



**STRENGTHENING BIRTH
REGISTRATION IN AFRICA
OPPORTUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS
TECHNICAL PAPER**



Abstract

This paper recalls the vital functions that civil registration systems perform in ensuring legal protection to the people of a country and contributing to the economic and social development of a nation through creation of a permanent demographic database. A brief review of the current situation reveals a number of reasons why the civil registration system is unable to meet the expectations in many countries. While some “interim solutions” including demographic surveys and surveillance sites have been implemented to bridge the gap regarding health related data, the paper argues that these are not a substitute for strengthening

the civil registration systems. Listing recommendations in this connection, the paper identifies the need to broaden the approach beyond “birth registration” that has been the focus for most international assistance. The paper recommends the need for an in-depth understanding of reasons why people hold back from registration in order to build a strategy that will make universal registration a reality. The paper also draws attention to some promising sources of funding support including the new aid mechanisms in the health sector that can help civil registration.

1. Birth registration for legal protection and economic development



“**T**o make people count, we first need to be able to count people,” said Dr. Lee Jong-Wook, Director General of the World Health Organization in 2003. Long before this, Africa witnessed one of the earliest attempts of mankind in counting people. During the early period of the Pharaohs from 3,340 BC to 3,050 BC, Egypt saw populations being counted for the purposes of tax collection and determining fitness for military service.

The theme of the African Conference of Ministers in Charge of Civil Registration reflects in full the two major functions of birth registration: one legal and the other statistical. Unless a person is registered, she or he does not exist in the eyes of the State. Registration is the only means to establish and protect identities, citizenship and property rights. Often, in the absence of registration, a person cannot easily access services and entitlements.

In the many countries battling the HIV/AIDS epidemic, children who are registered are in a stronger position to exercise their rights to inheritance of property and, where applicable, to cash grants, housing, schooling support or food-assistance. Registration also helps to protect women and children from exploitation through trafficking and child labor. The civil registration system produces the information that helps countries plan services for the population. Data on numbers of deaths and causes of death are essential if countries are to determine priorities and formulate and monitor policies, for public health care as well other government policy that may be based on such data.

Regular information from birth registration systems also makes it possible to compare data over time.

The generation of data from civil registration systems is more sustainable and cost-effective than those drawn from ad-hoc surveys. In addition, various surveys use different methods, definitions and variables that make comparison of assessments problematic. While the Demographic Health Surveys (see following sections) try to remedy this deficiency, the long-term solution is to strengthen civil registration.

In Sudan a child cannot go to school without a birth certificate. In Tanzania a birth certificate is required for university enrolment. In Cameroon, to be admitted to school, each child needs a birth certificate carrying their name and proving their age. In many cases, particularly in rural communities, children enter primary school without birth certificates; yet they later find they are unable to sit government exams for secondary schools due to their lack of legal registration.

South Africa records births and deaths comprehensively. However, for a long time, these data did not capture cause of deaths. Once this shortfall was remedied, it led to a shift of policy with respect to responses to HIV/AIDSs.

Source: The Lancet, Vol. 370 November 3, 2007, p. 1572

2. Birth registration is a human right

Birth registration, although just one key function in a complete civil registration system, has been at the core of the world community's concerns since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It has been a special concern of UNICEF (which was founded in the same year, and of child-focused NGOs, as it represents the starting point for the recognition and protection of every child's fundamental right to identity and existence. It refers to the permanent and official recording of a child's existence by the state. Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that every child the right to be registered at birth by the state.



Birth registration is both a right in itself - the right to a name, nationality and legal identity - but is also closely linked to the realization of other children's rights, such as - to name a few - protection from early recruitment into the armed forces or early marriage and protection from hazardous child labor. With respect to 'justice for children', the birth certificate plays a key role in determining a child's age and identity, thereby protecting the child's rights should he or she fall victim to a crime, or to ensure, that the child, if in conflict with the law, is subject to a justice system that is child-friendly and protected from facing the justice system in place for adults.

