PART 1

- A Situation Analysis of Birth Registration in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati

PART 2

- Report on the Regional Workshop on Enhancing Birth Registration: Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste
Birth Registration in the Pacific

PART I: A Situation Analysis of Birth Registration in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati

PART II: Regional Workshop on Enhancing Birth Registration: Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste
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PART I

A Situation Analysis of Birth Registration in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati

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Gillian Mellsop
Representative
UNICEF Suva
November 2005
Executive Summary

This report comprises two parts: first, a Situation Analysis of birth registration in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati as of March 2005; second, a report on a workshop held in May, 2005, to discuss strategies to improve birth registration in the Pacific.

The Situation Analysis is based on the consultant’s and UNICEF staff interviews with officials and other stakeholders in the three countries. Birth registration is an inalienable human right that confers an official identity and recognition as a citizen. The three main reasons why it is particularly important are: for child rights and protection, to give citizens access to services and to provide information for economic and social planning. It is one of the three main forms of civil registration, i.e. births, deaths and marriages. Most Pacific civil registration systems were established during colonial times, primarily as a bureaucratic requirement of the colonial government. This has led to generally better coverage in urban than in rural areas, and contributed to community undervaluing birth registration.

In Vanuatu coverage is good in urban areas but low in rural areas, giving an overall coverage of only around 30 per cent. A major reason for low coverage is sharing responsibility for civil registration between municipalities, provinces and a central Civil Registration Department. As registrars in the other offices are not directly responsible to the Civil Registration Department, they sometimes prioritise other activities, fail to submit timely returns and/or do not actively promote birth registration. Record storage systems in Vanuatu are generally inadequate, and the level of fees charged for registration serves as a significant deterrent. In addition to rectifying these situations, there is potential to improve coverage by transferring information about births from the health information system, although to date transfer of such information has been limited.

Birth registration coverage by the Solomon Islands civil registration system is extremely low, while around 80-90 per cent of births are recorded in the health information system. Civil registration is currently located in the Electoral Office, which has a very small staff and is required to prioritise maintenance of the Electoral Roll. It was evident that coverage could be improved very substantially by establishing a mechanism for transfer of data on births from the health information system to the Electoral Office, deploying registration staff in the provinces and raising public awareness of the value of birth registration.

Improvements to data storage and communications in recent years have substantially improved the birth registration system in Kiribati. It was the only one of the three countries to have a functioning, searchable database. Like Vanuatu, however, it has good coverage in its urban area, but much less in outlying islands because of division of responsibilities between the Civil Registration Office and local government. Possible strategies to improve the system include reviewing the way late registrations
are handled, strengthening incentives/penalties to promote timely registration and establishing a mechanism to transfer information about births from the health information system.

The report also identifies common basic requirements to improve birth registration coverage in all three countries:

- Widespread community awareness-raising of the value and importance of registration as a right;
- Increased awareness of officials of the importance of using birth registration as evidence of age;
- Review and update of the legislation to reflect modern technology and government structures;
- Promotion of greater compliance with the legislation; and
- Increased inter-ministry cooperation and use of other information sources, including church records.

It is evident that donor funding would assist countries in the achievement of some of these objectives.

While the Situation Analysis was still in draft form, a three-day Regional Workshop on Enhancing Birth Registration in the Pacific was held at the Jovili Meo Mission Centre, Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji from 25-27th May, 2005. This workshop was organised and sponsored by UNICEF in conjunction with WHO, SPC, and UNFPA and brought together participants from seven Pacific countries: Fiji, Kiribati; Samoa, Solomon Islands; Tonga; Tuvalu and Vanuatu; and from Timor Leste. Representatives from JICA, PLAN International and the sponsoring agencies also attended. The Situation Analysis writer attended as the Technical Adviser, and the draft Situation Analysis was used as a resource document for the workshop. Participants were invited to comment on the draft.

The workshop opened with presentations from donor representatives and the Technical Adviser and Facilitator. The first workshop session comprised presentations on birth registration processes, coverage and issues in the eight countries. It began with a presentation by the Technical Adviser on common issues in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati. The eight delegations then presented reports on their own countries. These presentations revealed both unique and common problems.

On the second day of the workshop there was a demonstration of Fiji’s computerised birth registration system, a presentation by the UNICEF New York Office and a presentation by PLAN International on strategies used in Cambodia to increase birth registration coverage. Participants then commenced the main task of the workshop, working in groups to draft strategies to improve birth registration in their own countries. When the strategies were drafted, participants from different countries reviewed them and made suggestions. The proposed strategies were then revised and summarised in brief country presentations to the workshop.

The workshop closed with comments from UNICEF New York and SPC, Suva. UNICEF Suva then closed the workshop with a vote of thanks to organisers and participants. A full record of presentations and activities is included in the second part of this report.
PART I

A Situation Analysis of Birth Registration in Vanuatu, Kiribati and Solomon Islands
1.1 Importance of registration

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states “every child has the right to be registered at birth by the State within whose jurisdiction the child is born… 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” (United Nations, 1989).

Birth registration provides the essential ‘membership card’ that gives the individual an official identity and entitles them to the various rights and privileges of contemporary society (UNICEF, 2002: 1). A Ni-Vanuatu entrant in an essay competition wrote about his own experience of the importance of birth registration, as follows:

“I think registration of birth is important because when your name is registered you become a citizen of Vanuatu. Birth registration helps other people and me know the date of my birth. It helps to see the population growth of the people of Vanuatu. Birth registration helps me have the right to education. When my parents wanted me to enter kindergarten, they had to apply with the birth certificate. Without a birth certificate my name would not have been selected. This applied to my primary education too. When I went to Fiji with my parents, my Dad applied for my Vanuatu passport. Again, my birth certificate is very important to have a passport to enter and live in another country. When we were in Fiji, my Mum told me she received child allowances for me and my brother. One day, after we arrived in Suva, she took me and my brother to a high building. There she showed our passports and birth certificates to a woman. Our parents said that if they did not show our birth certificates and passports to that woman in the high building we would not get child allowances.”

'Timi’, nine-year-old pupil of Vila North School, an entrant in the National Children’s Committee 2004 essay competition)
This child and his family clearly belong to the minority of citizens in his country who are fully integrated into the modern economic sector. The point is, however, that birth registration is the ‘membership card’ that gives every person access to their rights. As increasing numbers of Pacific Islanders become involved in the modern sector, birth registration is essential for full participation. Initially, birth registration may be necessary only to entitle them to education, but eventually individuals will need to provide proof of identity on many occasions, including when they seek employment, driving licenses, marriage licences, access to bars and nightclubs, child and aged allowances and passports. Although it may seem that some of these benefits are of little relevance to a subsistence lifestyle, those who lack this ‘membership card’ are unable to share in many of the benefits of modern society should they decide they want them. Birth registration also helps to protect children from abuse and exploitation, in the ways described in Section 1.1.1.

Failure to register a birth is a violation of the child’s inalienable human right to be given an identity at birth and to be recognized as a citizen of their country. Some groups are more likely than others to be disadvantaged in accessing their rights. Whereas the children of the privileged seldom have their rights denied or are discriminated against, the children of the poor, children of minorities – especially ethnic minorities – and also girls, refugee children and other marginal groups suffer disproportionately (UNICEF and PLAN, 2003: 10).

The purpose and importance of birth registration can be classified under three main headings. At the individual level, birth registration provides civil rights and protection, and access to services. At the national level, birth registration provides essential information for economic and social planning, as also mentioned by the nine-year-old essayist quoted above.

### 1.1.1 Civil rights and protection

Documentation of identity and age provides basic protection in society. A child lacking this documentation is particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The ‘invisibility’ of unregistered children means that any discrimination, neglect or abuse they experience may remain unnoticed. Unregistered children are more attractive to child traffickers because links with their families are not officially documented so they may be difficult to trace. Similarly, unregistered children have a greater risk than registered children of being forced into child labour or recruited into the armed forces. They are also more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, either commercial or otherwise, because their age cannot be proven so their abuser is likely to escape prosecution. Unregistered teenage girls are especially vulnerable to early marriage and commercial sexual exploitation (UNICEF, 2002).

Unregistered children who are not officially recognised as citizens may be deprived of their rights not only during childhood but also when they become adults. Unregistered children and adults face particular risks if they leave their place of birth, either deliberately, such as in search of employment, or because they have been displaced. Without proof of identity they are vulnerable to various threats, including mistaken identity, detention or even deportation.
Birth registration establishes a permanent link between parents and children, and provides essential proof of family connections at critical times, such as when children are missing or become involved with the law. It strengthens parental capacity to care for their children, and can enable authorities to enforce parental care of neglected children. Birth registration also may help children to identify and/or locate their natural parents in cases of adoption or family breakdown.

1.1.2 Access to services

By giving the individual an official identity, birth registration brings the right to access the basic entitlements of a citizen in society, such as healthcare, education, participation and use of services. Health services need to track the growth and health of children and ensure correct immunisation and treatment regimes, while schools need to allocate places and monitor student progress according to age. As societies evolve and/or modernise and living standards improve, proof of identity becomes increasingly important. Individuals without proof of identity in a modern society are excluded from most wage employment and from opening a bank account, applying for credit, driving a vehicle, obtaining a passport, obtaining a telephone or electricity service connection, from voting or running for office, and even from obtaining a marriage license. They may be unable to prove ownership of assets, unable to bequeath or inherit property, and unable to receive pensions, allowances and endowments (UNICEF and PLAN, 2003: 11). For the poor, lack of birth registration can exacerbate poverty and increase the extent of their marginalisation.

Proof of identity has become especially important as levels of intra-national and international mobility have increased and growing numbers of people leave their place of birth to travel to locations where few know them. Migrants who are unable to prove their identity are vulnerable to detention and deportation, as noted in Section 1.1.2 above, and to exclusion from employment and access to social services.

1.1.3 Information for economic and social planning

The third set of reasons for birth registration relate to the need for reliable population data at the national and sub-national level. Good governance requires that expenditure on the provision of services is allocated according to demand. Reliable estimates of population numbers and growth rates are therefore fundamental to effective social and economic planning. Accurate knowledge of population numbers and age structure in the catchment areas of schools and health facilities is necessary so that appropriate services can be provided. Planners also need to know the likely numbers requiring housing, water, and sanitation in the future; and the number of people likely to use facilities such as roads or electricity grids.

Population size is a function of the balance between fertility, mortality and migration. Because of a universal tendency for householders not to report certain types of births and deaths on census forms, especially extra-nuptial births and early infant deaths, census data tend to be a relatively
unreliable source of information for the calculation of fertility and mortality rates. Moreover, the techniques commonly employed to estimate fertility and mortality from census data involve a degree of subjectivity on the part of the estimator that does not necessarily accord with reality.

Registration data are a better source of information upon which to base fertility and mortality estimates, but they can only be used for this purpose when coverage is virtually complete. Comprehensive birth registration is thus an essential tool to ensure access to benefits at the community as well as the individual level.

1.2 Definitions

UNICEF (2002: 2) defines birth registration as ‘the official recording of the birth of a child by some administrative level of the state and coordinated by a particular branch of government’.

It is important to distinguish birth registration so defined from other systems of recording information about births. Health authorities in virtually every country also record information about births, and normally issue documents that they may call ‘birth certificates’. Similarly, religious denominations that conduct rites to admit children as church members also record information about the child’s parentage and date of birth.

Although other recording systems are not considered by governments to be birth registration systems, they may have an important function in society. This is certainly true in the three Pacific countries that are the focus of this report, where a full appreciation of why the status of birth registration is as it is cannot be gained without considering other recording systems as well as birth registration. Moreover, because similar information tends to be collected by different systems, there is sometimes confusion among both parents and officials as to exactly what constitutes birth registration. This can even be true when estimates of national coverage are prepared.

In order to avoid confusion in this report, the term ‘birth registration’ is used only to refer to ‘birth registrations’ made by an office specifically responsible for civil registration or the provincial or municipal authorities or equivalent office(s) in each country. That is, the terminology in this report is strictly in accordance with the UNICEF definition above. Other information about births collected by health facilities, churches or other community organizations is always referred to as ‘birth records’, i.e. information collected by means of ‘birth recording’.

As the name given to particular documents tends to vary between countries and institutions concerned with birth information, a particular term such as ‘birth certificate’ should not be assumed to be always part of either birth registration or birth recording. The documents used in each country are therefore described precisely in this report, and are always referred to by the exact name used in that country.
It is also very important to distinguish between birth registration and citizenship. Birth registration does not necessarily confer citizenship and should never be confused with entitlement to be a citizen. Each country makes its own laws on eligibility for citizenship, usually determined by factors such as parents’ place of birth, citizenship and residence. Birth registration in the country of birth is the right of every child, regardless of whether or not they are eligible to become a citizen of that country.

1.3 Requirements of a birth registration system

Box One sets out the most important criteria for an effective birth registration system. These criteria, which are derived from the Bangladesh experience, describe the basic requirements of a registration system that should ensure an effectively functioning system in any country. They encompass key issues relating to the mechanisms and use of birth registration, as well as issues of rights, access and equity. As such they provide a useful set of indicators against which the strengths and weaknesses of any system can be measured. Although not used as a simple checklist in this report, these criteria should be kept in mind during the chapters assessing each country’s current situation as regards birth registration.
Box One: Criteria for an effective birth registration system:

1. There is genuine political will and commitment to birth registration at all levels of government, expressed in allocation of resources.
2. The number and percentage of registered births is known and is being monitored.
3. The rules and procedures are transparent and straightforward and ‘pro-poor’; forms and certificates are easy to read and use.
4. Birth registrars have the capacity and necessary materials to register births and their offices are regularly open to the public.
5. Roles and responsibilities for birth registration are clearly defined and widely known.
6. There is widespread knowledge and awareness on the obligation and importance of registering births, among communities and relevant officials.
7. A certificate issued by the registration office in the relevant ministry is the document of choice to prove age during court proceedings.
8. The birth registration certificate is required as proof of identity for enrolment in education and access to other services, but safeguards are in place to ensure that lack of such evidence cannot be used to exclude a child from these services.
9. A legal framework for birth registration is in place, emphasizing incentives for registration rather than penalties for non-registration.
10. Forms, rules and proceedings should not discriminate explicitly or implicitly on sex, race, origin or religion.
11. Birth registration and registration documents contribute to gender equality.
12. Measures are in place to register births of children of internal-migrants, minority groups and children of the foreign-born.
13. Children born out of wedlock and children of sex-workers are not distinguished in their right to birth registration or in registration documents.
14. Birth registration data can be used for planning child health service delivery.
15. Birth registration services are sufficiently decentralized to make them accessible to people in remote areas.
17. Birth registration does not depend on outside funding.
18. Communication on birth registration emphasizes its relevance for child rights.
19. Activities to promote birth registration involve all stakeholders, including children.
20. A clear distinction is made between birth registration and nationality.

1.4 Essential information for birth registration

The core information normally required to enable a birth to be registered is date of birth, place of birth, sex and name of child, and mother’s and father’s names. Many countries have special regulations that enable registration without the father’s name, while most also collect various additional information, including mother’s and father’s date and place of birth or age, father’s occupation (less often, mother’s occupation) and mother’s previous issue (i.e. child’s siblings).

