

Universal Birth Registration

THE WAY FORWARD



**UNIVERSAL
BIRTH REGISTRATION
THE WAY FORWARD**

Firts West and Central Africa
Birth Registration Conference
Dakar, Senegal, 23-27 February 2004

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Foreword

Birth registration is one of the first rights of a young child, and in a region where the under-five mortality rate is one of the highest in the world, it is certainly an important one. Belonging to a family and a community is a most precious identity. But being registered at birth (Article 7 of the CRC) is recognizing the citizenship of a child, in a region where the growing number of armed conflicts related to nationality and citizenship is becoming an issue. Birth registration also contributes to building national statistical data - the 'bottom line' for national planning process and development plans - and being registered opens the door to social services such as education.

With an overall rate of one child registered for every three born in the West and Central Africa region, birth registration is an important issue which has been neglected for too long. That is why the African Union decided to dedicate the Day of the African Child, 16 June 2003, to birth registration. Following this important decision, a regional campaign was launched in Mali by President Amadou Toumani Toure to promote birth registration and to formulate action plans. In parallel, national campaigns have been launched in every country in the region - including countries in emergency situations - with high-level participation, often the President of the country, as in Cote d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

All of this has been made possible by the creation at country level of national multi-sectoral committees to launch the campaigns and follow the action plans. The national committees consist of representatives of central and local government, NGOs, and partners in development, in particular Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF. The regional- and national-level processes have been supported regionally by a partnership among Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF regional offices.

As a second step in the process, a questionnaire was sent to all countries to assess their situations, and to provide first-ever comprehensive information related to birth registration in the region. The returned questionnaires informed the planning of the regional partnership in holding this First West and Central Africa Birth Registration Conference, the objectives of which were to:

- Assess the situation of birth registration in countries of the region
- Increase awareness of on-going birth registration efforts
- Consider issues involved in effective birth registration systems
- Relate birth registration to other child rights issues
- Exchange experiences, practices and lessons with colleagues from other countries and regions
- Improve networking within and among civil registrars, government officials and partners such as Plan, UNICEF and UNFPA, and
- Define country and regional priorities for birth registration.

Based on the evaluation of the conference by participants and external observers, all the objectives were met. The conference also demonstrated the importance of collaboration among country-level multi-sectoral actors for a successful action plan and the importance of partnerships - like this one among Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF - to support country and regional initiatives. We hope that these proceedings will be a useful reference document for all of us as we go forward and jointly implement the next steps.

Executive Summary

The First West and Central Africa Birth Registration Conference - a partnership among Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF - was held in Dakar, Senegal, from 23-27 February 2004. The conference comprised approximately 175 persons, including four ministers (from Ghana, Niger, Senegal and Togo), department heads, civil registrars, parliamentarians, civil society organisations, NGOs, youth, media and colleagues from Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF. The conference closed with a recommendation for free and obligatory birth registration for all children aged 0-18 years in all 24 WCAR countries throughout 2005. Conference participants agreed that raising awareness, establishing legal frameworks and targeting top-level government officials were key priorities. On display were exhibits demonstrating progress in birth registration in all the participating countries.

Participants considered a range of issues in birth registration, with a focus on difficulties encountered in addressing them and possible solutions. They also set out priorities for their birth registration efforts in follow-up to the conference. Based on the issues and country priorities, a two-year regional plan of action was presented jointly by the regional offices of Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF, including:

- Strengthening partnerships among main actors, including governments, civil society, regional bodies, international NGOs, development partners, media, artists and children's parliaments
- Technically supporting countries facing similar problems and constraints, and
- Maintaining the mobilisation brought about by the conference through on-going follow-up.

In addition, the conference reinforced the alliance among Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF and other members of civil society, as they work together toward the realization of the rights of all children in the region..

The Conference

The “First West and Central Africa Birth Registration Conference” was held at the Hotel Sofitel Teranga in Dakar, Senegal, from 23-27 February 2004. This conference, and other birth registration initiatives in the region, are activities being carried out through a partnership among Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF. The conference was organized by the Plan West Africa Regional Office, UNFPA's Country Support Team and UNICEF's West and Central Africa Regional Office.

Objectives

The conference provided an opportunity for participants to:

- Assess the situation of birth registration in countries of the region
- Increase awareness of on-going birth registration efforts
- Consider issues involved in effective birth registration systems
- Relate birth registration to other child rights issues
- Exchange experiences, practices and lessons with colleagues from other countries and regions
- Improve networking within and among civil registrars, government officials and partners such as Plan, UNICEF and UNFPA, and
- Define country and regional priorities for birth registration.

Participants

The conference participants came from:

- Parliaments, ministries, and national and local civil registration offices; Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF country offices; NGOs and media in 24 West and Central African countries and Haiti
- Plan's Regional Offices for West Africa (WARO) and Eastern and Southern Africa (RESA), and International Headquarters
- UNFPA's Country Support Team
- UNICEF's West and Central Africa Regional Office and Headquarters, and
- With special participation of ministers from Ghana, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

Children and young people were represented through the participation of 18 persons from the African Movement of Working Children and Youth.

Most country delegations were comprised of national and local civil registrars, officials from government ministries and departments, Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF staff and national NGO representatives.

Twenty-four delegations prepared papers on birth registration in their countries, highlighting:

1. *Brief Demographic Profile of the Country*
2. *Status of Registration of Births in the Country*
3. *Recommendations for Strengthening the Registration of Births*

The Country Assessment Papers came from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

Interested persons may obtain the Country Assessment papers by contacting the regional offices of Plan, UNFPA or UNICEF.

Concept

Birth registration presents governments and development organisations with a challenge that cannot be ignored. Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child is “to be registered immediately after birth and thereby obtain an identity before the law of the country.” However, according to UNICEF’s March 2002 Innocenti Digest No. 9 Birth Registration - Right from the Start, an estimated 41 percent of births around the world were not registered in 2000. Thus, approximately 50 million children joined millions of other children born in previous years who were unregistered, did not have a certificate of birth, and therefore were legally without a name and identity.

I learned that ...

... birth registration is essential for a child’s right to an identity. Every child must be registered and all stakeholders must play their roles to ensure this. I also learned that birth registration can provide data for national planning.

Participant Evaluation Comment

Apart from being the first legal acknowledgement of a child’s existence, the registration of births is fundamental to the realization of a number of child rights in health, education and employment, as examples. Children in difficult circumstances and those in need of protection are especially vulnerable if they are unregistered.

A functioning system of birth and civil registration ensures that a country has an up-to-date and reliable database for planning, as useful at national level as it is for local government bodies responsible for maintaining health, education and other social services for communities. Most countries have legal provisions for registering children’s births, but such laws are often not comprehensive enough, not enforced or do not function. In some countries, birth registration systems have fallen into disuse for bureaucratic, resource and practical reasons. Particular groups within countries may also be excluded from birth registration because of discrimination.

There is therefore a need for awareness-raising at all levels in countries in West and Central Africa and efforts towards improvements in national policy environments, structures and processes for birth registration.



On 16 June 2003 -The Day of the African Child - national governments, Plan, UNICEF and UNFPA launched a regional campaign on birth registration in West and Central Africa. From this beginning, a comprehensive follow-up process has included:

- Establishment of National Steering Committees to carry out birth registration campaigns and recommend follow-up actions
- Preparation of Country Assessment Papers to determine the status of birth registration and actions to be taken in all countries
- Continued mobilization and raising of public awareness on the importance of birth registration, and
- Participation of countries in this First West and Central Africa Birth Registration Conference in Dakar, Senegal, from 23-27 February 2004.

To support the efforts of national governments, this partnership among Plan, UNICEF and UNFPA aims to contribute to the goal of Universal Birth Registration by working together with African governments and other partners to ensure birth registration for all African children. Each organisation brings a wealth of global experience in birth registration initiatives - individually and as partners. In Asia, Plan and UNICEF co-organized three regional conferences in 1999, 2000 and 2003, and are now working together at country level. In East Africa, UNICEF organized a regional workshop in 2002 with the participation of Plan. The three organisations are now building on these experiences for the first time in West and Central Africa.

BENIN



GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRTH REGISTRATION

Awareness-raising

- A participatory approach involving locally-elected councilors who work as volunteers has enabled the identification of communal relays or “communal registrars” of births taking place at home. Despite the difficulties encountered, this strategy has enabled the issuance of birth certificates in collaboration with parents and the village health units where first-aid workers and birth attendants known to the populations can be found.
- Awareness-raising campaigns, seminars and workshops which mobilized heads of urban districts, sub-prefects and mayors (before decentralization), civil registration officers, midwives, birth attendants, lawyers, social workers, representatives from NGOs and accommodation facilities for abandoned children or children in difficult situations.
- The organization of special court hearings in communities to allow children who do have birth certificates to be delivered certificates of probable age (late registration). This activity is undertaken in collaboration with conciliation courts, magistrates’ courts and communes.

Information Materials

- The publication in February 2002 by the Foundation Regard d’Amour of a document entitled “Children’s Rights and Civil Registration in Benin.” This document provides information on civil registration problems and those regarding birth certificates.
- The issuance of registration and birth cards to mothers as soon as they leave clinics and the coordination of the periodic and regular forwarding of birth forms between clinics and town halls. This action enables better control of the transmission of birth declaration forms to civil registration centres to record the birth of the child.
- Support of supplies to people in charge of birth registration to facilitate their work in the field. These are donations of registers and birth declaration forms to health agents, donations of registers to civil registration officers, and of lockers to file the documents issued.
- Strengthening of capacities: training with women’s associations which have been granted loans with a prerequisite that all members have an identity card, hence the need for these women to have a birth certificate or a birth declaration supplementary judgement. Thus made aware of the importance of the birth act, these women are themselves more inclined to register their children.
- Nutritional follow-up of pregnant and nursing women with children under 5 years; this enables children to be registered by their parents, and indications are given to women to facilitate the administrative process.

The Proceedings

The conference programme included a press briefing and conference, speeches, country exhibits, presentations, questions and discussion, group work, panel presentations, a cultural evening, a poster session, a concert, and workshops for journalists and musicians. Parallel to the conference programme was a workshop for children and young people representing the African Movement for Working Children and Youth and organized by ENDA. Their workshop activities prepared them to participate in certain sessions of the main programme, to work and learn together over the week.

About 30 speeches and presentations were made during the conference, excerpts from which appear in this publication.

Interested persons may obtain a CD-ROM of the speeches and presentations by contacting the regional offices of Plan, UNFPA or UNICEF.

These proceedings present a selection of what happened at the conference, with:

- Excerpts from speeches, presentations and panels
- Brief session and activity descriptions
- Comments from the conference evaluation responses
- Selected statements of good practice, and
- Conference outputs including issues, difficulties and solutions; stakeholder statements on birth registration; country priorities; and a regional action plan.

By browsing through this publication, readers will learn about the context of birth registration in West and Central Africa and understand the views of a variety of stakeholders. This document also serves as a basis to assess future progress in the countries' identified priorities and the region's follow-up actions in birth registration initiatives/

Day One

The First West and Central Africa Birth Registration Conference began with a half-day afternoon session to welcome participants and introduce the context of birth registration in the region. Following the opening speeches, time was spent with participants getting to know each other as they had their first viewing of the country exhibits which encircled the meeting space.

I learned that ...

... the problems we have in our country are similar to those of other countries in the region. They mainly have to do with capacity-building, creating awareness among people, availability of registration centres and getting government to be committed. I also learned about new ways to improve civil registration in my country.

Participant Evaluation Comment

Welcome Address

First of all, we would like to tell you that we do not want to hear anymore “a child born around.” We want all children to have birth certificates. Our organisation, the African Movement of Working Children and Youth, have realized many actions in our different countries on this phenomenon. We have sensitised populations and children about the importance of birth registration. Wherever we went, we have tried to identify difficulties faced by populations and factors which prevent birth registration, including:

- Illiteracy
- Lack of information, and
- Poverty, because parents cannot always afford to give birth in health centres.

Excerpt from African Movement of Working Children and Youth Representatives

Introduction to Birth Registration

To complement its information on the populations of its Member Countries, the United Nations Statistics Commission endeavoured early to define reliable indicators of populations and movements for comparability and follow-up of population activity, and for a better appreciation of economic and social development factors. UNFPA was created in 1969 to actively take part in strategic research and in the implementation of the established programme. It was a matter of registration, collection, exploitation, edition and publication methods for complete and/or partial demographic data in the countries.

Answers to questions about events which took place in households over the last ten months before the exhaustive counting in the field proved to be mostly useless to make up for the absence of civil status statistics. Without a proper coverage of the national civil status systems, adjustments - sometimes approximate - have had to be done to estimate the various levels of fecundity and mortality. This can be considered to be the starting point of the interest of African leaders and the international community for the improvement of civil status systems in Sub-Saharan Africa.