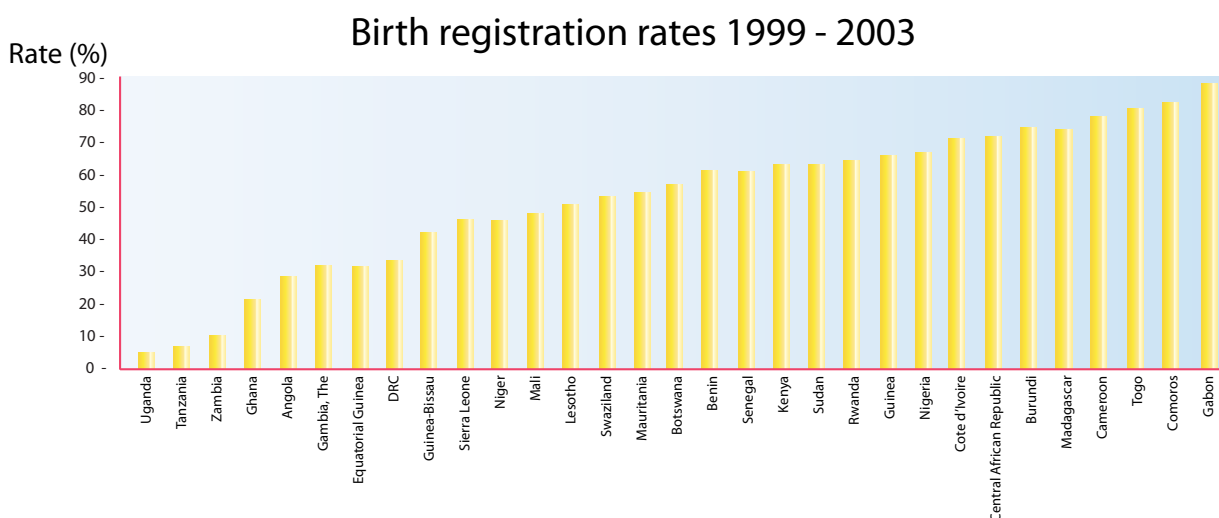
Similarly, it plays a key role in the determination of refugee status procedures, for family reunification, and in some instances, in ensuring that children are provided with appropriate humanitarian assistance, as well as with respect to, for example, immunization campaigns or school enrolment. Hence, birth registration is underpinning the realization of many other rights. But death- and cause-of-death registration play also an essential complementary role in establishing mortality before, during and after birth. Marriage registration is an instrument to protect children

against underage marriage and for the protection of women and their children with regards property rights in case of divorce or death of the husband.

Similarly, Governments will gain through adequate civil registration, not only through what children or adult rights-holders will gain, but also by implementing their obligations under international law Governments will provide a service that will enhance their citizens' quality of life, while in the absence of civil registration, a number of rights cannot be claimed.

This means that states must make birth registration accessible and available to all children including asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants. Drawing from the right to a name and nationality contained in article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the 2002 General Assembly Resolution 'A World Fit for Children' reaffirms governments' commitment to ensure the birth registration of all children and their protection from harm and exploitation as is the purpose of the CRC. In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary for governments to have accurate population data in order to plan service provision for children and their caregivers. The resolution

Graph 1- The status of birth registration in African countries



Source: MICS and DHS data

recommends that systems are developed to ensure the registration of every child at or shortly after birth, and fulfill his or her right to acquire a name and a nationality, in accordance with national laws and relevant international instruments. Nearly all countries (except Somalia in Africa, and the USA) have ratified the CRC and the vast majority of the African

countries have ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990). Graph 1 shows the status of registration in African countries. The right to a name and nationality is well established in these two human rights instruments (see box - The Rights Framework for Birth Registration)



United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child *Article 7*

1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.
2. States parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child *Article 6*

1. Every child shall have the right from his/her birth to a name.
2. Every child shall be registered immediately after birth
3. Every child has the right to acquire a nationality
4. States Parties to the present Charter shall undertake to ensure that their constitutional legislations recognize the principles according to which a child shall acquire the nationality of the State in the territory of which he/she has been born if, at the time of the child's birth, he/she is not granted nationality by any other State in accordance with its laws.

3. Birth Registration: past development and current status

The development of coverage of civil registration systems over the past four decades can be gleaned from the following table, which shows the development of rates of registration of births and deaths in the major regions of the world. The table shows that Africa is next to last (only after South-East Asia, which is dominated

by countries such as Indonesia combining a large population with incomplete registration) among regions in the world. A large part of the world's population – about 70% - lives in countries with incomplete registration. Only Europe and (North) America approach complete registration.

Table 1 – Birth- and death registration completeness by region 1965-2004 (Population in countries with complete death registration and complete birth registration as percentage of the population of their respective regions.)

