 Women Deliver side event, a gender-related infographic, animated videos, and articles published in devex. The UNFPA partnership has also mainstreamed gender – see EQ 3a.

## The CoE has been relentlessly active in the gender space

### Gender-relevant grants/partnerships

- ✓ UNFPA: “Integrating Gender, Leveraging Population Censuses and Building a Culture of Vital Statistics Production”
- ✓ Data2X: “Building an Advocacy Platform for Gender-Sensitive CRVS Systems”
- ✓ Open Data Watch: “Achieving Gender Equality Through Stronger CRVS Systems”
- ✓ Addis Ababa University: “The vulnerability of internally displaced women and children whose civil status is not registered in Ethiopia”

### Gender-relevant research and knowledge products

- ✓ Three series of knowledge briefs on gender and CRVS (with Open Data Watch)
- ✓ Two gender/CRVS articles for publication by devex, an infographic, two animated videos to highlight the importance of CRVS systems for gender equality and good governance (with Data2X)
- ✓ Blog series on gender and CRVS
- ✓ A literature review on demand for CRVS, with significant attention to gender (with Vital Strategies)
- ✓ Gender integrated into Legal Framework Toolkit and UNSD’s Handbook on CRVS and Identity Management Systems – Communication for Development
- ✓ Research on geographical and sex differentials in civil registration coverage in Burkina Faso (with IDRC Research Award Recipient)

### Gender-relevant conferences and presentations

- ✓ Panel on “Towards Closing the Gender Gap in Data and Digital Health” at the 2017 Global Digital Health Forum (co-organized)
- ✓ First global conference on gender and CRVS (2018) (organized and hosted, with Open Data Watch)
- ✓ Panel on gender and emergencies at the CoE’s 2018 CRVS Innovations conference (organized)
- ✓ Side event on “Civil Registration as a Tool for Women’s Empowerment” at the 2018 UN World Data Forum (organized)
- ✓ Keynote presentation at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s 2019 conference on gender and freedom of movement
- ✓ Panel discussion on “Gender data and civil registration: the path to equality” at the 2019 Gender Speaker Series Panel in Ottawa (organized)
- ✓ Side event “From Cradle to Grave: How Civil Registration and Gender Data Impact the Rights of Women and Girls” at the 2019 Women Deliver conference (co-hosted with Data2X and Open Data Watch)
- ✓ Presentation on gender and CRVS at UNESCAP’s 2019 CRVS Regional Core Group meeting
- ✓ Event on gender and identity management at the 2019 Int’l Conference on Population and Development (co-hosted)
- ✓ Second global conference on gender and CRVS (2020) (organized)

<sup>11</sup> IDRC utilizes a gender scale rating, ranging from gender-aware to gender-transformative. A gender-responsive project is one in which gender is considered in the project rationale and operative in methodology, and there is rigorous analysis of relations and how gender intersects with other relevant aspects of identities.

Stakeholders agree that the CoE is now seen as one of the most influential voices in this important topic, helping to fill a crucial gap in the field. Several reported that before the CoE, there had been almost no discussion of the gendered dimensions of CRVS. Gender was also the topic most often cited by stakeholders when asked what the CoE's niche is. Requests for support on gender-related issues from UN agencies are another good indication of its recognized leadership in this area: notably, UN Women approached the CoE in late 2019 to request assistance in identifying gender indicators for CRVS systems. Moreover, the CoE has walked the talk of gender equality: 60% of the CRVS experts that the CoE contracted or brokered in FY19-20 were female, and 42% of the experts in the Directory are female.

COVID-19 has unfortunately reduced some of the CoE's momentum in the gender space. Several gender-related events were planned for 2020 to capitalize on the momentum of the second global conference, but were cancelled or postponed due to social distancing requirements and travel restrictions. Notably, the Data2X grant saw two of its three high-level advocacy convenings cancelled due to the pandemic, and Data2X and the CoE mutually agreed to end the grant early as a result.

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*[The CoE] is a remarkably constructively critical voice when it comes to the intersection of CRVS, gender, equity, identity, and development....The Centre of Excellence has been a partner who is always interjecting a gendered perspective into the dialogue....in terms of the opportunity to give everyone a name, a nation, and a legal identity.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

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*The gender lens on CRVS is having and will have a huge impact on how we look at CRVS systems. It's integral to the work of the Centre of Excellence.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

## EQ 2d-2 Country-level supports. Response to MTE recommendation to enhance supports to national CRVS implementers

From the beginning, providing technical assistance to GFF countries as they prepare the CRVS components of their Investment Cases has been one of the core mandates of the CoE. That said, the CoE quickly became something much larger than this. Not only did it take on the additional, significant mandate of global and regional engagement (as envisioned since the very beginning), but its country-level supports have themselves become much broader than supporting GFF countries to prepare the CRVS component of their Investment Cases. More information is provided below about how and why this strategic shift has happened.

Starting very early in the CoE's life (FY15-17), **the CoE provided direct technical assistance on GFF Investment Cases, as originally envisioned/desired by the GFF**. Specifically, the CoE's Senior Program Specialists have assisted three Francophone, GFF-eligible sub-Saharan African countries in this capacity: Guinea, Senegal, and Cameroon (see Annex B). However, **the CoE quickly ran into significant challenges with providing country-level assistance in this way. Staffing was the major bottleneck**: with only two senior CRVS technical experts on staff, including lengthy periods with only one senior technical expert, it was difficult to devote so much senior staff time to country-level support; each engagement requires 45-50 days of work, including lengthy field missions. One CoE technical expert alone was responsible for all of the early field missions (Cameroon in FY15-17, Guinea in FY17-18, Senegal in FY17-18); if this approach were to continue, the two in-house experts would need to devote all of their time to these supports (and spend much of the year traveling) in order to make any significant headway in supporting the ~13 Francophone sub-Saharan GFF countries, let alone all 67 GFF countries worldwide.

By FY18-19, **the CoE was beginning to balance relying on in-house experts with external expertise**. An outside consultant, rather than an internal Senior Program Specialist, conducted the second field mission to Guinea (in FY18-19). By FY19-20, the CoE was spending much more of its time brokering *indirect* supports to countries, via its Directory of Experts (see EQ 2d-4), UNFPA partnership, and UNECA partnership (see EQ 3a). As the approach to country-level support shifted, **the countries targeted shifted as well**. The focus became much broader than Francophone GFF countries in sub-Saharan Africa, which had originally been envisioned as the CoE's geographical niche. The UNECA and

UNFPA partnerships added English- and Portuguese-speaking countries in sub-Saharan Africa; Spanish-speaking countries in Central and South America; and Arabic- and French-speaking countries in North Africa and Middle East;<sup>12</sup> some of these (Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Jordan, Tunisia) are non-GFF countries. At the same time, the focus broadened from support for the CRVS component of GFF Investment Cases to broader CRVS strengthening supports. Besides the seven countries that the CoE has directly or indirectly assisted with GFF Investment Cases, more than 20 others have been assisted or influenced in other ways; see Annex B for a complete list.

This evolving approach is **broadly in line with what the MTE recommended**. The MTE recommended relying more on outside experts to provide country-level supports, which the CoE clearly has done, though these supports were not undertaken in line with the GFF processes at country level. The MTE also noted that the original emphasis on supporting only those GFF countries that are preparing the CRVS components of their GFF Investment Cases was likely too narrow; the CoE has certainly acted on this implicit recommendation, as it expands both the types of countries that are supported and the types of support that are offered. The MTE also strongly recommended that the CoE provide “end-to-end in-country support” (through outside consultants) rather than the original “fly-in-fly-out” model. The CoE has achieved it to some extent with the Population Data Fellows (part of the UNFPA partnership – see EQ 3a) at the country level who provide technical assistance over the course of a year. The only MTE recommendation related to country-level support that the CoE has not implemented at all is the recommendation to provide more direct technical support by increasing the number of CoE’s staff to 7-8; as noted earlier, budgetary constraints meant this recommendation was not implemented.

#### **EQ 2d-3 Resource Library. Response to MTE recommendation for expansion and better curation of the Resource Library**

The CoE’s online Resource Library is intended to be a “**one-stop shop**” for CRVS knowledge products, including published research, working papers, communications/advocacy pieces, implementation guides/handbooks, best practice guidelines, and training tools. This is obviously an important part of being a “centre of excellence”: it is a key way in which the CoE can be a global resource hub for the best and most up-to-date thinking on CRVS.

The Resource Library was launched in early 2018. By the time of the MTE report (mid 2019), it already contained 200 freely available documents, and was receiving fairly high marks from stakeholders for the relevance and quality of the content. A major early achievement was the creation of a CRVS Systems Glossary: a taxonomy of CRVS-related topics which is said to be the first of its kind, and which allows the user to search by topic. But much work remained to be accomplished. Stakeholders wanted the Resource Library to expand: the MTE recommended adding both country-specific resources (case studies, profiles) and non-country-specific resources (best practice guidelines). Stakeholders also felt that better curation was needed: the library had received middling marks from stakeholders for organization and structure, and processes for identifying and vetting new resources were still in flux.

The CoE has **richly delivered on the recommendation to expand the Resource Library**. Since the MTE, the CoE has created or commissioned the following key documents (among others):

- ✓ 23 CRVS country profiles (all sub-Saharan Africa), with plans for 24 more (including sub-Saharan Africa as well as North Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, East Asia, and Europe). The country profiles can be accessed via an [interactive map](#).
- ✓ [Compendium of Good Practices in Linking CRVS and Identity Management Systems](#)
- ✓ [Compendium of Good Practices in Linking CRVS and Social Protection Systems](#)
- ✓ [Knowledge Briefs on Gender and CRVS](#)
- ✓ CRVS Improvement Framework (see EQ 3a)
- ✓ Technical reports on global conferences on gender/CRVS ([2018](#) and [2020](#)) and innovation/CRVS ([2018](#))

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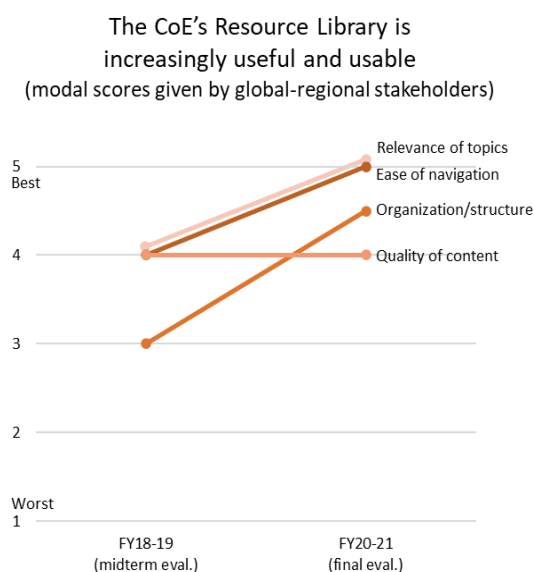
<sup>12</sup> Languages listed reflect the primary language used in government and administration.

