

Summary of Barriers and Facilitators to Female Death Registration Study in Tanzania

Background and Methods

Despite Tanzania's legal mandate requiring all deaths to be registered within 30 days, both national statistics and community-level evidence indicate that death registration, particularly for female deaths, remains low, delayed, and inconsistent. This study, funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies was conducted in partnership with CREMES International, Johns Hopkins University Gender Equity Unit, Vital Strategies, CDC Foundation and Tanzanian government agencies. It examined the barriers and facilitators of death registration in Tanzania and identified strategies for improving gender equity in civil registration. The mixed-methods study drew on analysis of 2013–2024 civil registration data and qualitative insights from 80 participants, including household members, key informants, and local officials across both urban and rural communities. All necessary ethical approvals were secured.

Results

Barriers to Female Death Registration

- **Lower Perceived Benefit for Registering Women's Deaths:** Because women often may not hold property or formal claims, a death certificate for a mother or wife is seen as offering little immediate return. In contrast, male deaths (e.g. of a husband or father) are more often registered because they are tied to inheritance, land, or pension matters that compel action.
- **Socio-cultural Norms and Attitudes:** In many communities, traditional views undervalue the importance of officially recording a woman's death. When a man dies, inheritance claims often create a need for a certificate because relatives want to claim inheritance. However, when a woman dies, even if she owns property, assets are usually transferred to her spouse without formal claims. This, combined with the belief in some communities that a woman's death only needs registration for specific purposes, reduces the urgency to register.
- **Social Stigma and Fear of Consequences:** Deaths associated with gender-based violence or complications arising from abortion are often accompanied by stigma and fear of legal and social repercussions. In such cases, families refrain from formally reporting the death due to feelings of shame as well as concerns about possible consequences.

Facilitators to Death Registration

- **Practical Needs as Motivators:** Families were far more likely to register a death when a tangible necessity made it urgent (i.e. for child's education, inheritance, or pension claims).
- **Prior Knowledge and Exposure:** Families who had a member with prior bureaucratic experience or who had heard of registration were more confident and proactive.
- **Family and Community Support:** When family members, communities and local officials work together and agree on the importance of obtaining a death certificate, they are more persistent in overcoming hurdles.
- **Improved Accessibility through System Reforms:** Ongoing improvements in the civil registration system have begun to reduce access barriers. The introduction of the online eRITA system and

decentralization initiatives now allow more deaths to be registered remotely or at local levels. Even in remote areas, families can seek help at local internet cafés or community offices to submit an online application.

By leveraging practical needs, strengthening awareness, fostering supportive networks, and expanding access through system improvements; Tanzania can increase both the timeliness and completeness of registrations. The growing number of late registrations, signals increasing public engagement and a foundation for further progress in building a more inclusive civil registration and vital statistics system.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations to improve female death registration included:

- **Highlighting Women's Deaths in Campaigns:** Ensure awareness initiatives explicitly emphasize that female deaths must be registered, challenging the misconception that women's deaths hold less legal or social importance.
- **Providing Gender-Sensitive Training:** Provide targeted training to frontline staff to address cultural norms and biases that reduce the likelihood of registering female deaths.
- **Creating Incentives:** Link registration of female deaths to access to certain benefits or administrative processes, encouraging families to act even without direct financial necessity.
- **Proactively Following Up:** Establish a system for local officials to follow up directly with families after a woman's death, offering guidance and support to complete registration promptly.
- **Leveraging Existing Women's Health Interventions:** Integrate female death registration into ongoing maternal health follow-up systems, such as Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response (MPDSR) or Maternal Verbal Death Review (MVDR). This ensures that any maternal death automatically triggers both the health investigation and the formal civil registration process, reducing missed registrations of women.

The full report is available here:

