STRENGTHENING THE BIRTH REGISTRATION SYSTEM IN SAMOA

Intelligence Report

UNDP

SBS Samoa Bureau of Statistics

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Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBS)
The Samoa Bureau of Statistics supports all statistical activities and services in Samoa including design and implementation in line with best practices and international standards. Within the bureau, the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Division is responsible for recording vital events such as births, deaths, marriages, changes of name, and adoptions in Samoa and generating the vital statistics.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This report is the product of research undertaken by the Accelerator Lab in the UNDP Samoa Multi-Country Office, in partnership with the Births, Deaths and Marriages Division of the Samoa Bureau of Statistics as part of their efforts towards strengthening the birth registration system in Samoa. All insights are based on the technical expertise of, and consultation with, relevant stakeholders including, but not limited to, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, and actors involved in the birth registration process at the community level.

Foreword

Every child has an inalienable right to a name and nationality. Birth registration enshrines this right to individuality, along with ensuring the entitlements that go with it, like education, participation in community life, employment and many others, all of which improve and enrich a person's life. The importance of the right to birth registration has been recognized in SDG 16.9, which aims to "provide legal identity to all, including birth registration, by 2030".

In close collaboration with the Government of Samoa, through the Samoa Bureau of Statistics, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) acknowledges the need to strengthen the birth registration system in Samoa. UNDP also recognizes that a strong birth registration system is the starting point for building a solid Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) System, which in turn creates the foundation for a robust national digital identity programme in Samoa.

This Report is the result of the close partnership between UNDP and the Samoa Bureau of Statistics and offers valuable insights on ways to strengthen the birth registration system in Samoa.

Jorn Sorensen
Resident Representative
UNDP Samoa Multi-Country Office

Birth registration is a fundamental right, recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and often forms the basis for the achievement of many other rights, including, but not limited to, the right to health and the right to education. Birth registration and related information are also key in ensuring effective development planning which benefits all, especially in a country like Samoa which remains increasingly vulnerable to disasters.

The Samoa Bureau of Statistics recognizes and acknowledges the need to strengthen the birth registration system in the country. As such, birth registration should be part of a wider civil registration system that includes the free and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of key events – births, deaths, adoptions, marriages, and divorces – and other civil status events pertaining to the population.

This report is the result of an effective collaboration between SBS and UNDP and presents a valuable opportunity to reinforce the commitment towards universal birth registration in Samoa guided by the insights and lessons learnt.

Leota Ali'ielua Salani
Chief Executive Officer
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Executive Summary

As enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and other international treaties, every child has inalienable rights to birth registration, name, and nationality which is key in ensuring protection and exercise of all other rights. In Samoa, recorded birth registration of children below the age of 5 currently stands at 66% when considering a sample size of 3,675 households which accounts for 10% of Samoa's total population. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the estimated current birth registration rate for the total population is around 60% which ranks Samoa as the lowest in birth registration rate in the Pacific.

The UNDP Accelerator Lab, in partnership with the Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBS), adopted a two-pronged methodology which combined systems thinking and portfolio-based approach to help strengthen the birth registration system in Samoa through comprehensive in-depth understanding of the existing process and transformative actionable learning.

The approach was implemented in three phases, with the first two phases focusing on analysing the birth registration system in Samoa to identify existing challenges. A key challenge identified was the limited legal and policy framework guiding the birth registration process with little to no relevant policies, rules and regulations, and SOPs to support the implementation of the Births, Deaths, and Marriages Registration Act 2002. A review of the existing legislation found that there were gaps in the current laws with some being discriminatory or divergent from UN standards and international best practices. Major issues were identified with relevance to governance and institutional mechanisms including, but not limited to, the lack of institutional coordination, capacity and memory and lack of accountability as well as prioritisation and commitment. It is also observed that use of obsolete technology for birth registration is another critical systemic issue resulting in delayed birth registration.

In following the birth registration process, several supply-side factors were identified as barriers to timely birth registration, including:

- **delayed notification of birth,**
- **complex registration form and verification process,**
- **lack of awareness amongst main informants and stakeholders,**
- **lack of easy access to registration services,**
- **complex process and lack of control checks,**
- **ineffective utilisation and adoption of technology,**
- **lack of integrated information system and interoperability of technology systems,**
- **high number of backlogs of unregistered individuals,**
- **frequent service disruption.**

Similarly, demand-side factors hindering timely birth registration were identified as well. These include:

- **lack of public awareness and information,**
- **sociocultural practices and norms,**
- **lack of incentives,**
- **direct and indirect costs such as transportation cost and fee charged to print and issue birth certificates.**

The final phase, transform, focuses on generating rapid learning about possible pathways or interventions that can impact the wider birth registration system process. These include bringing the whole-of-society approach for improved birth registration processes and digital transformation of the current CRVS system.