It is interesting that the description in UNICEF (2002: 2) of information that can be recorded at registration includes the child’s height (i.e. length), weight and gestational age, and it is mentioned that some countries such as Qatar include immunization status. These are clearly health variables that are not found on civil registration documents (although the name of the attending physician, midwife, or birth attendant as witnesses to the event often is). The distinction between birth registration and health recording is thus blurred, although it is stated clearly in a preceding paragraph that birth registration should be coordinated by a particular branch of government and is ideally a function of a civil registration system (UNICEF, 2002: 2).

This blurring and the way the term ‘birth certificate’ is used even in authoritative discussions serves to illustrate the extent of general confusion and complexity surrounding the issue of birth registration. It will be shown to be an important cause of under-registration in the three countries discussed in this report, and an issue that should always be addressed when formulating strategies to improve birth registration, so as to ensure that all possible confusion is avoided.

1.5 Birth registration in the Pacific1

Birth registration was introduced to virtually all Pacific countries as part of their contact with European colonial powers. Even Tonga, which was never a colony, adopted a European-style legal system and administration, including civil registration. In Solomon Islands and a few other countries, birth registration was originally introduced to keep track of European rather than indigenous inhabitants. It was not required of indigenous Solomon Islanders until almost 100 years after its first introduction (See Section 3.1 below). Elsewhere in the Pacific, birth and other types of civil registration followed a similar course of evolution, from being first part of the trappings of European society and then gradually extending to local inhabitants, sometimes not until after the achievement of independent nationhood.

This historical background is important, because it helps to explain contemporary Pacific attitudes to birth registration and also levels of coverage. Birth registration was adopted because it was part

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1 Except where otherwise stated, in this section the author is drawing on her personal knowledge and experience as former Head of the Demography/Population Programme at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.
and parcel of European administrative systems, not because it was perceived as important to the functioning of local society. Moreover, because it was associated with Europeanization, birth registration began very much as an urban-centred procedure, with mechanisms to facilitate registration in rural and remote areas evolving only much later, if at all.

Given this background, it is hardly surprising that coverage in the Pacific tends to be much higher in urban than in rural areas, and is near complete only in the smallest and most modernised island states, such as Cook Islands, Nauru, Tonga and Palau. In most of the remaining countries, and especially the larger countries with many different languages, such as Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, both birth registration and death registration are generally too incomplete to give a realistic picture of fertility and mortality. Moreover, many communities that live a largely subsistence lifestyle have little contact with modern institutions and may perceive little value in registration.


The majority of the population in the three countries considered in this study live a largely subsistence lifestyle with limited involvement in the cash economy. The percentage urbanised is 43 per cent in Kiribati, only 16 per cent in Solomon Islands and 21 per cent in Vanuatu (SPC, 2005). In both rural and urban areas the majority of people live in extended families and have a very strong sense of community, buoyed by almost universal participation in religious activities. In such societies every person is well known to the community around them, and documentation to prove identity tends to be perceived as a bureaucratic requirement rather than as having intrinsic value to the individual.

Promotion of birth registration as a rights issue has commenced only recently in the three countries, largely as a consequence of their adoption of CRC during the 1990s. Prior to that birth registration was considered of interest mainly to planners and other bureaucrats who wanted to obtain accurate population data. International and regional agencies such as United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and SPC made sporadic attempts to promote birth and death registration as a better source of population data for fertility and mortality estimation, but these efforts produced little improvement.

Birth registration as a civil right is a very different issue from birth registration as a bureaucratic requirement. Increasing emphasis on its importance as a rights issue has the potential to bring
substantial changes in both official and community attitudes towards birth registration in the three
countries discussed in this report. It is therefore timely to review their situations as regards birth
registration, examine the legislation and mechanisms and consider strategies to overcome any obstacles
to the achievement of almost universal coverage.

1.6 Methodology and report outline

This report is concerned with birth registration in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati. The
author visited each country in March 2005 and conducted interviews with personnel directly
concerned with birth registration and birth recording and with various stakeholders. This report is
based on the findings from these country visits, selected published sources and the author’s experience
of using registration data from these countries.

The structure of each country chapter is roughly the same, beginning with a brief introduction to
the country, followed by a review of the legislation and the institutional structures concerned with
birth registration and also birth recording, a description of the mechanisms for birth registration and
the data storage system, estimates of coverage, perceived incentives and disincentives for individuals
to register births, issues for officials and actions already taken to improve birth registration. Each
country chapter concludes with some recommendations on how to address local issues.

The country chapters are arranged in the order in which the countries were visited and studied
rather than in the more usual alphabetical order. This was a deliberate decision because it was felt
that examining them in this particular order enhanced understanding of the processes at work. Their
situations and levels of coverage are very different, but there are some common attitudes and issues
in each country.

The final chapter summarises country specific and common issues and proposes strategies to improve
registration coverage in each of the three countries.
2.1 Country background

Vanuatu is an independent country comprising a chain of islands in the Western Pacific. Until 1980 it was the New Hebrides, a condominium jointly administered by Britain and France. The most recent census of 1999 enumerated 189,678 people, of whom 21 per cent were classed as urban. The total fertility rate derived from the 1999 census was 4.8 children per woman (Republic of Vanuatu, 2003). As the 1989-1999 inter-censal growth rate of 2.6 per cent appears not to have declined significantly, the 2005 population is probably around 220,000. Indigenous Melanesians comprise more than 98 per cent of the total population (Republic of Vanuatu, 2003).

Since the introduction of local government in 1994, Vanuatu has been administered as six provinces: Torba, Sanma, Penama, Malampa, Shefa and Tafea (Commonwealth Local Government Forum, 2005). The main administrative centre and principal urban area is Port Vila, located on the island of Efate in Shefa Province. Luganville on the northern island of Espiritu Santo is also classed as urban. Outside these two urban areas, the majority of the people live a largely subsistence village-based lifestyle. In some of the most remote areas of Vanuatu there are still villages that have virtually no contact with modern institutions.

Around 90 per cent of the population are estimated to have access to health services, (Republic of Vanuatu, 2003) and 85 per cent of deliveries are assisted by trained medical personnel (World Health Organization, 2004). An estimated 78 per cent of children attend primary school (SPC, 2005). In recent years Vanuatu has experienced high levels of rural to urban migration as a consequence of a growing demand for wage employment, even though there are nowhere near enough jobs to meet the demand for employment in a small economy based on primary production, tourism and the public sector.
2.2 Legislation

Registration of all births in Vanuatu is governed by The Civil Status (Registration) Act (cap. 61, 1971, Revised Edition 1988 of Laws of The Republic of Vanuatu). The Act sets out the requirements for registration of births, as well as registration of marriages, deaths, and acknowledgement of parenthood. As it pre-dates Independence, the Act does not reflect the current administration and includes references to non-existent posts such as District Commissioner (Part IV, s31 (ss2)). The Act states:

‘18 (1) All births shall be declared within a period to be prescribed for each area by Order made by the Minister by-

1) the father or mother of the newborn child; or
2) a member of the family; or
3) the doctor, midwife, or medical officer who was present at the birth; or
4) the person at whose house the birth took place; or
5) the village chief, local leader or clergyman; or
6) any person having knowledge of the birth.

(2) Any birth not declared within the prescribed time shall be made the subject of a late declaration under the provisions of Part IV.’

The prescribed period for all civil status declarations are specified in Subsidiary Regulation (Joint Rules 39 of 1975):

Deaths 7 clear days
Births 21 clear days
Marriages 21 clear days
Foetal deaths 21 clear days
Acknowledgements 30 clear days

The procedure for late declarations specified in Part IV of the Act is complex, requiring the convening of a committee to review evidence and arrive at a majority opinion.

The Act provides for the registration of dead children. S 20 states: ‘When a child is dead at the time the declaration is made, the registering officer shall record the birth and the death in the appropriate registers’.

In s40, Part VI Miscellaneous Provisions it is stated ‘Entries in any registers shall be made free of charge. A fee may be charged when copies or extracts are issued, the amount of which shall be prescribed by the Minister by Order.’
Computerised data management technology is not recognised in the legislation, which requires entries in registers to be handwritten in ball-point pen, and states that there should be one handwritten original copy and 3 carbon copies (s7, ss(1) and (2)).

2.3 Institutional structure

2.3.1 Registration offices

The principal institution concerned with registration is the Civil Registration Department (also known as the Civil Status Office), Ministry of Internal Affairs. Located in Port Vila, this department collects, archives and reports on all registrations. It is headed by the Registrar-General and has five office staff. Registrars in each of the Provincial and Municipal Headquarters perform civil registrations and forward the documentation to the Civil Status Office for archiving.

In the distant past, registrations were made at a central office in Port Vila, but when local government was introduced in 1993, registrations were made only at the Provincial and Municipal Headquarters and the Civil Registration Department was responsible only for archiving. While the Provincial and Municipal Headquarters continue to make civil registrations, since 2001 the Civil Registration Department has resumed provision of registration facilities to the public, as well as continuing to be responsible for archiving.

Birth registrations can be made for persons of any age. Although the majority are for newborns and children attaining school age, substantial numbers of birth registrations are made for adults who find themselves in need of formal documentation. Registrations that do not fall within the ‘prescribed period’ (see above section) are classified as late registrations. Except in the case of children that are still very young, the usual practice is for registration staff to check documentary evidence then search existing records to ensure that the birth has not already been registered. The requirement to convene a committee to review evidence, as specified in the Act (see Section 2.2 above), is generally ignored because it is perceived as impractical.

2.3.2 Other sources of information about births

Ministry of Health facilities issue mothers with documentary evidence of deliveries attended by trained medical health personnel, and keep record books at health facilities. Some of the information on deliveries is included in a centralised, computerised database. When full record books are full with no more space for entries, facilities send them to the Ministry of Health in Port Vila for archiving.

Churches also record information about baptisms of members of local congregations. Although procedures differ between denominations, most retain records at local churches and do not archive information at any central location.

The procedures followed by health facilities and the churches are explained in detail Section 2.4.2
2.4 Birth registration and recording

2.4.1 The civil registration process

The Provincial and Municipal headquarters and the Civil Registration Department follow the same procedure and use identical stationery to register births. Details of births are recorded by hand in large format books, each containing 50 white forms with three blue carbon copies for each form. When the details have been recorded, the white form is forwarded to (or retained by) the Civil Registration Department, and one blue carbon copy is given to the client. Two blue carbon copies remain in the book for record purposes and can be issued as replacements if the client loses their copy.

Although the Act refers to the need for previous documentary evidence of the birth only in connection with late registrations, it appears that registrars request documentary evidence for every birth registration. In the case of newborns and children born in the last decade or two, the principal documentation is a ‘birth certificate’ issued by a health facility. Registrars said that they would not register a baby or a child that was simply brought to the office without any documentation to establish its date of birth. Those without a ‘birth certificate’ from a health facility, i.e. many adults, may provide evidence of birth from a church, or a letter from a pastor or other official or any person who can vouch for the date of birth.

As discussed in Section 2.1 above, the Act states that birth registration (including the issue of one blue carbon copy) should be free of charge (ss40) and fees should only be charged if an additional document known as ‘an extract’ is required. However, fees were introduced during the 1990s and are currently said by registrars to be around 200 - 500vt (depending which institution) per registration.2 Although the purpose was to cover the cost of the registration books used to record births, the fees charged are substantially higher than necessary to defray the cost of these books. The additional fee for an extract also varies, from 200vt to around 500 vt. Goods and services tax is added to all of these fees.

In principal, clients applying to register are allocated to particular registration centres according to where the birth occurred. Municipal Offices are required to register only births that occur within the municipality proper, while Provincial Offices normally register births occurring elsewhere in the province. Because of high levels of internal migration, however, especially very substantial movement to Port Vila, registrars tend not to adhere too strictly to this requirement, since people wishing to obtain a registration certificate may not be able to return to their birthplace and register at the appropriate institution. The high level of population mobility appears to have been the impetus for the re-introduction of registration services at the central Civil Registration Department, which can register people born anywhere in Vanuatu.

2 Vt = vatu. 100vt = USD 0.91 as at 10/4/2005
The Provincial and Municipal Offices in Efate accumulate registrations for from two to four months before forwarding them to the Civil Registration Department for archiving. The Registrar General said that sub-registrars in other provinces may take much longer to forward registrations, or possibly even fail to do so. In the interval between the registration taking place and the archiving of the white copy at the Civil Registration Department it is not possible for other registrars to verify that a particular individual has been registered.

2.4.2 Other forms of birth recording

Hospitals and other health facilities issue documentary evidence of any medically attended birth, and also record information about births in the computerised Health Information System. These records are quite different from registrations made at the Civil Registration Department. The mother of each child is issued with a document recording date and time of birth, parents’ names and other essential details when she receives the Child Health Card. Some facilities, such as the Port Vila Hospital, give out this information on a full page form entitled ‘Birth Certificate’, while others, such as Paunagis Health Centre, issue small slips of paper of a few lines, printed four to a page and imprinted with the health facility stamp. Carbon copies are not made or retained by the Ministry of Health or health facilities, and nor are they forwarded to the Civil Registration Department. Monthly summary reports from each facility on the number of births are entered into the computerised Health Information System, but information at the individual level is retained only in the hand written record books at the facility where the delivery occurred. Thus, if for any reason a mother requires a duplicate of this information, health personnel must conduct a time-consuming manual search of the record books. When the author visited the central records section at the Port Vila Hospital where Ministry of Health birth records are stored, the Ministry temporarily had no capacity at all to search and check records, because the assistant statistician who normally does so was herself on maternity leave.
Churches also record and distribute evidence of births to parents in their congregations. The format and nature of the information recorded and the type of documentation issued varies from one denomination to another. For example, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormon Church) fills out a one-page document entitled ‘Birth Registration and Blessing Certificate’. The same information is recorded on the upper and lower sections of the document, and the lower section is given to the parents while the upper is retained for the church records. The Presbyterian Church issues parents with a Certificate of Baptism containing similar essential details, and makes a charge of 100 vt to cover the cost of this certificate. Copies of the certificate are not retained, but the details of the baptism are recorded in church registers. Other churches follow similar practices. Although the most common age for information to be recorded may vary, most respondents said that the majority of church records are made within the first year or two of life.

2.5 Data Storage

Around 180,000 birth registrations are currently stored at the Civil Registration Department, dating from the year 1800. All registrations are stored in paper form, i.e. the white copies, which are kept in fireproof Chubb filing cabinets. Whenever any checking of registrations is necessary, which happens frequently, the white copies are searched by hand. This procedure is said to take around two and a half hours each time.

Recently the Civil Registration Department attempted to computerise the stored registrations using customised software developed by a consultant. Unfortunately the computer crashed and, as the information was not backed up, some 45,000 entries in the database were lost, apparently representing more than two years work.

The Shefa Provincial Headquarters and the Port Vila Municipality stack the registration books containing the two remaining carbon copies in cupboards and on bookshelves. They have no special provision for security or protection from vermin or hazards such as cyclones.