I am convinced that these four days we will spend together will enable us to define reliable common strategies to improve civil status systems in Central and Western Africa. We must join our efforts to contribute to the implementation of NEPAD. We must work together to mobilise financial resources at national, regional and international levels, by developing partnerships in favour of the social agenda, while ensuring the durability of our collective development efforts. As a privileged data source about natural population movements, civil status is an irreplaceable tool for measuring levels and tendencies of the main demographic indicators.

No modern state can be managed without a proper knowledge of its structure and composition. Only an efficient and performing

civil status system with a coverage close to 100% of births allows reaching this aim.



UNFPA offers the triple benefit of having (a) an important database about lessons learnt over its long experience, since its early involvement (nearly 35 years) in the improvement of civil status systems; (b) representation in all the countries; and (c) a network of high-level experts in its regional Technical Support Teams on the continent.

Excerpt from Bintou Sanogoh, Director, UNFPA Country Support Team

A simple piece of paper - a birth certificate - with my name, birth date and place of birth has provided me with so many opportunities and experiences, so many rights. However, 70 percent of children in Sub-Saharan Africa do not possess this piece of paper, and as a result are being denied opportunities that a birth certificate brings, such as access to education and health care; they are also being denied the most basic of rights - the right to an identity. Without a birth certificate a child does not officially exist, unable to prove their age, nationality or who their parents are. Thus they are denied the rights, privileges and protection a nation offers its citizens.

Plan works with children every day and too often we meet children whose lives have been ruined by people who exploit those who do not have the protection of a legal identity. Without birth certificates, children (and adults) are easy prey for unscrupulous people who want to take advantage of them. Throughout West Africa, children are vulnerable to being trafficked, sexually exploited, recruited for employment and enlisted as child soldiers.

Addressing the birth registration situation in West Africa is a huge task, and one that needs strong partnerships. Plan and UNICEF have been working closely together for the past six years to improve the birth registration situation around the world. Now Plan, UNICEF and UNFPA together have made a long-term commitment to work in partnership at all levels to tackle the problem in West Africa. Working in partnership is already paying off: last year, in Togo, over 14,000 children in 26 communities were registered. To ensure sustainability of this programme, a monitoring committee was set up in each community. Members include children, health service representatives, civil registration representatives, judiciary authorities and community members. The committee keeps track of unregistered children and encourages immediate registration, which is less expensive. Registration officers, nurses, traditional birth attendants, village development committee members and education workers also received formal training on the civil registration system.

Raising awareness about the importance of birth certificates will ultimately create a demand. We need to ensure that processes are in place to deal with this. Therefore, by forming local level partnerships, we can ensure that appropriate logistical support is provided, that adequate resources exist, and ensure the sustainability of the systems so that local communities can and will continue to register children long after this campaign has come to an end.

Excerpt from Martin McCann, Programme Director, Plan

This First West and Central Africa Birth Registration Conference is the second important moment of the campaign that we started together on the occasion of the Day of the African Child on 16 June 2003, dedicated by the African Union to birth registration. This historical decision testified how regional State leaders admitted the importance of this right to "a start in life," which is justified by the scale of the issue: 70% of the children, i.e., 17 million - are unregistered in Sub-Saharan Africa.

It was to meet this challenge that the regional campaign was launched on 16 June in Mali, with President Amadou Toumani Touré and his government, and in the presence of more than 1,000 people, including a large number of children. At the same time, in 24 countries of West and Central Africa, national campaigns were launched with the participation of the highest State authorities. Even countries in states of emergency took part in this regional surge: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Depending on the country, these campaigns gave hope-bearing, if various, results. They brought hope in terms of children registered over a relatively short period - 283,141 in Democratic Republic of Congo and 200,000 in Niger - and also in terms of innovative strategies and promising experiments. By way of an example, I will quote the cases of Sao Tome and Principe, with its mobile teams to reach marginalized children; Gambia with its campaign dealing at the same time with birth registration and impregnated mosquito nets; Cameroon through schools; Senegal with a campaign led in 11 regions of the country, which reached the aim of 100% birth registration in 110 villages of the Kolda, Tambacounda, Ziguinchor and Matam regions, and the regularization of 10,000 children who had not been declared at birth.

We must here and now proceed with this campaign to sensitise decision-makers and populations for universal, mandatory and cost-free registration at the time of birth. We must also work further together in long-lasting efforts toward reliable birth registration systems, close to communities and accessible.

This partnership between our different organisations is not a stroke of luck. It is the pillar of a strong alliance for vulnerable people, namely children and women. This alliance calls on national and international communities to change the world with children, and to place them at the centre of everyone's preoccupations.

The respect of humans rights, based on the equal value and dignity of every human being, is the keystone of well-being and the elimination of discrimination. It is the basis of social protection and of real participation in society. If the right to birth registration is not respected, it can have adverse consequences on the future life of children in various domains: access to school, identification as a beneficiary of basic services like health and others, protection against early labour and marriage, against early enrolment in the army, and protection in the law against child abuse. It is therefore a right that involves all actors of society: public and private sectors, government and civil society, families and communities, religious and customary leaders.

Excerpt from Rima Salah, Regional Director, UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office

In order for children to count, we must first count the children. UNICEF estimates that 17 million children - or 70% of the children born in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2000 - do not have a birth certificate. To deny children their legal documentation, their names and their identity, is to jeopardize their very lives and to deny them a future as citizens. If you're not registered it means, in some rather ironic way, that you do not exist."

To really know what progress we are making for children, we have to know how many children we have to begin with. To provide services, save lives and plan for the future, it is essential that every human life be counted. The simple act of counting is an expression of a country's intent to take care of its people.

Seventy percent of the child soldiers in Africa have not been registered at birth. That puts them outside the government system with no protection, making them prime targets for recruitment or forced conscription. Governments should ensure that birth registration is free, compulsory, readily accessible and that a copy of the child's birth certificate be provided to parents at no charge upon registration. It is important to provide registration for even the most remote communities and families. For many, family resources are sucked dry just trying to get to the registrar. To then be met with a fee is appalling.

In 1985, I helped start a project called 'We Are the World', and was able to convince many top artists that we could make a difference, using our gifts, using our voices. The song caught the attention of many people around the world and the results were swiftly put to use. Many people in Africa were beneficiaries of the resources raised by that song, and I travelled to many countries in Africa to see that those supplies were delivered to the people who needed them most. It was during that time that I first got to see UNICEF at work in the field. Among all the inhumanity that I was a witness to at that time, I also saw all the humanity of the many people who were helping, like the people working for UNICEF. Their humanity encouraged me to help out, so I was honoured when I was asked by UNICEF to become a Goodwill Ambassador in 1987.

My first UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador mission was to come to Senegal to chair the "International Symposium of Artists and Intellectuals for African Children," spreading the message that it is possible to save millions of people from dying. Since then I have travelled to other parts of Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe and North America to listen to children, speak on their behalf and to tell the world, the decision-makers and the donors what a real difference UNICEF makes in children's lives.

Excerpt from Harry Belafonte, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador

Welcome Address

Senegal launch a sensitisation campaign which will proceed until June 2004. The aim is to increase the birth registration rate of children aged up to one and to regularize the situation of those older than one who were not declared at birth. In our country, the overall birth registration rate is still low at 60%, with a wide disparity between urban and rural areas. In some rural zones, for instance, less than one in two children is registered at birth. Nevertheless, from an institutional point of view, our civil status system has evolved since it was set up in the 18th century, and today registration is mandatory for all in Senegal, without exception.

The Ministry of Family, Social Development and National Solidarity, together with the Ministry of Interior and Local Communities, and with the constant and important support of development partners (particularly UNICEF and Plan), associations and NGOs, has developed a sensitisation approach through various experiments, such as:

- A community approach in Fissel region
- The participatory approach of Medina Gounass, in a Dakar suburb, and
- Through schools in Vélingara, Kolda region.

The setting up of a national committee charged with technical support planning, coordination, follow-up and political decision-making processes, allowed for:

- Better cross-sector collaboration between public actors (ministries and local communities)
- Strong mobilization of civil society actors in every region (NGOs and community associations)
- Elaboration of a communication strategy based on a rights-oriented approach and the implementation of an integrated communication plan, aimed principally at obtaining a change in family and community behaviour, and good management of civil status
- Elaboration of local plans (at the level of the 11 regions) and of a national action plan



- Organisation of special fairground registration hearings, for which the government took the decision to significantly reduce individual registration fees to a symbolic price (200 FCFA instead of 2,600 to 2,800 FCFA), and,
- Good collaboration with Plan Senegal and UNICEF (both technically and financially).

Excerpt from Minister Awa Guèye Kébé, Minister of Family, Social Development and National Solidarity, Government of Senegal

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC



GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRTH REGISTRATION

- Lawmakers have made registration of birth compulsory and indiscriminate (as stated in the Family Code).
- Each commune in CAR has a civil status centre with civil status registers.
- For larger communes, secondary centres were set up in addition to principal centres and are directly managed by a Civil Status Registrar.
- Registration of a child in school is tied to the provision of a birth act. The measure also applies to the taking of various exams.
- Seminars grouping mayors, municipal councillors, heads of groups and town hall clerks were held to exchange birth registration experiences.
- Cooperation through itinerant court hearings by magistrates to facilitate the registration of births and issue statutory declarations.
- Decentralisation, involvement of ward heads, villages and groups in the keeping of cards and books for the registration of all births in their respective localities. The information is then transmitted to their respective mayors.
- Community development workers are provided with bicycles to do door-to-door registration of new births. The data collected are immediately transmitted to the registrar of the relevant locality.
- As part of the CAR-UNICEF cooperation, civil status registers were printed and availed at no cost to territorial communities with a view to reducing costs involved in the issuance of birth acts.
- Periodic training seminars for civil status clerks and other stakeholders were contributed.
- Birth registration data at national level were disseminated to take stock of the extent of the problem.
- Registration and issuance of birth acts to children belonging to the Pygmy minority in rural areas.

Day Two

The second day of the conference was opened with a statement from representatives of the children and young people's group, followed by a regional overview of birth registration by the regional directors of the conference partners: UNFPA, UNICEF and Plan. The rest of the day was spent with participants working in self-selected interest groups to consider a set of "hot issues" in birth registration in the region. [See the section on "Issues, Difficulties and Solutions" for a description of the activity and outcomes.]

I learned to ...

... understand and respect the views and work of other stakeholders and incorporated these into future strategies.

Participant Evaluation Comment

We are aware of the consequences of non-registration of children, where no African country today can give its population with certainty because it does not have a reliable civil status system. An unregistered child is an unidentified child; and an unidentified child cannot fully enjoy her or his rights, especially the right to go to school. Non-registration of children leads to their easy enrolment into conflicts.

Therefore we must develop together an action synergy to meet the challenge of registering every child at birth.

Excerpt from the Children and Young People's Group

Regional Overview on Birth Registration

The development of birth registration faces two major obstacles. First, civil status registration systems are mostly deficient for structural and functional reasons. Second, civil status statistics are unreliable, which means they cannot be used to analyse natural population movements. It is estimated that hardly 50% of births and between 20 and 30% of deaths are registered. Civil status systems must therefore be improved.

Several steps have been taken with UNFPA involvement over many years, for example:

- Observation of demographic and civil status systems (1974)
- First ad hoc commission on civil status (1978)
- Second ad hoc commission of Central Africa Customs and Economic Union (UDEAC) on civil status (Yaoundé, 1979)
- Training seminars (Bangui and Cotonou, 1980)
- Seminar on civil status in the CILSS countries, set up by CERPOD in Bamako, December 1990, and
- Workshops organized internationally on all continents between 1991 and 1995.

In the long term, such actions must result in the setting up of permanent and consistent civil status registration, and in the establishment and regular publishing of civil status statistics. This means that in the short term, the civil status system must be improved in pilot areas. Collection and reliable birth and death statistics elaboration must then be improved in the same areas.

Excerpt from Andre Mayouya, UNFPA Representative in Angola and Country Director for Sao Tome and Principe

The birth registration campaign was launched on 16 June 2003 on the occasion of the Day of the African Child, an event staged to promote birth registration in 24 countries of West and Central Africa. In Mali, the event was launched by President Amadou Toumani Touré and his government, and Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF regional offices.