Introduction

A child not registered at birth is invisible and nonexistent in the eyes of the law – denied the right to be counted as a person and be part of society with a recognized name and nationality.

As enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other international treaties, every child has inalienable rights to birth registration, name, and nationality which is key in ensuring protection and exercise of all other rights.

Birth registration provides formal recognition by the state of a child's birth and is often the primary vehicle for obtaining a legal identity.

It is the continuous, permanent, and universal recording within the civil registry of the occurrence and characteristics of births in accordance with the legal requirements of a country enabling a child to obtain a birth certificate.[1]

A birth certificate is the first, and often only proof, of legal identity, particularly for children, making it necessary to establish a nationality which prevents the risk of statelessness and helps protect children against separation from trafficking, and illegal adoption.[2] It is also crucial in safeguarding children from violence, abuse and exploitation including, but not limited to, being forced into early marriage, labour market or armed forces which often thrive on non-registration.[3] Additionally, it ensures access to basic services such as routine vaccines and other healthcare services as well as early childhood education. The

1. UNICEF (2013) *Every Child's Birth Right - Inequities and Trends in Birth Registration*
2. UNICEF (2019) *Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are we on track?*
3. UNICEF (2001) *We the Children: Meeting the promises of the World Summit for Children*

significance of birth registration does not end with childhood but in fact goes well into adulthood. A birth certificate is proof of official identification often required for individuals to obtain a passport, a marriage or driver's license, to open a bank account, to apply for and secure formal employment, to inherit property, to register to vote or to apply for and receive social security benefits.[4]

Going beyond the individual, effective registration provides vital statistics at the national level allowing for effective development planning. It helps to identify geographic, social and gender disparities within the national boundaries. Without a comprehensive system, the need for services, immediate intervention and additional budgetary resources in least developed areas or rural communities may be concealed by inaccurate population data resulting from low birth registration coverage. This in turn can lead to further exclusion of people already marginalized from the social and economic life of their country.[4] Furthermore, timely and accurate population data is one of the critical elements of disaster response strategies allowing for effective identification of at-risk population and their characteristics, provision of support and services, and monitoring the mortality impact of disaster.

All in all, every government needs to always know the exact number of people in the country to efficiently cater to their needs and ensure that no one is left behind.

4. UNICEF (2002) *Birth Registration: Right from the Start*

WHY BIRTH REGISTRATION IS SO IMPORTANT

HUMAN RIGHTS

Birth registration secures proof of legal identity establishing family relationships and nationality. This is necessary to ensure

access to:

- Health
- Social protection
- Education

protection from:

- Child marriage
- Child labour
- Trafficking
- Illegal detention

ACCESS TO SERVICES

Birth registration provides the necessary identification required to access many public and private services. This is important to be able to:

- Get a driver's licence
- Vote
- Register land
- Open a bank account
- Travel / get a passport
- Gain formal employment

VITAL STATISTICS

Birth registration provides vital statistics for national planning and decision making. It enables governments to:

- Understand population dynamics
- Assess level of inequality
- Plan and monitor development programmes
- Allocate resources efficiently
- Measure progress against the SDGs

Reference taken from Innvoations-in-Birth-Registration.pdf (humandignity.foundation)

BIRTH REGISTRATION SYSTEM IN SAMOA

In Samoa, recorded birth registration of children below the age of 5 currently stands at 66% when considering a sample size of 3,675 households which accounts for 10% of Samoa's total population.[5]

According to UNICEF, Samoa ranks lowest in birth registration rate in the Pacific with estimated birth registration rate for total population at approximately 60%.

The Births, Deaths, and Marriages Act 2002 (BDM Act 2002) requires the notification and legal registration of all births, including stillbirths. All births must be advised to the Registrar General by the responsible persons within 14 days of the birth or no later than 28 days after the birth of the baby should it be the Director General of Health. Responsible persons in cases other than when a child is born in or brought to a health care facility within 24 hours include the medical attendant. In the absence of a medical attendant, either every person in attendance at the birth or the President of the Women's Committee of a village or her appointee, or Pulenuu, or Minister of religion, can advise the registrar of the birth.

Birth notification should be followed by birth registration within 3 months from the date of birth of the child.

As per the legislation, the sole responsibility of birth registration rests primarily on the parents of the baby but should they fail or is unwilling to do so, anyone with relevant information and knowledge can complete the registration.