2.6 Timing of registration and coverage estimates

Although the registrars were unable to say exactly what proportion of birth registrations occur outside the prescribed period (i.e. within 21 days of birth), they felt that relatively few are timely. Most health facility documentation is issued immediately after birth, or within a few months of birth if a mother brings a previously unattended child for some form of health care. Midwives at the hospital and health facility staff said that whenever they give a ‘birth certificate’ to the mother they explain that she must present it at the Municipal, Provincial or Civil Registration Department as soon as possible and register the child, but it appears that many families do not act on this advice. The Civil Registration Office estimates that less than 20 per cent of all births are registered within a year (Republic of Vanuatu, 2005: 3)
Virtually all respondents, both officials and mothers, said that the majority of parents only register their child when they are actually required to produce evidence of formal registration. Typical occasions when such evidence is required include applying to enrol at a school, applying to sit the Class Six examination (for progression to secondary school), commencing formal employment, opening a bank account, applying for a drivers’ licence, joining the National Provident Fund or applying for a passport. As will be discussed in a later section, however, in some of these situations evidence other than birth registration is sometimes accepted.

As the 180,000 birth registrations currently stored at the Civil Registration Department is even less than the current total population of Vanuatu, it is clear that there is substantial under-registration of births. In 1989 UNFPA estimated that around 20 per cent of the population was registered (personal communication, Registrar-General). In 2004 1851 children were born at the Port Vila Hospital, while the Port Vila Municipal Office registered from 20-45 births per month in the four months September to December 2004. Shefa Provincial Headquarters registered 780 births in January and February 2005. However, as these registrations included people of all ages, and records are not computerised or summarised by age group or island, it would be very difficult and time consuming to calculate a realistic estimate of current coverage.

All registrars interviewed thought that UNICEF Pacific’s (2004) estimate of 30 per cent coverage seemed reasonable and that it is unlikely to be higher. Registrars also agreed that coverage is much more complete in urban than in rural areas, and that virtually all children of public servants are registered because the child allowance salary supplement can be claimed for registered children.

Some births in remote areas are attended only by a traditional birth attendant or relatives, and therefore lack written documentation. The percentage of births not attended by trained health personnel is unknown although the Ministry of Health estimates that more than 90 per cent of births are attended. This is confirmed by evidence from an isolated village in Tanna. Increasing numbers of mothers from this village are now travelling to a health facility to give birth, even though it is otherwise isolated from the modern world. Its children do not attend primary school, there is negligible involvement in the cash economy, no church and no one is registered (David Becker, personal communication).

Some informants thought that the percentage of births registered by churches of all denominations could be even higher than the percentage receiving medical assistance, which implies that if the records of every church could be combined, they might give a more complete picture of total births than health records, although less timely.
2.7 Incentives and disincentives for citizens to register births

2.7.1 Lack of awareness of benefits and cost of registration

Increasing participation in the modern economy is raising awareness of the importance of registration among some sections of the community, principally people living in urban areas and/or engaged in formal employment, who are likely to need such documentary evidence and who also benefit from economic development initiatives. Many more people engaged solely in the subsistence economy, however, have little contact with modern institutions and expect never to be required to produce personal documentation. Such people are hardly likely to regard birth registration as important, and the costs and possible inconvenience associated with obtaining it present a significant deterrent. For a large part of the Vanuatu community, birth registration seems to be a paradox in that it appears to be more use to planners and Government officials than to the individual, yet the individual is expected to pay for it.

In urban areas too, the cost of registration is a significant deterrent discouraging registration until it is absolutely necessary. All officials, and also the mothers randomly interviewed by the author of this report, were of the opinion that the principal reason for deferring or not registering is that a fee is charged for registering a birth. It seems that the deterrent effect of the fee is enhanced by the fact that most mothers received ‘free’ documentation of births from health facilities. Moreover, more than half the mothers interviewed believed that the current cost of registration was 2000 vt and said that this was unaffordable so they had not registered their children. The Municipal registrar confirmed that when first introduced the fee had been 2000 vt and said that this was unaffordable so they had not registered their children. The Municipal registrar confirmed that when first introduced the fee had been 2000 vt, but it has since been reduced substantially (see Section 2.4.1 above). It seems, however, that not all mothers are aware of this fact.

2.7.2 Inconsistent documentation requirements

The acceptability of various documents as proof of age differs. For example, although the official view is that evidence of birth registration must be produced for any child enrolling at a primary school, and some mothers interviewed also believe this, it clearly is not a universal requirement, but rather seems to follow patterns of affluence and modernisation. At the Port Vila Central School, which charges substantial fees, the Business Manager said that almost every application for enrolment is accompanied by a birth registration, with few parents supplying only a ‘birth certificate’ from a health facility. In contrast, staff at other schools reported that they do not insist on formal documentation and parents are required only to record the child’s date of birth on the application form. Staff at these schools said they could not enforce the production of documentation because many parents found birth registration unaffordable and, if pressed, might not enrol the child. Between these two extremes are schools that require documentation but accept any form of evidence, and do not distinguish between ‘birth certificates’ issued by health facilities and civil registration.

\[1\] In fact most health facilities charge a fee to deliver a child, typically around 1000 vt, with documentary evidence of the birth included as part of the service.
Opinions differed as to whether production of evidence of birth registration is required before a child can sit the Class Six examination that determines progression to secondary school. Some teachers and registrars said that it was compulsory, and one registrar cited instances of teachers advancing money to their pupils so that they could be registered and thus become eligible to sit the examination. In contrast, the headmistress of one primary school said that pupils at her school normally sat the examination and progressed to secondary school without producing any formal evidence of age. She said they simply fill in their date of birth on the appropriate form when they apply to sit the examination. It is thus clear that the existence of registration fees and the reluctance of teachers, and probably many other officials, to put pressure on people who cannot readily afford these fees is an obstacle to the achievement of complete coverage.

The situation is similar in the case of evidence of age for police and court purposes. Senior officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Legal Drafting Office said that whereas in Port Vila the usual document would be birth registration, any type of evidence would probably be accepted in rural areas. They were not aware of any instances where lack of formal evidence of age had prevented or hindered prosecutions.

### 2.7.3 Perception of registration as disadvantageous or unnecessary

It appears that some citizens could perceive disadvantage in birth registration. One person interviewed cited the example of children re-sitting the Class Six examination by providing a different date of birth and even a different name on their application form in subsequent years, which would not be possible if they had been required to produce evidence of birth registration. Other examples of people who may prefer to be without documentation that establishes their date of birth could include under-18s who wish to purchase alcohol or engage in activities reserved for older ages, and employees who have reached compulsory retirement age but wish to continue working because they have no pension privileges.

Although the Act requires birth registration before death registration, registrars said there were very few post-mortem birth registrations. Except for those who wish to cremate or inter their child at a public cemetery, parents who suffer a child death are unlikely to perceive value in post-mortem registration or to want to expend money on two registrations. This constitutes a major deficiency in the registration data as regards the estimation of infant and child mortality and also fertility levels.

### 2.8 Issues for registrars and health personnel

#### 2.8.1 Community under-valuing of registration

All the registrars interviewed said general community awareness of the value of registration is low. They said that many parents do not attach importance to registration until they are required to produce evidence of date of birth, and even those who do register tend not to appreciate the importance of registration as a rights issue. They also said that undervaluing of birth registration is
common among government officers, local government officials and parliamentarians as well as the general public. Consequently, because of lack of knowledge, or reluctance to force parents to incur additional expenditure, schools and other institutions often accept evidence of birth from health facilities or churches, or even do not require formal evidence at all. This was confirmed by the author’s discussions with schools, as described in Section 2.7.2 above.

Box Two: Implications of under- or delayed registration of births for EPI (the Expanded Programme of Immunisation)

The delivery of comprehensive health services depends on reliable information on the demand for services being available. The National EPI Coordinator at the Ministry of Health said that all EPI and Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services needs are based on health facility records of births. If births are under-recorded or recording of some births is delayed because trained health professionals were not present at a delivery, under-estimation of the need for EPI and MCH services may occur. This can lead to:

- Insufficient MCH staff and services
- Incomplete coverage of target age groups
- Shortages of vaccines at delivery points

2.8.2 Inadequate data storage and management facilities

All the registrars interviewed mentioned the need for computerisation of birth registrations. Their first concern was to reduce the laborious process of manual searching whenever it is necessary to check that a birth has not been registered previously, or issue an extract or copy.

Another advantage of computerisation would be more comprehensive searching, as the time between registration at outlying offices and dispatch to the Civil Registration Department could be reduced. At present both Provincial and Municipal Offices check registrations stored at the Civil Registration Department, but are unable to check registrations at other offices that have not yet been forwarded to the Civil Registration Department. It is thus possible for births to be registered in more than one place.

A further major advantage of computerisation would be safer storage of data. Even though this was not the case with the previous attempt to computerise registrations at the Civil Registration Department (see Section 2.5 above), the Registrar-General recognises that upgrading the computer hardware in the office and providing more training for staff in data management and backing up work could prevent such a loss in future. Properly computerised data could be backed up and stored in several locations to prevent loss, whereas the paper records currently maintained are vulnerable to vermin and natural hazards. For example, the sub-registrar at the Shefa Provincial Headquarters said
that sometimes in cyclonic weather she has stayed in her office overnight to ensure that registration books stored on shelves near the window were not damaged.

2.8.3 Lack of centralisation and inadequate inter-departmental collaboration

The Registrar-General was of the opinion that lack of centralisation is a major factor causing delays and inefficiency in the system. Sub-registrars working in the provinces are appointed by local politicians and so are not directly responsible to the Civil Registration Department. In his view, registrars should all be attached to the Civil Registration Department rather than responsible to Provincial or Municipal Offices. The Registrar-General also commented that this would enable standardization of fees across all registration facilities. Taking a slightly different angle, the sub-registrars interviewed said delays and inefficiency would be much reduced if there were better communication between their offices and the Civil Registration Department.

Both the Registrar-General and sub-registrars said that registration coverage could be greatly improved by the introduction of a mechanism for health officials and the churches to inform the Civil Registration Department about any births they had recorded, and for schools to notify the Department if they encountered any unregistered children. Computerisation of the Civil Registration Department could make this relatively easy by enabling it to import data from the Health and Education information systems.

The Registrar-General was formerly the National Statistician and so has a good appreciation of the excellent data management and storage capacity of the National Statistics Office (NSO). Both the Registrar-General and the Acting National Statistician said that closer cooperation between the Civil Registration Department and the NSO would help to improve efficiency and management, analysis and utilisation of registration data.
Box Three: Implications of under- or delayed registration of births for schools

Educational planning depends on reliable estimates of the number of pupils in each school catchment area. If births are not registered or registration is delayed until children reach school age, the Ministry of Education cannot reliably anticipate the demand for school places. The consequences may include:

- Under or over-estimation of the number of school places required
- Under or over-estimation of the number of teachers required
- Under or over-estimation of school supplies
- Over-crowding of schools
- Inefficiencies in the distribution of schools

2.9 Actions already taken to strengthen birth registration and improve coverage

The Government of Vanuatu is committed to the improvement of social statistics, particularly since the adoption by most Pacific Countries of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Vanuatu NSO was one of the first to participate in two major data projects at The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) – ‘Prism’ and the ‘Population Geographical Information System’. Both relate a range of economic and social indicators to population estimates.

The appointment of the former Government Statistician as Registrar-General was another strategy to help strengthen civil registration. In recent years the Civil Registration Department has conducted a number of workshops for senior representatives from the Ministries of Health, Education, Finance and Economic Development and also the National Provident Fund (NPF), as well as Internal Affairs. These meetings have led to the development of the Civil Registration Institutional Strengthening Project proposal to strengthen civil registration by means of collaboration between the four Ministries and community organizations.

The objectives set out in the proposal are to:

1) Establish a proper registration and computerised system for Vanuatu;
2) Strengthen the existing institutions in the Central Government and local government;
3) Establish regional offices with sub-registrars in the 11 major islands in Vanuatu and make registration of Ni-Vanuatu in Noumea, New Caledonia, a responsibility of the Consulate;
4) Support Education Policy;
5) Support Health Policy;
6) Support Police Crime Statistics;
7) Support the Immigration Department;
8) Support the Disaster Management Department;
9) Strengthen the role of chiefs in registration;
10) Strengthen the role of women in registration;
11) Strengthen the role of pastors and church leaders in registration;
12) Maintain the system in the future.

(Civil Registration Department, 2005: 2)

If implemented, this major initiative would facilitate a range of government and civil functions and benefit the whole population of Vanuatu, as well as expanding and re-equipping the Civil Registration Office. Project activities include upgrading the registration skills of health personnel, collaboration with schools and health facilities to encourage timely and comprehensive registration, and collaborating with churches, village communities and village organizations to raise awareness and reach every citizen. The proposed project has the aim of achieving near 100 per cent registration within its two-year time frame of the project (Civil Registration Department, 2005: 3).

First prepared in 2001, this project proposal was twice submitted to and approved by the Council of Ministers, but did not attract the necessary funding of approximately 97 million vatu. At the time of writing it was being revised in readiness for a third attempt.

The National Children’s Committee, currently headed by the Ministry of Finance and Economics has undertaken some awareness-raising as part of the implementation of CRC. This has included sponsoring a competition for primary school pupils who were asked to write what birth registration means to them. Radio broadcasts and the printed media have also been used to raise awareness of the importance of birth registration. To date, most of this activity has centred on Port Vila.

2.10 Suggested strategies to further improve coverage

2.10.1 Fee reduction and community awareness-raising

Every person interviewed for this report, including mothers interviewed on a random basis by the author, made some reference to two issues in regard to birth registration: 1) The need to remove or reduce fees very substantially; and 2) low community awareness of the importance and utility of birth registration.

The issue of fees has already been discussed in this report and it has been noted that the existing legislation specifies that no fee should be charged for registering a birth, only fees for documentation in addition to the original copy (see Section 2.1 above). Clearly the question of whether or not it is possible for the Government to bear the costs of stationery and registration services is a political matter, but it is a crucial one and it seems unlikely that the Civil Registration Institutional
Strengthening Project could achieve its objective of near 100 per cent coverage without addressing this issue. Perhaps the vast improvement in efficiency that would be achieved with computerisation - reducing the need for stationery and ending the process of manual searching of records - would be sufficient to allow removal of the fee for registration.

There is no argument with the second point, that widespread community awareness-raising about the importance of registration is needed. Nonetheless, it is unlikely to achieve much unless the importance of registration is demonstrated in a practical way. Both officials and other respondents said that the majority of births are not registered until evidence of registration is needed. That is, until people perceive that there is something that they and/or their children will gain from registration. There seems no doubt that parents can be induced to register their children when they see some advantage in doing so, as evidenced by the virtually complete registration of children of public servants who can qualify for a child allowance.

Some of the very valid and important reasons for birth registration set out in CRC have little meaning to people living a rural subsistence lifestyle who may rarely or never come into contact with formal institutions. Awareness of the value of registering births will only be raised if it really is important for everyone to register their births because there is some advantage in doing so.

