

Improving Vital Statistics with SAVVY



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Problem Reliable data on vital events — most notably mortality and its causes — does not exist in most developing countries. Mortality estimates, which are central to setting health sector priorities, are often based on disparate data sources or modeled from limited information and may not provide the best foundation for assessing health program progress and impact.

Solution The Sample Vital Registration with Verbal Autopsy (**SAVVY**) toolkit is a series of best practice manuals and methods for providing vital events information where high coverage of civil registration and good cause of death data are not available. SAVVY methods are integrated into the Health Metrics Network’s vision of “stepping stones” to better vital events monitoring, and are harmonized with the WHO International Classification of Diseases (ICD). Items from the SAVVY toolkit can be used individually or in various combinations. When implemented as a complete system, the SAVVY toolkit can provide nationally representative vital statistics, including information about levels and causes of death. SAVVY includes resources to implement the Demographic surveillance system, the Mortality surveillance system, Death certification and ICD coding, and nested surveys.

Example With funding from USAID and UNICEF, MEASURE Evaluation and the U.S. Census Bureau supported the Mozambican National Statistics Institute to implement the first-ever sub-nationally representative post-census cause-of-death survey. Using SAVVY tools, which included the most recent standardized Verbal Autopsy questionnaires, the study provided causes of child and adult mortality related to malaria, HIV/AIDS, and maternal conditions, as well as other causes of death. Key findings include:

1. Bacterial sepsis is the leading cause of death in newborns
2. Malaria is the leading cause of death of children younger than 5 years of age
3. HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death for persons 5 years of age and older
4. About 15% of maternal deaths occurred during or within 42 days of an abortion
5. Nearly three quarters of all deaths occurred at home
6. Over one quarter of all the decedents sought no medical care prior to their death
7. Malaria was the leading cause of death in the general rural population
8. HIV/AIDS was the leading cause of death in the general urban population

To access the SAVVY toolkit, go to www.cpc.unc.edu/measure/savvy

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