The legislation also allows for the registration of abandoned babies by the guardian or caretaker. Upon successful submission of the birth registration form and requisite documentation, the birth registration process is completed with the issuance of the birth certificate.

This three-step process of notification, registration and issuance of certificate is overseen by the Births, Deaths, and Marriage Registration Division (BDM) in the Samoa Bureau of Statistics. It also makes up the National CRVS Steering Committee along with the Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD), Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Police, which is responsible to oversee and support the broader Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system in Samoa.

Birth registration in Samoa, is a complex system involving a diverse range of stakeholders with many feedback

5. Samoa Bureau of Statistics (2020) *Fact Sheet - Samoa DHS - MICS 2019-20*

Methodology

loops. To uncover the multiple layers of the existing process and find actionable learning that can transform birth registration in Samoa, a two-pronged methodology was adopted which combined systems thinking and portfolio-based approach.
Systems thinking allows for a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected, dynamic nature of systems. It involves looking at the patterns, linkages, and interactions between the different elements that comprise the system as a whole. Building on this, portfolio-based approach seeks to develop and test interventions that can transform the system for learning and scale-up in the future as appropriate.

The approach was implemented in three phases as explained below.

1 SENSE AND FRAME

WHY
To understand the landscape around the challenges and the gaps in the current practice and reframe the issue

WHAT
- Initial problem scoping
- Mapping of context, assets and trends
- Framing the challenge

HOW
- Rapid ethnography
- Horizon scanning
- Ecosystem mapping
- Literature review
- Engage and position

2 ENGAGE AND POSITION

WHY
To understand the drivers and their interlinking effects, develop narratives Tor systems change, and identify the intervening space for programming end new opportunities for partnership

WHAT
- Deep dive into the challenge space
- Stakeholder engagement
- Narrative development
- Position UNDP

HOW
- Systemic design Problem space design
- Systems mapping
- Strategic foresight

3 TRANSFORM

WHY
To enhance the coherence of programmes, demonstrate development effect, & develop distinctive service offering for governments and funding partners

WHAT
- Portfolio co-design and activation
- Programmes implementation with partners
- Movement building

HOW
- Portfolio design
- Portfolio sensemaking
- Experimentation design and execution
- Advocacy

Reference taken from UNDP (2022) System Change: A Guidebook for Adopting Portfolio Approaches. Bangkok, Thailand

PHASE 1: SENSE AND FRAME

The *Sense and Frame* phase looked at the different elements of the birth registration system to better understand the problem.

In doing so, a mix of methods were used including horizon scanning, ecosystem mapping, rapid ethnography, and literature review.

Horizon scanning involved the collection of information relating to the current status of birth registration in Samoa and government's outlook on it. It also looked at digital transformation as an enabler in improving such processes and other public services. A two-day workshop was conducted to do a visual mapping of the birth registration system including identification of all relevant actors at different levels. This workshop brought together key government officials of the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD) in addition to the Samoa Bureau of Statistics. This was followed by a focus group discussion with the Births, Deaths, and Marriages (BDM) Division and a comprehensive literature review of existing legislations against UN standards on birth registration to fill any missing information gaps.

As a final step, an ecosystem mapping was done focusing on the external environment to identify existing initiatives and solutions relating to birth registration in different contexts and countries to draw inspiration on how to approach the challenge moving forward.

PHASE 2: ENGAGE AND POSITION

The *Engage and Position* phase involved taking a deep dive into the challenge space and mobilizing system stakeholders.

It aimed to uncover diverse perceptions and experiences of a broad group of stakeholders in the birth registration system by exploring the nature of culture, relational and power dynamics that influence the system. Some of the main stakeholders include BDM officials, nurses, mid-wives, medical officers, Sui Tamaitai o Nuu (STN) or Sui o Nuu (SN), church ministers and parents.

The birth registration process in Samoa is multi-layered, and the steps vary depending on where the child was born i.e. main hospital, district hospital or at home. All possible pathways were explored in-depth from birth notification to birth registration. The journey of the birth notification form (B10 form) was followed as it gets passed on by the nurse or midwife at the main hospital in Upolu and district hospitals in Upolu and Savaii, to the mother of the newborn and finally submitted to the BDM office. A copy of the form is also directly relayed from the hospitals to the BDM office. Similarly, the birth registration process relating to home births was traced as well, where STNs or SNs fill and submit the B10 form to the BDM office through the Ministry of Women and Community and Social Development. Birth parents were still required in person at the BDM office to complete the birth registration process.