One way of reinforcing the value of birth registration might be for awareness-raising campaigns to emphasise the importance of registration for social and economic planning purposes, and demonstrate the link between accurate population information and the quality of social services. Although it might take time to convince people in remote areas that currently receive few Government-funded services, in the long run it might be a more effective approach than stressing civil rights to such people when they have little contact with modern institutions.

2.10.2 Institutional strengthening and collaboration with other ministries

All officials interviewed in the offices concerned with registration spoke of the importance of improving and strengthening the institutions and the mechanisms of the registration process. There is no doubt that such strengthening is essential to support the demand for registration services, and to make the whole process more efficient and more secure.

A major and relatively simple improvement would be to devise a mechanism for the Ministry of Health to inform the Civil Registration Department or Provincial Registrars when a birth has occurred, so that registrars are made aware of births and can contact the child's parents. This could be done either by simple forms of communication or by sharing computerised information. Schools also could assist by informing registrars about any children who are unable to provide evidence of registration. For this cooperation to be effective, it is essential parents are not penalised for having failed to register a birth, and ideally, there is no fee for registering. Although the legislation already
empowers health personnel to ‘declare’ a birth to a registrar (s18, ss (1) c and d), regulations may be needed to specify the exact nature of the inter-ministry communication that should take place, establish a mechanism and ensure it functions in a timely and regular fashion.

Other priorities for strengthening institutions and procedures identified by various registration officials include:

- Computerise all records held at the Civil Registration Office to improve storage and to facilitate searching. Eventually it may be possible to introduce computerisation at the provincial registration offices, but this is not an immediate priority.
- Review and update the legislation.
- Centralise registration in a single office with regional sub-registrars and increase collaboration between ministries, as described in the Civil Registration Institutional Strengthening Project.
- Raise awareness about the value of birth registration among government officials, politicians, community leaders, teachers and health personnel as well as the general community. This includes awareness of the correct use of the various types of documentary evidence.
- Conduct regular workshops and update sessions for registrars and staff in collaborating Ministries to facilitate communication and maintain their skills and interest.
- Analyse the data and give regular feedback to registrars and staff of Ministries, and issue media releases to inform the community, generate interest and demonstrate utility of registration data.
- Strengthen communication between the Civil Registration Department and churches to facilitate transfer of records on baptisms, blessings and other admissions into church congregations.
3.1 Country background

Solomon Islands comprises a double chain of six large islands and hundreds of small islands. The interiors of the large islands are mountainous and densely forested and there are very few roads or facilities. Most of the predominantly Melanesian population live a largely subsistence lifestyle in villages near the coast. Copra is the main source of cash for villagers, and other important exports are timber and fish. The total fertility rate estimated from the 1999 census was 4.8 children per woman, and the population growth rate averaged 2.8 per cent per annum in the 1986-1999 intercensal period (National Statistics Office, 2002). In 2005 the total population numbered around 480,000 people.4

In 1999 76.5 per cent of children were enrolled in primary school but only 29.3 per cent attended secondary school (National Statistics Office, 2002). Around 90 per cent of the population has access to a health facility (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2004) and an estimated 85 per cent of deliveries are assisted by trained medical personnel (WHO, 2004).

Solomon Islands achieved Independence in 1979, after almost a century of colonialism as the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. During the colonial period most administrative and economic activities, facilities and employment opportunities were concentrated in the main urban area, Honiara. This is still true, although the country is now divided into nine provinces and one urban area - Choiseul, Western, Ysabel, Central, Rennel and Bellona, Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira and Ulawa, Temotu and Honiara - administered by a system of local government. Rapid population growth in rural areas has caused large numbers of people to flock to Honiara in search of employment and other opportunities. In the period 1999 and 2003 economic and social tension and led to sporadic outbreaks of violent civil conflict, mainly between ethnic groups in Guadalcanal and Malaita. During these periods of conflict, which will be referred to here as ‘The Tensions’ (using the terminology of the report on Peace and Conflict Development Analysis prepared by UNDP; Solomon Islands Department of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace; and National Peace Council, 2004: vii), most administrative activities and services were suspended.

4 Estimated by applying the average annual growth rate of 2.8 per cent to the 1999 population census total of 409,042.
When this report was being prepared Solomon Islands had entered a new phase of peace and stability and was in the process of rebuilding its economy and restoring services to the outer provinces.

3.2 Legislation

The legal and institutional structures relating to birth registration in the Solomon Islands are complex. It is necessary to examine them in detail in order to understand the reasons for the present low levels of registration and to provide an adequate background for formulation of strategies to improve them.


The original Act of 1896 sets out that registration will be under the auspices of a Minister of the Government, but does not specify a particular Ministry. The Minister is empowered to appoint ministers of the church to act as registrars, and subject them to a fine if they do not do so within six months. Two subsequent legal notices of 1978 state ‘The Minister (i.e. minister of the church) shall keep books for the registry therein of births, marriages and deaths of foreigners occurring within the limits of this Act, and will, as soon as possible after being informed of any such birth, marriage or death, enter the same respectively in the books in such manner as he may think convenient’ (ss11(1) via LN 46A of 1978) and ‘A copy of the entry of any birth, marriage, or death signed by the Registrar-General shall be received as prima facie evidence of the fact of such birth, marriage or death’ (ss12 via LN 46A of 1978). This is the only mention of the Registrar-General in the Act, and again, the Ministry in which he or she should be located is not specified.

In fact this Act of 1896 applies only to the registration of marriages and vital events involving ‘British Subjects and Foreigners’. Marriages of indigenous citizens are specifically excluded in ss17 ‘The provisions of this Act regarding the celebration and registration of marriages shall not be compulsory when both parties to any marriage are Islanders’. There is no mention of any conditions governing registration of births of ‘Islanders’, but since registration of their marriages was not compulsory, the implication is that registration of their births and deaths also is not required.

The Births and Deaths (Registration) Act of 1993 (1988) relates exclusively to registration of indigenous Solomon Islanders, and it is stipulated in ss2 that it does not apply to persons required to be registered under the Act of 1896 (i.e. ‘British Subjects and Foreigners’). The Act of 1993 provides
for the appointment of a Registrar by the Public Service Commission (ss5) although it does not specify the Ministry in which the Registrar’s office should be located. It empowers the Registrar, with the approval of the Minister\textsuperscript{5} and a provincial authority, to appoint and employ any person, body or organization considered by the Registrar to be capable of providing services or information that would assist in the exercise of the functions of the Registrar under this Act or any other Act (ss6 (2)). The Registrar is required to keep and maintain a register of births and deaths (ss8 (1)), and persons are, on payment of a prescribed fee, entitled to inspect the register and obtain copies of particulars (ss8(2)), while, if requested by a court, the Registrar shall make any required information available to the court free of charge (ss8 (3)).

The Act states that responsibility for notifying the Registrar of a birth rests with health officials, or, if none are present at the birth, the parents.

9. - (1) A responsible person shall, as soon as reasonably practicable after the birth of a child, report the birth to the Registrar.

   - (2) A report under subsection (1), -
       1) if made by a medical practitioner or nurse, shall be in writing; or
       2) if made by the father or mother of the child, may be in writing or by word of mouth; and
       3) in either case, shall specify-
          a. the name and sex of the child;
          b. the place where the birth occurred; and
          c. the names and address of the parents of the child.

   - (3) In this section, “responsible person” means-
       1. in the case where the birth occurred in the presence of –
          a. a medical practitioner only, the medical practitioner;
          b. a medical practitioner and a nurse, the medical practitioner, or where the medical practitioner is, on reasonable grounds, unable to do so, the nurse;
          c. a nurse only, the nurse; and
          d. in any other case, the father or, in his absence, the mother of the child.

Ss11 states that the Registrar should seek out the appropriate ‘responsible person’ and require them to make a report on a birth (or death) ‘Where the Registrar has reasonable cause to believe that a birth or death has occurred and no report has been made under sections 9 or 10…’ The Act defines falsifying, altering or destroying records as offences (ss13-18), and provides for the Minister to make regulations as necessary, including on the keeping of records and the procedure for reporting births and deaths to the Registrar (ss19(b) and (c)), and with respect to the division of Solomon Islands into regulation areas (ss19(d)).

\textsuperscript{5} In this instance ‘Minister’ refers to the relevant parliamentarian, as opposed to the clerics referred to in the Act of 1896.
3.3 Institutional structure

3.3.1 Civil Registration and Electoral Commission

Registration of births of Solomon Islanders has been an official function since the Act was first passed in 1988. The Act specifies that the post of Registrar should be created, but does not specify that there should be a separate Registrar's Office, or where the Registrar's Office should be located within the Public Service structure. Registration has therefore been subject to restructuring on at least one occasion. Originally the Civil Registration Division was created within the Department of Home Affairs, and headed by a Registrar, but by 1998 this Division was amalgamated with the Electoral Commission to form the Civil Registration and Electoral Commission, still within the Department of Home Affairs. This amalgamation added responsibility for birth registration to the duties of the Chief Electoral Officer.

At the time of writing the designated strength of the Civil Registration and Electoral Commission was a Registrar, a Deputy, an IT specialist and two other posts. Only the first three of these five posts was filled when this report was prepared, and the IT specialist was temporarily seconded elsewhere. Before each election, substantial numbers of temporary staff are hired to visit villages in the provinces to update the Electoral Roll (Voters’ List) and enrol newly qualified voters within the time frame allotted for new enrolments (usually 60 days). As only those who have reached the age of 18 are eligible for the Electoral Roll, and proof of date of birth is not required for enrolment, temporary registrars do not register births during these periods of intensive activity.
3.3.2 The Department of Agriculture and Lands

Within the Department of Agriculture and Lands is the Office of the Registrar-General. According to the Deputy Registrar-General (who was Acting Registrar-General when interviewed for this report) the post of Registrar-General was created in the 1970s (see reference to ss12 via LN 46A of 1978 in Section 3.1 above) to take over an assortment of civil registration functions, including birth, marriage and death registration as specified in the Act of 1896, i.e. registration of British subjects and foreigners. This was a localisation of a colonial activity that had been carried out under the auspices of the Western Pacific High Commission, Suva, which until then had received and retained all records. In the course of the post-Independence creation and restructuring of the Solomon Islands Public Service, registration was moved from the Ministry of Justice to various locations in the Office of Home Affairs and other Ministries, and eventually to the Department of Agriculture and Lands. When the Civil Registration Office was established within the Department of Home Affairs to implement the Act of 1993 (i.e. to register births, marriages and deaths of indigenous Solomon Islanders) registration of non-indigenes remained with Agriculture and Lands, although most who now register are said by the Acting Registrar-General to be of Chinese origin.

3.3.3 Other sources of birth information

The essential details of every birth attended by medical personnel are recorded, including place and date of delivery and names and date of birth or age of parents. In urban areas most births take place in hospitals, but in rural areas they may take place in health clinics or with assistance from a nurse at a Nurse Aid Post. If no trained medical personnel attend the delivery, the details are recorded when the infant is first taken to a health facility. This is part of normal record keeping for medical purposes, and forms part of the Ministry’s computerised Health Information System.

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*Other registration functions of the office include registration of titles, companies, business names, bills of sales, trade marks, patents, copyrights, trade unions, charitable trusts, liquidation of companies, bankruptcy, deceased estates and adopted children.*
The various churches keep records of all baptisms, blessings and other ceremonies, as well as marriages and burials. As noted above, churches were originally entrusted with notifying births under the 1896 Act, but this was ‘required’ only for ‘British and foreigners’ so the number of such registrations may have been few. Church officials interviewed for this study were of the opinion that although registration was not required for indigenous Solomon Islanders prior to 1988, ministers of the church have always recorded the details of any person for whom they perform a baptism, marriage or burial.

3.4 Birth registration and recording

3.4.1 Civil Registration

Birth registration is performed free of charge at the Electoral Office. Applicants fill out a form setting out the particulars of the child, father and mother, their marriage, a witness to the birth and particulars of the informant. Evidence in the form of a Birth Certificate from the Ministry of Health (see below) or some other corroboration of identity is always required. The applicant’s details are transferred to a computerised database by Electoral Office staff, and the applicant is issued with a certificate of registration generated by the computerised system. The same procedure is followed by the Department of Agriculture and Lands to register non-indigenous births and similar forms are used.

3.4.2 Birth recording by Ministry of Health

Mothers who are attended at delivery by health personnel are given a Birth Certificate and also a Child Health Book. If no medical personnel were present at the birth, the Birth Certificate and Child Health Book are given to the mother when the child is first taken to a health facility. A charge of $SID 8.007 is levied for the Child Health Book, but the Birth Certificate is handed out free of charge. Children who never receive any form of service from a health facility are omitted from the Health Information System.

$SID=Solomon Island Dollars. SID 1.00 = USD 0.14 as at 10 April 2005.
Blank Birth Certificates comprise three panels of identical information and are printed in bound books. Each panel includes the date and place of birth, sex of child, name of child (if already determined), mothers’ and fathers’ names and ages or dates of birth, and their island nationality. Each panel is filled out and signed by the attendant medical personnel. One copy is given to the mother, one forwarded to the central health registry at the Ministry of Health in Honiara, and the third remains in the book to be retained at the facility issuing the Birth Certificate. If the mother loses the Birth Certificate she is able to obtain duplicate information in the form of a Birth Notice from the Ministry of Health, for which a fee of $SID 10.00 is charged.

3.4.3 Birth recording by churches

The exact procedure and the particular events that leads to recording of a child by a church varies between denominations, but the church officials interviewed for this study were all of the opinion that most Solomon Island children receive some form of baptism or blessing within the first year or two of life, and often within a month of birth. The information typically recorded by churches is the date and place of the event, the child’s name and date of birth, and the parents’ names. Churches commonly issue a certificate to commemorate the event, for which they make a small charge to defray printing costs, e.g. $SID 3.00.

3.5 Data Storage

Birth registration was computerised soon after the Civil Registration Office amalgamated with the Electoral Office. Records of registrations made prior to this are stored in paper form in filing cabinets. No one in the office at the time of the author’s visit knew how many paper records existed. Searching these records to check the birth details of people who are now adults is a labour and time intensive process and, because the office has few staff, such searches tend to be carried out infrequently.

Birth records have been computerised in the Health Information System since 2004. Health facilities also retain hard copies of birth information in record books. Prior to computerisation, deliveries were recorded only in hard copy record books kept at health facilities and at the Ministry of Health. These records extend back to the 1970s.

There has been no computerisation of the birth records of the Church of Melanesia, the largest church to which around one third of all church members in Solomon Islands belong. Its birth records, spanning many years, are stored only in hard copy record books held at more than 600 different churches scattered throughout Solomon Islands, making them extremely vulnerable to damage or loss. Records of most other churches are probably equally dispersed and not computerised.
3.6 Timing of registration and coverage estimates

Awareness of the value and importance of birth registration among indigenous Solomon Islanders appears to be extremely low. The Registrar said that the Civil Registration and Electoral Commission has added only 576 birth registrations to its database since 2002, whereas there have probably been at least 45,000 births in Solomon Islands during that time period. In contrast, the Registrar estimates that substantially in excess of the adult target population is registered on the Electoral Roll. He said that most recent birth registrations were in fact registrations of adults, and usually their reason for applying was that they needed documentation to obtain a passport.

The Acting Registrar-General, Department of Agriculture and Lands, believed that most children of Chinese parentage born in Solomon Islands are registered soon after birth, but the total number is only around 50 each year.

Health officials’ estimates of coverage by the Health Information System ranged from about 80 per cent to in excess of 90 per cent. They generally agreed that most birth records are entered into the computerised database within a year of birth. Coverage is said to be virtually 100 per cent in small provinces such as Temotu, and in Choiseul, but lowest in Guadalcanal and Malaita, the provinces with extensive inaccessible areas.

Health officials all were of the opinion that the main factor determining completeness of birth information in the Health Information System is the degree of difficulty involved in reaching a health facility. For example, the Deputy Director of Health said that sometimes mothers in remote areas will travel to a health facility for antenatal care in their first or second trimester, but may be unable to reach it when they become heavily pregnant or when they have an infant to carry over difficult terrain.

It is probable that the combined records of all the church denominations in Solomon Islands would cover a higher percentage of all births than are recorded in the Health Information System. Given that they are widely dispersed and not computerised, however, church records have limited utility at the national level.

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*Estimated roughly by applying the Crude Birth Rate of 34 per 1000 to population estimates derived from the 1999 census, giving around 16,000 births per year in 2005.*
3.7 Incentives and disincentives for citizens to register births

3.7.1 Lack of awareness of importance of registration

It is obvious that a major reason for the very low coverage by the formal civil registration system is that birth registration is generally not perceived as important. As most Solomon Islanders are never required to produce evidence of birth, they do not regard registration as necessary, and it is likely that many do not even know what it is. Primary schools do not ask for evidence of date of birth when children enrol, but, as in the case of the Electoral Roll, accept estimates of age. Community awareness of children’s rights as defined by CRC is also low. Even in Honiara, the author of this report encountered people who did not know anything at all about birth registration or where births could be registered, or who were misinformed on both counts.

3.7.2 Limited registration facilities

A corollary of 3.7.1 above is that the limited availability of registration facilities also discourages registration. The Civil Registration and Electoral Commission do not maintain permanent staff in the provinces, and hence information on registration and awareness of the value of registration is low.

3.7.3 Willingness to register when evidence required

The fact that most of the very few people who register a birth do so because evidence of registration is required for a particular purpose demonstrates willingness to register when there is perceived value in doing so. Willingness to enrol on the Electoral Roll also suggests that the process of registration is generally acceptable to the Solomon Islands community.
3.8 Issues for registrars and health personnel

3.8.1 Multiple responsibilities of Chief Electoral Officer

Under the present arrangement, the ‘Registrar’ referred to in the 1993 Act has responsibility not only for births, marriages and deaths, but also for updating the Electoral Roll before each election. Although elections usually occur only at four-year intervals, checking and maintenance of the Electoral Roll absorbs most of the Chief Electoral Officer’s time. If the number of applications to register births were to increase substantially, a commensurate increase in staff and resources devoted to birth registration would be required.

Box Four: Implications of under-registration of births for planners

In the absence of comprehensive birth registration data, planners must rely on census-based estimates of fertility and mortality rates. Census data are not a good basis for making these estimates, however. Births tend to be understated in censuses, while many parents do not mention infant deaths or the births of infants that lived only a short time.

The published infant mortality rate (IMR) derived from the 1986 Solomon Islands census was 38 per 1000 live births. When the 1999 census yielded a similar rate using simple analytical techniques, the demographers analysing the census data did not consider it to be a realistic estimate, so they applied sophisticated techniques to adjust the IMR upward to 66 per 1000 live births. (Solomon Islands, 2002 and personal communications, National Statistical Office and National Planning Office).

Which estimate is closest to the truth? No one will ever know. Both methods of analysis are valid and technically correct, but their use is subjective. The only way to be sure about the birth rate and the IMR is to register every birth and death and calculate the rates from registration data rather than from census data.

3.8.2 Lack of inter-Ministry collaboration

Although the 1993 Act states that there should be collaboration between medical officers and registration staff, with the ‘responsible person’ at the birth being required to notify the Registrar that a birth has taken place, no procedures or agreements between offices or ministries are in place. The Acting Registrar-General said that when the Civil Registration Office was first established the intention had been to put appropriate procedures in place to facilitate collaboration, but this did not happen.
Some health personnel interviewed for this report were unaware that the Act requires collaboration between medical officers and registration staff. In addition, nurses do not routinely advise mothers to register births when they give out Birth Certificates. Nor are there procedures in place to transfer notifications of births between churches and registration officials, even though the Act of 1993 states that if no health personnel are present at a birth, a church minister should notify the Registrar that a birth has occurred.

### 3.9 Actions already taken to strengthen birth registration and improve coverage

#### 3.9.1 Awareness-raising and promotion of CRC

The National Action Committee for Children (NACC) is active in advocating birth registration as part of CRC, although it lacks resources to implement specific projects. Save the Children Fund (SCF), formerly the secretariat to NACC, has a project to raise awareness of rights among youth and the general community, including the rights set out in CRC. The project strategy includes training peer educators and developing effective methods of communication. Part of this SCF project is aimed at strengthening NACC itself.

#### 3.9.2 Review of electoral enrolment and birth registration

The Civil Registration and Electoral Commission has recognised that the process of checking and cleaning the Electoral Roll would be greatly simplified if birth registration were virtually complete. The office is currently exploring possible strategies to utilise birth registration data to check the Electoral Roll. Increased efforts by the Commission to register births could substantially increase the level of birth registration.

#### 3.9.3 Ministry of Health initiatives to improve health coverage

The Reproductive Health Division of the Ministry of Health has recently piloted in Choiseul Province a system of recording health information known as the Family Health Card. It is proposed that a Family Health Card could be allocated to every family in the catchment area of each rural health clinic. Once a year a nurse from the clinic or from an aid posts within the catchment area would visit every household and update the information on the card, including recording details of each family member and any births or deaths that have occurred since the last visit.

Although still in the early pilot testing phase, this strategy, or one using a similar approach, has the potential to capture information about births in remote areas and other births that are currently missed by the Health Information System. It is possible that expansion of the Family Health Card or a similar strategy to all Solomon Islands could result in documentation of virtually 100 per cent of births.
3.10 Strategies to further improve coverage

3.10.1 Strengthen and support birth registration mechanisms with inter-ministry collaboration

In Solomon Islands, as in Vanuatu, birth registration coverage will only increase if there is both awareness-raising and strengthening of registration mechanisms. The most efficient entry point to start this process appears to be to establish a mechanism for the Ministry of Health to convey information about births to the Registrar, i.e. to the Electoral Office. This would need to be accompanied by an increase in Electoral Office staff to enable them to contact parents of candidates for registration. Temporary staff currently sent to the provinces to check electoral rolls could also register births. At the same time, a community awareness campaign pointing out the value of birth registration would help to promote registration.

The extremely low levels of registration in Solomon Islands at the time of writing suggest that dramatic improvements in full-registration coverage are unlikely in the short-term. The transfer of information from the Ministry of Health, however, would provide better information on births and deaths for planners. It is suggested that the Electoral Office adopts a dual classification system: partial and full registration. Partial registration is when only information from Ministry of Health has been provided and parents have not yet registered the child. While the work of registrars would be to convert all partial registrations to full registrations, as an interim measure full and partial registrations could be combined to provide population estimates for planners.

The existing legislation already provides for collaboration of this sort between Ministry of Health and civil registration. Use of individual birth registration to check Electoral Rolls is a different matter, however, that is not covered by the existing legislation and would need to be reviewed in the light of privacy considerations.
3.10.2 Expand health recording of births by strengthening health service delivery

Once a mechanism is in place to enable Ministry of Health birth records to be transferred to the Electoral Office, the most efficient way of improving coverage would be to expand health services. This could include increasing the percentage of deliveries attended by trained health personnel and increasing health surveillance, such as by introducing a Family Health Card or similar system. Strengthening birth registration via the health system would bring the dual benefit of improving maternal and child health as well as registration coverage.

3.10.3 Awareness-raising

As in Vanuatu, awareness-raising about the importance and use of birth registration, both in the community and among officials, would be necessary to support other initiatives, but is unlikely to achieve significant improvements until people perceive real value in birth registration. Enforcing the production of evidence of birth registration for school enrolment would be one way of adding value, but would be impractical while levels of registration are so low. A better strategy that is likely to be more welcome and more effective is to point out the importance of registration as a right, as essential for child protection and as an aid to improved community planning and development.

Schools could help to improve coverage by teaching pupils the importance of birth registration and by encouraging parents to produce evidence of registration if available. As registration coverage increases it could become a requirement for enrolment. Other opportunities to raise community awareness of the importance and value of birth registration include the pre-2006 election Civic Education Project jointly funded by the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) (NZAID and AusAID, 2005).
4.1 Country background

Kiribati, formerly part of the British Colony of Gilbert and Ellice Islands, became an independent nation in 1979. Its current population of around 90,000 people of Micronesian origin is scattered throughout 29 coral atolls in three island chains, spanning more than 2 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean.

Traditional culture remains strong in Kiribati, and the majority of people still live in traditional coconut and pandanus housing, even in the main urban centre, South Tarawa. Aside from approximately 10,000 or so who have full or part-time jobs in the formal sector, the majority of the population depend largely on subsistence activities, supplemented by sale of produce, especially fish and copra. The persistence of traditional island life has helped to sustain an average total fertility rate of 4.3 children per woman in the period 1995-2000 (National Statistics Office, 2002). In response to a growing demand for basic services and employment that already exceeds supply, the government has committed to promoting slower population growth to reduce population pressure (Republic of Kiribati, 2003). Resistance of the majority Catholic church to family planning, however, coupled with a scarcity of modern sector opportunities for school leavers, suggest that the 2005 census will show no decline in the population growth rate that has averaged 1.7 per cent per annum since 1947 (National Statistics Office, 2002).

An estimated 95 per cent of the population has access to health services, and it is estimated that 85 per cent of deliveries are attended by trained medical personnel (WHO, 2004). Ninety-four per cent of children attend primary school (SPC, 2005). As in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, most modern sector activity and wage employment in Kiribati is concentrated in urban areas. Small local government structures and basic facilities on outer islands provide few modern sector employment opportunities, so sustained rural to urban movement in search of employment and services have concentrated 43 per cent of the total Kiribati population in South Tarawa (National Statistics Office, 2002).
4.2 Legislation

All aspects of birth registration in Kiribati are governed by a very detailed and comprehensive piece of legislation dating from 1966, that is, an Act formulated when the country was still a British colony. The most recent edition of this Act, which incorporates only a few small amendments made since 1966, is ‘Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration’, Cap. 5 in ‘The Laws of the Gilbert Islands enacted before 1 January 1977’. Although this edition also pre-dates Independence, it is still the only legislation, apart from a few small additions to cover registration of children born overseas to I-Kiribati parents, that were introduced in ‘An Act to Amend the Births Deaths and Marriages Ordinance (cap.5)’ (No. 4 of 1997). A set of revisions to replace references to the British Government with references to the Kiribati Government was published in the Kiribati Gazette (date not shown, but presumably shortly after the attainment of Independence in 1979) and a schedule of fees was published in the Kiribati Gazette, 29 January 1993.

The 1977 Act requires the birth of every child born alive or stillborn in the Gilbert Islands to be registered by the registrar in the district where the birth occurred (s9 (s1)). It is ‘the duty’ of the father and mother or, if unable, ‘such other qualified informant’ present at the birth or responsible for the child to register the birth within 10 days (s10). The Act also provides for the registration by ‘qualified informants’ of children found exposed whose parents cannot be identified (s11).

If a birth has not been registered within 10 days, the registrar may give notice, in writing, requiring any qualified informant ‘to attend personally at the registrar’s office’, or, if more than 20 miles distant, at some other place nominated by the registrar (s12 (a)), to provide the particulars. If attendance at the registrar’s office occurs within three months of the birth, the registration is free of charge (s13). If the child is not registered within three months, the same procedure applies for up to 12 months from the date of birth, except that the ‘qualified person’ is required to make ‘a declaration’ of the particulars rather than simply to state them (s14). There is no mention of a fee for registrations from 3-12 months after the birth.

The situation is quite different when a birth has not been registered within 12 months. S15 states that the Minister shall appoint late registration assessors, who must be magistrates. Although births may be registered up to any age, those wishing to register late (i.e. 12 months or more after the birth) must produce documentary evidence and/or call witnesses to satisfy the assessor. The assessor is given considerable investigative powers, including the power to subpoena witnesses or make any other necessary enquiries, while the Registrar-General or his (sic) representative, or the applicant wishing to make a late registration, may cross-examine witnesses (s17). There is no time limit on late registration of births.
4.3 Institutional structure

4.3.1 Civil Registration Office

The 1977 Act states that the ‘Minister’ shall appoint a Registrar-General to exercise the powers set out in the Act (s3), who shall be located in the General Registry Office (s4). It does not specify which ministerial portfolio should be responsible for registration. The function of civil registration was located in the Ministry of Finance during the 1980s, then relocated to Environment in the 1990s. In 2003 it moved to the Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs (MISA). The Civil Registration Office is currently staffed by the Registrar-General, the Registrar, the Deputy-Registrar, a senior-registration clerk, four registration clerks, an accounts clerk, a data analyst and a cleaner.

S5 of the Act states that the Minister is empowered to ‘divide the Gilbert Islands into districts and may appoint any person to be the registrar of births, deaths and marriages for any such district’. ‘Every registrar shall have an office in the district for which he (sic) is appointed’ (s6 (ss1)). Subsidiary legislation to the 1966 Act (LN 57/72 and LN 27/74, cited in Cap 5 1977) decreed that registration of births in the area of every town council, except Betio (part of South Tarawa), is the responsibility of the executive officer or clerk of that council. Births in Betio Town Council Area are to be registered by the Registrar-General; births on Ocean Island (Banaba) are to be registered by the District Officer, Ocean Island; and births in every other administrative district are to be registered by the administrative officer in charge of that district.

4.3.2 Other sources of information about births

As in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, information about births is also recorded by the health facilities and by the churches. Nurses make reports to the Ministry of Health on every service they provide to mothers, including deliveries. Mothers who deliver at the main hospital at Nawerewere, South Tarawa, and the hospital on Kiritimati (Christmas Island in the Line Island chain to the east) are given a ‘birth certificate’ for their child, and instructed to register the birth at the Civil Registration Office. Birth certificates are not issued routinely elsewhere in Kiribati or for non-hospital births in urban areas, however, although one nurse said that she and other nurses sometimes write the details of date and time on a piece of paper and give it to the mother. There is no systematic forwarding of information on births from Ministry of Health to the Civil Registration Office.

The churches record details of baptisms or other services to mark the entry of an infant into the church, and some churches issue certificates. The way in which this information is managed varies between churches. For example, there is no centralised storage of birth records in the Kiribati Protestant Church, and registration books remain with each parish. The Kiribati Catholic Church stores records of births in South Tarawa at its headquarters, but records outside South Tarawa tend to remain with the parish. This dispersal makes it difficult to use church records for official purposes such as record checking, but they can be used as evidence of date of birth.
4.4 Registration and recording

4.4.1 Civil registration

The Civil Registration Office is fully computerised, with all but the very oldest registrations (from the 1890s) entered into a Microsoft Access database. Applicants are required to complete a form setting out particulars of the birth. A registration clerk then enters the details from the application form into the computerised database, and prints out a certificate of registration very much like the one specified in Schedule One (s45) of the Act. The essential details of the registration are also entered by hand into a registration book.

Prior to computerisation the procedure was similar, with the information recorded by hand in a registration book and the certificate of registration completed by hand. As the island councils are not computerised, they still follow the manual procedure, recording information in record books and issuing certificates that have been filled out by hand.

Various supporting documentation and searches are required prior to registration, depending on the time elapsed between the application and the date of birth. If the application is lodged within 10 days of the birth, a birth certificate from the hospital or the parents’ evidence is sufficient, and no search is required. Any registrations after the 10-day period must be preceded by a search to establish that the birth has not already been registered. A search costs $1.00.9 Computerisation has made this process virtually effortless and instantaneous, and Island Councils can check for previous registration simply by phoning or faxing the Civil Registration Office in South Tarawa.

The ‘short’ certificates issued are of different colours, depending on when the birth is registered: a white certificate for timely registration and a pink certificate for registration after 10 days. Timely registration is free, with $2.00 charged for the certificate. Although the Act states that registration should be free up to three months, and does not specify that there should be a fee for registrations from three to 12 months, the Civil Registration Office deems all registrations after 10 days to be late, and charges accordingly. Late registrations attract a fee of $4.00 plus $2.00 for the certificate. A full birth certificate with complete details always costs $3.00, regardless of the timing of registration.

The Civil Registration Office registers all births that occur in South Tarawa, even though, as stated above, according to the Act it should register only births in the Betio Town council area. This centralisation is probably just as well, as it means that more than 40 per cent of the population is covered by an efficient office that is dedicated wholly to registration.

9 The Kiribati currency is Australian dollars (AUD). In April 2005 the exchange rate was AUD 1.00 = USD 0.76.
As specified in the Act, late registrations require production of formal evidence. According to the Registrar-General, two late registration assessors have been appointed in each registration district, but they do not receive any special payment for their civil registration duties. The registrar in North Tarawa, which is less than an hour by boat from South Tarawa, said that late registrations cannot be handled locally and she always refers them to the Civil Registration Office in South Tarawa.

There has been an increase in applications for late registration since the introduction in 2004 of the Elders Allowance of $40.00 per month for every Kiribati citizen aged 70 and over, and the extension of membership of the Kiribati Provident Fund to informally or self-employed residents of the outer islands, such as copra-cutters. Birth certificates must be produced in order to qualify for either benefit. Aged applicants, along with any others who apply for late registration, are required to produce evidence such as health or church records, employment history, declarations from relatives and neighbours or similar proof to support late registration applications.

Although the late registration procedure appears to work well enough in South Tarawa where it is under the supervision of the Civil Registration Office, the comments of the Registrar-General suggest that it is generally is not well implemented in the outer islands, largely because the assessors have not been properly trained. This is discussed further in Section 4.9.3.

4.4.2 Recording of births in the Health Information System

As noted in Section 4.3.2, health officials issue ‘birth certificates’ only for hospital deliveries. If a child born at home is later presented for treatment or immunisation, the mother is given a Child Health Card that shows the date of birth as stated by the mother. This date, or the date of delivery in the hospital if available, is entered into the Health Information System, but not full details of the birth because nurses submit only summary reports while other details are kept in record books at health facilities.

The Health Statistician commented that if the child is not yet named, its birth appears under the mother’s record. This means that if a child dies before it has a name and a separate record in the Health Information System, the death appears on the mother’s record, and it is not always clear whether it is the child or the mother that has died.

4.5 Data Storage

As stated in Section 4.4.1 above, all registrations made by the Civil Registration Office are now computerised except the very oldest dating from the 1890s. The registers in which these very old registrations are recorded are too fragile to subject to much handling and need to be scanned on a flat-bed scanner. Computerisation commenced in 1994 using DBaseIV, and since 2001 all registrations have been entered into a Microsoft Access system. The Registrar-General pointed out, however, that although birth registration is fully computerised, only one of the ten clerical staff in his office was
able to use the computerised database. He said that at least some of the others need training, while computerisation could be further simplified by the introduction of more user-friendly customised software.

The Act prescribes that the Registrar-General shall provide lockable, ‘fire-resisting boxes’ for storage of registers kept by each registrar, (i.e. those in outer islands) and ensure that the registrar is kept supplied with a sufficient number of registers in the form prescribed (s7 (ss1-3)). Custody of registers that are not yet filled is to be passed from one registrar to the successor, or the Registrar-General if there is no successor (s8 (ss1)).

All registrars are required to submit reports of birth registrations to the Registrar-General every quarter. That is, certified copies of every birth registration anywhere in Kiribati should reach the Civil Registration Office within three months of registration. Originally these copies and the completed registration books were archived in cabinets at the Civil Registration Office. Now that the Office is computerised, all records are entered into a database as well as being retained in hard copy in registers.

### 4.6 Timing of registration and recording and coverage estimates

#### 4.6.1 Civil registration

The official view and a common opinion among respondents is that most births in South Tarawa are registered within 10 days or very soon thereafter, so coverage is virtually complete in the urban area. On the other hand, it was generally agreed that coverage is lower and birth registrations are often delayed in the outer islands. It was clear from interviews, however, including interviews with teachers, that there are still parents in South Tarawa who delay registering births. Staff at one school suggested that around 10 – 20 per cent of children presenting for enrolment cannot produce evidence of birth registration, although the impression of teachers was that the level of awareness and timeliness of birth registration is improving.

The Registrar-General said that although many registrations are delayed until children reach school age, especially in the outer islands, he estimates that national coverage is around 90 per cent by age 20. Given that late registration is difficult, and teachers are said not to insist on evidence of birth registration for enrolment in most outer island schools, it is likely that considerable numbers of parents do not bother to register their children. Only when they need to produce evidence for formal employment or some other official purpose, such as the Elderly Allowance, would such children be expected to make the effort to register. The estimate of 90 per cent by age 20 therefore seems optimistic, and is perhaps based on an unrealistically low denominator.
Figure 4.1 shows the total number of registrations each year since 1989. During this time there was a gradual decline in fertility from 4.7 children per woman to 4.3, but the population increased by an average of 1.7 per year, so the total number of registrations would be expected to increase each year.

![Figure 4.1 Total registrations each year, Kiribati, 1989-2004](image)

Table 4.1 sets out the registrations for 2004. It is notable that Kiribati was able to produce this table on request because birth registration is computerised. The table excludes 97 registrations that had not yet been computerised when the request was made, presumably mostly from Outer Islands. Adding in these additional registration brings the total number for all Kiribati for 2004 to 1851. It can be estimated that there would have been around 2900 births in Kiribati in 2004\(^{10}\), suggesting a coverage rate of 64 per cent. In South Tarawa, where 43 per cent of the population reside, the number of registrations is almost exactly the number that would be expected, indicating virtually complete coverage. Coverage for the rest of the country was only around 30 per cent, or possibly even lower, given that 2004 would have had a higher than usual proportion of very late registrations because of the introduction of the Elderly Allowance and Provident Fund membership for informal cash generating activities.

\(^{10}\) Calculated by applying the Crude Birth Rate from the 2000 census of 33 per thousand to the estimated population for 2005 of 89,500.
Table 4.1  Birth Registration in Kiribati, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Island</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Unstated</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makin</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butaritari</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marakei</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abaiang</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Tarawa</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Tarawa</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiana</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aranuka</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abemama</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonouti</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabiteuea North</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabiteuea South</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onotoa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beru</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikunau</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamana</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arorae</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banaba</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orona</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Kiribati</strong></td>
<td><strong>835</strong></td>
<td><strong>904</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>1754</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table excludes 97 reports not yet computerised, so is not consistent with Figure 4.1 (see above text).
Source: Table provided by Civil Registration Office, Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, 2005
The table shows a plausible sex ratio of 108 males per hundred females, but, surprisingly, sex was not recorded for 15 registrations. Presumably this is due to registrars failing to complete the registration documents correctly. The table also shows no returns at all from six districts. This is most likely due to failure to register some births and/or failure to send quarterly reports on time, implying poor communication between district officers and the Civil Registration Office.

Informants mentioned that children of informal marriages tend not to be registered. In anticipation of this risk, farsighted legal draftsmen provided in s19 of the Act that ‘in the case of an illegitimate child no person shall, as father of the child, be required to give information concerning the birth of the child, and the registrar shall not enter in the register the name of any person as father of the child except at the joint request made in writing and signed by both the mother and the person acknowledging himself to be the father of the child’. Although the Registrar-General confirmed that it is possible for the mother only to be named on the registration application form if the father is not known, most people interviewed seemed to be unaware of this provision. They said that children of such relationships are likely to be left unregistered because their parents fear recriminations or are simply reluctant to draw official attention to their informal status.

Other issues relating to timeliness and coverage and possible reluctance to apply for late registration are discussed in Section 4.8.

4.6.2 Coverage of health records of births

It is not clear whether the Health Information System covers more births than the Civil Registration System. It is likely that it is less complete in South Tarawa but more complete in the outer islands. The Ministry of Health statistician estimated that about 1000 births are recorded in South Tarawa each year, and said there were fewer from the islands but could not say exactly how many. Comparing these estimates with an expected 2900 for all Kiribati suggests a substantial shortfall, and implies that even in South Tarawa there are still substantial numbers of births assisted only by untrained personnel.

A group of senior nurses said that mothers in South Tarawa encourage each other to seek medical assistance because they perceive the benefit, and even mothers who delivered at home with the assistance of traditional birth attendants are said to seek medical care soon afterwards. The nurses also said medical personnel can usually anticipate births because most mothers present for ante-natal care.

Although higher than the world average of 105 males per hundred females, 108 is plausible for Kiribati. More than 30 per cent of the population is known to carry Hepatitis B, and some research has demonstrated that the presence of Hepatitis B surface antigen is associated with higher than usual sex ratios at birth (reviewed in Oster, 2005).
4.7 Under-registration of peri-natal deaths

An important, but infrequently mentioned issue in Kiribati is possible under-reporting of peri-natal deaths and stillbirths. The Registrar-General said it is unusual for the birth and death of an infant to be registered simultaneously by the Civil Registration Office, although a death certificate is required by the council before any burial can take place, including that of an infant. Nurses said they include child deaths in their reports, whether or not the birth has been recorded, and doctors issue death certificates for any dead infants they attend. It appears, however, that some infant deaths may escape registration.

Metai (1995: 63) visited 50 mothers in South Tarawa who were recorded in the health information system as having experienced an infant death in the period 1991-1994. His doorknock survey of 66 adjacent households revealed an astonishing 36 additional couples who had experienced infant deaths that were not recorded in the health system.

Although respondents interviewed for this report said that infant deaths in Kiribati are always marked by a funeral and formal interment, Metai’s research suggests that many early peri-natal deaths, most of which are probably attended only by traditional birth attendants, are treated as pregnancy wastage and not registered. Given that 36 of 66 households visited by Metai had experienced an infant death that was not recorded in the health information system, and the Registrar-General said posthumous birth registration is rare, this points to a very high level of under-recording of peri-natal deaths.

Improved health service delivery and an increase in the percentage of births attended by medical personnel since Metai conducted this research may have reduced such occurrences, but non-registration of births that result in an early peri-natal death is still likely to occur where mothers are attended only by traditional birth attendants. Further research on this very important topic is needed.

4.8 Incentives and disincentives for citizens to register births

4.8.1 Taxation and benefits

Major incentives to register births in families with a wage earner are taxation concessions and child allowances and other family benefits. Such benefits apply only to the first two children in any family, however, so they do not act as incentives to register subsequent births. Another, recently introduced incentive that has promoted a spate of late registrations, as discussed above, was the introduction in 2004 of the Elderly Allowance.

4.8.2 School enrolment

One of the main incentives to register a birth is when pre-schools and schools require evidence of age before they enrol a child. Whereas this is official policy for all schools in Kiribati, policies
regarding admission of children who lack such evidence differ between schools. In the outer islands, schools are said to be very relaxed about this requirement and to freely admit children without such evidence. Staff at a large public primary school in South Tarawa said they require evidence, but if it is not produced at enrolment they admit the child pending production of a birth registration certificate. They believed that there are some schools in South Tarawa that refuse admission until a birth registration certificate is produced.

4.8.3 Lack of awareness and low value attached to registration

As in the countries previously discussed in this report, awareness of the importance of birth registration as a civil right is low in Kiribati. Most respondents interviewed for this report said that people register births only because they fear penalties if they do not register or because they need to produce evidence of registration.

4.8.4 Cost

One informant observed that people in Kiribati tend to be short of money around the time of a birth because there are many demands on their resources at that time, so they may be reluctant or unable to pay for a birth registration certificate. This is especially an issue in the outer islands where there are fewer wage earners and where even small amounts of cash are hard to come by. Cost may therefore be a factor contributing to delayed registration.

4.8.5 Perceptions and misconceptions about late registration

The requirement for legal assessment of late applications also appears to act as a major deterrent and as a source of misinformation. Some quite senior officials from various government departments, as well as people interviewed on a random basis by the writer, were under the impression that a fine applies for late registration of births, with $20 commonly mentioned. In fact there is no penalty specified under the legislation, only a fee for late registrations of $4.00, which is not unreasonable considering that late registrations require considerably more effort to process. Some people were even said to fear that they could be jailed for late registration, presumably because they had heard that they had to appear before a magistrate.

It was clear from discussions that even people who did not have such fears found the idea of dealing with a magistrate unappealing, and assumed that late registration would involve considerable time and trouble. This was in South Tarawa where involvement in the cash economy brings taxation and other incentives to encourage registration of births. The disincentive of dealing with a magistrate is likely to be much stronger in the outer islands where the utility of birth registration is less apparent, and assessors are likely to be harder to reach, more lax about performing their tasks or perhaps not available at all. Misconceptions about possible penalties along with a belief that the mechanism for late registration is formidable seem to be a considerable deterrent to those in the outer islands who fail to register a birth within 10 days. Most late registrations probably occur only when an individual has a pressing need for evidence of birth.
4.8.6 Lack of safe storage for documents

The majority of people in Kiribati live in traditional housing and so have difficulty storing registration papers safely. This may make them reluctant to purchase hard copy evidence of birth registration before it is needed. Although the legislation does not require that a registration certificate must be purchased immediately after a birth is registered, or, indeed, ever, this seems not to be widely known or taken into account. Several respondents commented that mothers often lose their certificates, and some believed that it is not possible to obtain a replacement or even that it is an offence to lose a birth certificate.

Box Six: Lack of knowledge of registration procedures

Even educated Kiribati parents who have registered their children may have insufficient information about other processes. One mother told a story about an incorrect birth registration. She gave birth to a daughter while she was studying in New Zealand, and was issued with a New Zealand birth certificate showing the year of birth as 1994. As she was overseas, she delegated registration of the birth in Kiribati to a relative in South Tarawa. During the process of registration at the Civil Registration Office, the year of birth date was mistakenly recorded as 1995 without the relative noticing. The girl was subsequently included on the mother’s Kiribati passport with her date of birth showing correctly as 1994, although this was inconsistent with the records in Kiribati.