	DEATHS				BIRTHS			
	1965-74	1975-84	1985-94	1995-2004	1965-74	1975-84	1985-94	1995-
2004								
Total	27%	25%	28%	26%	33%	31%	28%	30%
Americas	2%	4%	2%	7%	7%	7%	9%	5%
Eastern	69%	66%	64%	61%	58%	55%	53%	53%
Mediterranean	17%	21%	15%	1%	21%	25%	17%	42%
Europe								
South-East Asia	62%	61%	92%	86%	95%	94%	93%	92%
Western Pacific	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
	12%	11%	10%	13%	12%	14%	13%	18%

Complete means that at least 90% of events (births or deaths) are registered by the system. Figures for 1965-94 from the Demographic Yearbook (historical supplement 1948-1997), UN Statistics Division, New York, 2000. Figures for 1995-2004 are based on the Demographic Yearbook 2004, UN Statistics Division, New York.

The following are a few birth registration key data for Africa and the world:

- Each year nearly 50 million children are not registered worldwide (see table 2)
- Almost all unregistered births are accounted for by developing countries; South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa together account for 79 percent of all unregistered births (see table 2)
- The registration of deaths is even less than the registration of births in all regions except the Americas (see table 1)
- In Africa only the small island states of Mauritius and the Seychelles have complete registration of births, deaths and causes of death.

	Births (in thousands)	Proportion of unregistered children	Number of unregistered children (in thousands)
South Asia	37 099	63%	23 395
Sub-Saharan Africa	26 879	55%	14 751
Middle East and north Africa	9 790	16%	1 543
C.I.S. and Baltic States	5 250	23%	1 218
East Asia and Pacific	31 616	19%	5 901
Latin America and Caribbean	11 567	15%	1 787
Industrialised countries	10 827	2%	218
Developing countries	119 973	40%	48 147
Least developed countries	27 819	71%	19 682
World	133 028	36%	48 276

Table 2 – Estimated annual number and proportion of unregistered births by region, 2003
Source: *The Lancet* Vol. 370, November 3, 2007, p. 1571

While the opposite may often be assumed there is no evidence that there is a clear and strong correlation between a country's resources (measured by its gross Domestic Product per capita at purchasing power parity) and the completeness of its civil registration system (measured by the birth registration rate as indicator).

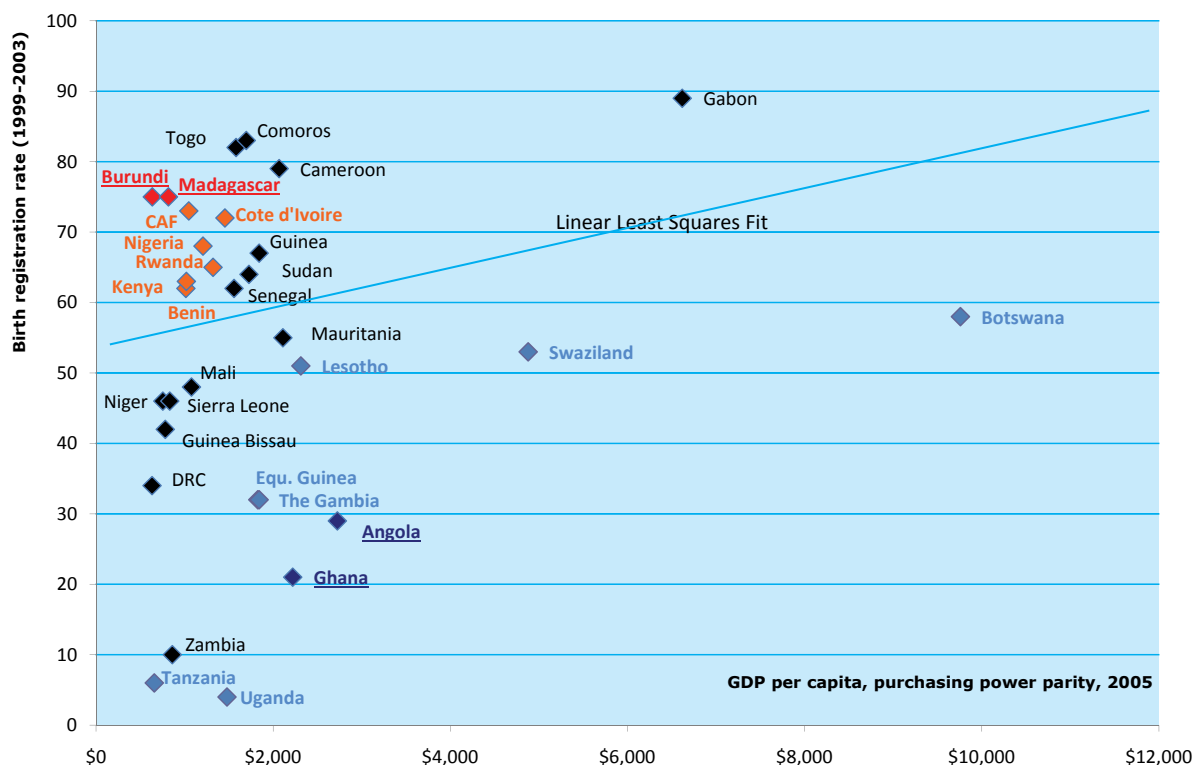
There are poor countries with relatively good and sometimes almost complete registration systems, while there are also relatively rich developing countries that have a very rudimentary civil registration. Graph 2 (*next page*) shows the relationship between birth registration rates and GDP per capita for African countries for which birth registration rates are available.



