

#COUNTINGEVERYONE

CRVS Leadership in Bangladesh



Mustakim Billah Faruqui

Registrar General

Government of Bangladesh

Mustakim Billah Faruqui is currently the Registrar General of Bangladesh. He joined the government in 1994 because he saw the value of working in service to the people. Born in a remote village in the Jamalpur district, Mustakim Faruqui was himself not registered within the government system until he finished his secondary schooling. Registering his birth, even belatedly, allowed for him to vote, and subsequently pursue a profession in government.

Because of his own experience, Billah Faruqui sees the implementation of Bangladesh's new model of civil registration as a life-changing improvement to the country's CRVS system. In 2016, the Government of Bangladesh established the Office of the Registrar General as the civil registry authority for birth and death in the country. It sanctioned a convening body to lead and orchestrate with other agencies and offices to create a technology-enabled system that empowered frontline medical workers and other community actors to help families register births and deaths.

The model began as a pilot in the Kaliganj sub-district in Bangladesh and has since been scaled in an adapted form to every district in the country. One adaptation has been to tie targets for birth and death registration completeness to performance reviews of certain civil servants. Another has been the increased role of digital technology in the notification and registration of births and deaths.



Anir Chowdhury

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Anir Chowdhury, who serves as policy advisor in the Government of Bangladesh's Aspire to Innovate (a2i) program, is one of the leaders integrating digital technology in the country's systems to create scalable change through programs like CRVS. As he remarks, "When we started out, in terms of digitization, we didn't really have much. We were a poor country struggling with food security, healthcare, primary education—but we chose technology digitization as the means to accelerate socio-economic development, and that's what has happened."

While technology has enabled for vital events to be recorded through a decentralized system, the rapid roll-out of the new model of civil registration could not have been achieved without an investment in government coordination.

Chowdhury explains: "The first and foremost thing was really a coordination mechanism supported by strong political will. Civil registration is not a matter of just one ministry, or one department—it's really a whole of government approach that makes it successful. The coordination mechanism is one of the most important things that we set up in Bangladesh."

The Bangladesh government views civil registration and vital statistics as the foundation of rights, protections, entitlements and services from cradle to grave. As Mustakim Billah Faruqui emphasizes, "CRVS is a right, and the foundation of rights."

Key Success Factors

- The new model of civil registration began as a pilot in one sub-district in Bangladesh and has since been adapted and applied to every district across the country.
- With approximately 80% of deaths in Bangladesh occurring outside of hospitals, with no doctor in attendance, it is of critical importance to learn as much as possible about the likely causes of these deaths. Through verbal autopsy—a method used to determine the most probable cause of death based on information obtained from a caregiver of the deceased—the government can regularly capture cause-of-death data from communities where causes previously went undetermined. Verbal autopsy has been implemented as part of the CRVS system in 13 sub-districts of Bangladesh; more than 34,000 causes of deaths have been determined through verbal autopsy.
- The international standard form for medical certification of cause of death was adopted for the first time in Bangladesh. This has allowed for the collection of over 250,000 medical certificates of cause of death from over 100 hospitals since 2017.