With these and other knowledge products added to the Resource Library, **the volume of resources available has been steadily increasing**, from 188 at the end of FY17-18 to 260 at the end of FY19-20. In keeping with the MTE’s recommendations, these include both country-specific resources (the country profiles) and non-country-specific resources (the compendia, knowledge briefs, improvement framework, etc.).

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*The online hub is like a library. When you want to know something about CRVS in a specific area, you go there.*

– Regional-global stakeholder



The CoE has also **made significant progress towards implementing the MTE recommendation to curate documents more effectively.**

The chart to the left shows that the Resource Library has already **improved in utility (relevance of topics) and usability (ease of navigation, organization/ structure)** since the MTE. Moreover, the CoE is in the process of improving utility and usability to an even greater extent. Originally, an external contractor was responsible for identifying new resources and CoE staff vetted them internally. This was considered insufficiently rigorous, however, as the broader CRVS field was not being consulted about which resources should be included. In FY18-19, the CoE developed a new identification/vetting system in which an advisory committee of CRVS experts took on the task. This, however, proved to be unworkable due to the busy schedules of the committee members. The CoE learned from these experiences and, in FY19-20 and the beginning of FY20-21, produced a new “CRVS Resource Library Management Strategy and Suggested Improvements” document which outlines a revamped system for vetting and curating documents. In this new scheme:

- CRVS experts will be invited to submit new publications for vetting at least once a year
- New publications by any member of the Global CRVS Group (including the CoE itself) will be considered pre-vetted, and added to the library as a matter of course
- New ways of leveraging CRVS experts for quality review will be tested (e.g. including this as a standing agenda item in Global CRVS Group meetings)
- Inclusion criteria will be transparently communicated to visitors
- Users will be able to search not only by topic but also by resource type, author, publisher, and region/country of focus
- Topic categories and sub-categories will be redefined and simplified, and resources will be categorized under multiple topics when appropriate.

Implementation of this new curation strategy will begin shortly. The document that describes it is considered evergreen, so some elements will undoubtedly evolve over time. While there is not yet a final answer to the question of how best to curate the Resource Library, what is clear is that the CoE is experimenting, innovating, and adapting in response to user feedback.

Stakeholders provided a few other recommendations for maximizing the value of the Resource Library:

- Ensure that the Resource Library is not purely supply-driven. That is to say, the Resource Library should include categories for important topics *even if resources on that topic are few or nonexistent*. This would highlight gaps in the available literature that the CoE, or other stakeholders, might wish to fill.
- Organize the resources with a CRVS implementer or policymaker's needs in mind, so that he/she can easily find guidance on each aspect of designing or improving a CRVS system.
- Include more brief resources (one-pagers, policy briefs, summaries). The existing resources, relevant and high-quality though they are, can be lengthy and difficult to digest for busy practitioners.

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*Put [yourselves] in the shoes of someone who needs to solve a particular improvement problem....If there was a line of sight between the problems that keep CRVS constituents up at night in the countries where we want that impact, and the resources that would help them sleep better at night once they're applied, adapted, adopted, domesticated, institutionalized, and sustained [them] – that's the way to have really true and lasting impact in terms of the knowledge products that have accumulated at the CoE.*  
– Regional-global stakeholder

The Resource Library also needs additional marketing and promotion: even some of the CRVS stakeholders who work closely with the CoE had not explored it, indicating that the value to the field could be communicated more clearly and persuasively. Stakeholders also reported that UNECA has its own online resource library: the CoE Resource Library's unique value proposition, vis-à-vis this and possibly other “competitors,” needs to be defined, and synergies found to avoid duplication of effort.

For information about the usability, utility, and impact of the knowledge products themselves, see EQ 1b.

#### EQ 2d-4 Directory of Experts. Response to MTE recommendation to expand and nurture Directory of Experts

The idea of a directory of experts dates back to the original funding proposal to GAC. It is meant to be a **centralized database of CRVS specialists** that can be hired to provide expert advice and services to national CRVS implementers, regional-global CRVS stakeholders, and the CoE itself. It is one mechanism by which the CoE could scale its impact beyond the level possible with internal experts (i.e. CoE staff) alone. There is a great deal of enthusiasm from stakeholders for this idea; interviewees pointed to perennial challenges in finding qualified consultants that specialize in CRVS, and the MTE argued that the Directory might become the CoE's foremost contribution to the field. Currently, however, the Directory can be considered a **promising but not yet proven idea**. Providing a history of the still-evolving Directory gives a sense of some of the challenges that have been encountered, as well as directions forward.

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*The directory of experts, if well nurtured, has the potential to become the most prized tool of the CoE...a 'global good' that would benefit many other partners.*  
– Mid-term evaluation

The Directory of Experts began in May 2017 with a widely disseminated call for applicants which received over 750 submissions. Applicants were first screened for their work experience, education, and language proficiency. Shortlisted applicants were then vetted by a committee of independent global experts. As a result of this process, 117 experts were added to the Directory. An analysis of the first call showed that these experts were disproportionately male, from developed countries, and concentrated in a small number of subject areas. A second call for applicants, sent out in November 2018, aimed to expand the Directory while addressing these areas of underrepresentation. As a result of this second call, another 42 experts were added, increasing the roster to 159 and significantly improving the gender, geographic, and subject matter balance: close to half (42%) of the experts were now female, more than half (62%) were from outside of North America and Europe, and all specialties other than Law were adequately represented.

By mid-2019 the Directory had a healthy roster of experts, and issues of underrepresentation had been addressed. But other challenges lingered. Many of the experts had little to no CRVS field experience. The vetting process, for all its rigour, was also extremely time-consuming and resource-intensive for the CoE; funds had to be spent hiring an external contractor to do much of the work, and applicants had to wait six months between submitting an application and receiving their final decision. Moreover, the Directory was not actually publicly accessible. It existed in FluidReview, a platform designed to be an internal HR recruitment tool rather than a public-facing directory; experts' information could not be made public as there was no way to restrict access to sensitive information such as unsuccessful applications.

As a result, the CoE was obliged to act as mediators: a request for an expert would be received, the CoE would search in the Directory for suitable candidates, and then forward the information for the matching candidates to the requester. This was problematic for several reasons. First, it put the CoE in the awkward position of endorsing specific experts: while the CoE always intended to vet experts for inclusion in the Directory, it had not intended to recommend experts for particular assignments; the problematic nature of this became obvious when an organization was unsatisfied with the work of an expert whom they had hired on the CoE's recommendation. Second, choosing an expert was a laborious and time-consuming process: when the CoE received a request for an expert, CoE staff had to download the data from FluidReview into an Excel document (the data had to be downloaded again each time there was a new request, as the Excel document did not auto-update), then use Excel filters to manually identify experts. Third, the CoE's role as mediator meant that it was staff's, rather than experts', responsibility to update their contact and other information; FluidReview was described as unintuitive by external users, which meant that few experts updated their information independently. The result, according to an internal review and external survey conducted in 2019, was a Directory with high costs for the CoE and low returns to the CRVS field. **By the end of FY19-20, there had been just 8 requests for experts from the Directory, and the Directory was far from coming into its own.**

Taking into account feedback from intended users, and in an effort to reduce costs and increase benefits, **the CoE revamped the Directory in 2020.** The new version of the Directory, launched between June and September 2020, includes several sweeping changes:

- The Directory is now publicly accessible through a new [online platform](#), which eliminates the CoE's problematic and laborious mediator role. Members can update their qualifications and experience on an ongoing basis, and accounts are deactivated after nine months of inactivity in order to reduce the need for the CoE to update profiles.
- The vetting process has been streamlined in an attempt to reduce the burden on the CoE while maintaining quality control. The applicant must answer a series of eligibility questions, then request a reference from a colleague; this colleague receives an email asking him or her to verify the details of the application. The CoE exercises due diligence by ensuring that the email originates from a recognized organization. This is quick enough that the CoE no longer needs to pay an outside contractor to do it. Details of the vetting process vary by the sector to which the applicant belongs.
- The Directory has expanded its remit to include job listings, consulting opportunities, calls for proposals, training opportunities, and information about CRVS events and resources. The Directory now also allows organizations, not just individuals, to join, and members of the Directory can choose to be informed of new items by email. In some ways, this is the most radical change, as it (to quote a CoE staff) reconceives the expert roster as a *network*, thus greatly expanding its intended role. The rationale for this is twofold. First, the CRVS field currently lacks such a meeting place; the Directory might become the place where, for instance, the Registrar General of one country can fill out a contact form and be put in touch with the Registrar General of another country. Second, it might attract more experts to join: if they find value in the Directory other than being awarded the occasional consulting contract, they are more likely to sign up.

At the CoE itself, there are diverse views about whether the new vetting process still maintains same level of rigour, and if the Directory's additional features replicate what other sites do without reducing costs of its maintenance. **Only time will tell whether this newly retooled and reconceived Directory will be successful.**

The MTE provided two recommendations for the Directory of Experts. The first is that it be expanded to include more experts. This recommendation was given at the point when only the first call for applicants had been completed, resulting in 117 experts on the roster. It is obvious that **this recommendation was followed through on**, as the second call resulted in 42 more experts joining, and experts continue to join now through the new vetting process, which allows intake on an ongoing basis.

The second MTE recommendation was to nurture the experts in the Directory: the MTE argued that realizing the Directory's full potential would require not just *finding* experts but also *upskilling* existing experts and *training* new experts. To address this gap in the Directory, as well as the broader scarcity of CRVS experts in the sector, the **CoE has designed a "capacity strengthening road map"** to increase the supply of generalist CRVS experts as well as experts in specific CRVS-relevant areas such as strategic planning, law, digitization, and communication. Capacity building opportunities have included the following:

- The CRVS Research Fellows program, delivered through a grant/partnership with the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population's (IUSSP's) Scientific Panel on Population Perspectives and Demographic Methods to Strengthen CRVS. This program has selected 8 individuals, out of 133 applicants, to be remotely mentored by the panel over two years to assess the completeness and quality of CRVS systems. These fellows are from Malaysia, Peru, Uganda, Italy, Iran, Bangladesh, and India; they are relatively junior (graduate students, postdocs, or newly minted assistant professors) but highly promising, so this qualifies as an effort to build a new generation of experts.
- The Population Data Fellows program, which is part of the UNFPA partnership. Unlike the CRVS Research Fellows program, this is a residential fellowship – see EQ 3a for more information.
- The Global CRVS eLearning course, which is available free of charge in French and English through the World Bank's online Open Learning Campus. (The CoE contributed to this course by hosting, and funding 15 participants to attend, an expert group meeting in Ottawa in July 2016 to review the course content. The CoE also peer reviewed four of the modules.)
- Online training workshop specifically for members of the Directory. This is to be a 10-day workshop, organized jointly by the CoE and UNESCAP, and available to both English and French speakers. Forty carefully chosen experts, mainly from the Directory, will complete a general learning block based on the CRVS Improvement Framework; one of five specialized learning blocks (strategic planning, law, VS, digitalization, and communication for change); field trips to CRVS-relevant sites in the host country; and inter-sectoral group work. This has not yet materialized, however, due to COVID-19.
- Training webinars. Still in development, these bilingual offerings will focus on CRVS-relevant communication for development; factoring in social norms in CRVS programming; and CRVS in conflicts, fragile states, and emergencies, including epidemics.

In addition to the practical challenges and delays caused by COVID-19, questions also remain as to the cost-effectiveness of nurturing experts and what direct value the CoE might gain in return (e.g., should experts that the CoE has trained be expected to contribute knowledge products to the CoE's Resource Library?). Internal strategy documents supporting the FY19-20 narrative report to GAC indicate that nurturing CRVS experts will take much longer than the CoE's current mandate. So **the capacity strengthening road map, like the Directory of Experts more generally, is a promising but not-yet-proven idea**; a new mandate for the CoE would be needed to see to what extent this will bear fruit.

## EQ 2d-5 COVID-19. Impacts of the pandemic on the CoE and how the CoE has responded

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented both challenges and opportunities for the CoE. The **challenges have mainly been practical and logistical** ones. Most of the CoE's research grantees have been set back considerably due to the need to cancel, postpone, or virtualize fieldwork, workshops, and dissemination activities. The CoE's in-house activities have also been set back to some extent. Important conferences and meetings that the CoE was going to play a role in (e.g. 64th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, World Bank Spring Meetings, ID4Africa Conference) have been postponed or cancelled, which has reduced some of the CoE's momentum, particularly in the gender arena and in capacity building for CRVS experts. Stakeholders pointed out that some activities, such as fieldwork, cannot be virtualized, and others, such as capacity building workshops, can be virtualized only with great effort and sacrifice (some participants lack reliable internet access, and rapport is more easily built in person). These challenges inspired the CoE to push back the timelines of most of its funded research projects through no-cost extensions, and to request its own no-cost extension (to July 2021) from GAC, which it received. In one case, the CoE and Data2X mutually agreed to terminate their partnership early, as COVID-19 had forced the cancellation of the remaining grant activities (in-person advocacy meetings).

All that said, the **CoE has proven itself to be extremely nimble in responding and adapting to the pandemic**. On the practical and logistical side, the CoE took the initial period of social distancing as an opportunity to focus efforts on launching the Directory of Experts and finalizing a number of knowledge products. Dissemination activities have been moved online to the greatest extent possible, through virtual sessions, social media, distributing videos and infographics, and other means.

Even more impressively, the **CoE quickly showed leadership in defining the intersection of COVID-19 and CRVS and articulating the importance of CRVS in a pandemic**. By late April 2020, the CoE had produced a "Messaging around CRVS and COVID-19" document that lays out a compelling argument that CRVS systems should be considered essential services during the pandemic. This is not only for the usual reasons that CRVS systems are important, but also because death registration is the gold standard for generating complete and accurate data on COVID-19's death toll. The CoE has acted on this conviction through several channels:

- The CoE has **convened a CRVS and COVID-19 Working Group** comprising statisticians, demographers, public health specialists, and data experts; it is said to be the only of its kind in the world, and is an excellent example of the CoE's convening power at work (see EQ 2b). The Working Group's activities to date include: a French-language literature review on COVID-19 and CRVS systems; a webinar on CRVS and COVID-19 attended by more than 100 stakeholders; and a session on COVID-19 and death registration at the 2020 Virtual UN World Data Forum. The Working Group also has plans to develop guidance papers and a blog series on the implications of COVID-19 for CRVS and vice-versa.
- The CoE has **worked through its partnership with UNECA to understand the COVID-19/CRVS connection in Africa and support African CRVS implementers to weather the pandemic**. The CoE supported UNECA's rapid survey of African governments regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on CRVS systems and how governments are responding; the results of this survey led to recommendations to African governments on how to continue registering births and deaths and producing vital statistics during the pandemic. The UNECA partnership also supported two webinar series on COVID-19 and CRVS for African governments, and three briefs on good practices in maintaining and building resilient CRVS systems in Africa during the pandemic, with plans for two more.
- The CoE has also incorporated discussion of COVID-19 into two papers on CRVS in fragile settings, and plans to incorporate it into one of its training webinars for members of the Directory of Experts.

Stakeholders welcome the CoE's thought leadership in this area: all stakeholders that the Cathexis team interviewed agreed that the CoE has an important role to play in the pandemic. This is not only because of the interconnections between COVID-19 and CRVS, but also because of unique abilities that the CoE brings to the table: its ability to convene stakeholders to respond to the issue; its capacity to produce action-oriented research and disseminate it through large networks; its niche in advocating for the importance of CRVS systems even (especially) during crises; and its already-

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*There are lessons in this pandemic that the Centre of Excellence can capture, document, and share. It could shift conversation on how you prepare and future-proof systems, so in case of another pandemic, CRVS systems are resilient. Definitely, CoE has the mandate to guide the world [on this].*

– Regional-global stakeholder

established thought leadership in CRVS in emergencies. Stakeholders hope that the CoE will advocate for CRVS as an essential service; facilitate South-South exchange of best practices in continuing CRVS during the pandemic; and put a spotlight on death registration, which even high-income countries often struggle with. Some stakeholders also argued that the pandemic is an ideal time for the CoE to think about innovative ways of doing registration quickly and cheaply, especially as the capacity of civil registration offices is reduced and many people avoid hospitals and end up giving birth or dying in community settings. These are largely the areas that the CoE is already tackling, so it seems the CoE is meeting the needs of the field.

**EQ 2e Partnerships.** How appropriate and successful has the partnership between GAC, GFF, and IDRC been for delivering intended results? What lessons have been learned that could be applied to future partnerships?

The CoE is the product of a partnership between a Canadian federal department (GAC), a Canadian crown corporation (IDRC), and a US-based multilateral donor platform (the GFF, housed at the World Bank). The main roles of these three partners are shown in the table below:

Role	GAC	IDRC	GFF
<b>Houses and operates</b> the CoE		✓	
<b>Funds</b> the CoE	✓ (\$15m)	✓ (\$1m)	
Exercises <b>accountability</b> over the CoE (approves progress reports, exercises financial oversight)	✓	✓	
<b>Governs</b> the CoE (sits on the CoE's Executive Committee [EC], attends ~semi-annual EC meeting, sets strategic direction)	✓ (1 EC rep)	✓ (1 EC rep)	✓ (1 EC rep)
<b>Coordinates</b> operationally with the CoE (sits on Planning Group, attends ~bi-monthly Planning Group meetings)	✓	✓	✓
<b>Collaborates</b> with the CoE (selected areas of collaboration are in parentheses; there are many others)	✓ (champions the CoE with Government of Canada)	✓ (supports research, publication, dissemination)	✓ (brokers contact with countries that need support with GFF Investment Cases)

As is clear from the table above, and as stakeholders reported, **this is a somewhat complex and confusing—which is not to say ineffective—partnership arrangement.** GAC funds and governs the CoE and the CoE is accountable to it. IDRC contributes only a small percentage of the CoE funding, but has a large amount of control over the CoE due to its equal representation on the Executive Committee and the fact that the CoE is physically, administratively, and in every other

way a part of IDRC. The GFF does not fund the CoE and does not exercise true control of it, but does “govern” it as an equal member of its Executive Committee.

This arrangement can only be understood by examining the early history of the CoE. The Government of Canada committed \$200m to the GFF as part of its initial investment in RMNCAH, with \$100m of that funding committed toward CRVS. GAC (Canada) wanted the CRVS funds to create a Canadian-based Centre of Excellence that would leverage Canadian expertise, with a broader global mandate. The agreement reached was that the CoE would be located in Canada and would serve this broader purpose, but would also assist GFF-eligible countries with their Investment Cases and the GFF would have an equal voice in governing it. This made sense, as GAC wanted to ensure that its investment in the GFF would be measurably impactful. Next came the decision to house the CoE at IDRC, which fit well with GAC’s desire to leverage Canadian expertise and CoE’s research and thought leadership mandate, but fit uneasily with the CoE’s country-level technical assistance mandate. IDRC agreed to contribute an additional \$1m to the CoE, in a co-funding arrangement that is typical at this organization, and the CoE was born.

The paragraphs below explore the advantages and disadvantages of the CoE being partnered with each of these three organizations, what has worked well, and what has been learned.

CoE’s partnership with GAC. **This has been the most unequivocally positive of the partner relationships**, according to stakeholders and Cathexis’ assessment. As noted above, GAC’s role is clear and straightforward: it funds, oversees, and governs the CoE. GAC also goes beyond this and proactively advocates for the CoE, invites it to present its work, and expands its network by introducing CoE staff to other organizations. There is no conflict, as GAC always wished for the CoE to have its dual mandate of global thought leadership and country-level support, and it welcomes both.

CoE’s relationship with IDRC. **This has been a beneficial relationship, but there have been some early challenges.** From the beginning, IDRC, as a “home” for the CoE, brought much more to the table than its location on Canadian soil and its Canadian branding. Stakeholders pointed out many advantages of CoE being part of IDRC:

- ✓ IDRC specializes in research, and research is a large part of what the CoE does. The CoE benefits from IDRC’s well honed in-house supports for research grant-making, publication, and dissemination. The CoE lacks internal capacity in communications, and is grateful to be able to rely on IDRC’s communications expertise and infrastructure (e.g. social media channels).
- ✓ IDRC is agile in a way that Canadian federal departments, the World Bank, and UN agencies are not: it is set up to quickly award grants and arrange consulting contracts, which has greatly aided the CoE’s ability to get work done with a small staff (see EQ 2c).
- ✓ IDRC has a long history and established reputation that rubs off on the CoE, even with its young age and short mandate.
- ✓ As a crown corporation, IDRC works at arm’s length from the Government of Canada and so it (and the CoE) can conduct truly independent and unbiased research.
- ✓ IDRC shares the CoE’s interest in gender, and has a large and growing presence in the public health, open data, data for development, data privacy, and big data movements.

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*There is some marriage of convenience [in housing CoE at IDRC]. But overall, [the decision] was driven by the fact that IDRC actually had the technical skills and systems to pull this off, and I think they have.*

– Core partner

There are also drawbacks to the arrangement:

- ✘ IDRC does not often work directly with or directly support governments, which is an important part of the CoE's mandate. This makes the CoE an outlier in IDRC's suite of programs. IDRC has few country offices, making it more difficult for the CoE to support on-the-ground implementation.
- ✘ IDRC does not typically arrange partnerships with or grants to UN agencies, which has made it very difficult, and sometimes impossible, for the CoE to do so.
- ✘ Housing the CoE in Ottawa puts it far from the parts of the world that need support with CRVS; a few stakeholders felt that it would have been better to hire CoE staff at UNECA/APAI-CRVS in Ethiopia and UNESCAP/Get Every One in the Picture in Thailand, to serve Africa and Asia, respectively.