The mother said that although both documents were produced simultaneously on one occasion and she was very worried that she might have a serious problem, ‘fortunately the official did not notice the inconsistency’. She would like to remedy the discrepancy because she realises it could cause difficulties for her daughter in the future, but she does not know how to go about it, and, as a busy career women, she is reluctant to spend time, effort and money in going through the necessary processes.

4.9 Issues for registrars and health personnel

4.9.1 Low community and official awareness of the value of registration

It was evident from respondents’ comments and reported community behaviour that, for most people in Kiribati, birth registration is perceived primarily as a necessary chore and a ticket to other benefits rather than as an individual right. This contributes to community apathy and substantial levels of late registration, especially in the outer islands, and is perceived by registrars as making their job difficult and unappreciated.
Registrars also said that many government officials in other ministries do not appreciate the value of birth registration as a rights issue, or fully understand its use. They believe that more awareness-raising for officials would help to improve coverage. For example, nurses who have a good appreciation of the value of birth registration are more likely to encourage mothers to register their babies. Similarly, teachers who understand the importance of birth registration can help to improve coverage by always requiring parents to produce registration certificates when enrolling children, and by offering provisional enrolment for children who are not registered and advising their parents to obtain a certificate to complete enrolment formalities.

4.9.2 Lack of collaboration between ministries and island authorities

Despite its relative efficiency, the Kiribati birth registration system does not make full use of the provisions of the Act. S9 (d) and S10 state that any medical person attending a birth is qualified to give information on a birth to the appropriate registrar but this rarely happens. Civil Registration Office staff said they sometimes receive notification of deaths from health personnel, but not notifications of births.

Timeliness and coverage in the outer islands are affected by the actions of registrars working with island councils, as well as by the community. S34 of the Act states that registrars in outer islands shall ‘in the months of January, April, July and October’ deliver ‘true copies, certified by him (i.e. the district registrar) in the prescribed manner of all entries of births, deaths and marriages made in the registers during the preceding three months to the Registrar-General (ss34 (a)). Similarly, when a register (i.e. hard copy book) of births, deaths or marriages is filled, the registrar is required to deliver it to the Registrar-General (s34 (b)). In fact there are often substantial delays in relaying information to the Registrar-General in the Civil Registration Office, and, as shown in Table 4.1 above, sometimes returns are not received within a year.

The main reason for tardiness appears to be that most registrars are employed by Island Councils rather than directly by the Civil Registration Office, so are not directly responsible to the Registrar-General. Obviously it is very difficult to enforce punctuality in reporting when the officers concerned are answerable to a different authority.

In the interval between the date of registration and entry of the registration record into the database at the Civil Registration Office, the registration is only of value at the individual level. It cannot be searched and cannot be used for planning purposes, so from a government perspective it effectively does not exist.
The Registrar-General also raised a number of other issues relating to the need to increase Civil Registration Office staff numbers and to train staff in both that office and in the island councils, and regarding the equipping and maintenance of offices associated with registration. These largely administrative issues, along with some of the issues mentioned above, have been listed in a project proposal that has been directed to cabinet via senior MISA management, and which may or may not receive funding.

4.9.3 Late registration assessment

The procedures for late registration appear to present substantial difficulties in Kiribati. Since the Registrar-General defines any birth registration after the expiration of 10 days as a late registration, it appears that large numbers of births are subject to these procedures. Late registration assessment gives considerable scope for use of judgement, so assessors need to be fully trained, but the training given is said by the Registrar-General to be inadequate. Another issue is that since assessors are not paid staff of the Civil Registration Office, and do not receive any specific payment for making an assessment, their activities are difficult for the Registrar-General to regulate, and they may not be strongly committed to their task.

A careful reading of the Act suggests that the law applying to late registrations is possibly contradictory and could cause births to be unregistered. While s9 requires all births to be registered, s6 states ‘Where after the expiration of 12 months from the date of the birth of any child or from the date when any living new-born child is found exposed, the birth of the child has not been registered, the birth shall not be registered except upon order of a late registration assessor made in accordance with s 17 and in such manner as may be prescribed.’ This suggests a possible loophole, i.e. if parents or other qualified informants are unable to produce sufficient evidence to satisfy an assessor, births may not be registered even though they are bona fide and legally entitled to be registered. Staff of the Civil Registration Office confirmed that assessors do sometimes refuse to register births. It is clear that much depends on the judgement of individual assessors, who could be either very easily satisfied by whatever evidence is produced, or could choose to be very demanding in their requirements.

4.10 Actions already taken to strengthen birth registration and improve coverage

- MISA had been promoting the importance of birth registration as a rights issue in a series of radio broadcasts running in the three months prior to the consultant’s visit to Kiribati. Broadcasts were fortnightly until Christmas 2004, and weekly in early 2005.
- Many respondents interviewed had heard these broadcasts and said they were an effective method of awareness-raising.
- A combination of Government and project funding has enabled the modernisation of Civil Registration Office equipment, including new computers and software. Computerised records are now safely and regularly backed up with removable storage devices (i.e. USB memory stick).
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Improved communications between island councils and the Civil Registration Office have enabled registrars in the islands to phone or send faxes when they want to conduct a record search prior to registering a birth.

The Registrar-General has sought funding for further upgrades to the Office, including new staff and training for existing staff. Although it is unlikely that the levels of additional staffing requested will be achieved, this initiative is a reflection of the Civil Registration Office staff’s enthusiasm and commitment to improving birth registration.

4.11 Suggested strategies to further improve coverage

4.11.1 More awareness-raising and training of officials

As in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, there is still scope for further raising awareness of the importance of birth registration as a rights issue, in both the community and among officials. Interestingly, at least six respondents, including several senior government officials, said that Kiribati people are unlikely to be persuaded that they should register because it is a civil right, as they are more responsive to penalties than to incentives. These respondents argued that the most effective strategy would be to increase penalties for failure to register. Whether or not this is true, both children and their parents should be properly informed about children’s rights, while officials need to know why it is important to promote birth registration, and how to perform their tasks properly.

4.11.2 Establish a Task Force to improve mechanisms for birth registration, including collaboration

Increased collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Civil Registration Office could be accommodated by the existing legislation, including providing for the Health Statistician to send details of all births recorded in the health information system to Civil Registration. Even so, senior officials said that a task force is needed to identify and recommend strategies, as it would have more effect as regards increasing commitment of concerned ministries, and ensuring that any new strategies are implemented.

A priority of any such task force should be to formalise a mechanism for exchange of information between Ministry of Health and Civil Registration. As Ministry of Health is about to embark on a very substantial European Commission-funded project to improve health services to the outer islands (European Commission, 2004), it would be worth establishing such a mechanism as soon as possible so that improvements to record keeping and exchange of information could be incorporated as part of this project. This could include encouraging Ministry of Health to issue birth certificates for all births, and to include a note on the bottom of each birth certificate advising mothers to present the certificate at the Civil Registration Office or the Island Council within 10 days of the birth.
In addition to addressing issues of collaboration between ministries, other important functions of a task force could be to:

1) determine how to elicit better performances and timely reporting from island councils e.g. by providing registration facilities at set times and offering some financial inducement to island registrars, or making registration part of the duties of MISA officers posted to islands;

2) review birth registration costs and determine the most effective balance of penalties and inducements to encourage registration;

3) review and recommend updates to the legislation to reflect present procedures and needs;

4) review the system of late registration and make recommendations as to how it could be simplified and made to function more effectively.

4.11.3 Administrative improvements

Despite considerable progress towards improving administrative efficiency, the Civil Registration Office still needs further improvement. Training of all registration staff in the central office in the use of the computerised database is clearly a priority. The Office also needs to establish an indexing system for hard copy registers and to appoint a custodian to archive and care for the volumes. Training is also needed for staff in the outer islands, especially those charged with assessing late registrations.

One other simple administrative improvement that could contribute to improved registration coverage is to explore ways of making birth registration appear more desirable, memorable and important to parents, such as by retailing attractive certificates at cost price. Certificates with special features such as a coloured baby photo, lamination and/or similar features easily produced with a digital camera, computer and colour printer could become a sought-after ‘status symbol’ in the community. It seems possible that increasing the perceived value of the birth registration certificate could be at least as effective as efforts to change community perceptions of the importance of birth registration.
5.1 Why civil registration?

This report has adopted the UNICEF definition of ‘birth registration’, that is, registration by the civil registration system. The preceding chapters have shown, however, that none of the three countries discussed meet the majority of the criteria set out in Box One, Section 1.4 of this study. Although there is no systematic discrimination against particular sections of the community, many registrations in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati are not timely, and while levels of registration vary between countries, none have complete or nearly complete coverage.

On the other hand, most infants are taken to a health facility for immunisation, and the health information systems of all three countries contain information about some or most births, and usually issue mothers with documentation that could substitute for civil registration. In at least two of the three countries discussed here the health information system records significantly more births than does the civil registration system, and some officials and parents believe that a ‘birth certificate’ generated by the health system is sufficient documentation for official purposes. The question must therefore be asked, why shouldn’t ‘birth certificates’ issued by health facilities become the official documents instead of civil registration certificates?

The explanation as to why this would not be a wise approach can be found among the reasons why birth registration is important and why health information systems exist. As discussed in Section 1.1 of this report, at the individual level birth registration provides civil rights and protection, and access to services. At the national level, birth registration provides essential information for economic and social planning.

 Whereas the birth certificates issued by health personnel in the three countries can be used for individual level proof of identity and thereby can, and sometimes do, provide access to rights, protection and services, the priority for the health information systems is to monitor patients and service delivery rather than to provide population information. Adapting health information systems to provide population information for planning purposes and allow birth records to be verified many years after the event would involve changing the data collection and analysis practices, and the addition or expansion of customer services.
Although on the surface this might appear to be a minor consideration, it is actually a very major consideration in the countries discussed here, especially since the health information systems of all three still have limitations as regards their primary function, i.e. meeting the data requirements of the health system. Adding another function to health information systems would risk compromising their effectiveness and would create a new layer of the types of political, administrative and personnel/performance-related problems described in the country chapters and summarised in Section 5.2 below.

It is much wiser and more efficient to follow UNICEF’s recommendation that birth registration should be ‘the official recording of the birth of a child by some administrative level of the state and coordinated by a particular branch of government’ … preferably by civil registration (UNICEF, 2002:2). Health ministries do have a role to play, but not by taking over the birth registration process altogether. Rather, the role of health ministries should be to collaborate with civil registration offices and ensure that health officials perform the functions delegated to them by the civil registration legislation. Some strategies to facilitate collaboration between health and civil registration officials are set out in Section 5.4 below.

The remainder of this chapter summarises some common factors that limit birth registration coverage in the three countries, and proposes strategies to address them.

**5.2 Factors limiting birth registration coverage**

UNICEF (2002) identifies seven categories of ‘potential barrier’ to birth registration: ‘political, administrative, economic, neglect of cultural and community realities, gender discrimination, geographic barriers and war and internal conflict’. It is clear from the preceding chapters that the first three of these barriers are the most important in the three countries discussed here, along with, to a lesser extent, obvious geographical barriers that need no further explanation. Gender discrimination does not appear to be a barrier in any of the three countries, while sporadic civil conflict has occurred only in Solomon Islands, and is unlikely to have had much impact since the level of birth registration was already very low before ‘The Tensions’. While there is no evidence of specific ‘neglect of cultural and community realities’, the political, administrative and economic barriers described below largely originate from cultural attitudes and realities.

**5.2.1 Political will**

While the governments of all three countries support the expansion of birth registration and have accepted it as one of the articles of CRC, there tends to be a passive political barrier in the sense described in UNICEF 2002:12. That is, there tends to be weak enforcement; lack of coordination and cooperation between different ministries and sectors that have a stake in birth registration; blurred lines of responsibility; decentralisation without adequate resources; inadequate financial allocations and insufficient and poorly trained personnel, ill-equipped offices and shortages of materials.
to get the job done. The research undertaken for this study suggests that the investment required to remove or minimise these barriers would be modest in terms of the overall scale of the national budgets. What is needed is political will and commitment to overcome these barriers. It must be recognised, however, that all three countries are facing budgetary constraints and are striving to rationalise and reduce their public service budgets rather than create new positions, so donor assistance to strengthen birth registration and ensure sustainability may be required.

5.2.2 Administrative barriers

Even when political barriers are passive rather than deliberate, they can have administrative implications by according low priority for registration activities and low status for registration authorities. Low status translates into low pay, which in turn contributes to lack of motivation and lack of commitment (UNICEF, 2002: 13).

In the three countries discussed here, as in most developing countries, it can be difficult to engineer and sustain timely reporting within a single ministry or to achieve inter-ministry cooperation. Some of the reasons for this include inadequate job descriptions, insufficient supervision, poor communication facilities, low staff morale, lack of understanding and/or limited vision of work objectives, and lack of feedback or positive reinforcement of staff efforts.

The registrars in the principal registration facilities in the urban areas in each of the three countries appeared to have reasonable status, and to be very committed and motivated. There was clear evidence, however, that this is not true for some of the officers responsible for registration in outlying provinces and outer islands, who receive little or no pay. Moreover, as most are employed by local authorities rather than directly answerable to the Registrar-General, they do not always send reports in a timely fashion. This needs to be addressed by increasing political will to rationalise and equip registration systems, and by providing training and feedback. Honest evaluations of the administrative obstacles to efficient reporting are therefore essential, along with innovative strategies to remove any obstacles identified.

UNICEF (2002) does not mention lack of computerisation as a barrier to administrative efficiency, but it is clear that lack of computerisation in Vanuatu not only makes searches extremely inefficient but also contributes to apathy and low morale of registration staff. An efficiently backed-up computerised birth registration database at the central Civil Status Office would facilitate storage and speed up searches. It would also create a demand for more skilled staff and more training, which in turn would increase staff morale and commitment.

Another type of administrative barrier is that some of the legislation is out of date and does not reflect current realities and needs. Legislative review is needed in all three countries. There is also a need to review the way birth registration is used. For example, procedures at some schools need to be tightened so that birth registration is always required for school admission, but with safeguards to
ensure that unregistered children are admitted pending their registration and schools cooperate with registrars and parents to ensure that every child is registered (see Box One). This would enable the attainment of school age to be used as a checkpoint to ensure that every child is registered and thus eligible to enjoy the benefits of citizenship of their country.

5.2.3 Economic barriers

UNICEF (2002:14) recommends ‘at the individual level, birth registration and the issuing of the first copy of …(a registration certificate)… should be free of charge’. In each country discussed here the legislation says that timely birth registration should be free of charge, but fees should be charged for registration certificates and extracts. In practice all three countries issue certificates at the time of registration. Whereas it might be possible to obtain timely registration without purchasing a certificate, and therefore without paying a fee in Kiribati and Solomon Islands, Vanuatu charges an administrative fee to cover the cost of the registration books, and does not separate the process of registration and the issue of a certificate. These practices have led parents in all three countries not to distinguish between registration and registration certificates, and to perceive registration as having a cost. Moreover, although the costs are very small, many perceive them as a deterrent, especially people who are not employed in the formal sector and who may have to work hard to obtain even small amounts of cash.