Leaders and political executives showed a real involvement in all countries. Several examples demonstrate the variety of approaches taken in different countries:

- In Democratic Republic of Congo, President Kabila announced a media campaign and social mobilisation actions in the 24 districts of Kinshasa and 11 provinces. The DRC's strategy was based on door-to-door action and the creation of auxiliary civil status offices.
- In Ivory Coast, the President of the Republic launched the event along with the Children's Parliament and the NGO Forum. The main action was fairground hearings in the whole country - including zones out of government control - thanks to a partnership with NGOs.
- A cross-ministry committee and a group of NGOs started the event in Liberia, where national talks were held involving the Children's Parliament, including those from displaced persons camps. Messages were printed on football match tickets to help distribute the information.
- The launching in Sierra Leone was celebrated by the Vice-President and UN agencies. It consisted of special sessions in Parliament and a media campaign, and two days of free birth registration for all children aged 0-18 in 14 districts.
- Guinea held actions for refugees, displaced people, reception communities and women who need special protection through its Health, Early-Learning and Children's Protection Centres.
- Nigeria (with a 28% coverage rate) announced the registration of all new-born babies in two states and the training of 308 volunteers.
- In Ghana, which provided free registration, the responsibilities of some districts were extended to other districts without coverage. Sensitisation actions were also held in 40 communities.
- Equatorial Guinea also worked on a sensitisation campaign in primary schools, through community leaders and on TV.
- Benin concentrated on a national radio campaign, involving 14 radio stations and airing 378 commercials.
- In Senegal, the highest political executives were involved. Ministries worked with local communities to elaborate local plans. Thanks to fairground hearings, some localities reached the aim of 100%.
- Central African Republic worked on involvement at all levels: e.g., neighbourhood, village and group chiefs, midwives, mayors and magistrates. Special attention was given to the Pygmy minority.

Questionnaires were sent to all countries for an in-depth analysis. Response rate was 100%, and two consultants analysed the data to get a better evaluation of the situation by country and by region, creating a discussion basis for this Dakar conference. Beyond the campaign, the situation in the countries of the region calls for:

- National action plans
- Adaptation and enforcement of legislation
- Appropriate levels of resources
- Getting closer to communities, and
- Relying on civil society in emergency situations

Excerpt from Theophane Nikyema, Deputy Regional Director UNICEF

The extent of the birth registration problem clearly shows that no one government, institution or organisation can resolve the situation. That is why it is essential that all stakeholders should work together to ensure that all children in Africa have their births registered, the starting point for an identity and citizenship. A perfect example of such partnership is the one in Asia between Plan, UNICEF, the governments of the concerned countries, communities, and representatives of civil society. This alliance resulted in more than seven million children being registered and the setting up or rejuvenation of effective functional registration systems in many Southeast Asian countries.

That is why, for Plan and our partners from UNICEF, UNFPA and the governments of our programme countries, it seems essential that we broaden this partnership at all levels:

- At the community level, all stakeholders should play their roles: parents, religious and community leaders, local government, NGOs and associations.
- At the national level, cooperation between state structures at national and local levels (municipalities, local, district), NGOs, national and international organisations is essential.
- At the international level, the cooperation of governments, national and international organisations, to put an end to child trafficking, in which most victims are unregistered children, is still a challenge.

This partnership in West and Central Africa is already ongoing and the celebration of the Day of the African Child on 16 June 2003 in Bamako is a perfect illustration of this.

NGOs and governments can work together to great effect. But many other organisations and individuals can play roles in informing parents about the importance of birth registration. Nurses, doctors, midwives and traditional birth attendants can remind mothers to register their babies. Village chiefs, teachers, religious and other community leaders can help break down barriers that prevent parents from registering their children. And, of course, our colleagues in the media can help too, by publicizing the argument for registration and informing their audiences how to go about registering a birth.

Plan's years of working closely with children themselves has shown that they can be some of the best advocates for their own rights. Plan's Child-Centred Community Development approach has shown that, when supported, children are more than ready to exercise and demand their rights, and are well placed to persuade their parents to register them if they were not registered at birth and to register new babies when they are born.

Regarding future challenges, I would like to stress these:

- Awareness-raising to increase the demand and support for registration and overall knowledge of children's rights among government officials, community leaders, parents, children and young people.
- Support to government for the creation of more effective government laws where they do not exist and the strengthening of structures where they do exist.
- Enhancing the technical capacity of government officials and other relevant parties to undertake birth registration.
- The resolution of issues relating to the lack of adequate human and/or material resources.
- Grassroots networking and local-level initiatives to bring the issue of registration as close to communities as possible.
- Incorporation of birth registration across our other development programmes.
- Support from the private sector, namely national and international companies, for the mobilization of the required resources for funding the civil registration system. This is an essential tool for market studies, in itself essential for investment decisions.

Excerpt from John Chaloner, Regional Director, Plan West Africa Regional Office

COTE D'IVOIRE



GOOD PRACTICES IN BIRTH REGISTRATION

Itinerant Court Sessions

When the birth of a person is not declared within the legal timeframe, the person - or his or her parents if a minor - petition the court of the place of birth to obtain a statutory declaration. But because many parents fail to use this procedure for various reasons, their children are left without a birth certificate. Therefore, itinerant sessions bring the court closer to populations to deliver statutory declarations of birth acts to persons whose births were not declared within the legal timeframe.

The court is composed of a magistrate of the bench, a public prosecutor and a court registrar. A doctor and a civil status worker are generally added to these personnel. The former is responsible for determining the physiological age of the applicant, while the latter is in charge of entering in civil status registers the rulings for future issuance of acts.

Based on their itinerant nature, these sessions give populations living in areas remote from cities access to justice. Furthermore, because they last several days, itinerant sessions enable a given locality to solve all, or if not, at least a substantial part, of the birth act cases in the locality. Despite these advantages, the recourse to itinerant sessions is, however, limited due to insufficient magistrates whose absence from the bench for several days could disrupt the smooth functioning of the court.

Day Three

The third day of the conference began with a panel session on effective birth registration systems, with a focus on some challenges and perspectives in decentralisation. The day ended with a presentation and another panel on learning from others' experiences. Participants spent the time between these sessions in stakeholder groups, discussing and agreeing statements of their particular perspectives on issues of birth registration. [See the section on "Stakeholder Statements on Birth Registration" for the outcomes.]

I learned that ...

... the problems of Francophone and Anglophone countries in the region are similar. The importance of registration was reactivated and we have more enthusiasm to work harder.

Participant Evaluation Comment

Effective Birth Registration Systems - Decentralization: Challenges and Perspectives

Challenges and Perspectives Regarding the Action of the Social Affairs Ministry of Cameroon

After the Day of the African Child Day in 2003, a pilot project was carried out by the North West Provincial Delegation for Social Affairs with the 'marginal' populations of Mboroboro nomadic shepherds. Their children are sometimes born in health centres, but mostly with the help of traditional midwives. Illiteracy among the Mboroboro is one of the highest in Cameroon. Therefore, many of their children are born and brought up without a birth certificate, hence their marginalization.

Characteristics of Civil Status Registration in Cameroon

- Every child can be registered, whether born in a health centre or not, whether he is abandoned or not.
- Ministers have to check that children are registered before being administered a sacrament, even if it means they have to declare them on their own.
- Late birth registration is possible.
- There is a fine against authorized persons who do not declare a birth.
- Birth registration, whether late or not, is free.
- The system is decentralized.

Challenges

- Not enough civil status centres; some have not been created
- Lack of equipment in existing centres
- Lack of interest in the concerned population
- Lack of knowledge about laws regarding birth registration
- Nomadic life, which is harmful for preservation of birth certificates
- Lack of motivation among civil status officers, and
- Traditional jurisdictions which could make auxiliary judgements easier do not work.

Perspectives

A birth registration seminar in Banjoun in September 2003 with UNICEF and Plan Cameroon came up with a national action plan (2004-07) with the following aims:

- Modification of various existing laws
- Various measures to bring community jurisdictions closer together
- Census of existing civil status centres and creation of a civil status map
- Improving civil status services and procedures to get auxiliary judgments
- Creating special civil status centres for 'marginal' populations
- Various measures to ensure that civil status centres work on a permanent basis
- Various measures to ensure that traditional jurisdictions work on a permanent basis, and Cameroon
- Ensuring all persons concerned (traditional midwives, teachers, school managers, associations and NGO executives) participate in sensitizing populations and identifying unregistered children.

The birth registration rate in Cameroon is now 79% and should improve over the coming years as the aforementioned plan is implemented.

Excerpt from Yossa Andre, North West Provincial Delegate, Ministry of Social Affairs, Bamenda City,

Recommendations from the Preparatory Consulting Report for the First West and Central Africa Birth Registration Conference

Involvement of Authorities - Involve African countries and make them aware that registering civil status data is indispensable. A Decade of Civil Registration in Africa and other third world countries may be considered.

Modernization of Archiving Locations - Regional and departmental capitals must have facilities for proper register storage, security and accessibility. Information confidentiality must be ensured.

Status of Civil Status Agents - Civil status agents must have a particular status and a proper education to manage principal and secondary civil status centres with more responsibility.

Technical and Administrative Management Structure - An autonomous technical and administrative committee must manage all civil status centres. It would be responsible for managing receipts and documents, and making the link between populations and administration.

Ministerial Coordination Structure - The civil status system should be inspected twice a year by the ministries in charge (e.g., justice, economy, public health and territorial administration) with the help of the technical management structure.

Financing the Civil Status System - The management structure of the civil status system must draw its financial autonomy from receipts from civil status operations. It must have a budget for printing documents and logistical resources to deliver them.

Presentation of Certificate and Declaration Registers - Although section registers seem to be quite adapted to third world countries, collecting and storing them is still an issue. Ideally, the whole civil status system should be computerised.

Population Sensitisation - Sensitisation campaigns should aim simultaneously at authorities, who must be aware of the stakes behind civil status registration, civil status officers involved in collecting this information, and populations from which the data originate.

Civil Status Computerisation - Although only statistics-oriented civil status data can be entirely computerised, there is an obvious need for human and equipment resources. Full-time teams must be appointed for keying in information.

Civil Status System Financing and Technical Assistance - The countries involved should be responsible for implementing and financing their civil status system. UN agencies and NGOs can only help technically and financially to improve the operation of the system.

Excerpt from Abdou Karim Diop, Consultant UNFPA

Excerpt from Dieh Mandiaye Ba Deme, Chief of Division of Civil Registration, Government of Senegal

Learning from Others - Birth Registration Practices from Other Regions

Ellen Mouravieff-Apostol, Representative and Former President of the NGO Committee on UNICEF:

During the 1990s - and in the wake of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in December 1989 - the international NGO community was increasingly concerned about various forms of child exploitation: sexual abuse, child prostitution, child labour, the involvement of children in armed conflict and others. In addressing these issues, the NGO Committee on UNICEF, a body of some 150 international NGOs founded in 1952, attempted to determine primary protection measures against such ills, and turned its attention to birth registration as a start.

Combining this concern with outreach to NGOs in developing regions of the world, the Committee held a Consultation on Unregistered Children in Bangkok, Thailand, in August 1996, with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and in cooperation with ASIANET, a child rights NGO which has since ceased its activities. The consultation included six countries: Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The Unregistered Children Project, however, only really went into gear when the Committee was able to join forces in 1988 with Plan International, which has since taken the lead in a determined and collegial effort with UNICEF and others to boost birth registration in Asia and in Africa as of 2002.

Jaap van der Straaten, Head of International Grants Management, Plan:

At the end of 1997, Plan was approached by Ellen Mouravieff-Apostol to help her with a project on birth registration in Southeast Asia, and the request happened to land on my desk. I had never realized that birth registration was a child right or was a problem, although I should have known better. My own family is an example of globalisation, vital events having occurred in Singapore (marriage) and in Indonesia, Philippines and the Netherlands (births). To provide one's children with a birth certificate is as obvious a must as it is to ensure they have had all their vaccinations.

I thought that the amount of money Ellen brought with her was insufficient, although we did not have much of an idea yet how big the problem actually was. Not much later we learned from UNICEF's 1998 Progress of Nations that Asia accounted for two-thirds of the 40 million children not registered each year. After a start with projects in the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam - always in close collaboration with the civil registrars general and UNICEF - we did not stop until every Asian country had been touched in one way or another. As a child rights and good governance issue, birth registration now registers higher on the agendas of governments and donors. So we found the extra money we needed. Most importantly, many civil registrars are now confident about the great importance of their work. We have seen a great cooperation network develop and it is great to see it now further envelop Africa!

Gopalan Balagopal, Senior Adviser, Child Protection, UNICEF, New York:

My introduction to birth registration came about while working with UNICEF Bangladesh in 1996. The State Party Report of Bangladesh had gone to the CRC Committee that year; the concluding observations included a strong paragraph calling attention to the fact that the right of identity of large numbers of children in that country was denied due to the limited registration of births. The Government of Bangladesh immediately sought the help of UNICEF to find a solution to this. Our first response was to conduct a quick sample survey to estimate registration of births in selected urban and rural areas. The results confirmed the low rates of registration. Following this, UNICEF in Bangladesh initiated a series of activities, working with elected representatives in rural and urban areas to create understanding of the importance of registration and to strengthen birth registration systems. I have continued my association with the birth registration issues after coming to UNICEF Headquarters in 2000, coordinating work now being undertaken worldwide in partnership with governments, other UN agencies and NGOs, including Plan.