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*Like any organization, IDRC is good at some things and other things not. When it comes to technical assistance, I know lots of organizations that can do that better than us....[But] when it comes to research grants, IDRC can do and has done all sorts of grants, small and large.*

– IDRC staff

Overall, the benefits of being a part of IDRC probably outweigh the detriments. One stakeholder referred to the arrangement as a “marriage of convenience,” given the not-quite-perfect fit, but also stated that no other parent organization (GFF, GAC, UN, entirely new organization) would have been better.

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*[GFF] thought the Centre [of Excellence] would play a very hands-on role in every country working through these Investment Cases, and be that centre of CRVS knowledge and expertise....But the establishment of the Centre with four staff members, there was no way that could happen. Somewhere along the line the communication was not clear.*

– Stakeholder

CoE's partnership with GFF<sup>13</sup>. There has been some early strain in this partnership, but working relations have improved considerably.

Stakeholders reported that the GFF-CoE relationship was sometimes a strained one in the early part of the CoE's life. The GFF hoped that the CoE would devote much, perhaps most, of its energy to providing technical assistance to GFF countries as they developed and implemented their Investment Cases. Meanwhile, GAC (and CoE staff) envisioned the CoE as a purveyor of “global goods” and not just country-level supports. Moreover, the CoE expanded its understanding of country-level support beyond what the GFF had imagined: the CoE began assisting GFF countries with more CRVS-system matters not directly related to Investment Cases, and has even supported some non-GFF-eligible countries (see EQ 1b, 2d-2 and 3a). This caused some

tension, with the GFF perceiving the CoE to have underdelivered on its country-level mandate (it had directly assisted just three GFF countries with their Investment Cases), while the CoE argued that its broader mandate and small staff had made delivering any more than this impossible. Diverging expectations were exacerbated by the ambiguous governance role of the GFF, in which the CoE is “governed” by GFF but not fully accountable to it, and by turnover of some of the key architects of the CoE between its conception and its execution.

Arguably, some friction was all but inevitable. The CoE was born out of at least two distinct agendas, leading to multiple sets of expectations: it might simply have delivered abundantly on all of these expectations, but the CoE's small staff meant that at least one partner would not get all they hoped for. **What is remarkable is not that some of the parties did not get everything they hoped for, but that all of them got so much from such a small and strategically spread-thin organization.** This point is taken up again in EQ 2f.

<sup>13</sup> Quotes in this section are not attributed to particular stakeholder groups, given the sensitive nature of the topic.

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*There were a couple of workshops we had between GFF team, the Centre, and GAC that helped clarify roles and responsibilities. Once those roles and responsibilities were clear, the partnership worked so much better.*  
 – Stakeholder

The partners identified a way forward. The GFF adjusted its expectations for the level and amount of support the CoE could provide, and the CoE found ways to provide technical support to a larger number of countries, including GFF countries. The GFF increasingly embraced the CoE’s global thought leadership mandate and supported it in a variety of ways. Program partners now point to benefits to the relationship. The GFF provides existing relationships with governments to support the CoE’s contribution to GFF investment cases at country level; other program partners do not offer the same

relationships. The GFF also connects the low- and middle-income countries with whom the CoE works with a large source of funds to implement, at country-level, some of the concrete improvements that CoE hopes to see; other program partners do not offer that.

Core program partners and CoE stakeholders suggested a few ways of creating greater clarity and compatibility in the GFF-CoE partnership in a future mandate of the CoE. Either the GFF should be *only* an operational partner (and not “govern” the CoE), or it should fund the CoE and the CoE should be truly accountable to it. At the very least, expectations must be defined and agreed upon from the beginning, and they must be commensurate with the CoE’s level of staffing and resourcing.

Taking a step back, the key predictor of whether one of CoE’s core partnerships is wholly positive or whether there is some mismatch is the **strategic emphasis** of the partner, vis-à-vis the CoE’s dual mandate; see the table below.

Strategic emphasis	CoE	GAC	IDRC	GFF
Research, knowledge translation, global thought leadership	✓	✓	✓	✗
Implementation, government assistance, country-level support	✓	✓	✗	✓

This table could be interpreted as meaning that there is a mismatch between the CoE and two out of three of its partners. But the evaluation team would suggest that it shows, rather, that the partnership *as a whole* is well designed: CoE gains support from IDRC for one side of its mission, GFF for the other, and GAC for both. Hence, the main lesson learned for the future of these, and other, partnerships is the importance of communicating early and often to ensure that roles are clear, expectations are reasonable, and mandate is agreed upon.

## EQ 2f Enablers and barriers. What are the major external or internal factors that have promoted or constrained the attainment of program outcomes by the CoE?

Below are the major enablers and barriers that the CoE has faced. (The CoE’s core partnerships with GFF, GAC, and IDRC give rise to enablers as well as some barriers: these are covered in EQ 2e.)

### Internal enablers

**The CoE’s staff is its biggest asset.** The core team earned universal praise from stakeholders for their specialized CRVS expertise, dedication, and hard work; the fact that the CoE has managed to do and accomplish so much, despite its slender resources and young age, owes in large part to these qualities in its human resources.

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*It’s amazing what that small team can do and has achieved in such a short period of time. It’s unbelievable to me. I’ve worked in government before, so I know how slowly things move. That’s not the case with them.*  
 – Regional-global stakeholder

The CoE has also shown itself to be extremely **nimble, adaptive, and innovative** as an institution. To give some examples, the CoE quickly found a niche in gender that its founders had not foreseen; learned from early challenges in offering direct country-level support and is experimenting with several alternate models; rapidly pivoted both operationally and thematically in the face of COVID-19; took on neglected topics such as marriage registration; and is revamping its approach to both its Directory of Experts and its Resource Library in order to overcome identified challenges.

### External enablers

The CoE was created at a time of **rapidly increasing global interest in CRVS**. The year that the CoE began, 2015, was a remarkable year for CRVS: it was the year that UNESCAP's "CRVS Decade" (2015-2024) began, the year that the GFF (with its essential link to CRVS) was founded, and the year that the Sustainable Development Goals (several of which include CRVS targets) were declared. The timing seems to have been perfect, as there have been enough other organizations with an interest in CRVS for the CoE to partner with (see EQ 2e and EQ 3a), but not so many as to prevent the CoE from having a *raison d'être* and a unique value proposition (see EQ 2b).<sup>14</sup>

### Internal barriers

A major barrier to achieving program goals has been the CoE's **short time horizon and the uncertainty of continued funding**.

Stakeholders considered the CoE's five-year mandate to be very short, relative to 1) the 2015-2030 time horizon of the UN's Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2) the longevity and assured continuance of other players in this field (UN agencies, World Bank, etc.), and 3) the amount of time that it takes to see concrete improvement in complex systems in LMICs. The problem is not just that five years is a short time to deliver on an ambitious mandate, but also that the uncertainty of future funding reduces the CoE's standing in the eyes of other organizations; they may be reluctant to partner with an organization that may no longer exist in a few years' time. Stakeholders also pointed out that a short mandate is inefficient, as a few years are inevitably needed simply to ramp up, and the final year is often devoted to winding down (concluding grants, reporting, etc.), which leaves little time to get work done.

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*Organizing initiatives that have a project funding cycle, there is a period of ramping up at the start and a period of winding down at the end...If we're winding down and restarting again, that takes a lot of energy and resources to rebuild. Having longer term funding means the level of activities continue to ramp up.*

– CoE staff

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*It took three years to get anywhere, one year of decent work, one year of good work, and now it's stopped?*

– Regional-global stakeholder

The other significant internal barrier that the CoE has faced is **understaffing**. The CoE had challenges in recruiting staff in its first year due to the highly specialized nature of the work, constraints in hiring non-Canadian citizens, and modest salaries compared to what CRVS experts might obtain from UN agencies. The CoE was not fully staffed until February 2017, over a year after it began. PMF data indicates that during that time (FY15-17), only 64% of planned strategic outputs were completed, and stakeholders attribute these delays largely to understaffing.

Even once the CoE had hired its full team, understaffing remained a challenge. A full team is just four full-time staff, of which just two are senior CRVS subject matter experts of the sort who could provide direct technical assistance to countries. Having such a lean staff was a conscious strategy and is not necessarily a bad thing (see EQ 2c), but stakeholders reported that it is nonetheless extremely ambitious to deliver on the CoE's global, regional, and country-level mandate with so few team members. Staff turnover continued to add challenges in subsequent years, with workplans needing to be adjusted multiple times. Nonetheless, the CoE managed to deliver most of its outputs on time in FY17-18 (82%), FY18-19 (78%), and FY19-20 (82%).

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<sup>14</sup> A few stakeholders considered the rapidly increasing global interest in CRVS as an external barrier as well as enabler: they described the field as “noisy” and “crowded,” which can make it more difficult for the CoE to be heard and noticed. Still, it seems unlikely that there could have been any better year than 2015 for the CoE to launch.

It is clear that the CoE has accomplished a lot in absolute terms, and a remarkably large amount relative to its size.

Although the MTE recommendation to double the staff size was rejected as unrealistic by IDRC management, the matter should be revisited; even a single additional CRVS expert (especially one who speaks French) would be helpful, and there were a number of calls from stakeholders to consider additional hiring.

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*[CoE] needs a bigger centre of gravity to be truly impactful....Doubling the staff would more than double the impact.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

#### External barriers

**COVID-19** is a titanic external force that has created major challenges for the CoE and its grantees in delivering outputs on time, as well as opportunities for showing thought leadership, as explored in more detail in EQ 2d.-5

The other major external barrier has been **bureaucratic hurdles in creating formal partnerships with and giving grants to UN agencies**. Given the specialized nature of CRVS, the need for global and regional impact, and the reach and reputation of the UN, the CoE has little choice but to partner with UN agencies. Unfortunately, UN organizations have often been unable to accept the terms of IDRC grants (i.e. formal partnerships with the CoE) due to their own legal and administrative rules.<sup>15</sup> With the support of a legal expert at the UN, and with much CoE staff time and effort, this hurdle was overcome in the case of UNECA and UNFPA. But it was unfortunately not possible to overcome this barrier in attempts to create partnerships with UNICEF and UNESCAP, which represents a major missed opportunity.

## 4 Detailed findings: Sustainability and scalability

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**EQ 3a Scale-up efforts.** To what extent has the CoE oriented programming to scale-up solutions and global thought leadership? What have been helping or hindering factors, and what has been learned?