Interesting “guide countries” are Burundi and Madagascar which have relatively high birth registration rates (both 75%) while they are among the poorest countries. Almost as good are the Central African Republic, Cote d’Ivoire, Benin, Kenya, Nigeria and Rwanda because of the results achieved at their resource level,

and a third group consisting of Togo, Comoros, Cameroon and Gabon for their achievements although at relatively higher levels of per capita GDP. At the other extreme in countries such as Ghana and Angola birth registration rates are too low at their level of GDP.

Graph 2: Classification of African countries by their birth registration rate (1999-2003) and per capita GDP (at purchasing power parity prices, 2005)



Source: Birth registration rates 1999-2003: DHS and MICS; per capita GDP 2005 at purchasing power parity: World Bank

Burundi:	very high rate for GDP pc;	Nigeria:	high rate for GDP pc;
Mali:	rate expected for GDP pc;	Swaziland:	low rate for GDP pc;
Angola:	very low rate for GDP pc.		

The scatter in the graph shows a crucial lesson for Governments and the international aid community: Adequate civil registration is possible at low levels of a country’s national income. National-economic savings by substituting an adequate civil registration system for what is otherwise a plethora of band-aid solutions, e.g. surveys, which at best poorly allocate a country’s scarce resources outweigh the costs of a complete civil registration

system – a position taken by the United Nations Statistics Division, the UN agency responsible for civil registration. Hence, even in poorer countries, it is possible to provide for national efficiency through rational allocation of resources and for good governance through an established basis for reliable and confidential accounting for the civil status of all the country’s citizens and for conferring on all citizens their rights.

4. What ails civil registration?

Governments and development partners have for long neglected civil registration. Some of the reasons for this neglect include the following:

Awareness and demand: In many countries, the main reason for non-registration is a general lack of awareness among parents and guardians of the need for and importance of birth registration and certificates for their child's future, or, similarly, among family members of the importance of death registration.

An important role in education, information and communication should be played by government- and non-government front-line staff who reach women and children in the early stages of life: birth attendants (skilled and unskilled); immunization workers; breast feeding advocates and counselors; baby-friendly-hospital administrators; community health workers in general; AIDS/HIV workers and counselors responsible for PMTCT. An example of which is the Mukembau-Plan project in Kenya (*cf. box p. 11*)

Political will: Lack of high-level political commitment to strengthen the civil registration systems in many countries.

Legal framework: Inadequacy in the laws that govern registration of births and deaths.

In Kenya the late registration fee when families do not register within the first six months acts as a hindrance to late registration. In Tanzania registration is free but birth certificates issuance incurs costs, the amount of which increases over time and accounts for 1/3 of the average monthly income when the child is over 10. In Kenya and Egypt immunization requires a birth certificate.

Financial resources: Lack of adequate funding to strengthen systems either from national budgets or through international development agencies.

Accessibility: Weak registration infrastructure and inadequate reach of the system that makes the opportunity cost of registration too high for the people.

Roles and responsibilities: Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities among the actors and agencies involved in the registration processes.