The impact of birth registration activities that the partnership has undertaken has resulted in over 80 UNICEF country offices now working on strengthening birth registration. The publication of a flagship Innocenti Digest on birth registration, major regional meetings in Asia, East and West Africa, the observation of the African Day of the Child on the theme of birth registration, and the integration of birth registration with other interventions for children like immunization, have all facilitated a rapid expansion of attention to the issue. The importance of registration in the context of orphans, conflict and displaced populations is also being increasingly recognized. All of these efforts will hopefully result in near universal registration of births in the not too distant future.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA



GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRTH REGISTRATION

Itinerant Court Sessions

Concerning innovative practices in birth registration in Equatorial Guinea, in January 2003 the first Conference on Legal State for the Consolidation of the State of Right was celebrated.

In the Final Declaration of the January 2003 National Conference on the State of Right, four recommendations were pronounced regarding the legal protection of minors:

- The creation of a law to protect women and children (Family Code)
- The creation of a special court for minors
- The expansion of registration services to the level of municipalities, and
- The gratuity of all registration acts within a period of 30 days.

At present, a document which compiles existing legal dispositions on birth registration, and an evaluation of the existing structures of the department of the registrar and its personnel is being redacted.

In terms of birth registration, the recommendations of the National Conference clearly imply a reform of the Registration Law, a wide re-organization of the registration system in the Civil Registrar and training of personnel in charge of registration. It is proposed to adopt a law on registration without penalties.

Further, there are concrete recommendations and objectives related to a National Plan of Action on Birth Registration. Within this context - taking into consideration the organizational structure (national, regional, provincial and municipal) - a cooperation strategy is to be implemented to establish a network with social structures and entities.

Day Four

The participants spent the fourth day working in their country delegation groups to discuss and define a set of national-level priorities to take forward in follow up to the conference. This provided an opportunity for colleagues representing different stakeholder groups to come together as a national team, which will be able to look back at the priorities they decided on to assess their progress in the future. [See the section on "Country Priorities" for the outcomes.]

I learned about ...

... the different processes in country systems and best practices of birth registration implementation.

Participant Evaluation Comment

GAMBIA**GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRTH REGISTRATION**

A mobile birth registration campaign for children under five, combined with mass dipping of mosquito nets, was conducted in Lower River Division (LRD) in The Gambia during one week in May 2003. This was the first time that access to the birth registration process and the annual dipping of mosquito nets had been combined. The campaign targeted a population of 295,307 in 787 villages located in two of the most impoverished UNICEF-assisted divisions, Lower River and Central River, where child and maternal mortality rates are high.

Following the success of the birth registration mass campaign in LRD, a mini-campaign was conducted in Banjul and Kanifing Municipality on 16 June as part of the Day of the African Child (DAC) Commemoration. The theme for DAC 2003 was "Birth Registration" and the commemoration took a participatory, hands-on approach in the form of mini-birth registration campaigns in the eight electoral districts of Banjul and Kanifing Municipality. Adolescents participated in the campaign as social mobilisers and also as birth registration clerks following a one-day training conducted by staff of the Birth Registration Unit of the Department of State for Health.

Over a period of ten days, a total of 7,860 children under five were registered in LRD. This compared with 512 children registered in the eight months prior to the campaign. As a result, the coverage of registered children increased over five-fold in LRD, from a baseline of 11.2% to 61%. During the mini-campaign in Banjul and Kanifing Municipality, in a single day 3,200 children under five were registered and issued with birth certificates, compared to a daily average of 29 birth registrations before the campaign.

Given the successful experience in Lower River Division, the Day of the African Child Commemoration and the size of the country, campaigning is clearly a strategy that yields results. Therefore, mobile birth registration campaigns will be used in future to reduce the number of children under five whose rights to birth registration have not been fulfilled.

Day Five

The first part of the final half-day session saw the conference hall filled with participants moving from one country exhibit to the next, viewing and discussing their colleagues' country priorities. This was followed by the conference organisers' proposing a regional plan of action to follow up the conference. [See the section on "Regional Action Plan" for the outcomes.]

I learned about ...

... country situations, needs and priorities, and the way forward for adoption, implementation and evaluation of birth registration methods.

Participant Evaluation Comment

The proposal was enthusiastically received by participants, who were particularly excited with the suggestion that "**in 2005 there should be free registration for all children aged 0 to 18 in the 24 countries for one year**".

The conference was closed with a series of speeches by representatives of various stakeholder groups.



Closing

Facing the challenge that represents birth registration in our countries, we propose the following actions to make effective the right to a nationality.

We aim at keeping up our activities with a reinforcement of sensitisation initiatives on the importance of birth registration and the process of its achievement. We will keep on meeting the populations, communities, leaders and media to inform them about how to get a birth certificate which is considered to be the life passport. These sensitisations will be strengthened through radio, television and the written press. Door-to-door campaigns and communication methods like drama and sketches will allow us to strengthen the census of non-declared children in our villages, districts, cities and countries.

We will work with authorities and decision-makers to ensure the gratuity of birth registration for all the children. With our administrative and political authorities, we will insist on the necessity and urgency of the building and equipment of hospitals



and birth registration centres in the countries. We will also insist on the appointment of well-trained intermediate persons to ensure registration in hospitals and in villages. We think it is important to revise the preservation system for declarations and we also need to computerize the registration system.

Finally, we believe in a frank collaboration between children's associations, NGOs, governments and international institutions for the deliverance of a life passport for each child and each citizen.

Excerpt from the Children and Young People's Group

All national coalitions and NGOs who belong to CONAFE will make birth registration a priority action in our strategic objectives. Our national coalitions will involve themselves with governments, UNICEF, Plan, UNFPA and other actors' national offices to reach the objectives set by the conclusions of the current conference. We will advocate to customary, religious and political authorities through traditional communication channels. As a proximity actor, we will help in holding fairground birth registration hearings.

Excerpt from Moussa Sissoko - CONAFE Representative

The state of the art and national priorities as they were presented to us show that the situation is still far from being satisfactory. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Central Africa Customs and Economic Union (UDEAC) - which was later to become the Central Africa Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) - made civil status systems one of its priority issues.

As early as 1970, UDEAC undertook an overall basic demographic data collection strategy, centred on the permanent implementation of the classical collection of demographic data and the execution of periodical censuses, completed by a satisfying registration of civil status data. Subsequently, an ad hoc civil status commission of UDEAC was created. A schema for civil status data registration was elaborated, as well as a training manual for civil status staff. This commission proposed these solutions:

- Simplification of registration procedures
- Training of the civil status staff
- Institution of a sedentary civil status, along with an itinerant civil status in rural regions
- Follow-up use of civil status data, and
- Information and education of populations.

You can notice that our conference, although especially interested in the issue of birth registration, identified similar solutions.

Excerpt from Dieudonne Bm'Niyat Bangamboulou CEMAC Representative

The essential aim of the civil status registration system is to help identify every individual living on the national territory. Implementing a satisfactory system must therefore simultaneously serve the administration's and individuals' interests. By providing knowledge about the population's composition by age and sex, complete birth registration makes it easier to identify needs to be satisfied in terms of schooling and health services.

Regarding the sensitisation messages you will have to elaborate in your respective countries, it is advisable to remember that while informing populations, you should insist with the civil state on the links between birth registration and the creation of schools, community clinics, maternity hospitals and other social centres, that is, every structure indispensable for elaborating political and social programmes.

Excerpt from Bintou Sanogoh, Director, UNFPA Regional Country Technical Support Office

Key word for the closing remark, February 27th 2004

Your Excellency, the director of cabinet of the ministry of family, social development and national solidarity,
 Your excellencies ministers of Ghana, Niger, Senegal and Togo
 Colleagues from UNICEF and UNFPA
 The representative of African Movement of Working Children and Youth
 The NGO Committee on UNICEF
 Children and youth
 Plan colleagues
 Country delegations
 Ladies and gentlemen
 Honorable guests

I am very pleased to be here to thank you all for the hard work done during these five days, particularly for all your energy and enthusiasm.

We started this conference with 7 objectives including:

- To assess the situation of birth registration in countries of the region
- To increase awareness of on-going birth registration efforts
- To define country and regional priorities for birth registration

I'm happy to say that over these five days, we have achieved our objectives in the sense that we have:

Clear ideas about the way forward, that is to say, we have a clear global target, we have identified 8 important issues in the country assessment papers including:

- Awareness raising,
- The need for an appropriate legal framework, which is very important
- And political will of senior decision makers.

In addition, we are pleased that we have gained a better understanding of different stakeholders' perspectives, and most importantly we have a regional follow-up plan.

Plan priorities include:

- To ensure that all African children under 18 years are registered
- Advocate for free or at least minimal charge for birth registration
- To promote partnership at all levels (local, regional, national and international level). And it is important to note that we must include children in our partnerships as well as the artists we'll see tonight. Artists provide an important way of communicating - when I spoke with Madame Miriam Makeba she said, "we are ready to help, tell us what you want us to do."

Partnership

Plan is a grassroots organisation and partnership is very important for us. During this conference, we also agreed that no single institution or organization could solve the issue of unregistered children. I am happy to see in almost all the country priorities the important role of partnership. Let's put our efforts and resources together to ensure the registration of all African children.

Let's look upon our partnership as an alliance for birth registration. We are accountable to children so let's be accountable for the issues we have discussed. The international board of Plan is committed to delivering on this. We have a very good starting point, common aspirations, common willingness and common passion. What are we waiting for?

In closing, I would like to thank the government of Senegal for hosting this important event and the support they are providing. Thank you to UNICEF and UNFPA for our fruitful partnership - long may it continue!
 I thank you very much for listening to me.

Excerpt from Steinar Sivertsen, International Board Chair, Plan

For the first time in Western and Central Africa, more than 200 participants from 24 countries, social and human sciences experts, speakers from community context, government and non-governmental organisation representatives, development and cooperation agencies, have met to analyse the situation of birth registration and involve themselves in concrete actions to fight against the non-registration of children.

The regional offices of Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF have submitted for your attention a regional plan where the four main threads of action offered serve as a complement to your national plans:

- Sensitisation and mobilisation of governments, NGOs and development partners
- Technical support to groups of countries facing similar issues
- Exchanges of experiences, and
- Follow-up to this conference.

Excerpt from Rima Salah, Regional Director, UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office

The Journalists' Appeal

- Considering that the birth certificate is a basic document demonstrating the legal existence of a person
- Considering that birth registration is an undeniable right of the child and an imperative duty of parents, society and of States
- Considering that 17 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa, representing 70% of births in 2000 were not registered
- Considering that this fact is related to poverty, ignorance, neglect and lack of knowledge on the rights of the child
- Considering that administrative constraints constitute an obstacle to the birth registration process, and
- Considering that effective birth registration can help with reliable demographic data in development planning,

We, the journalists and communicators of West and Central Africa, who met at the First West and Central Africa Birth Registration Conference, are launching this pressing and solemn appeal:

To governments

- To make birth registration a priority in all States
- To undertake a review of laws to facilitate the process of birth registration
- To collaborate with the media, authorities and development partners on the issue of birth registration
- To remove constraints related to the acquisition of the birth certificate (costs and complex procedures)
- To take necessary measures to remove all obstacles in the process of birth registration
- To set up and properly equip adequate birth registration centres at all levels of society, and
- To set aside days, weeks or months to sensitise the population on the need to register births in all countries.

To all religious leaders

- To include birth registration themes in the preaching of sermons, and
- To sensitise their congregations to change their negative attitudes and behaviour towards birth registration at collective and individual levels.

To opinion leaders and civil society

- To promote sensitisation initiatives on birth registration at all levels
- To support any action that is undertaken by political and administrative authorities, and
- To denounce any obstacle to the normal process of birth registration.

To partners in development

- To give the necessary support to sensitisation programmes on birth registration
- To support structures or organisations whose objective is to promote birth registration, and
- To organize training sessions for stakeholders in the birth registration process (civil society, NGOs, associations, religious communities and the media)

To the media

- To promote sensitisation activities on birth registration, and
- To support sensitisation programmes on birth registration.

To parents and guardians of children

- To carefully keep the birth certificates of their children and wards.

Besides this, we encourage children to organise themselves into associations or clubs to promote their rights, especially that of being registered at birth and to encourage their peers to get involved in the activities of such associations, and to participate in the birth registration process as much as possible.

GUINEA



GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRTH REGISTRATION

Following the decision of the African Union to dedicate the 16 June 2003 Day of the African Child to birth registration, the Republic of Guinea launched a process toward claiming this right stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, both ratified by Guinea. The strategy adopted consisted of public awareness-building through community and religious leaders, school and university students. To this end, the government was especially supported by UNICEF and Plan Guinea.

Stamp duties for the delivery of birth extracts by local governments were standardised. The broad dissemination of Order 5330/MEF/99 of 1999 stating that the delivery of birth extracts is FG 1,000 superseding illegal taxes was a heavy blow on unsound practices. After the issuance of Orders 019/PRG and 092/PRG of 1990, the office of Civil Status Registrar was henceforth assumed by Mayors and Development Rural Community chairpersons as part of decentralisation.