As noted in EQ 2d-2, the CoE quickly discovered that directly supporting individual countries through its own in-house experts could not possibly bring impact at scale. Since that discovery was made, the CoE has been experimenting with several methods of scaling its impact, most notably including two sizeable, multi-stranded partnerships with UN agencies (UNFPA and UNECA); these and other related scaling strategies are discussed below. (The Directory of Experts can also be understood as a scaling strategy; it is covered in EQ 2d-4.) The overall conclusion is that **the CoE is working diligently and intentionally at the problem of scaling; all of its efforts in this area are promising, and at least one (the UNFPA partnership) has arguably already led to impact at quite a broad scale.**

#### The UNFPA partnership as a scaling strategy

UNFPA is undoubtedly the CoE's most important partner after the core partners of GAC, GFF, and IDRC. The CoE's partnership with this UN agency ("Integrating Gender, Leveraging Population Censuses and Building a Culture of Vital Statistics Production," often referred to as the Connecting Vital Events Registration and Gender Equality, or **ConVERGE**, initiative) is by far its largest grant, at over CAD3.2m. Beginning in March 2019 and continuing to the present day, the initiative is focused on **scalable improvements in collecting and making use of gender-sensitive and gender-disaggregated vital statistics**.<sup>16</sup> This is a complex and multi-stranded initiative unto itself, whose main activities and accomplishments are as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> This is also an internal barrier: IDRC is not well positioned to negotiate grant-giving relationships with UN agencies. Similarly, at one point the CoE floated the idea of seconding a staff member to UNECA, but IDRC was unable to accommodate such an arrangement.

<sup>16</sup> The attention paid to the "VS" side of CRVS in this initiative responds to a specific recommendation in the MTE.

- Championing the cause of marriage registration, in particular by adding relevant questions to demographic surveys. **This might be the CoE's most impressive example of scaled impact to date.** As a result of ConVERGE, the newest Demographic and Health Survey (DHS-8) now includes marriage registration questions. This revised survey will be administered in about 120 countries in 2020 and 2021 (as opposed to just seven countries that had such questions previously), resulting in **the first comprehensive global picture of marriage registration completeness that has ever been available to the CRVS field.** This is an important initiative for gender equality, as marriage registration helps protect women from early and forced marriage and ensures women can inherit from their deceased husbands and claim custody of children. ConVERGE also provided guidance to all of UNFPA's country offices on marriage registration questions to be included in the 2020 **census round**, and many of these countries, including two GFF countries in sub-Saharan Africa, are planning to use them; the initiative has also recommended that UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) should include a marriage registration question, and signs are promising that this will happen.
- The Population Data Fellows Program, and direct technical assistance to countries. Eight promising junior professionals are receiving a 14-month fellowship to develop hands-on skills in gender-sensitive vital statistics collection and analysis. These fellows receive training, followed by deployment to UNFPA headquarters or a UNFPA regional or country office, and additional workshops and ongoing mentoring. The fellows provide technical assistance to individual countries (a train-the-trainer model), namely Senegal, Burkina Faso, Benin, Republic of Congo, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia. Longer-term, this is meant to build a new generation of gender-sensitive CRVS experts.
- Capacity building for National Statistical Offices (NSOs). The initiative has developed open source statistical analysis tools (R Code libraries), training modules (data lab tutorials, PanOpto video tutorials), and guidance documents to enhance NSOs' ability to analyze vital statistics, in particular with regards to gender disaggregation. These tools were piloted in Jordan and Morocco, as part of direct technical assistance, and were planned for wider dissemination at capacity building workshops in 2020, but COVID-19 has reduced some momentum in this area.
- Multi-country sociocultural research on the causes of under-registration, in particular of women. Fieldwork is being conducted in the Republic of Congo, Senegal, Benin, Jordan, and Morocco on this topic, though efforts have been set back by COVID-19. A particular research project on this topic in Burkina Faso has led to a field trial of an IT solution for civil registration ("iCivil") rolled out with sensitivity to sociocultural and demand-side factors. Additional quantitative research has been done on marriage registration completeness in the Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Kyrgyzstan.

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*[At the 2019] Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, [ConVERGE] organized and convened a session focusing exclusively on marriage registration. After that panel session, we were able to get a resolution adopted by the Ministers in the committee that yes, there has been neglect of marriage registration, marriage registration has to be taken seriously, and we need strengthening in that...It's exciting and promising.*

– Stakeholder involved in ConVERGE

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*At the national level, [ConVERGE] has supported the reinforcement of a technical system [for CRVS]....helping both with regard to the technical aspects of the systems as well as the social aspects of rolling this system out....We are now collecting more refined information, for example the age of the mother....This allows us to see if a young girl becomes a mother very young. We have this information, and we can take action....Many of our citizens are displaced due to war. These individuals have no identity once they leave their region. They have no documents. This will not be the case in the future.*

– National CRVS implementer engaged

It is clear from the above, and stakeholders agreed, that **this partnership has already achieved impact at scale and seems poised to achieve much more.**

### The UNECA partnership as a scaling strategy

While smaller in scale than the UNFPA partnership (CAD356k as opposed to CAD3.2m), the UNECA partnership is an important one and another example of the CoE scaling impact through partnerships with UN organizations. The initiative, known as “Strengthening CRVS systems through technical assistance and targeted capacity building programs within the African region,” has **hired a bilingual consultant based at the APAI-CRVS Secretariat (part of UNECA) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to provide direct CRVS technical support to African countries.** Initially, 12 GFF countries were to be supported to attend the COM5, but various types of support have been extended to at least 17 GFF countries to date (see Annex B). Assistance has been done both in-person (the consultant has completed five missions to date) and remotely. Supports have included:

- Assistance with implementing GFF Investment Cases (three countries)
- Piloting the CRVS Improvement Framework (see below) (two countries)
- Mapping the current state of CRVS systems (12 countries)
- Providing extensive guidance and support on maintaining CRVS systems during COVID-19 (see EQ 2d-5), which helped at least five countries advocate for CRVS as an essential service during the pandemic, and three others adopt the WHO’s Rapid Mortality Surveillance System to collect accurate data on the pandemic’s death toll.
- Development of 4 technical briefs on the impacts of Covid-19 on Civil Registration Systems, and good practises in reversing the long term impact.

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*The mission [by the UNECA consultant] resulted in improved connection with other players, within [my country] and outside. We improved connections with institutions, ministries, and departments. Prior to the mission, we didn’t see the relevance of building connections with these players....This was very key, as it increased the number of players to make sure we can move forward....*

*[Now] I know where to get help when I need it....The relationship [with UNECA] has pushed me and my team to push forward....We are learning on the job and moving forward. We feel more motivated...and more mobilized. We are learning something new every day from these guys.*

– National CRVS implementer engaged through the UNECA partnership

Plans for the future include delivering virtual capacity building workshops for African Registrars General (through the Committee of African Registrars General – see below), and contributing additional CRVS country profiles to the CoE Resource Library.

### Related scaling strategies

Another scaling strategy that intersects with, but is not entirely a part of, the UNECA partnership is the **Committee of African Registrars General**. The CoE helped to establish this community of practice (the first of its kind) in 2017, and has played an important role in keeping it active. It has funded members of the committee (i.e. Registrars General from African countries) to attend in-person and virtual meetings (e.g. the Fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration) and is planning additional virtual training sessions and webinars for the group. It is through this community of practice that much of the UNECA partnership’s accomplishments in supporting countries during COVID-19 have been possible (see EQ 2d-5). Reportedly, attendance is very high. This is an example of the CoE’s convening power at work, and represents a unique way for the CoE to scale the adoption of best practices in sub-Saharan Africa.

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*Governments really sincerely appreciate learning from each other. When...you’re building a system, being exposed to other systems is very valuable, to confirm and reject ideas. You go to a country and see this is how they’re doing it, and is this is a good idea or not. Countries find inspiration in these platforms and joined in huge numbers.*

– CoE staff

**The CRVS Improvement Framework** can also be understood as a scaling strategy. The CoE has collaborated with UNECA, Vital Strategies, and the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to create this document, which is

being finalized in its English form as of September 2020 and will be translated into French. The document is intended to provide guidance to countries as they assess gaps in CRVS systems and develop costed plans to fill them. It is being piloted in Ethiopia, and Senegal and Malawi have also shown interest. The CoE is now developing e-learning modules to support the use of this resource.

### EQ 3b Prospects for the future. What are the prospects for sustaining the CoE in the future, and scaling up the solutions that it offers? How might an extended mandate best be leveraged?

Interviewees **universally agreed that the CoE should continue** with an extended mandate from GAC. Stakeholders gave several reasons for this:

- First, that **CRVS is an important area in which much work remains to be done**. As stakeholders pointed out, concrete change takes time in the CRVS space, and the CoE must continue in order to see the Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 2030 target of universal registration, through to its conclusion.
- Second, that the **CoE is unique in the CRVS world and has a crucial role to play in the CRVS agenda**, as a convenor, researcher, gender champion, knowledge hub, and documenter and spreader of innovations.
- Third, that **institutional continuity is important**, for capitalizing on the CoE's growing momentum, for snowballing its impact, and for demonstrating credibility to partners. A few stakeholders pointed to a reputational risk for IDRC, GAC, and Canada if the CoE were to be discontinued at this juncture and stakeholders' high hopes for the CoE dashed. Discontinuation would, at the very least, require finding new homes for the CoE's Resource Library and Directory of Experts (UNSD has agreed to take on the latter).

Given the importance of institutional continuity and the 2015-2030 timeframe of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, several stakeholders recommended that the CoE should be **renewed for a full ten years rather than just five**.

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*I definitely think that they should continue to exist. If they don't there is something wrong in the system, because much less important initiatives are funded. There are huge inequalities in registration, and groups of people that are really left behind. It's 2020 and people are not being counted. Lots of these issues are being politicized, and foundational systems like CRVS need to be strong in countries. There is no one-size fits all approach. Researching, being a watchdog, convening different groups – it's fundamental for the development agenda, and for human rights.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

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*They've set themselves up well, and formed a good foundation as the go-to place – the 'centre of excellence.' It would be unfair to them to wind down and lose that credibility they've developed over the five years. The future is only brighter.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

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*The risk of [the CoE] not being available is that the CRVS agenda would go back to where it was 13 years ago – disarray and UN agencies not speaking to one another without an executive order to do so. It's very necessary.*

– Regional-global stakeholder

In terms of how a new mandate might be best leveraged, the most fundamental and difficult question that stakeholders grappled with is **whether the CoE should narrow its scope in the future**. Narrowing the scope might mean focusing on just one of the CoE's two overarching mandates (country-level support and global thought leadership), or it might mean keeping both mandates but focusing more narrowly within them (e.g. restricting the range of countries supported, or aiming research and advocacy at just a few key topical areas). The benefits of a more focused approach that stakeholders cited are obvious: a narrowed scope would allow for concentration of resources and efforts within the areas of greatest impact, and it would make the CoE's value proposition simpler and clearer to its peers. But the detriments would be severe. Focusing on *just* country-level supports or global thought leadership would break the vital connection between the two (see EQ 2c): the CoE would find itself supporting implementation unfounded in evidence,

or doing research without supporting its use. Focusing in more specifically *within* either of the overarching mandates is also risky, as it entails preordaining which countries should receive support, predefining the types of support needed, predetermining the topics that need thought leadership, and so forth. To put it differently, one of the reasons that the CoE may appear scattered is precisely because it has been demand-driven and adaptive to the field's needs; as stakeholders pointed out, it would be a shame if the CoE artificially limited itself simply to be more easily understandable on paper.