Human resources: Qualitative and quantitative shortages in human resources. This applies both to civil registration staff (including their access to and ability to use modern technology) and (training of) personnel in other government agencies e.g. health workers.

As a consequence of the above mentioned neglect, both the legal as well as the statistical function of the civil registration system very often fall considerably short of expectations. Births are not comprehensively recorded depriving the population of the protection and benefits citizens are entitled to. Where some death reporting does take place, the age at death could be mis-reported and the cause of death may not be certified by a physician or may have been misdiagnosed.

Complete civil registration allows Governments to more quickly and effectively manage problems of citizens affected by natural disasters, conflict, internal displacement and refuge. It will also allow better analysis of and policy formulation to address issues of marginalization and social exclusion of certain groups in society.

5. Interim solutions

“International funding agencies decided that it was cheaper and quicker to obtain macro data through household systems than to support the long term development of registration systems”, according to Robert A. Israel, a former director of the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics which ceased to exist in 2006 for want of funding.

Given the importance of data on births and deaths combined with accurate cause of deaths for health and development policy, a number of interim solutions (sometimes funded by aid agencies) have been used to bridge the gap in the absence of reliable data from civil registration systems. Examples are:

1 Population Census:

Periodic population censuses, even though they take place generally once in 10 years, have offered the possibility of estimating much more information than the denominator figures for birth and death.

These include:

- a. Estimates of fertility
- b. Under 5 mortality
- c. Adult mortality, including maternal mortality.
- d. Possibilities of following up on cause of death through verbal autopsy methods on individual cases

2. Sample registration systems:

The best-known example of this is the National Sample Surveys of India, which have been covering the whole country since the past 30 years. The system is estimated to capture about 85% of deaths and is elaborately constructed to minimize possibilities of error. The costs of maintaining such a system are higher than the costs of comprehensive civil registration. In addition the inevitably limited sample size does not allow generating reliable data for small geographical areas, which can lead to misjudgment of problems (e.g. foeticide) and misallocation of scarce government resources.

3. Demographic surveillance sites

This approach is similar to the sample registration systems, but being limited to a defined geographic area it is not necessarily representative of the population of the country as a whole. The best-known example of this approach is the Matlab site in Bangladesh. The INDEPTH Network coordinates work at 37 sites, of which 26 are located in Africa.

UN Statistics Division:

“Although there is no substitute for the availability of continuous information on vital events as obtained from registration of vital events in civil registration... allowance is made, as appropriate, for the use of other sources of complementary or alternative data.”

Demographic surveillance systems continuously record longitudinal demographic data, usually within small geographically defined populations. These systems start with an initial census to define the baseline denominator population and thereafter continuously monitor this population at well-defined periods of time to record changes or events that take place in the initial population. Although the length of follow-up varies, three times a year is typical. During these routine visits, vital events such as births, deaths, migrations, and in some cases pregnancies are registered and monitored.³¹ Deaths recorded by field workers are followed up with verbal autopsy interviews using standardized interview protocols.

4. Demographic household surveys

These are the best known and most comprehensive of the interim solutions. The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and the UNICEF led Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) are the two major surveys. Fertility, maternal and child mortality estimates from these surveys are available for the past 15-20 years. Cross-national comparisons are possible with this data.

5. Hospital records

Though often incomplete, hospital records give valuable insights into both underlying and multiple causes of death.

A major strength of DHS and MICS surveys is the speed at which results are published and the easy access of the data to individual users. A drawback is the lack of sufficient sample size to detect regional and social inequities.

A small but growing body of research about the costs of obtaining information suggests that civil registration and complementary systems are quite affordable. When the costs are divided by the number of people benefiting from the information generated, the costs become negligible.

Source: The Lancet Vol. 370, p. 1575



One of the limitations of these interim statistical measures is that they lack socio-economic information. There is also absence of risk factors and the health status of living people. Relying on retrospective information, they are also prone to selection bias.

Though opportune, the interim solutions should not be viewed as alternatives, but as complementary to each other and civil registration. The capacity and demand created in a country through the operation of interim measures can be turned into the parallel strengthening of civil registration.

6. UN Agencies, NGOs and communities Partnerships and alliances for universal registration



The UN Statistical Division (UNSD) has an important role in setting standards and bringing out global compilations of data from civil registration systems. Since its founding in 1947 it has been a global centre for economic and environmental data and demographic and social statistics gathered from national and international sources. UNSD promotes international standards of methods, classifications and definitions used by national agencies, and it assists UN Member States, at their request, to improve their statistical services by giving advice and training. Unfortunately a lack of funding has forced UNSD to cease in the 1990s its training of civil registrars, but it still provides advice and manuals for civil registration. Important as well, the UNSD facilitates the monitoring of progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by leading the Interagency and Expert Group on MDG indicators and maintaining the global MDG indicator database.

The United Nations Fund for Population Affairs (UNFPA) was one of the earliest agencies to support efforts to strengthen Civil Registration Systems and the production of vital statistics in many countries. During the 1970s and 1980s, UNFPA invested substantially in about 20 developing countries in this area. However, the *Lancet* states “UNFPA paid little attention to strengthening the inter-ministerial and inter-agency linkages.”

UNICEF promotes birth registration as a human right and has had a pioneering role in advocating for birth registration along with partners, notably the child charity Plan. UNICEF’s 1998 *Progress of Nations* edition, 50 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, marked an important step-change in the organization’s advocacy for birth registration with a seminal article written by Ms. Unity Dow. A year earlier UNICEF in Bangladesh had started its first actual birth registration support to the government of the country. Following a ten country meeting on

Through UNICEF efforts of integrating birth registration into the Reproductive and Child Health Services, the Gambia has raised the level of registration from 64 to 71% in 2008 over the course of just one year. Swaziland conducted registration camps in schools in partnership with the Ministry of Education.

birth registration in Uganda in 2002, UNICEF-advocacy led the African Union to declare the theme of the African Day of the Child in 2003 as “Birth Registration”. This accelerated the efforts to promote registration all over Africa supported by efforts in the West and Central Africa and North Africa, and three more regional meetings were held for Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone Africa, with support from UNICEF and Plan. The UNICEF-advocacy for and support to birth registration have been successful in many parts of the world in creating a level of commitment among governments and bringing about greater efficiency in the systems that register births. Obviously, improving birth registration will often “lift all boats” and mean an improvement of civil registration at large. However, UNICEF has not so far accorded sufficient priority to the registration of deaths and causes of deaths, data for which are crucial for monitoring maternal, prenatal and neonatal mortality.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has supported the systematic introduction and implementation of the International Medical Certificate of Death (ICD) in many countries in Africa and Asia where cause of death data are either not reported or are of limited use. WHO has also developed and applied methods of strengthening verbal autopsy techniques.

Plan and, thus far to a much smaller extent, World Vision and Save the Children, have been the leading international non-government organizations, which have worked in this area. Plan started its multi-country Unregistered Children Project in Asia in 1998 and, from the start, worked with UNICEF and the NGO Committee. Plan, in 1999, organized the Asian Civil Registrars General Convention in Bangkok on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the

Convention of the Rights of the Child. Plan's birth registration activities expanded to the other continents in the past ten years, and over the past five years Plan has run its so-called Universal Birth Registration campaign. Plan is a grass-roots development organization working in about 50 developing countries. It has a rights-based and child-centered community development approach, which allows the organization not only to lobby governments but also to promote bottom-up approaches for improvement of birth registration. However, for the cause of civil registration to obtain bottom-up traction worldwide many more local and international NGOs need to rally for the cause. Building partnerships and alliances between Governments, UN-organizations, the aid community, non-governmental organizations and communities will be a key in expanding the coverage of civil registration in hard-to-reach areas and of marginalized and socially excluded groups in society.

In Kenya Mukembau, a community-based organization and Plan partner, discovered that many parents did not know their children's date of birth and many did not have health clinic cards. And as a result, young people were struggling to get identity cards when they were 18 years old, as they were required to supply both their own birth certificate and those of their parents. Working together, Plan and Mukembau developed a successful project to train a network of volunteers to collect birth registration data. The network involved villages, children's clubs, volunteer child officers and community health workers. This project has become a key link between the community and local registration services and as well as promoting birth registration; they ensure that health clinic and identity cards are distributed to families and young people. Mukembau also holds a celebration ceremony when individuals receive their birth certificates, creating greater awareness and demand for registration services. This model has strengthened genuine community participation, and Plan and Mukembau have facilitated the registration of more than 90 per cent of births in the project catchment area, far above the national average for Kenya.