These statutes authorised the creation of secondary civil status centres, which brings the administration and populations closer. The Fast Birth Registration Programme opened eight secondary centres in 2003. A Steering Inter-sectoral Committee was set up to plan, harmonise interventions and coordinate efforts. These various arrangements guaranteed the sustainability of the Fast Birth Registration Programme.

Some outcomes included:

- Increased awareness of 3,000 elected officials, civil status registrars, religious and community leaders; 1,800 fieldworkers were able to fill statutory declarations forms correctly.
- A total of 114 children MPs have visited prefectures to build awareness of parents and communities.
- A total of 8,500 school and university students have formed "birth registration clubs" and visited 250 development rural communities out of the existing 303.
- The campaign has registered 85,700 children aged 0-15, accounting for 23% of estimated births in 2003.
- A total of 7,000 birth registers were printed and distributed to decentralised communities. They henceforth bear "Marginal Comments" for the public administration to follow up the evolution of the child in terms of citizenship.
- To address the problem of birth extract collection, the government has initiated and popularised "village books" whose holders act as assistants to administrative departments. A total of 10,000 village books are available, while 800 voluntary officers were trained.
- All refugee children born in Guinea were issued birth declaration certificates at no cost with the support of partners (UNHCR, UNICEF, Plan Guinea). A total of 3,300 refugee children were registered at birth in the prefecture of Nzerekore since June 2002.

Issues, Difficulties and Solutions

The conference facilitators and organisers reviewed the 24 Country Assessment Papers and drew out 16 issues that were common to some countries and specific to certain ones. These were then grouped around a set of themes: awareness, systems, institutions, cooperation and partnerships, special situations, gender, and society and culture. When these themes and issues were presented to the conference participants, the group including the ministers from several countries suggested that another theme and issue should be added - political will. Working in self-selected groups of their own interest, participants considered difficulties in addressing "their issue" and highlighted possible solutions. Note that no participants opted to discuss issues 12, 13 and 16.

I learned to ...

... the potential of partnerships and networking in achieving the goal of universal birth registration in the region.

Participant Evaluation Comment

Issues

Awareness

- Awareness of importance of birth registration and child rights (population, government and media)
- Public awareness of birth registration procedures

Systems

- Legal frameworks and birth registration practice (mismatch, enforcement)
- Birth registration records (consistency of practice, computerization, back-up, storage, privacy)
- National vital statistics (availability, use, link with birth registration data, link with national planning)

Institutions

- Capacity (institutional, staff, community, youth)
- Registration centres (access, distance, equipment and materials, resources, mobile registration)
- Cost (birth delivery in health centres, late registration)

Cooperation and Partnerships

- Inter-sectoral integration of birth registration with other programmes like health, education and others
- National and international agency cooperation (long-term partnerships, private sector)

Special Situations

- Children in difficult circumstances
- Conflict situations
- Migratory groups

Gender

- Gender discrimination (against girl children and also women registering children)

Society and Culture

- Role of religious and communal leaders
- Traditional and cultural beliefs and practices

Political Will

- Political Will

Difficulties and Solutions

Issue 1: Awareness of importance of birth registration and child rights (population, government and media)

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignorance of laws governing birth registration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt and translate key texts into local languages • Dissemination of texts • Training of birth registration agents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remoteness of birth registration centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locating birth registration centres closer to populations • Involve opinion leaders and community-based associations in birth registration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population does not have access to media (Radio, TV, electricity), and inadequate communication tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop awareness messages on birth registration (radio and TV spots, press) • Organize and train communicators on the birth registration system • Use media like theatre, specials and sketches • Adapt communication tools to the culture of target groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth certificate is expensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free birth registration
<i>Government-related</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws not enforced and not disseminated to birth registration actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforcement of Conventions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicting birth registration related texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise decentralization laws in the different countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disfunctioning of birth registration centres (lack of registers, forms, human and logistical resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen and broaden the scope of partnership to make civil registry systems more effective
<i>Media-related</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remoteness of media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and reinforce community radio stations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messages are conveyed to local population in foreign languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of local languages and training of local communication persons

Issue 2: Public awareness of birth registration procedures

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisions for birth registration exist in the law, but are not well-known by all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures in official languages must be made available at all levels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penalties related to certain procedures (e.g., late registration) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cancel or reduce penalties • There should be some sort of financial encouragement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of collaboration between birth registration actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train, recycle and raise awareness on partnership for all birth registration actors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures for birth registration are not known by parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow parents to have better knowledge of procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of the population is illiterate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversify awareness raising tools that exist in local languages • Identify community members who can disseminate information among those who cannot read by using interpersonal communication (e.g., talk sessions) • Other channels of information, e.g., radio • Raise pupils' awareness to allow them to become awareness-raisers in the families

Issue 3: Legal frameworks and birth registration practice (mismatch, enforcement)

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deadlines for registering children are too tight in some countries (for example, 3, 30 or 45 days) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deadlines should be between three (minimum) and six months (maximum); laws should be amended accordingly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No enforcement of legal provisions (e.g., acts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal provisions should be enforced (e.g., acts)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of coordination mechanisms between ministers in charge of registering births 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A national coordination mechanism should be set up in collaboration with all ministries involved (e.g., Interior, Justice, Family, Social Affairs, Health, Finance, Foreign Affairs and Education)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some laws governing birth registration are archaic (legal provisions like sanctions are not enforced) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All laws governing birth registration should be updated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws governing birth registration are inconsistent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These need to be codified

Issue 4: Birth registration records (consistency of practice, computerization, back-up, storage, privacy)

Difficulties	Solutions
Practices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth registration practices should be harmonized (birth registration data is centralized; practices differ (at local and central or federal levels)) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal frameworks should be harmonized
Computerization	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of logistics equipment • Lack of knowledge and mastery of computer use • Lack of human resources • Mismatch with legal framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate financial support to acquire equipment and train personnel • Legal framework to be adapted to computerization
Back-up and Data Storage	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bad quality of storage infrastructure, equipment and conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support to acquire appropriate equipment
Confidentiality	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to birth registration data • Unsafe storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure confidentiality by acquiring appropriate equipment

Issue 5: National vital statistics (availability, use, link with birth registration data, link with national planning)

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concepts, definitions and indicators not concepts and indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a national mechanism for harmonizing harmonized enough
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of links between vital statistics and birth registration data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve and harmonize data collection tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No breakdown of existing data by area, boys and girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take breakdown of data in the design and terms of reference of data collection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data on births at local level not available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disseminate data on births across all countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of link between statistical and legal mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a coordination mechanism between statistics, justice and interior ministries for data collection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of collaboration between statistics offices and ministries of interior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a coordination mechanism for statistical activities at government level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistency of available data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness raising and training of birth registration personnel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient funding for collection of statistical and civil registry data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop programmes; carry out specific studies • Give enough resources to civil registry departments

Issue 6: Capacity (institutional, staff, community, youth)

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At central level, lack of resources (financial, material, logistics) and no synergy in the interventions of different departments 	
Human resources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth registration personnel not specialized and without special status • Low education level, status not valued, not well-known • Insufficient personnel • Lack of a specialized training structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce birth registration personnel capacities • Regional training centre • Give special status to civil registry agents • Support in equipment and supplies (e.g., registers, computers, logistics)
Community and youth	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignorance of laws and procedures • Linguistic barriers • Sex-based discrimination • Youth and young people not involved enough 	

Issue 7: Registration centres (access, distance, equipment and materials, resources, mobile registration)

Difficulties	Solutions
Access and Distance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads in poor shape • Remoteness of centres • Some areas are landlocked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open one registration centre in each village • Create mobile birth registration centres (in clusters of 15) • Reinforce the programme for road maintenance
Equipment and Material	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of registers and/or birth registration forms • Lack or insufficient storage, materials and equipment • Lack of premises for registration agents in villages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate more funds for acquisition of registers and forms • Equip civil registration centres with furniture and cupboards • Build, rehabilitate and equip birth registration centres in villages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of means of transportation • Lack of a computerized registration system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computerize main registration centres • Adequate means of transportation for outreach registration by agents
Resources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient human resources • Insufficient motivation of birth registration agents • Lack of training and retraining for civil registration agents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form, recycle and follow agents during the establishment of the civil status system • Hire civil registry agents • Increase budgets allocated to registration staff
Integration with Other Domains	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth registration not integrated with other development programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open birth registration centres in health centres • Raise teachers' and headmasters' awareness on the importance of helping parents to register children who do not have birth certificates • Integrate birth registration with health agents' strategies (e.g., immunization days)

Issue 8: Cost (birth delivery in health centres, late registration)

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Very) low salaries and corruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater financial involvement from the state and better salaries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistence of negative traditional practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness-raising
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penalties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspension during birth registration campaign • Amount should be reduced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad hoc solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase and harmonize registration deadlines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach activities • Open secondary registration centres • Mobile registration

Issue 9: Inter-sectoral integration of birth registration with other programmes like health, education and others

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health agents do not show much interest in birth registration and therefore do not help much with addressing the issue of late registration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience has shown that it is possible to train health staff to help parents fill in registration forms. Ghana, where this type of intervention is currently being envisaged, is a good illustration of the involvement of health staff.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education is not an “opened door,” but appears as a repressive tool, especially in the case of unregistered children, who are expelled from the school system because they are not registered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration deadlines should be changed. This would give schools (in cooperation with local registration authorities) an active role in providing guidance to children and parents on registration or late registration.

Issue 10: National and international agency cooperation (long-term partnerships, private sector)

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different mandates and objectives for intergovernmental organisations and international organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote national coalitions (devise national action plans)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of coordination between ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a framework for networking and coordination of government actors’ efforts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NGOs having difficulties to understand how they can access funding; Donors making all decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framework should be developed to allow all stakeholders to talk together
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of coordination of birth registration players efforts both at micro and macro levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to develop mechanisms for funding, monitoring and evaluation of national campaigns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of a directory of all players and donors in the area of birth registration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a directory for all players and donors in the area of birth registration

Issue 11: Children in difficult circumstances

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures • Lack of family guidance, filiations issues • Identity issues • Children are mobile • Economic barriers • Dysfunction of the civil registry system • Social exclusion • Ignorance • Difficulties in accessing civil registration centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the legal framework by including provisions on children in difficult circumstances • Social census and surveys • Social census and surveys • Regularize their situation by EMC EQ • Providing guidance to children in difficult circumstances • Orientation; revise functioning of the civil system • Free birth registration • Awareness-raising • Bring civil registration centres closer to populations

Issue 12: Conflict situations

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in priority needs of people. Most programmes addressing needs (physical) are donor driven. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of birth registration into other emergency interventions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass movement of population resulting in internally-displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisional registration of unaccompanied children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total breakdown of administrative and structural systems - personnel are either lost or moved out of conflict areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of humanitarian workers on emergency birth registration, which registrar general could use to issue birth certificates after conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of unaccompanied children and resultant lack of witnesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy with donors to provide support for birth registration during conflict

Issue 14: Gender discrimination (against girl children and also women registering children)

Difficulties	Solutions
<i>Socio-cultural</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher registration rates among boys • Registration often done by men (any woman who does it is excluded) • Most civil registrars are men • Dowry is perceived as a way of “buying” women, which makes them men’s property • Women who are unmarried and living in a couple must first get the consent of their “friend” before registering their child with the civil registrar • Enduring traditional practices: when a man “inherits” his brother’s wife after his death, he is generally reluctant to register any subsequent child, because his name would be mentioned in the birth certificate as the name of the child’s father 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African societies must integrate in their customs and accept that women can register births without being marginalised • Discrimination between girls and boys must be fought against (teach parents that children are equal) • Favour and encourage the emergence of women as OEC • Change rules regarding marriage conditions and dowry: in countries where it still exists, it must be symbolic
<i>Legal</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some countries, birth registration cannot be done if the informant cannot give the name of the child’s father. To give just one example, these laws tend to victimize women who have been raped by many unidentified individuals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal reform to promote easy access to birth registration for all • Revise procedural framework for birth registration

Issue 15: Role of religious and communal leaders

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illiteracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy training • Appoint a community secretary (on a voluntary basis) who could help with birth registration in the community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of the importance of birth registration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness campaign using different channels and means of communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enduring social traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide communities and populations with information on the evolution of modern society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low income of citizens is a constraint to leaders’ actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce birth registration costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-involvement of leaders in birth registration procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater involvement of leaders for birth registration in collaboration with local birth registration authorities

Issue 17: Political will

Difficulties	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Civil registration does not seem to come as a priority on the development agenda of countries on account of severely limited resources• The issue of civil registry needs to be responded to, not only within the framework of children's rights, but also in the broader context of sustaining development efforts• All parties involved in civil registration issues (territorial administration, health, social affairs, women, finance) must develop and implement relevant mechanisms to raise awareness on the importance of the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organize and hold a conference for Heads of States and all Ministers involved in civil registration matters to harmonize the whole system

LIBERIA



GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRTH REGISTRATION

Liberia, one of Africa's oldest and least populous nations, has been beleaguered by war for 14 years. This period saw the deaths of over 250,000 persons, the migration of a significant number of its human resources, and the mass displacement of over 300,000 people.