Among interviewees, there are supporters of the CoE focusing more as well as supporters of it continuing to work broadly and holistically. The latter is the more common view, however, and the evaluation team sides with this perspective: **the complexity of the CoE's activities is the**

**inevitable cost of being nimble and responsive and in having the unique twin mandate which is so central to the CoE's value.** But even if the scope remains broad, the **need for clearer communication of what the CoE is doing—the many strands of activity and how they interrelate—remains.** The CoE may never be easy to fully grasp, but with the right communications it could be easier than it is; the CoE's most recent narrative report to GAC (FY19-20) is a step in the right direction for understandability, but more needs to be done.

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*Being demand-driven sometimes challenges the kind of the coherent, rational, methodical kind of [approach]... There's a difference between...being responsive to multiple sets of demands, and having something that looks like a coherent thing on paper and in a log frame. You don't necessarily have better impact just because it looks better on the log frame.*

— Broader IDRC staff

Another key question regarding a future mandate is **who will fund the CoE and with whom the CoE will have its core partnerships.** While no stakeholders suggested that GAC and IDRC should no longer be funders, several stakeholders advocated broadening the funding base beyond these organizations. A new funding partner, if it were a major international institution, could bring both greater financial resources and broader networks; it would also, for better or worse, make the CoE into a global rather than Canadian initiative. One option suggested by some stakeholders would be for the GFF to become a funder of the CoE. This would resolve the ambiguity in the GFF's role, but might also constrain the types of supports the CoE could offer at country level and would dilute the CoE's Canadian branding.

Whatever the funding arrangement and core partnerships, stakeholders were adamant that, in any future mandate, the CoE must continue to work through **strategic operational partnerships**, as it is currently doing.

To make the most of **country-level supports** in a future mandate, stakeholders suggested the following:

- The CoE needs to do more to **connect the governments it supports with the financial resources** that are needed to make real change. The GFF Investment Case process is one way to do this, of course, but the CoE might also consider connecting countries with other large donors. While there are not many other large donors for CRVS systems, the GFF was not intended to be the sole financier of CRVS. Alternatively, the CoE could give out its own implementation grants: the CoE's 2021-2032 Business Plan proposes a “Catalytic Fund” by which countries propose specific improvements in their CRVS systems and are given CAD50-250k grants through a competitive process. National governments must also allocate financial resources to ensure sustainability of CRVS systems.

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*The Centre of Excellence is the go-to for countries who see the value of improving CRVS systems, but the offer of CoE is just knowledge – not technology [or] resources. When a country wants to improve their CRVS systems, they need more than just knowledge.*

— Regional-global stakeholder

- The CoE needs to provide more **guidance to countries on the technological side of CRVS**, including digitization of registration, data storage and protection, interoperability of systems, and IT infrastructure and hardware needs, which are now inevitable elements of any modern CRVS system.
- The CoE needs to work to **convert the unconverted** to the benefits of CRVS; currently, the CoE too often preaches to the choir by working with Civil Registration offices, NSOs, CRVS experts, and others who already take the importance of CRVS for granted.
- The CoE could **expand its country-level work to parts of the world** that it has engaged with minimally or not at all. Stakeholders who recommended this advocated for their own regions, but from an outside perspective, regions that might be added include the Caribbean and Asia.
- The CoE might consider expanding its capacity building for CRVS implementers to include **study tours** of other countries who have successfully strengthened their CRVS systems; the UN and the World Bank have reportedly taken this approach with topics other than CRVS, with success.

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*[CoE] could be stronger CRVS advocates among our national governments. The international community is convinced and see the links. I cannot say the same for our own governments.*

– National CRVS implementer

To make the most of **global thought leadership and research** in a future mandate, stakeholders recommended the following:

- The CoE should continue to **place great emphasis on its research role**, in particular by continuing to produce implementation-oriented research; there is great enthusiasm among stakeholders for this role and they insist that it must continue in a future mandate. The CoE might begin with a **systematic needs assessment for CRVS research** based on surveying the full range of partners.
- The CoE should continue to act as a **neutral convenor** for the CRVS field.
- The CoE should redouble **efforts at the regional level to spread CRVS innovations**, evidence, and best practices between countries; this could be done through UN regional commissions and/or by convening **additional networks of Civil Registrars** beyond the one already founded in Africa.
- The CoE should continue to champion important cross-cutting issues in CRVS, especially gender, legal identity (which may include engaging with the UN Legal Identity Agenda), social protection, demand-side factors, and COVID-19.
- The CoE should continue supplying **capacity building opportunities**, nurturing the next generation of CRVS experts, and building and deploying the Directory of Experts.

One recommendation from stakeholders cross-cuts the CoE’s two overarching mandates: the CoE ought to **pay more attention to the potential for misuse of data stored in CRVS systems**, and how data protection and other measures can guard against this. While the CoE has played (and should continue to play) the role of CRVS champion, it must confront the possibility of abuse and show leadership in preventing this.

In terms of internal changes to the CoE in a future mandate, stakeholders renewed calls for adding more senior CRVS experts to the core staff, especially those with on-the-ground experience in implementing CRVS systems in LMICs; while the 7-8 staff suggested in the MTE may not be realistic, even a single additional Senior Program Specialist might greatly increase impact. A few stakeholders also suggested that the CoE needs a **leader hired for the job**. To date, leadership has come in part from IDRC’s Program Leader for the Maternal and Child Health team, but that individual must divide his time between the CoE and other responsibilities.

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

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As this report has made clear, the CoE has risen to the challenge articulated in the MTE (see quote to the right). **From a non-entity in 2015, to a newly recognized influencer in 2018, to a leader with credibility and momentum in late 2020 is a remarkable rise.**

What is required now is more time to **consolidate and expand** the gains. A second mandate, ideally of ten years, is both deserved by the CoE and needed by the CRVS field. Staying the course for another 5-10 years may lead to even more impressive achievements. Of course, staying the course does not mean remaining the same. The CoE's great strength, and the reason it has been able to find a place for itself in an arena of large, active, and influential peers, is its adaptive and demand-driven nature. There may come a time in a second mandate when the CoE's model is more set, its focus more restricted, and experimentation less important. For now, responsiveness, opportunism, and a broad mandate that allows for creativity and innovation within its wide bounds are what is needed.

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*The next two years are crucial for CoE as it has to deliver on various fronts. There will be challenges but there are opportunities too. All that the Centre of Excellence has to do is 'to step up its level of excellence.'*

– Mid-term evaluation (2018-9)

The complexity and dynamism of the CoE does not make it impossible to clearly describe; in fact, **clear communication of activities and achievements is *most* important for such a program**. Arguably, the CoE's largest shortcoming is how it has been described; it often appears to be doing less than it is, and what it is doing may appear less coherent and well thought through than is truly the case. There are many more synergies and interconnections than are spelled out in the CoE's documents, and also many more country-level activities and accomplishments than initially appear when looking at the three countries that the CoE has directly supported with Investment Cases, or even when reading about the UNFPA and UNECA partnerships; the evaluation team had to pull together many sources to build Annex B, and even this is likely to be an incomplete list of country-level activities. Innovative ways of describing this multi-stranded program need to be explored so that the wisdom of the CoE's strategies and the breadth of its accomplishments is clear to all.

### Recommendations

The evaluation team's recommendations for the CoE, which flow from the findings of this evaluation, are presented below; they are organized according to cross-cutting themes rather than evaluation questions.

#### 1. Renewed mandate

- 1a. The CoE should receive a renewed mandate in order to continue its (and Canada's) unique and valued contribution to CRVS and RMNCAH.
- 1b. This renewed mandate should be for 10 years, rather than five, to communicate Canada's commitment, to direct resources towards the real work rather than to the start-up and ramp-down processes, and to see the CoE through to the end of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health.
- 1c. In any future mandate of the CoE, ensure that the PMF (including its logic model and associated indicators) allows for an adaptive, organic, demand-driven approach. In particular, ensure that the PMF captures country-level impacts beyond contributions to GFF Investment Cases.

#### 2. Niche and focus

- 2a. Keep the CoE's broad mandate. This breadth includes its global remit; its life course approach that includes all registration types; and cross-fertilizing combination of country-level and regional-global activities.

- 2b. Find ways to more clearly communicate to stakeholders what the CoE does. In particular, a chart illustrating the many interconnections between the CoE's main activities and offerings (Directory of Experts, Resource Library, capacity-building events, research, country-level supports, etc.) would be helpful.
- 2c. Continue to place a heavy emphasis on commissioning and producing original CRVS research; maintain an implementation-oriented and demand-driven approach.

### 3. Partnerships

- 3a. In a new mandate, continue the core partnerships with IDRC, GAC, and GFF. Although there have been some challenges, the benefits have also been great. Frequent and regular communication helps to mitigate such challenges.
- 3b. Critically explore options for adding additional core partners and funders. Resources and reach might be increased, but the CoE might also be split in new directions and the CoE's branding as *Canada's* contribution to CRVS and RMNCAH might be diluted.
- 3c. Ensure roles, responsibilities, and expectations are clear and reasonable within available resources before beginning any new partnerships.
- 3d. Continue to rely heavily on partnerships, grants, and contracts to accomplish much of the CoE's work; this keeps the CoE nimble and takes advantage of other individuals' and organizations' skills and networks.

*Also see recommendation 7f.*

### 4. Specific topical areas

- 4a. Continue to act as a thought leader in the gender arena.
- 4b. Continue to act as a thought leader in the intersections between COVID-19 and CRVS.
- 4c. Better communicate to the field the CoE's burgeoning thought leadership in marriage and divorce registration; VS production and dissemination; CRVS and identity management; CRVS and social protection; CRVS in conflicts, emergencies, and fragile settings; and demand side factors in CRVS.
- 4d. Explore possibilities for showing thought leadership in the other neglected types of registration: adoption, recognition, and legitimation.

### 5. Resource Library

- 5a. Continue to publish resources in both French and English as a matter of course.
- 5b. Consider also translating and disseminating knowledge products in Spanish, Portuguese, and/or Arabic.
- 5c. Prioritize efforts to better organize the Resource Library.
- 5d. Invest in brief versions of key knowledge products (summaries, one-pagers, infographics, desk aids, etc.).
- 5e. Continue to emphasize South-South knowledge exchange by documenting promising CRVS practices from around the world and sharing them in the Resource Library and elsewhere.
- 5f. More actively promote the Resource Library among the stakeholder network.
- 5g. Identify all other CRVS-related online libraries that exist, and work with these organizations (UNECA being one) to find synergies and reduce duplication of effort.