7. The Millennium Development Goals: A major opportunity to strengthen civil registration

A distinguished group of demographers, public health specialists, health economists and academics spearheaded a major effort to focus attention on the opportunities following the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals to strengthen civil registration through four special articles in the *Lancet*. This group has claimed that: “Civil registration, vital statistics and data for cause of death are essential public goods”.

The authors of the articles, on behalf of the Monitoring of Vital Events (MOVE) writing group, draw attention to the huge increase in funds available to fight specific diseases. However the access to these funds would depend on the ability of countries to assess the reduction of deaths.

The current aid modalities also emphasize that the assistance is aligned to the country's strategies and its ability to measure, monitor and manage results. At least six of the eight Millennium Development Goals rely on accurate estimates for fertility, mortality and causes of death. The current state of health statistics is a critical barrier for many countries, especially in Africa to be able to measure these indicators accurately.

If countries and the aid community could agree to use a small part of the increased aid for the health Millennium Development Goals, this could provide the critical boost that is needed to improve situation of health statistics while bringing about a long lasting change in civil registration. In addition, improvements in the impact of aid remain of rhetorical value only unless reliable measurement has been made possible.

HMN's MoVE initiative

A fundamental prerequisite for, and sign of, good governance is knowledge of population size, structure and change — births, deaths and causes of death. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), several of which relate to mortality, have drawn the attention of policy makers at national and global levels to the need for accurate and timely population data. Yet such information is lacking in the majority of developing countries, where births and deaths too often go unregistered and causes of death remain poorly understood.

Tackling this striking imbalance between demand and supply is one of the objectives of the Health Metrics Network. To this end, HMN is involved with other partners in launching an international advocacy and research effort to improve the coverage and quality of vital statistics — the Monitoring of Vital Events (MoVE) initiative. Both the need and the responsibility for population statistics extend well beyond the health sector and key partners in the initiative include national statistics offices, local government and interior ministries as well as the multilateral statistical and development partners. Anticipated outcomes include consensus around innovative approaches to improving vital statistics such as use of demographic surveillance, sample registration systems and use of verbal autopsy for settings where medical certification of cause of death is not possible.

Source: PARIS21

8. Towards stronger civil registration systems



A number of suggestions are listed below which could be adapted to specific country situations as may be relevant:

1 Assessing the present status There could be a variety of reasons why registration rates are poor. People may not see the value in registering births and deaths, particularly if it includes costs – both direct as well as opportunity costs. In communities where the neo-natal death rates are high, it is common that these deaths are not reported. This first step of assessing both the demand and the supply side of the civil registration situation is critical to determine what needs to be done at the stages that are listed below.

2 Nurture public trust The population needs to believe that the civil registration system will benefit them and will not be misused as an instrument for repression. Of great importance is the safeguarding of the confidentiality of data that is in the custody of the system. For example, while there is no doubt about the importance of fighting the Aids/HIV scourge, the recording of HIV-positive citizens is a breach of the right to privacy.

3 Stimulate political commitment- Educational programmes for ministers and heads of other government agencies that interact with children and mothers before, during, and just after the birthing period to increase their awareness of the mutual benefits to them of birth registration, and of the need of coordination between different branches of government. National workshops, exchange visits, media involvement and public education can as well support such stimulation.

4 Assign roles and responsibilities
Appropriate coordination mechanisms need to be established between different parts of the government involved with civil registration. Value should be clearly perceived in the process of registration by both by the authorities responsible for registration and the population who are registered. The concept of civil registration, vital statistics and data as “essential public goods”, could be broken down to seeing these as local, national and global “public goods” with perceived value at each level.

5 Create supportive legal frameworks
Create the legal frameworks for comprehensive civil registration (covering birth, death, marriage, divorce, and location), fit the local situation and culture and are consistent with UN Standards.

6 Mobilize financial support
Innovative approaches should be explored to mobilize resources for strengthening birth registration systems. In Uganda, 1.3 million children were registered through integration of birth registration in the sector wide approach on Justice, Law and Order.

7 Develop a human resource base
Training of civil registration staff is key. For birth registration (but also for death certification for maternal death or still birth) training of doctors midwives and traditional birth attendants is indicated. This includes training in the correct use of the International Classification of Death (ICD) and verbal autopsies. Attention should be paid too to include and enhance the role of non-government actors such as churches, mosques and astrologers (India).