As a consequence of the war, social services became unavailable, most if not all systems became paralyzed, the economy was left in shambles and according to the UNDP, Liberia ranked high among countries with the worst Human Development Indexes. During this period that the country was plunged into turmoil, birth certificates were handwritten, thus leading to an uncontrollable wave of fraudulent production of certificates. It therefore became apparent that there was a need to curtail the aforementioned and as a remedy, the responsible bureau decided to computerize the production and printing of birth certificates. A company was contracted and has since been producing and printing the certificates. Because the company charged fees for services in US dollars, the Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Health, adjusted the cost of the birth certificates in the same currency. The public became vehemently opposed to this and outcry became prevalent.

In solidarity with the public, a human rights organization issued a lawsuit against the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare through the Bureau of Vital and Health Statistics to show just cause why Liberians should pay US dollars for birth certificates. After adjudication of the case, the court ruled that all fees related to birth registration be paid in local currency. The fees charged were the same across the board for all age categories.

As a further move to provide an attractive birth registration package, the Minister of Health unilaterally decided that no fee is charged for children under five years old. Since this decision was made in 1998, all birth certificates for children under five have been free. Although this scheme covers the entire the country, the lack of resources has been a serious impediment to take this to rural communities.

The only significant achievement that Liberia has made is free birth registration for children under five years old and for the indigent. Even though the birth certificates are computerized, thus controlling fraud, there is no readily retrievable database. Forms filled by applicants are the only records available and as a consequence, retrieving information is often a huge task.

Stakeholder Statements on Birth Registration

Ministers and Senior Officials

I. To improve the birth registration system, we commit ourselves to make birth registration and civil status management national priorities. Therefore, we commit ourselves to affect substantial resources to civil status registration centres in human, financial and material terms (in the national budget). We also commit ourselves to set up an efficient coordination, follow-up and evaluation machinery.

I learned to ...

... the range of partners and stakeholders involved in birth registration, and the importance of building strong partnerships in birth registration - not only with NGOs and UN agencies but also with community-based and civil society organisations, and children. I also learned about the need to motivate parents to register their children.

Participant Evaluation Comment

II. Regarding advocacy, we commit ourselves to:

1. Organize top-level meetings between government executives about birth registration and civil status management
2. Institutionalize days or weeks of birth registration, presided over by the top hierarchy (President or Prime Minister)
3. Create and publicize civil status focal points in various ministries, and
4. Present a national annual report about birth registration and civil status (which could be used by MAEP-NEPAD's African Peer Evaluation Machinery).

III. Regarding parents' motivation to go and register their children's birth, the Ministers and Senior Officials Group commits itself to:

1. Maintain free birth registration, whether it is done on time or late
2. Take measures to reduce the waiting time for issuance and dispatch of birth certificates to parents, and
3. Organize competitions to point out parents who are fastest to register the birth of their children.

IV. Regarding communication, the group commits itself to:

1. Involve high-level authorities in campaigns about birth registration and civil status
2. Decree that radio and TV spots and messages regarding birth registration and civil status should be aired for free, or at least subject to a substantial reduction, and
3. Use media to broadcast radio and TV programmes in national and local languages.

Members of Parliaments

We, Members of Parliaments, taking part in the First West and Central Africa Conference in on Birth Registration, convinced of the importance of registering children at birth for every acknowledgment of the citizen status and of belonging to a State, declare that MPs associated to local elected representatives must endorse a capital role to optimize birth registration in our respective countries, regarding machinery as well as registration coverage rate.

MPs' prerogatives are indeed:

1. Legislate, that is, initiate law proposals or law text amendments, and examine and adopt law projects and propositions, that gives them a legal disposition for every law clarification or reform that aims to eliminate disparities and to ensure that birth declaration and registration is free and remains so
2. Sensitise and inform populations about any question submitted to or taken by an MP. The MP must therefore get entirely involved in order to transmit accurate and effective information. In the same manner, he must collect the population's grievances about this question and forward them to the qualified structures, who must in turn ensure the improvement and efficiency of the registration machinery, and
3. Control the government's action through parliamentary instruments such as interpellation and hearing of the members of the government or administrations in charge, spoken and written questions or parliamentary inquiries, thus leveraging optimal results realization for birth registration.

Also, considering their natural role in the sensitisation and birth registration legalization process, MPs recommend that:

1. They take an effective part in national commissions in charge of the follow-up of child registration at birth, and
2. Their involvement be taken into account by development partners. The latter will have to apply themselves to make their capacity reinforcement easier, whether at the information level or at that of means to grant them easier access to sensitisation, information and motivation of their electors about the need and use for birth registration.

That is the price to pay if MPs and local elected representatives are to trigger in populations a surge in favor of birth registration, reminding them continuously that it is a pass for school attendance, children's health follow-up, but also for the creation of identity cards and passports, and the benefits that come with the status of citizenship.

Civil Registry Officials (Francophone group)

The group agreed that the prerequisites for an efficient birth registration system were complete decentralization and good governance. The group also underlined the necessity to reinforce human and logistic capacities to ensure effort durability. The group also looked into challenges to be taken up and perspectives to consider to improve the civil status system.

The main challenges were identified as:

- Non-adaptation and non-application of texts
- Inefficient centre organisation
- Lack of a coordination and follow-up structure
- Insufficient training of actors (local elected representatives and civil status agents)
- Low resource allocation to the system (by the state, communities or partners)
- Negligence of civil status in poverty reduction policies
- The 'pro-consul' behaviour of certain partners

The following perspectives were brought out:

- Adapt the judicial framework to the cultural realities of the countries involved and actually apply the texts
- Train and/or recycle actors (local elected representatives and agents)
- Bring civil status structures closer to the populations (creation of civil status centres)
- Set up government coordination

- Allocate resources needed for the operation of the system (state, communities and partners)
- Reinforce populations' sensitisation
- Inscribe civil status in poverty reduction programmes
- Bring partners to take into account the priorities as identified by governments
- Modernize and secure the civil status system
- Create a corps of civil status agents under oath

Civil Registry Officials (Anglophone group)

Making birth registration systems function better is our primary objective. To this end:

- A top priority is recruitment and regular training of registrars, who should be full-time employees responsible for vital registration.
- The working conditions of registrars should be made conducive and an adequate scheme of service should be put in place for them. This will promote integrity and transparency in the registration process.
- More registration centres should be created, to make the facility accessible to all.
- In terms of logistics support, office accommodation, transportation, registration materials and equipment (such as basic furniture and computers) should be made available.
- Amend laws to ease cumbersome registration procedures.
- Multiple registration, which often leads to wastage and increased unreliability of data, must be tackled through effective computerization.
- Inter-ministerial cooperation is also critical to successful birth registration.
- A proactive sensitisation of all arms of government, the public and all stakeholders is critical.
- Donor agencies and development partners are urged to use their clout to prevail on national governments to ensure full implementation of children's rights, including the right to a birth certificate.
- One day in the year should be declared and celebrated through Africa as the "African Day of Birth Registration" to draw attention to this critical issue and enhance public awareness.
- To motivate parents, free education in public schools for all children with birth certificates should be institutionalized.
- Period of free issuance of birth certificates should be extended, from a few months after birth to five years, in all African countries.

Ministries of Interior Officials

Aware of the fact that Ministries of Interior constitute the kingpin of birth registration systems in most countries, representatives of the same Ministries propose:

- Reinforcing the capacity of actors who animate the civil status system within Ministries of Interior
- Redefining the status of staff in charge of civil status
- Reinforcing equipment, office and civil status centres
- Creating a framework for regular dialogue between the different ministries involved in civil status management
- Widening the coverage of civil status centres on national territories
- Inspecting and controlling regularly civil status acts, as well as the efficiency of the operation of services in charge of civil status
- Actually applying sanctions defined by legal dispositions, and
- Having civil status officers elaborate an annual report to make the regulation of the system operation easier.

Ministries of Justice Officials

Concerned by the issues of birth registration, a passport for life and an element of identification and sovereignty,

Convinced that several States, especially those from Central and Western Africa, supported the Convention on the Rights of the Child,

We, the group of Ministries of Justice Officials, including Magistrates and Law Technicians:

- Wish that texts relative to birth registration in our respective countries be updated, codified and made effective
- Ask each country to inject new dynamism in its justice and its judicial machinery and to provide them with resources both sufficient and adapted (judicial system computerization, sufficient and qualified staff, appropriate facilities)
- Draw the attention of the countries involved on inevitable malfunctions by asking all actors of justice, at all levels, to produce periodic reports, to make proposals and suggestions to their supervising ministry
- Wish intently that the supervising ministry initiate a dialogue with other ministries involved in the birth registration system (cross-sector partnership is more efficient and more effective)
- Simplify exceedingly heavy judicial procedures (redesigning them by standardizing documents necessary for putting together files for auxiliary judgments regarding birth certificates), and
- Considering birth registration is mandatory, sanctions should logically be planned for against those responsible for registering a birth.

Ministries of Health, Social Action, Family and Women

Regarding issues brought up by panelists about the birth registration system, and to improve this system, we propose:

- Besides the four ministries usually in charge of the civil status system, it would be appropriate to associate other actors in charge of children's rights issues, in particular ministries responsible for education, social action, communication and NGOs
- Reinforcing social mobilization by sensitizing communities, using all communication channels available to trigger a change of behaviour regarding birth registration, and
- Encouraging local communities who made substantial efforts regarding birth registration, awarding, for instance, an official declaration of satisfaction along with other measures if needed.

UNICEF (Anglophone group)

UNICEF is in agreement with national governments which recognize that birth registration has a contributory process to national development. It is true that birth registration is the first step to fulfilling the rights of citizens. In light of this, UNICEF - in collaboration with other development stakeholders - is ready to support initiatives from government to ensure effective birth registration at all levels.

In this respect, support will be given for policy development, staff development, material and infrastructural development and community mobilization and participation.

UNICEF believes that in the area of decentralization there should be three steps: the inputs, the process and the outputs. They should consist of:

Inputs

- Legal and policy framework
- Human resources
- Financial resources
- Material
- Equipment
- Infrastructure
- Technical capacity

Process

- Sensitisation
- Notification of births
- Registration
- Keeping of records (storage)
- Review of framework
- Monitoring and evaluation

Outputs

- Number of people with birth certificates
- Renewed policy framework
- Increase in demand for birth registration

In the area of advocating to governments, we believe that the focus should be on providing adequate funding and support, and giving birth registration a priority in the national budget. This can be done by reinforcing birth registration as a right, replicating national campaigns (e.g., Day of the African Child), and linking birth registration with national security, elections and economic planning, among others.

Parents can be motivated to register their children by using familiar advocacy tools, for example, referring to traditional methods of registering a new arrival in the family (such as marking on trees in Ghana), linking birth registration to holding political office, land ownership and inheritance.

UNICEF (Francophone Group)

Considering that:

- Birth registration is part of an overall civil status system
- A birth certificate constitutes the starting point for obtaining other civil status certificates, and
- Birth registration is the first right of a child and guarantees that he or she will enjoy other rights,

UNICEF, in accordance with its mandate, commits itself with Governments and other partners to support:

- The inscription of birth registration in the priorities of national development, and
- The set-up of a national judicial framework favorable to the reform of the civil status system. This commitment articulates around the following strategic points:

In terms of an operational civil status system:

- Reinforce advocacy to improve the institutional framework, by contributing to the set-up of national commissions and piloting committees
- Support the reform of judicial texts regarding birth registration
- Encourage collaboration between partners at various levels (e.g., UNFPA and Plan)
- Support policy or strategic plan elaboration
- Contribute to the development of coordination machineries at all levels, and
- Capitalize on successful or innovative experiments.

Carry on with advocacy to government to improve the situation of birth registration by:

- Creating an independent national cross-ministry commission under the supervision of the Head of State, and
- Developing joint initiatives with partners involved in birth registration as Government interlocutors.

Support to identification and set-up of an incentive machinery to make parents register their children by:

- Asserting free registration when done on time
- Pointing out the numerous issues met during late registration
- Facilitating bringing civil status centres and communities closer together
- Multiplying fairground hearings, and
- Making birth registration procedures easier.

Perspectives:

- Zero tolerance for non-declaration of birth in intervention zones by 2010
- Integration of birth registration activities in all UNICEF programmes and special events (e.g., vaccination, distribution of impregnated mosquito nets, child sponsoring)
- Mobilization of resources in favour of birth registration, and
- Support of institutional capacity, e.g., training, register supply, stationery

Plan

“Plan believes that, with a proper registration, children will be able to realize their full potential.” (Plan’s paper presented to UNGASS, New York, 2001)

The primary goal of the birth registration initiative is to numerically increase the number of children who are registered and receive birth certificates, with the ultimate goal that all children up to the age of 18 are registered and obtain certificates. Plan’s recently agreed Global Advocacy Strategy will focus on Universal Birth Registration as the organisation’s first global advocacy campaign. In 2004 this will assist Plan’s West African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo) in their own work as part of the global campaign.