### 6. Directory of Experts

- 6a. Continue to invest in the Directory of Experts, by continuing to improve the platform, add experts, upskill existing experts, and nurture new ones.
- 6b. Have open discussions as a team about the vision for the Directory. If disagreements about *strategy* (means) persist, try to come to an agreement on what *success* (ends) looks like and track that (e.g. a target for uptake by a certain date). If targets are reached, embrace the existing strategy as a team. If it is not, work as a team to formulate and pilot a new strategy.

### 7. Country-level supports and capacity building

- 7a. Continue to extend supports to individual countries both directly from CoE staff and indirectly through strategic partnerships.

- 7b. Find ways to connect governments to the financial resources they need; this can be through GFF, through other funders, or through implementation grants from the CoE itself.
- 7c. Offer more guidance to countries on the technological side of CRVS, including the topic of data protection and the prevention of the misuse of CRVS data. Collaborating with other IDRC programs that work in this area may be helpful.
- 7d. Make sure to engage with stakeholders who are not yet convinced of the value of CRVS.
- 7e. Explore possibilities for offering country-level support in Asia and the Caribbean (neither of which have had any engagement) and more widely in Central and South America and the Middle East/North Africa.
- 7f. Revisit the possibility of partnering with additional UN agencies, in order to reach countries in new regions or address additional topical areas. Additional large partnerships of this type might require a larger annual budget for the CoE, and/or hiring a new Senior Program Specialist to manage the partnership and provide technical input.
- 7g. Redouble efforts to work at the regional level to spread CRVS innovations and best practices between countries. Explore possibilities for convening analogues of the Committee of African Registrars General in other regions of the world, if they do not already exist, in order to facilitate South-South learning on CRVS.
- 7h. Once travel restrictions have been lifted, consider funding, organizing, or otherwise contributing to study tours by government officials to learn firsthand about CRVS practices in other countries (including Southern ones).

#### 8. Internal staffing

- 8a. Consider hiring an additional Senior Program Specialist (senior CRVS subject matter expert) as part of the internal CoE team. This new hire should speak at least two languages of countries that the CoE is supporting; the second language could be French, but consider as well the possibility of Spanish, Portuguese, or Arabic.
- 8b. Consider hiring an internal leader for the CoE.

## Annex A: Evaluation questions and areas of interest

Evaluation questions	Areas of interest
<p>1. Outcomes</p> <p>a. <b>PMF ultimate outcome.</b> How likely is it that the CoE will contribute to improved CRVS systems to track progress on women's, newborns', children's and adolescents' health in GFF countries that are implementing or have implemented GFF Investment Cases?</p> <p>b. <b>PMF intermediate outcome #1.</b> To what extent has there been increased use of the CoE as a facilitator of technical assistance, knowledge, standards, and guidance on CRVS by CRVS stakeholders (national, regional and global)?</p> <p>c. <b>PMF intermediate outcome #2.</b> To what extent has the CoE contributed to increased use of evidence, global tools and standards in planning and implementing CRVS systems improvements in countries that are developing or implementing GFF Investment Cases?</p> <p>d. <b>Unanticipated outcomes.</b> What, if any, outcomes have been achieved that were not predicted in the PMF or CoE logic model?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Countries and regions in which the CoE has, or likely will, contribute to improved CRVS systems</li> <li>▪ Particular improvements in CRVS systems that the CoE has, or likely will, contribute to</li> <li>▪ Trends (2015-2020) in the use of the CoE by CRVS stakeholders</li> <li>▪ Use of Resource Library (and specific resources within it)</li> <li>▪ Use of Directory of Experts</li> <li>▪ Use of country-level supports</li> <li>▪ Use of standards, guidance documents, and best practices on CoE's Resource Library</li> <li>▪ Unanticipated positive outcomes</li> <li>▪ Unintended negative outcomes</li> </ul>
<p>2. Strategy, implementation, and lessons learned</p> <p>a. <b>Institutional establishment.</b> To what extent has the CoE achieved institutional growth and consolidation to establish itself as a credible global partner?</p> <p>b. <b>Niche.</b> What needs and gaps has the CoE filled in the international efforts to strengthen CRVS systems?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Visibility</li> <li>▪ Credibility and reputation</li> <li>▪ Value-add of the CoE, as perceived by stakeholders</li> <li>▪ Sustainability/longevity of the CoE, as perceived by stakeholders</li> <li>▪ Unique value proposition; what CoE provides that is different or better than other organizations that support CRVS</li> <li>▪ Systems-level/holistic approach to CRVS</li> <li>▪ Gender focus</li> <li>▪ Providing CRVS-related technical assistance for GFF Investment Cases</li> <li>▪ Connecting stakeholders to CRVS experts</li> <li>▪ Impartial organization / honest broker</li> <li>▪ Other possible niches or unique value propositions</li> </ul>

Evaluation questions	Areas of interest
<p>c. <b>Model and strategy.</b> How appropriate are the choices the CoE has made towards achieving its intended outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What it means (and what it should mean) to be a “Centre of Excellence”</li> <li>▪ Choice of countries/regions to focus on (Francophone, Africa)</li> <li>▪ Choice to be a lean organization (few staff, no country offices)</li> <li>▪ Choice to partner with UNFPA (which has country offices) in order to extend impact</li> <li>▪ Choice to be part of IDRC rather than e.g. GFF</li> <li>▪ Choice to use the Directory of Experts (rather than a larger in-house staff) to increase impact</li> <li>▪ Limited funding of new research, compared to other IDRC programs</li> </ul>
<p>d. <b>Evolution and adaptation.</b> To what extent has the CoE responded appropriately to the recommendations in the MTE (specifically on gender, country-level support, resource library, and Directory of Experts) and to strategic priorities that have emerged since the MTE?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Response to MTE recommendation to deliver on promise to be a champion of gendered dimensions of CRVS</li> <li>▪ Response to MTE recommendation to enhance supports to national CRVS implementers; evolving approach to country-level supports</li> <li>▪ Response to MTE recommendation for expansion and better curation of online Resource Library</li> <li>▪ Response to MTE recommendation to expand and nurture Directory of Experts</li> <li>▪ Evolving approach to which countries and regions to target</li> <li>▪ Adaptation and response to the COVID-19 pandemic</li> </ul>
<p>e. <b>Partnerships.</b> How appropriate and successful has the partnership between GAC, GFF, and IDRC been for delivering intended results? What lessons have been learned that could be applied to future partnerships?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Genesis of the IDRC/GAC/GFF partnership</li> <li>▪ Co-funding relationship between IDRC and GAC</li> <li>▪ Operational relationship between IDRC, GAC, and GFF (Coordination Group)</li> <li>▪ Governance structure (Executive Committee)</li> </ul>
<p>f. <b>Enablers and barriers.</b> What are the major external or internal factors that have promoted or constrained the attainment of program outcomes by the CoE?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ External enablers/barriers</li> <li>▪ Internal enablers/barriers</li> </ul>
<p>3. Sustainability and scalability</p> <p>a. <b>Scale-up efforts.</b> To what extent has the CoE oriented programming to scale-up solutions and global thought leadership? What have been helping or hindering factors, and what has been learned?</p> <p>b. <b>Prospects for the future.</b> What are the prospects for sustaining the CoE in the future, and scaling up the solutions that it offers? How might an extended mandate best be leveraged?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deliberate efforts to scale-up solutions</li> <li>▪ Models for scaling up impact (UNFPA partnership, Directory of Experts, etc.) – what has worked or is most likely to work in the future</li> <li>▪ Role that the CoE could play in the final ten years of the Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s, and Adolescents’ Health</li> <li>▪ Role that the CoE could play in emerging public health priorities in the wake of COVID-19</li> </ul>

## Annex B: Table of the CoE's country-level supports and impacts

Country	Primary language used in gov't	Relationship to GFF		Mode of support			Description of support and/or impact (impacts are in bold)
		GFF-eligible country?	CoE supporting GFF Investment Case?	Directly by CoE	Via UNFPA partnership	Via UNECA partnership	
Sub-Saharan Africa							
Cameroon	French	✓	✓	✓		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The CoE has helped Cameroon develop its GFF Investment Case. During a FY15-17 mission, the CoE brought Cameroonian CRVS stakeholders together with international stakeholders (WHO, UNECA, GFF) for a CRVS business process mapping exercise and analysis of bottlenecks in the country's CRVS system. This resulted in <b>agreement on CRVS strengthening priorities</b>, influencing both the GFF Investment Case and the national CRVS strategy</li><li>In FY17-18, Cameroon stakeholders indicated that the CoE's support was "fairly helpful" towards achieving these outcomes, and indicated that there had been moderate impact on <b>improved coordination between key ministries and stakeholders</b>, and moderate to high impact on <b>awareness-raising of best practices in CRVS systems and identification of priorities for improvement</b>.</li><li>In mid-2020, in the final evaluation survey, the country rated the CoE's support as "very useful" for preparing their GFF Investment Case, and stated that the CoE's support was instrumental in helping the country achieve its current state, namely <b>possessing all of the plans needed to modernize CRVS</b>. (The challenge now for implementation is the lack, so far, of sufficient financing.)</li><li>More recently, Cameroon has received technical assistance through the UNECA partnership (a mission by the UNECA-based consultant as well as ongoing remote follow-up support).</li></ul>
Guinea	French	✓	✓	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The CoE conducted two missions to Guinea to support development of its GFF Investment Case. During the first mission (FY17-18), the CoE facilitated a working group for prioritizing the country's approach to reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health, <b>raising awareness of CRVS as a tool for measuring progress in this area</b>. The second mission (FY18-19) assisted the Guinean government in creating an associated communications plan.</li><li>In FY17-18, Guinea stakeholders ranked the CoE's support "very helpful" in contributing to these outcomes.</li><li>The CoE also reviewed Guinea's GFF Investment Case in 2020 at the request of Guinea and the GFF; this resulted in a reformulation of the Investment Case, including the development of new indicators.</li><li>Support to Guinea will continue: CoE has contracted two consultants to provide support to the development of the implementation plan.</li></ul>
Senegal	French	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The CoE has helped Senegal develop its GFF Investment Case. The CoE conducted a mission to Senegal in FY17-18, convening multiple stakeholders in working sessions to draft the CRVS component of the Investment Case, and to <b>build capacity in CRVS budgeting and mapping</b>.</li><li>Senegal stakeholders indicated in FY17-18 that the CoE had made a moderate to high impact on <b>improved coordination and dialogue between CRVS-related stakeholders</b>, and a moderate to high impact on <b>increased knowledge of CRVS best practices and identification of priorities for improvement</b>.</li><li>Some direct assistance from the CoE has continued to the present day, but most of the engagement after the CoE's FY17-18 mission has been through grantees (both UNFPA and UNECA). This has included quantitative analysis marriage registration completeness based on census data; piloting a monitoring tool to collect data on registration rates and the number of registers. There is also interest in piloting the CRVS Improvement Framework, though this has not yet materialized due to pandemic-related travel restrictions.</li></ul>

Country	Primary language used in gov't	Relationship to GFF		Mode of support			Description of support and/or impact (impacts are in bold)
		GFF-eligible country?	CoE supporting GFF Investment Case?	Directly by CoE	Via UNFPA partnership	Via UNECA partnership	
Liberia	English	✓		✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The CoE provided direct technical assistance to Liberia's Ministry of Health by reviewing and providing feedback on its civil registration policy document.</li> </ul>
Burkina Faso	French	✓			✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most of the CoE's engagement with Burkina Faso has been via ConVERGE/UNFPA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Population Data Fellow is placed in-country to provide CRVS-related technical support to this government.</li> <li>An anthropological research project on the causes of under-registration in this country has led to a <b>field trial of a mobile IT solution for civil registration</b> ("iCivil") rolled out with sensitivity to sociocultural and demand-side factors.</li> <li>Burkina Faso is one of the countries that has <b>committed to including a marriage registration question in its 2020 census round</b>, as a result of ConVERGE recommendations and guidance.</li> </ul> </li> <li>More recently, Burkina Faso has received technical assistance through the UNECA partnership (a mission by the UNECA-based consultant as well as ongoing remote follow-up support).</li> <li>In 2019, CoE hosted IDRC's Research Award Recipient as he conducted the research project "Improving birth, marriage, and death registration in Burkina Faso: The case of the Nouna health and demographic surveillance system." This field-based project led to policy recommendations that, if adopted, might increase civil registration coverage in this country.</li> <li>CoE-organized multi-country learning events reportedly led to a deepened understanding of the relationship between CRVS and gender equality.</li> </ul>
Benin	French	✓			✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The CoE's engagement with Benin has been through ConVERGE/UNFPA.</li> <li>A Population Data Fellow is placed in-country to provide CRVS-related technical support to this government.</li> <li>Research is being conducted on sociocultural/demand-side reasons for under-registration.</li> <li>Benin is also one of the countries in which a monitoring tool to collect data on registration rates and the number of registers is being piloted.</li> </ul>
Republic of Congo	French	✓			✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The CoE's engagement with the Republic of Congo has been through ConVERGE/UNFPA.</li> <li>A Population Data Fellow is placed in-country to provide CRVS-related technical support to this government</li> <li>Sociocultural research on the causes of under-registration is being conducted.</li> <li>Quantitative analysis of marriage registration completeness based on census data from this country is being undertaken.</li> <li>Republic of Congo is one of the countries piloting a monitoring tool to collect data on registration rates and the number of registers.</li> </ul>
Uganda	English	✓	✓			✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The CoE's engagement with Uganda has been through the UNECA partnership. The CRVS expert consultant placed at UNECA in Addis Ababa has provided technical assistance to Uganda on death registration, and is helping the country to <b>implement its GFF Investment Case</b>.</li> </ul>
Mozambique	Portuguese	✓	✓			✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The CoE's engagement with Mozambique has been through the UNECA partnership.</li> <li>The CRVS expert consultant placed at UNECA in Addis Ababa has provided technical assistance to Mozambique to help <b>implement their GFF Investment Case</b>, through a mission and ongoing remote follow-up support.</li> </ul>
Ethiopia	English/Amharic	✓	✓	✓		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethiopia is <b>piloting the CRVS Improvement Framework to support its implementation of its GFF Investment Case</b>.</li> <li>The CoE's research grant to Addis Ababa University ("The vulnerability of internally displaced women and children whose civil status is not registered in Ethiopia") resulted in the identification of gaps in CRVS legislation and implementation, and emphasized the importance of digitizing CR in the country.</li> </ul>

Country	Primary language used in gov't	Relationship to GFF		Mode of support			Description of support and/or impact (impacts are in bold)
		GFF-eligible country?	CoE supporting GFF Investment Case?	Directly by CoE	Via UNFPA partnership	Via UNECA partnership	
Sierra Leone	English	✓	✓			✓	▪ The UNECA consultant will provide <b>support for the implementation of Sierra Leone's GFF Investment Case.</b>
Eswatini	English / Swati	✓				✓	▪ UNECA-organized knowledge-sharing on COVID-19 helped this country successfully <b>advocate for CRVS as an essential service during COVID-19.</b>
Ghana	English	✓				✓	▪ Ghana <b>adopted a COVID-19 business continuity plan</b> for its CRVS system as a result of UNECA-organized knowledge-sharing with other countries.
Kenya	English	✓				✓	▪ Kenya has received remote support from the UNECA consultant, leading in part to the <b>adoption of the Rapid Mortality Surveillance System.</b>
Malawi	English	✓				✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The CoE's engagement with Malawi has been through the UNECA partnership.</li> <li>▪ The CRVS expert consultant placed at UNECA in Addis Ababa has completed a mission to Malawi as well as ongoing remote follow-up support, focused on digitalization of CRVS; this has resulted in an action plan and a concept note for further assessment.</li> <li>▪ The mission also resulted in national CRVS implementers <b>realizing the need for stronger connection with other government ministries, a goal they are already pursuing.</b></li> <li>▪ Malawi has also shown interest in piloting the CRVS Improvement Framework.</li> </ul>
Nigeria	English	✓				✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNECA-organized knowledge-sharing on COVID-19 helped this country <b>advocate for CRVS as an essential service during COVID-19.</b></li> <li>▪ UNECA's assessment of the country's existing CRVS system <b>helped fast-track its launch of a new CRVS system.</b></li> </ul>
Tanzania	English	✓				✓	▪ Tanzania has received remote support from the UNECA consultant on the topics of VS reports and unique ID in health.
Somalia	English / Somali	✓				✓	▪ Somalia has received technical assistance through the UNECA partnership, to <b>support the creation of a civil registration agency and policy.</b>
Zambia	English	✓				✓	▪ The UNECA partnership has contributed to this country's adoption of the <b>Rapid Mortality Surveillance System.</b>
Rwanda	French / English	✓				✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rwanda has received technical assistance through the UNECA partnership: a mission by the UNECA-based consultant focused on a comprehensive assessment of the current state of the country's CRVS system.</li> <li>▪ The UNECA partnership has also contributed to this country's <b>adoption of the Rapid Mortality Surveillance System.</b></li> <li>▪ CoE-organized learning events reportedly helped CRVS stakeholders bring learnings from other African countries back to Rwanda, and they feel better equipped to improve their CRVS systems as a result.</li> </ul>
Angola	Portuguese	✓				✓	▪ UNECA-organized knowledge-sharing on COVID-19 helped this country <b>advocate for birth registration as an essential service during COVID-19.</b>
Guinea-Bissau	Portug./ French	✓				✓	▪ UNECA-organized knowledge-sharing on COVID-19 helped this country <b>advocate for CRVS as an essential service during COVID-19.</b>
Central and South America							

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		GFF-eligible country?	CoE supporting GFF Investment Case?	Directly by CoE	Via UNFPA partnership	Via UNECA partnership	
Guatemala	Spanish	✓		✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This country is being supported via the UNFPA by a Population Data Fellow posted outside the country.</li> <li>The CoE contracted with the Organization of American States to complete a CRVS system mapping exercise; a report was drafted in March 2018, and national stakeholders reviewed and validated the report in a workshop held thereafter.</li> <li>Guatemala is also one of the countries that the CoE is supporting to assess the feasibility of using CRVS systems to address teenage pregnancy, as Costa Rica and Uruguay have done.</li> </ul>
Ecuador	Spanish			✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This country is being supported via the UNFPA by a Population Data Fellow posted outside the country. Technical assistance has included support to the national statistics office to assess sex differentials and data quality in death registration, and to <b>develop a strategy to reduce these inequalities</b>.</li> <li>Ecuador is also one of the countries that the CoE is supporting to assess the feasibility of using CRVS systems to address teenage pregnancy, as Costa Rica and Uruguay have done.</li> </ul>
Peru	Spanish			✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This country is being supported via the UNFPA by a Population Data Fellow posted outside the country.</li> <li>Peru is also one of the countries that the CoE is supporting to assess the feasibility of using CRVS systems to address teenage pregnancy, as Costa Rica and Uruguay have done.</li> </ul>
Colombia	Spanish				✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This country is being supported via the UNFPA by a Population Data Fellow posted outside the country. Technical assistance has included support to the country's national statistics office ("DANE") to assess birth registration completeness, quality, and timeliness using immunization records.</li> </ul>
North Africa and the Middle East							
Mauritania	Arabic	✓				✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mauritania has received technical assistance through the UNECA partnership (a mission by the UNECA-based consultant as well as ongoing remote follow-up support), resulting in an action plan.</li> </ul>
Jordan	Arabic			✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most engagement has been through ConVERGE/UNFPA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Population Data Fellow is placed in-country to provide CRVS-related technical support to the government. This has included support in assessing death registration coverage, data quality, and sex differentials.</li> <li>Various materials to increase national statistics office's ability to generate vital statistics (open source statistical analysis tools, training modules, guidance documents) are being piloted here.</li> <li>Sociocultural research on the causes of under-registration is being conducted here.</li> <li>Jordan is one of the countries piloting a monitoring tool to collect data on registration rates and the number of registers.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The CoE also collaborated with the UNFPA and the government of Jordan to organize and host a multi-sectoral national consultation (the first in this country) on Jordan's CRVS systems; strategies to improve CRVS were discussed.</li> <li>The CoE also organized and co-hosted a regional workshop in Jordan for the governments of Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, attended as well by UNESCWA, UNICEF, and WHO. This led to <b>a commitment to collaborate to make progress on CRVS in the Middle East/North Africa region</b>.</li> </ul>

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		GFF-eligible country?	CoE supporting GFF Investment Case?	Directly by CoE	Via UNFPA partnership	Via UNECA partnership	
Morocco	Arabic / French	✓		✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most engagement has been through ConVERGE/UNFPA:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Population Data Fellow is placed in-country to provide CRVS-related technical support to the government. This has included support in assess death registration coverage, data quality, and sex differentials.</li> <li>Various materials to increase national statistics office's ability to generate vital statistics (open source statistical analysis tools, training modules, guidance documents) are being piloted here.</li> <li>Sociocultural research on the causes of under-registration is being conducted here.</li> <li>Morocco is one of the countries piloting a monitoring tool to collect data on registration rates and the number of registers.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The government of Morocco was one of three country attendees of the regional workshop on CRVS improvement that the CoE organized and co-hosted.</li> </ul>
Tunisia	Arabic / French			✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most engagement has been through ConVERGE/UNFPA. A Population Data Fellow is placed in-country to provide CRVS-related technical support to the government. This has included support in assessing death registration coverage, data quality, and sex differentials.</li> <li>The government of Tunisia was also one of three country attendees of the regional workshop on CRVS improvement that the CoE organized and co-hosted.</li> </ul>

## Annex C: The CoE's logic model

The CoE's logic model is shown below; it is reproduced from the CoE's PMF, created by the firm Hera in 2016.