It is very desirable to follow the UNICEF recommendation above, that registration and the first registration certificate should be free. If countries decide that they really cannot afford this, one strategy to minimise the impact of cost as a disincentive to register might be to raise public awareness of the exact nature of the cost structure, and in the case of Vanuatu, to introduce the option of registering without purchasing a certificate.

Media campaigns could be used to point out that registration is free within a certain time frame, and that it is not essential to purchase a registration certificate until it is actually needed. This would promote registration in at least two ways, firstly by correcting the misconception that there is a fee for registration itself, and secondly by removing the concern of residents of traditional housing that they will be unable to store this valuable document safely until it is needed. Consideration should also be given to establishing a mechanism for schools to check children’s registration status and ages directly with Civil Registration offices so that parents do not have to purchase a registration certificate in order to enrol their children. It must be remembered that lack of decentralisation of registration facilities can constitute another economic barrier from the parents’ perspective, in that any costs of travelling to a registration facility must be added to any direct registration charges.
5.3 Common basic requirements

Proof of identity for a variety of purposes has become an integral part of day-to-day life in modern society, and no doubt will, eventually, become part of every-day life in every Pacific country. Until then, however, levels of registration are unlikely to increase substantially without specific strategies to remove the barriers discussed in the previous section.

Countries such as Bangladesh have demonstrated that it is possible to achieve a dramatic improvement in birth registration within a short time if concerted efforts are coupled with innovative approaches (Bangladesh, 2002). The strategies used in Bangladesh included strengthening and improving registration systems, clearly defining administrative responsibilities, establishing mechanisms to coordinate birth registration, making the process more transparent, and raising community awareness of the uses and importance of birth registration. Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati could achieve equally impressive improvements if they concentrate on a few basic strategies that are appropriate for their communities and address most of the barriers to birth registration.

5.3.1 Awareness-raising

In each country it was clear that birth registration is commonly perceived as a troublesome bureaucratic requirement rather than as a civil right. This is probably because, originally, their birth registration systems were introduced by colonial administrations prior to the attainment of Independence, rather than evolving in response to local needs.

Awareness-raising to change this perception is needed in all three countries. This includes raising community awareness of the importance of registration as a rights issue and raising the awareness of officials of the importance of and correct uses of registration. It is most important, however, that awareness-raising strategies are locally designed and customised to suit particular countries. Campaigns to promote birth registration that have worked effectively in countries such as Bangladesh and Vietnam are not necessarily appropriate for Pacific countries, and may not achieve the same results. Similarly, strategies that work effectively in Vanuatu are not necessarily appropriate for Solomon Islands and Kiribati.

Research is needed to target strategies to suit the needs of each country, possibly with different approaches for rural and urban residents or other sub-groups within populations. For example, decisions need to be made as to whether the main emphasis in local campaigns should be child rights, legal requirements, social benefits, or some other aspect of birth registration that triggers community interest and participation. Similarly, in some communities campaigns may be more effective if they focus on one or two issues, while in other communities it may be more effective to emphasise multiple reasons. Pilot testing to compare and evaluate approaches is essential before embarking on awareness-raising campaigns.
5.3.2 Compliance with the legislation, including cost minimisation

In Vanuatu and Kiribati registration is perceived as having a cost, although the legislation states that it should be free. In Solomon Islands direct costs are probably less of a concern to parents than are hidden costs, such as the high cost and inconvenience of travelling to the Electoral Office in Honiara. Countries need to ensure that registration is free or as cheap as possible, and that there is no compulsion to purchase documentation when registering. In the case of Vanuatu, reduction and standardisation of costs is urgently needed. Countries also need to ensure that registration facilities are decentralised to convenient locations, at the provincial or preferably the island level.

5.3.3 Computerisation and adequate staff training and staffing levels

Computerisation of the birth registration systems and upgrading staff skills to manage them is an essential part of improving coverage and efficiency. As demonstrated in Kiribati, computerisation vastly increases the speed and accuracy of record searching. Computerisation also greatly facilitates storage of information, provided that systems are properly backed up.

Another advantage of computerisation is that it can simplify the incorporation of data from other information systems, such as health and education. Fiji has developed a computerised database that facilitates collaboration between health officials and the civil registration system (see Part II Chapter Two). The system comprises an on-line database that can be accessed by authorised government departments. As soon as a mother presents for antenatal care, Ministry of Health personnel enter her details and the expected date of birth of her child into the database. This comprises an incomplete record which is picked up by civil registration staff and used to identify and, if necessary, follow up on births to ensure that registration occurs after the baby is born. It also facilitates tracking of stillbirths and neo-natal deaths. Customised menus ensure confidentiality by restricting access of various types of users to the particular parts of the database that concern them. This makes it possible to allow Ministry of Education and other authorised users to check details of particular clients on-line, without compromising the confidentiality and security of the system as a whole.

Clearly, the three countries discussed in this report are not yet ready to adopt such a sophisticated system, but something similar could probably be adopted within a few years when registrars and health personnel become familiar with the use of computerised databases and increase their skills. The objective now should be to ensure that all existing and future records are computerised in their central registration offices, and sufficient staff are trained to use the computerised system. The next steps would be to extend computerisation to provincial or outlying centres and link with computerised systems in collaborating ministries.

It is vital that computerisation is supported by staff training and by revision of job descriptions to ensure that existing staff are properly utilised. Where registration systems are computerised, all staff associated with the registration process should be competent in the use of the computerised database.
Strategies that increase coverage are likely to generate a need for increased staffing levels. Issues regarding the appropriate institutional structure and the division of responsibilities between provincial/island and central administrations are country specific and need to be addressed at the country level. What is common to all three countries, however, is the need to recognise there should be sufficient numbers of appropriately skilled staff in designated locations who have clearly defined tasks and responsibilities and are motivated to perform them.

**5.3.4 Increased inter-ministry cooperation and use of other information sources**

As discussed in previous chapters, many people in the Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu live largely self-contained subsistence lifestyles and have minimal contact with modern institutions, and it is likely that the majority of their children will also spend most of their lives in living that way. Such people tend to see little advantage in registering their children soon after birth. Strategies focussing only on awareness-raising, institutional strengthening and enforcement are therefore unlikely to achieve any substantial improvement in coverage in the short-term.

If there are to be dramatic improvements in coverage, it is necessary to increase collaboration between civil registration authorities, health ministries, schools and churches. The next section outlines the elements of a strategy to establish a mechanism for collaboration.

**5.4 A suggested strategy to increase birth registration in the three countries**

The health systems in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati are constantly being improved and extended, and it is possible that within a few years virtually every newborn infant will come into contact with the health system. It is therefore timely to devise original strategies to accelerate the attainment of comprehensive birth registration so they can become part of the improvement of health systems.

The essential elements of a strategy to increase collaboration between civil registration and health and other sources of birth information that could be implemented in all three countries are as follows:

1. Health and Civil Registration authorities should agree on a set of common key variables to give each child a unique identity, such as village name, date and time of birth, mother’s name and mother’s age, and, where available, father’s name, father’s age.

2. Medical personnel would ensure that this key information for every child is recorded in the health system when the child first has contact with health personnel, whether at delivery or later (as in Solomon Islands).

3. An efficient mechanism should be developed to ensure that the key information on each newly contacted child is transferred from Health to Civil Registration regularly and in a timely fashion (e.g. within no more than three months). This includes establishing a mechanism for timely
reporting by rural health facilities. Part of this development would be to determine whether it is more efficient for Health to aggregate and forward information to Civil Registration at the island, provincial or national level.

4. Civil Registration would develop a system that identifies two different types of registration: a) partial registration, comprising only information supplied directly by Health or other sources; and, b) completed registration, after parents have confirmed the child’s details

5. Civil Registration should utilise the information provided by Health and other sources to identify and contact parents who have not yet registered their children.

6. Schools should provide the Civil Registration Office with details of children for whom evidence of registration was not produced at enrolment. These data should be checked against existing registrations, then, if necessary, added to the civil registration birth database as partial registrations and flagged for follow-up with parents.

7. Churches could make a substantial contribution towards improving civil registration by recording some common key details of every baptism to the Civil Registration Office. As in the case of collaboration with the Health Information System and with schools, unregistered children who come to the registrar’s attention through baptismal records could be checked against existing registrations, and, if necessary, added to the birth database as partial registrations and flagged for follow-up.

8. Governments would use both partial and complete registrations to formulate estimates of target populations for planning and other purposes.

9. The long-term objective, when registration staff skills and familiarity with computerisation have reached an adequate level, should be to establish an integrated computerised system to facilitate inter-ministry collaboration, such as that currently in use in Fiji.

It must be recognised that in the three countries discussed here, as in most developing countries, it can be difficult to engineer and sustain timely reporting within a single ministry or to achieve inter-ministry cooperation. Some of the reasons for this include inadequate job descriptions, insufficient supervision, poor communication facilities, low staff morale, lack of understanding and limited vision of work objectives, and lack of feedback or positive reinforcement of staff efforts. Honest evaluations of the administrative obstacles to efficient reporting are therefore an essential part of this strategy, along with innovative approaches to remove any obstacles identified.

Implementing the proposed strategy while simultaneously promoting birth registration as a civil right as well as a legal requirement would quickly increase birth registration coverage in the three countries.
5.5 Priorities for UNICEF and other donors

Strengthening of birth registration systems in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu is most likely to be achieved by collaboration between donors and governments. Initially it will depend on increased political commitment at the country level to ensure appropriate legislation, efficient administration and data management, collaboration between health and registration departments, and sustainable and accessible registration procedures. Without these structures, complete birth registration is unlikely to be achieved.

The first priority for donors should therefore be to encourage the development of this political commitment by promoting awareness among parliamentarians and senior officials of the importance and value of birth registration. Workshops and presentations at high-level meetings would help to achieve this. It may also be possible for donors to support specific activities to strengthen systems.

The second priority should be to facilitate the development of appropriate, country-specific awareness-raising and promotion strategies to inform communities about the value and importance of birth registration and encourage compliance. This would include facilitating in-country consultations to determine the most effective and persuasive approaches, and supporting pilot testing of such approaches. For example, some Kiribati officials suggested that Kiribati people respond more to penalties than incentives, and so recommended increasing penalties for non-registration, while others held the opposite view and said encouragement would be more effective. Donors should support research and pilot testing to determine the best approach or combination of approaches for each country. When the most effective approaches have been determined, donors could help implement awareness-raising campaigns.

A third priority for donors should be to provide assistance with computerisation and training in civil registration offices. Needs differ as regards computerisation, so it is essential that there is careful evaluation as to exactly what is required to improve the efficiency of the registration process in each country. This includes ensuring that the hardware is appropriate, that software is customised to meet current needs but has capacity for long-term improvements and adaptations, and that sufficient numbers of staff are fully trained to operate and maintain the computerised system, including full training in safe backup practices.

A fourth priority should be to facilitate exchanges of information between registrars and other stakeholders, including assisting with newsletters, internet exchanges and regional meetings such as that held in Suva from 25–27th May, 2005 (see report in this volume). Exchanging information helps to motivate and encourage registrars, many of whom who feel that birth registration tends to be
undervalued by both officials and the community. It also helps to raise awareness of the potential of new technologies and of effective strategies for promoting birth registration. An important part of this support should be to encourage and facilitate the establishment of some form of secure archiving at the regional level to ensure that records are not lost in the event of a national-level natural disaster.

The fifth way in which donors can support birth registration is to support the expansion of assisted deliveries and health care for newborns. Once administrative structures that include effective collaboration between health and registration authorities are in place and functioning effectively, the most efficient way for donors to assist the expansion of civil registration would be to support the expansion of health care to newborns. This would be an on-going activity that is wholly compatible with UNICEF’s mandate, and the general donor objective of improving community wellbeing. Supporting birth registration in this way would ensure that funds are used efficiently by targeting two important objectives simultaneously, that is, improvement of MCH as well as the expansion of birth registration coverage.
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# List of People Interviewed

## Vanuatu, 1-10 March 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Jacob Isaiah</td>
<td>Registrar-General</td>
<td>Civil Registration Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Alice Manuake</td>
<td>Sub-Registrar</td>
<td>Port Vila Municipality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Evelyn Nawen</td>
<td>Registration Officer</td>
<td>Shefa Provincial Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Pioni Willie</td>
<td>Acting National Statistician</td>
<td>Statistics Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Yvanna Taga</td>
<td>Health Statistician</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sr Leitangi Barry</td>
<td>Senior Midwife</td>
<td>Vila Central Hospital</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Jane Bani</td>
<td>Legal Drafting Officer</td>
<td>State Law Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Hilson Toaliu</td>
<td>Country Program Director</td>
<td>Save the Children Fund, Vanuatu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Cathy Emery</td>
<td>Program Manager, Pacific</td>
<td>Save the Children Fund, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Flora Bani</td>
<td>Health Sector Analyst &amp; NCC Chairperson</td>
<td>Depart. of Economics &amp; Social Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Leonard Tabilip</td>
<td>EPI Coordinator</td>
<td>Public Health Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Susan Kalorib</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>Central Primary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Leipanga Kaloris</td>
<td>Head Mistress</td>
<td>Kawenu Primary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pastor Fiana Rakau</td>
<td>Assembly Clerk</td>
<td>Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sr Ann Magret</td>
<td>Nurse Practitioner</td>
<td>Paunagisu Health Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Joe Kalo</td>
<td>First Political Advisor</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr David Becker</td>
<td>Photographer and advisor</td>
<td>Vanuatu Cultural Centre</td>
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## Solomon Islands, 10 - 17 March, 2005

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Ruth Liloqula,</td>
<td>PS DHA/NACC Chair</td>
<td>Department of Home Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr James Rizzu,</td>
<td>Children’s Desk Officer</td>
<td>Department of Home Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Nick Gagahe</td>
<td>National Statistician</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. George Malefaosi,</td>
<td>Under-Secretary</td>
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<td>Ms Pauline Boseto</td>
<td>Population Planner</td>
<td>Department of Planning and Aid Coordination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Noelyn Biliki,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Junilyn Pikacha</td>
<td>Director Reproductive Health Division</td>
<td>Ministry of Health and Medical Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Julianne Oge</td>
<td>Child Advocacy Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Martin Karani</td>
<td>Registrar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr H. Pelu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr David Clark</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Fox Qwaina</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Church of Melanesia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Judith Siota</td>
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<td>Fr Baddeley Longatabo</td>
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<td>Church of Melanesia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sr Bethlyn Wareareu</td>
<td>Programme Manager, Reproductive Health</td>
<td>Rove Health Clinic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sr Jennifer Anga</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Borau Koina</td>
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<td>Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs</td>
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<td>Mr Uriam Reiti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sr Ioanna Tekaai</td>
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<td>Mr Ioelu Tapatu</td>
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<td>Dr Airam Metai</td>
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<td>Dr Ieti Rouata</td>
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<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<td>Catechist</td>
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