Plan believes that the best birth registration system is compulsory but flexible, free of charge (or with a minor charge) and with the ability for children at any age to be registered without penalty. The system should be simple and accessible (for example, needing the bare minimum of documents), particularly for illiterate people. There should be a minimum delay before a birth certificate is issued. Such a system allows the mother, father or other adults to register the child and is not prejudiced in terms of gender. It should be able to register children who live in rural and urban areas and those who are in minorities, as well as orphans and vulnerable children. This latter group is of particular concern to Plan. Birth registration must be linked to child rights and child protection. No matter where we work in West Africa, Plan devotes special attention to groups of children most in need of protection: HIV/AIDS orphans, children in danger of trafficking and sexual exploitation, street children, and those in conflict zones as combatants or refugees.

Plan will campaign for the positive connection between birth registration and access to education and health services. Given Plan’s commitment in the areas of Child Rights, Learning, Growing Up Healthy, Water and Environmental Sanitation, and Sustainable Livelihoods, registration can be easily integrated into such programmes to help the identification of unregistered children, facilitate their access to basic services, and to register them. Given the complexities of birth registration, Plan works in collaboration with governments at national, regional and local levels, UN agencies, civil society and community-based organisations. Plan assists others in the reform of structures for universal birth registration - the law and census-taking. Plan is working to encourage the creation of more effective processes to register births and to enhance technical capacity to undertake birth registration. This includes mobile registration, registration at the place of birth or late registration at the place of domicile. Plan does this through grassroots networking to bring the issue of registration as close to the community as possible; raising awareness to increase the demand for registration among government officials, community leaders, parents and children, and through local level initiatives to incorporate birth registration with other activities across programmes. Plan works at the grassroots level to empower children, families and communities to take control of their lives and offer their solutions to their problems. Participation of local people is the key to universal birth registration.

As a child-centred community development organisation, Plan includes children among our partners. Children are often the best advocates of all. Their sustained commitment and enthusiasm is hard to beat. Often it is children themselves who persuade their parents to go and register new babies and to register the older siblings if they do not yet have birth certificates. Working with children can also help ensure that they will register their own children when they become parents, and so it can become a sustainable, habitual practice in the future.

Plan recognizes the need for good documentation on various aspects of birth registration interventions to learn effectively from one country to another: our advocacy campaigns, the positive networking and facilitating, how to work with communities, conduct good surveys, record best practices and learn from problem cases. Plan will build on its own and others’ experiences to scale up effective practices in Plan communities and beyond.

UNFPA

UNFPA has since 1969 been at the forefront of advocacy for improved lives for families, particularly women and children. This advocacy effort culminated in the 1994 ICPD and its subsequent follow-up in 1999, where issues relating to children, among others, took centre stage of declarations that followed. This year marks exactly ten years since the development community affirmed its commitment to the landmark declaration made in Cairo. As we celebrate the ten years of ICPD declaration, UNFPA affirm its commitment to the principle that the birth registration of every child is a fundamental human right and is also a sequel to good governance and development.

Building on our strength of using population-based data to advocate with governments on linkages between socio-economic development and population growth, accurate recording of births can serve as an impetus for planning in all areas of life. We wish to emphasize UNFPA's commitment to improved civil registration systems and not just birth registration. We believe that availability of these records would inform governments of actions that need to be taken to improve people's lives, particularly women and children. In an effort to achieve this, we recognize that serious capacity gaps exist in the area of civil registration and its subsequent analysis for policy action. UNFPA can assist countries in the Africa sub-region to build their competence to collect accurate and reliable data through provision of training, equipment, advocacy with governments and community and religious leaders, and other forms of technical assistance in analysis of data generated from birth registration. We reiterate our commitment to assist countries in strengthening their management information systems through additional effort to provide computers and database software. This we believe will help countries gather and store existing information before it is lost.

We further recognize that over the years, some of the constraints to effective birth registration have to do with lack of understanding of the reasons for parents and governments not paying greater attention to civil registration. UNFPA pledge to support research on in-depth situational analysis and KAP studies to unearth real motives for lack of interest in civil registration of children. We are convinced that production of qualitative data invariably leads to interventions that can improve effective civil registration systems. We believe that each country has its own specific cultural constraints that could negatively impinge on registration of children. It is the understanding of these milieu of the countries concerned that programmes could develop effective communication and advocacy tools to influence behaviours and bring about changes in policies. Further, it is our conviction that in the process of creating responsible demand for civil registration systems, we equally deem it our collective responsibility to meet these increasing demands through improved client care at registration centres.

Our experience in population and reproductive health advocacy using combined efforts of other UN partners has also shown that advocacy directed at political and community leaders leads to more durable effect. UNFPA will reinforce its collaborative links with NGOs, FBOs and community-based organisations to secure their greater involvement in civil registration at all levels of societal life.

Finally, we at UNFPA wish to affirm that civil registration is not only a societal responsibility to children, but also an indication of system functionality. Therefore with collective action from all partners, we must make systems in societal structures work for the betterment of children today and those yet to be born.

Other NGOs

The group representing other NGOs, discussed:

1. How to make the civil status system work?

- Simplify the civil status system to make it more accessible to everyone and to ensure its effectiveness
- Involve NGOs in birth registration which promote children's rights, and
- Develop sensitisation and communication strategies at NGO level for a change of behaviour within the populations.

2. How to manage advocacy to governments?

- Set up a coalition with NGOs involved in children's rights promotion at the regional level, and
- Create a tripartite common action platform: government, technical and financial partners and NGOs working with children's rights

3. How could parents be brought to register births?

- Decree a region-wide day for birth registration for Western and Central Africa, and
- Use all information and communication channels as well as official events to sensitise populations to the importance of birth registration.

Strong Recommendation

Simplify the civil status system to make its access easier, and fully involve NGOs who promote children's rights, so that they develop advocacy and communication strategies to trigger a change of behaviour in populations.

Media

A statement to render more effective and efficient birth registration in Africa South of the Sahara:

Irrespective of our colonial history, we Africans should be capable to put in place a birth registration system that reflects our socio-cultural realities. We reiterate the need for collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, especially the government and the media. Capacity-building needs to be enhanced through the training of personnel with improvement on human and material resources. This can be better done by governments and development partners giving the necessary input to spur birth registration. Whatever funds raised in birth registration should be ploughed back into the process. Finally, community radio stations should be created by development agents and effectively used with emphasis on the dissemination of vital information in mother tongues or national languages through trained staff.



NIGER**GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRTH REGISTRATION**

The Association of Traditional Chiefs of Niger, which benefits from a proven social and moral credit, has been a catalyst of social mobilization and communication around birth registration since 16 June 2003. The approach has been extended to traditional events with local or national coverage to promote children's and women's rights. This was also an opportunity to reach out to groups which have been marginalized because, among others, of their way of life (e.g., nomadism, pastoralism) and geographical location. Declaration acts had been established for everyone, regardless of ethnic group, age or sex. These events were used as opportunities to organise immunization sessions and engage in debates on topics such as early marriage, girls school enrolment, HIV/AIDS and malaria.

The participation and commitment of young people materialized through a multi-disciplinary caravan, composed of artists (drama troops, puppeteers, rap groups), members of parliament, scouts, and representatives of Plan, UNFPA and UNICEF, which traveled all over Niger, from 15-28 June 2003. The caravan combined leisure with information by conveying messages on the importance and need for birth registration before an audience estimated at several thousand people. The strong media coverage of the event enabled the reaching of an even greater target audience. At each stop, the representative of the Youth Parliament pleaded, in prelude to court hearings, for the issuance of declaration and supplementary judgements of birth by magistrates. These hearings were held between the months of July and September all over the country.

In addition to the traditional structures of birth registration, ad hoc secondary and auxiliary centers have been set up all over the country to facilitate access for a greater number of people, especially those who are poor and illiterate. These centers are especially created in the public and private health centers of big villages and chief towns of cantons.

Country Priorities

Benin

1. Materialize political will (send a plea to political decision-makers)
2. Sensitise public opinion on the importance of birth registration
3. Reinforce actors (training and equipment)
4. Improve the institutional and judicial framework of the civil registration system
5. Mobilize resources
6. Strengthen partnerships

I learned that ...

... birth registration is a cross-cutting issue that should interest all stakeholders for effective national development.

Participant Evaluation Comment

Burkina Faso

1. Complement statistical data (first week of March 2004)
2. Motivate the steering committee for birth registration (composition, attributions, revision of the action plan)
3. Mobilize human and financial resources
4. Couple together birth registration and demographic census of the population (April 2004), including census of unregistered persons, sensitisation and delivery of civil status certificates

Cameroon

1. Reinforcement of the capacity of the civil status centres in terms of equipment, training and budget
2. Creation of a permanent and multi-sector national mechanism for coordinating and following up civil status
3. Sensitisation of all involved
4. Text update

Cape Verde

1. Evaluation and analysis of the current situation (state-of-the-art)
2. Creation of a national structure for action coordination (committee)
3. Generalization of existing initiatives at the national level (starting with the pending pilot project)
4. Widening of the campaign against late registration at the national level
5. Revision and adaptation of legislation
6. Reinforcement of the capacity of institutions
7. Modernization and computerization of the system
8. Reinforcement of partnerships with national organisations (NGOs, government, private sector) and development partners
9. Reinforcement of the partnership with INS
10. Creation of a statistical system for civil status
11. Elaboration of a communication strategy to sensitise all involved in civil society and government

Central African Republic

1. Rehabilitate and equip civil status centres destroyed due to political and military unrest
2. Identify and create secondary civil status centres in the remotest regions
3. Reinforce partnerships among various actors (authorities, government organisations, NGOs, international organisations and media)
4. Continue population sensitisation about birth registration, especially ethnic minorities (Pygmies and Bororo)
5. Reinforce the capacity of civil status agents

Chad

6. Adoption of the National Strategy and the civil status law in Chad
7. Mobilization by the national authorities of sufficient resources to implement the National Strategy and birth registration
8. Reinforcement of social mobilization and partnerships for birth registration

Congo

1. Activities for reporting about the Dakar Conference
2. Set up a technical committee for birth registration
3. Reinforcement of the capacity of civil status centres: e.g., registers, equipment, officer training
4. Local and national campaigns for birth registration

Democratic Republic of Congo

1. Set up a coordination, follow-up and evaluation mechanism for birth registration
2. Re-organisation of civil status, and decentralization through creation of secondary and auxiliary offices
3. Reinforcement of the national capacity regarding civil status, in terms of:
 - logistics (reduce the register's format; make the register and other material available)
 - techniques (train and/or recycle civil status officers; set up a corps of civil status officers under oath)
4. Information and sensitisation about the importance of and procedures for birth registration
5. A plan for:
 - free procedure for auxiliary judgment (up to 18 years)
 - resource mobilization for operation

Equatorial Guinea

1. Set up a cross-ministry committee for coordination and follow-up of birth registration
2. Set-up a legislative framework specific to birth registration to make it mandatory and free
3. Sensitisation and information of populations about the importance of birth registration
4. Launch a (birth registration) regularization campaign for children aged 0 to 12
5. Reinforce partnerships with NGOs and international organisations active in birth registration

The Gambia

1. Advocacy targeting government to a) increase budgetary allocation for birth registration, b) carry out legal reform, and c) extend and strengthen decentralization to the grassroots village level
2. Sensitisation of the general public through all existing media channels (e.g., TV, radio, traditional communicators) on the importance of birth registration and procedures, and their roles

3. Integration of birth registration into the maternal and child health services country-wide
4. Improve the management of birth registration records (storage and confidentiality)
5. Capacity-building for birth registration personnel of all levels through training, logistical support, equipment and transport
6. Extend and strengthen partnerships on birth registration to involve the private sector, NGOs, children, UN agencies and civil society
7. Mobilize additional resources to take care of the backlog in birth registration

Ghana

1. Make birth registration facilities accessible to every community
2. Recruit and train necessary numbers of staff to undertake the job
3. Increase advocacy among policy-makers to lend support to birth registration. (Policy-makers need to be made aware of the importance of data generated for effective planning.)
4. Raise awareness of the importance of birth registration, and increase demand for the service among the population through public education campaigns in rural and urban areas
5. Mainstream birth registration into immunization activities of the Ghana Health Service. Community health nurses could be trained to complete birth registration forms during their routine immunization rounds of children who have not been registered. The forms can then be forwarded to district registration officers who will register and issue certificates to these children. These certificates will then be routed back through the community health workers.
6. Operationalise Community Population Register Programme, which involves placing population registers in all communities to record all vital events as they occur. These registers are to be kept and administered by chosen trusted members of the communities (Community Registration Officers, or CRAs). Information on births will be forwarded to district birth registration officers for registration and issuance of certificates, which will be sent through the CRA to their owners.
7. Institute a National Annual Birth Registration Day, preferably on 1 September, which was the date of the first birth registration in 1912. On this day, all children under 18 years could be registered free of charge (subject to approval).
8. Computerize systems to check and avoid multiple registration and to make it easy for retrieval of information