8 Reach marginal population groups through use of mobile registration systems and using modern technology.

9. Create incentives/penalties for birth registration This needs to be done taking into account the local conditions in each country as there is the danger that the application of incentives or penalties have unintended consequences. Emphasis should be on the State not to jeopardize the human rights of vulnerable citizens for example with regards to the right to education.

10 Modernize data collection, storage and retrieval
Using the advances in capacity and cost available from the rapid development in Information Communication Technology, including SMS. Confidentiality of data should however not be compromised in the urgency for adoption of new technology.

11 UN Agencies, the donor community and NGOs UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO, the donor community, and local and international NGOs and civil society, working in partnership and support of birth registration should greatly step up their collaboration and advocacy and awareness raising for the vital and multi-faceted importance of civil registration.

The strengthening of civil registration systems is a complex task. The first requirement is strong political commitment to look beyond birth registration where most of the advocacy efforts of international organizations have been focused so far. It is hoped that the August 2010 meeting of the African Union Ministers in Charge of Civil Registration will create the beginning of this change in the approach towards civil registration.



The second step will be to bring together at the country level all the stakeholders who have an interest in seeing both the legal function of civil registration as well as the statistical function with a focus on measuring progress towards the MDGs strengthened. It will also be essential to uncover the reasons parents give for not registering children at birth or family members for not reporting death in their family. These may be totally different from those perceived by the authorities and may require different interventions on a priority basis since increasing the supply without generating demand will prove to be unsuccessful and unsustainable.

The challenge before this group will be to make an honest assessment of the current situation in the country and identify ways and means of strengthening both aspects of civil registration. This includes current Government capacity to collect and record, store and retrieve data. The involvement of local authorities, civil society or NGOs in the process of this assessment will add greatly to the richness of the understanding.

It is essential that all interim measures used for estimating births, deaths and causes of death are evaluated and a plan adopted to maximize access to the data that the
the MDGs. While in the short run the data would be sourced from one or more of the interim measures reviewed earlier in this paper, the longer term focus should be to build sustained capacity in the civil registration system to perform a central role in this statistical function.

This plan will then need to be shared with decision makers who are responsible to negotiate for additional resources both from the country's own budget as well as from Overseas Development Assistance that is available, particularly for health sector focused aid, towards the strengthening of the Civil Registration system.

Once the acceleration plans are agreed upon and additional resources are identified, the same group of stakeholders would continue to monitor progress to ensure that the country is in a position to adequately monitor progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, while at the same time offering the range of recognition and protection that the system offers to the people of the country.



Notes

ⁱ Address to WHO staff, July 21, 2003.

ⁱⁱ UNICEF, *The 'rights' start to life, A statistical analysis of birth registration*, New York, United Nations Children's Fund, 2005.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Lancet* Vol. 370, November 3, 2007

^{vi} *Ibid*, p. 1574

^v *The Lancet*, Vol. 370, November 24, 2007, p. 1796: "Although the data are limited, it seems clear that in the long run, systems requiring active follow-up and application of verbal autopsy to determine cause of death, such as the sample system in India, are more costly to maintain than civil registration, which relies on routine reporting by individuals and health facilities."

^{vi} INDEPTH sites in Africa are in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. The International Network for the Demographic Evaluation of Populations and Their Health in Developing Countries (INDEPTH) is a global network of members who conduct longitudinal health and demographic evaluation of populations in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). INDEPTH aims to strengthen global capacity for Health and Demographic Surveillance Systems (HDSS), and to mount multi-site research to guide health priorities and policies in LMICs, based on up-to-date scientific evidence.

Source: <http://www.indepth-network.org>

^{vii} Quoted in *The Lancet* Vol. 370, November 10, 2007.

^{viii} Ms. Unity Dow (1959) is a judge, human rights activist and writer from Botswana. As a lawyer she earned acclaim for her stances on women's rights. She was the plaintiff in a case that allowed the children of women by foreign nationals to be considered Botswana. Tradition, and prior precedent, stated nationality only descended from the father. She later became Botswana's first female High Court judge.

^{ix} Cf. Cody, C. (2009). *Count every child: The right to birth registration*. Woking, UK, Plan Ltd., for the campaign details and results. This is also the source of the material in some of the boxes that mention Plan.

^x *The Lancet* 2007, Vol. 370: pp. 1569-77.

^{xi} The six Millennium Development Goals are eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achievement of universal primary education; attaining gender equality; reductions in child mortality; improvements in maternal health and reductions in prevalence of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

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