Ivory Coast

1. Long term: Reconstitution of civil status in formerly besieged zones; Short term: Registration of children born in formerly besieged zones since September 2002
2. Long term: Processing of information and modernization of civil status; Short term: Reinforcement of the collecting system for civil status data by making printed material and registers available
3. Long term: Improvement of the judicial and legislative framework; Short term: Link sanctions to the obligation of registering birth
4. Long term: Sensitisation and information; Short term: Sensitise population, government and media about the necessity and importance of birth registration

Gabon

1. Set up a birth registration system adapted to minorities (Pygmies)
2. Set up a computerization and archiving system of civil status certificates
3. Favour synergies between ministries and decentralized services

Guinea

1. Report on the recommendations of the Dakar Conference (mobilization of human and financial resources)
2. Elevate and widen the status of the Steering Committee for Birth Registration under the responsibility of the Prime Minister
3. Develop state-of-the-art data and systems operation
4. Reform of regulatory and legislative texts about birth registration
5. Social mobilization campaign to increase the rate of birth registration (children aged 0 to 17)

Guinea-Bissau

1. Sensitisation and requests to decision-makers and communities
2. Revision of the legal framework regarding birth registration (no cost between 0 and 1 year)
3. Reinforcement of institutional capacity: training, equipment, logistics, control and follow-up
4. Republishing of damaged registers: conservation, computerization at the central level, registration of all children aged 0 to 17
5. Creation of coordination mechanisms (Justice, Education and Health Ministries)
6. Integration of birth registration into various development programmes
7. Resource mobilization
8. Set up a national consultation about birth registration
9. Use of Portuguese as a working language

Haiti

1. Sensitisation of field staff
2. Establish partnerships with NGOs and international organisations
3. Establish the state-of-the-art with partners (NGOs and international organisations)
4. Mobilization and partnerships with government and local organisations (children's clubs, children journalists, local media, delegates)
5. Launch a campaign at local and national levels

Liberia

1. Adequate budgetary allotment by government with authority and commitment to fully implement planned activities for birth registration
2. Completely decentralize birth registration programmes and empower registrars at all levels
3. Promote operational research, such as surveys into number of registered children, and special studies
4. Document - storage and retrieval (computerize), reporting (facilitate movement of records to control)
5. Collaborative partnerships with NGOs, media, UN agencies, communities and other stakeholders

Mali

1. Adaptation of the judicial and institutional framework to socio-cultural reality (law on civil status, code of persons and family)
2. Modernization and securing of the civil status system; coupling of the system together with population census, electoral and "travel documents" files
3. Reinforcement of the capacity of structures (civil status and declaration centres) and people involved in the system (officers and civil status agents)
4. Development of a cross-sector sensitisation strategy
5. Set up a coordination, control and follow-up system to make birth registration universal

6. New transitory disposition different from the current auxiliary judgment to register all children aged 0 to 18 who do not have a birth certificate
7. Planning of an active disposition to take into account the registration of children who need special protection measures
8. Take charge of the statistical exploitation of civil status facts to use them in decision-making
9. Dissociate the establishment of birth certificates from the payment of commune tax
10. Integration of the extension of civil status facts in programmes against poverty

Mauritania

1. Reinforce citizen sensitisation by involving the civil society
2. Generalise the computerisation of civil status centres and set up a national network linked to a central database
3. Train civil status personnel: officers, agents and auxiliaries
4. Set up an efficient coordination mechanism between various actors in the system:
 - Ministry of Interior (central civil status administration)
 - Local communities (cities)
 - Ministry of Finance
 - State Secretariat in Charge of Women's Condition
 - Ministry of Health
 - Ministry of Education
 - Ministry of Justice
 - National Statistics System
 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 - Ministry of Communication
 - Civil society
 - Media

Niger

1. Reinforcement of the current system's efficiency through:
 - Agent training
 - Giving decentralized structures adequate resources
 - Payment of bonuses to civil status agents (incentive)
 - Setting up a coordination and follow-up structure
2. Elaboration and set-up of a mid-term plan for information, sensitisation and advocacy campaign with:
 - Authorities (political, administrative and customary)
 - Civil status agents
 - Population
3. Revision of legislative texts to adapt them to the socio-economic and cultural context by:
 - Reducing the amount of penalties
 - Extending the declaration period
4. Annual collection and exploitation of statistical sections
5. Resource mobilization
 - Allocation of a significant budget to civil status (state, communities)
 - Contribution of development partners
6. Mid-term elaboration of a national policy for civil status fact registration

Nigeria

1. Clearance of the backlog of unregistered children born (from 1999?) and linking birth registration to national immunization and health programmes
2. Advocate for increased and regular allocation and mobilization of funds to ensure procurement of materials and equipment for vital registration
3. Advocacy and sensitisation of all stakeholders (government, media, NGOs, civil society organisations, FBOs, community-based organisations) on the importance of birth registration
4. Capacity-building of vital registration personnel, upgrading of existing facilities and establishment of additional registration centres for better access at the community level
5. Full implementation of the provisions of the vital registration law of 1992

Sao Tome and Principe

1. Finalise the draft treaty between the ministries of health and justice and make it operational so that mobile teams can be set up in health centres
2. Advocate for free birth registration
3. Continue the birth registration campaign
4. Sensitise and inform the population about the importance of birth registration and declaration procedures

Senegal

1. Intensification of the promotion campaign in villages and poor urban neighborhoods; community-based campaign, multimedia approach and traditional communication
2. Improvement of the judicial and institutional framework: revision of the Legal Modification Project and vote by the Assembly
3. Reinforcement of the capacity of institutions and community members involved in civil status: (central) state services, mayors, PCR, village chiefs, neighbourhood chiefs
4. Advocate for increase of resources (human and budgetary), and political decision-making for the development of the civil status system

Sierra Leone

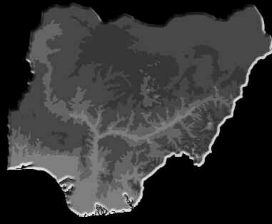
1. Identification of stakeholders and partners for birth registration
2. Development of communication and sensitisation strategies
3. Revision of policies and birth registration acts
4. Retraining and capacity-building of birth registration personnel
5. Revision and provision of birth registration tools
6. Increase registration centres
7. Establish an effective documentation system

Togo

1. Improvement of the judicial and institutional framework:
 - Systematic regularization or birth
 - Actualization of the 1962 decree on civil status
 - Bringing civil status centres and communities closer together
 - Remuneration of civil status agents
 - Creation of an action synergy between ministries and partners
 - National organisation of fairground hearings for children

- Re-dynamization of the judicial control
- Set-up of a national week for registration
- 2. Capacity reinforcement**
 - Training and recycling of civil status agents
 - Generalization of the installation of civil registration kiosks in health centres
 - Providing civil status centres with equipment, stationery and logistic resources
 - Extension of the birth registration follow-up committees (COSEN)
- 3. Set-up of communication strategies**
 - Enough tools available for birth registration
 - Organizing the various communication channels
 - Elaboration of communication tools
 - Register children in early-learning centres (day nurseries) during routine vaccinations
- 4. Report of the recommendations of the Dakar Conference**

NIGERIA



GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRTH REGISTRATION

In Nigeria, the birth of a child is often celebrated with elaborate naming ceremonies which bring together the entire community and other well-wishers in joyous union with the child's immediate family. However, this good practice does not go further to accord the child the basic right to a "name and nationality" through certified birth registration as enshrined in the African Union (AU) charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) Article 6 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 7. Most parents fail to accord due regard to this aspect of a child's rights due to ignorance, logistics and other reasons.

To stimulate dialogue and establish linkages among relevant partners - towards revamping birth registration as a right of the child and integrating it into community development efforts - a dialogue with Directors of Child Development State Ministries of Women Affairs and State Directors of the National Population Commission (NPC) was held. This dialogue developed modalities for implementing childbirth registration in 'D' Field Office (DFO) states which included printing and distribution of forms (live birth registration form, still birth registration form, notification of birth form, notification of still birth form and books for registration of birth) to State offices of the National Population Commission.

Collaboration with State Ministry of Women Affairs, NPC and community and religious leaders, with support from UNICEF, initiated community mobilization for advocacy and dialogue during which the State Director of NPC provides an overview on the importance of childbirth registration with reference to ACRWC and CRC. The presentation usually triggers a discussion session with community members and results in a commitment to ensure the sustainability of birth registration and protection of the rights of children in communities.

This participatory exercise enlists community members to identify volunteers and notifiers, comprising traditional birth attendants (TBA), town criers, teachers, headmasters and community health extension workers, who are trained in how to complete live birth registration forms used by NPC. Completed forms are returned to the registrar who issues a birth certificate in respect of each form submitted with the name of the child entered in the register of birth. The TBAs and town criers serve as notifiers and report all births in the community to the volunteers listed above. The volunteers also serve as a link between the communities and the registrar based at the Local Government Area (LGA) headquarters.

To facilitate an improvement in the number of children registered in LGAs in Nasarawa State, NPC initiated mobile birth registration services which involve staff of the commission at LGA offices going out to clinics where children are taken for routine immunization, for birth registration and 'mop-up' registration of eligible children.

This strategy has improved demand for childbirth registration with UNICEF-assisted communities extending birth registration to neighbouring communities and some state governments taking up the initiative to provide birth registration in communities not covered by UNICEF-assisted programmes.

Regional Action Plan

Objective I: Partnership Reinforcement

Strategy = Sensitisation and mobilization of:

- Governments, through ECOWAS, CEMAC, PALOP and A.U.
- International NGOs
- Donors and development partners (e.g., PNUD, WB, partner PRSP)
- Media
- Artists, and
- Children, e.g., Children's Parliaments

I learned that ...

... it is important to involve children and the media as key stakeholders in birth registration.

Participant Evaluation Comment

Objective II: Support Countries Facing Similar Constraints

Strategy = Group countries for specific technical support

Strategy 2 = Exchange experience by:

- Documenting promising experiments and good practice
- Exchanging documentation and information, and
- Cross-border exchange missions.

Strategy 3 = Fund-raising

- Meetings with potential donors for involvement, and
- Request to governments for birth registration to be taken into account in sector-based and national development plan policies and budgets (e.g., PRSP, UNDAF, SWAPS).

Objective III: Maintaining Mobilization (Conference Follow-up)

Strategy 1 = Information and mobilization by:

- Reporting on sharing with countries, and within countries with whom it may concern
- Finding a slogan linked to this objective, and
- Using a website for exchange.

Strategy 2 = Hold a follow-up meeting in 2006 on goals reached, constraints met and good practice

RECOMMENDATION - In 2005 there should be free registration for all children aged 0 to 18 in the 24 countries for one year (to catch up with the backlog of unregistered children).

Dakar, 27 February 2004

SENEGAL



GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRTH REGISTRATION

Following a national workshop on the production of support materials for the promotion of universal registration of children at birth held in May 2002, the Chairperson of Fissel rural community had vowed to reach a 100% registration rate for children born in his community. In line with this, the rural council adopted an approbation motion and was mobilized around this objective. Thus, a campaign which touched all 28 villages was launched at the beginning of June 2002 (in prelude to the commemoration of the Day of the African Child). The midway assessment of this campaign was presented in February 2004 during a meeting of the council of the rural community. This council meeting, extended to community actors and heads of villages, saw the presence of the sub-prefect, the president of the rural community and UNICEF, which supported the process.

The first results recorded by village reveal a global upward tendency and an indication of a positive evolution towards universal registration at birth: 1,648 children registered at birth from January to December 2003 against 1,053 from January to December 2002, which represents an increase of more than 50% and a registration rate of 10 % for the children born during the period from June to December 2003. These data should be confirmed by the mid-term assessment (which is in progress) of the national campaign with the support of Plan Senegal and UNICEF.

The strategies developed to reach such a result included:

- Implementation of 28 village committees of Fissel for the promotion of civil registration (The committees were made up of imams and priests, heads of villages, representatives of youth associations and women promotion associations, midwives and traditional birth attendants, organizers and volunteers)
- A workshop on the strengthening of capacities of committee members
- Implementation of 14 organizers and their 14 relays, and
- Monthly follow-up meetings on birth registration.

Lessons learned included the importance of:

- Public commitment of decision-makers (president of the rural community and village heads)
- Involvement of community organizations, which provide experience in participatory local development, human resources and financing of campaigns
- Involvement of imams, priests and traditional birth attendants
- First emphasizing children under one year old, and
- Having a global development perspective of the civil registration system (including the registration of deaths and marriages).

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