This was complemented by utilising a user journey approach where the shadowing of nurses and pregnant women in two district hospitals in Upolu and Savaii and observing interaction between BDM officials and parents who came for registration for a full day took place. This provided further insights on the nature of interactions between various actors and the record keeping process within the hospitals.

Focus group discussions were conducted with nurses, STNs, mothers and pregnant women from 45 villages across Upolu and Savaii. Given that nurses and STNs were frontliners in the birth registration process, their understanding of the system and how it works was key in identifying existing challenges. Discussions with present and future mothers helped understand the cultural barriers that often cause delays in the birth registration process. Additional cultural insights were collected through one-on-one meetings with church ministers from diverse congregations.

Such an immersive approach helped identify existing difficulties and gaps at the ground-level through the lens of different actors. With this understanding, a case for change was proposed focusing on the position of the organization and the unique value of collaboration towards new and impactful strategic interventions.

PHASE 3: TRANSFORM

The *Transform* phase focuses on generating rapid learning about possible pathways or interventions that can impact the wider system process.

This marks the final step moving from the assessment and analysis of the problem to the design and implementation of a portfolio of solutions. This phase is ongoing, and learnings and insights are captured that can be converted into programmes for strengthening the birth registration system.

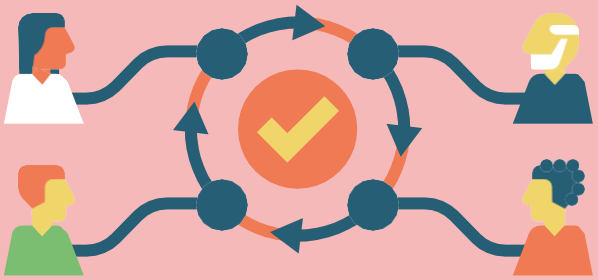
This phase was kickstarted with a portfolio co-design workshop with BDM officials. A summary of findings of the previous two phases were presented along with examples of international best practices in birth registration. This was followed by a brainstorming and ideation exercise focusing on finding solutions to address identified challenges within the birth registration system in Samoa. The exercise aimed to identify solutions across various areas of change including legal, technological, institutional, educational, economic, political, and cultural which together can generate a portfolio of interventions.

Based on the solutions proposed, a portfolio was designed featuring initiatives that are complementary and together can promote systemic change transforming the birth registration system in Samoa for the better. Moving forward, the portfolio of interventions will be tested. All experiments will ensure thorough documentation of results and collection of relevant data. A review of the experimental results and lessons learnt will be used to guide the next steps.

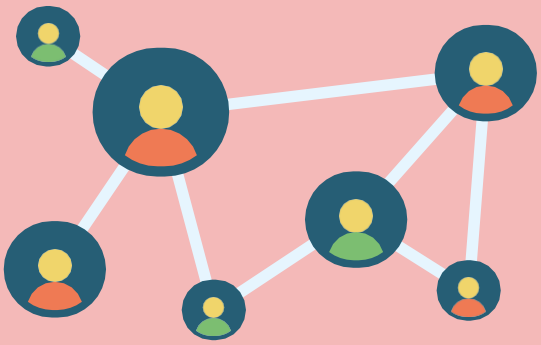
KEY GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE ACCLAB'S WORK

Accelerated learning
In addressing complex problems, it is important to identify rapid solutions that can provide relief in the short-term while working on long-term transformative change. Accordingly, this requires a thorough focus on learning and synthesizing actionable intelligence that can pave the way for the next steps towards finding solutions at every stage.

Engage the system influencers
Meaningful collaboration and engagement with key system influencers such as government officials early on is a necessary precondition for building and maintaining the momentum required to create effective, transformational, and long-term solutions.



Focus on user centricity
Any system is made up of different groups of people who constantly engage with it at different levels. It is critical to harness the lived experiences of all the diverse users of the system across all stages to ensure all efforts are responsive to the needs of the users, in alignment with the social fabric and relevant in the long term.



Collaborate and leverage what already exists
Innovation is not always about creating new solutions, it can also include actively looking out for bright spots, solutions and actions that are already working and adapting it to the existing context to generate maximum results in minimum time.

Iterative learning loops between and across phases
In a complex system, problems are neither linear nor are the solutions, thus requiring learning loops across all stages to ensure understanding of the system keeps evolving with additional information generated at various stages and is alerted by external changes.

Existing Challenges in the Birth Registration System in Samoa

LINE OF ENQUIRY

Legislative Framework
- Existing legislations and policies on birth registration
- Comparing legislation on birth registration with UN Standards and international best practices

Governance Mechanisms and Institutional Capacity
- Institutional capacity and coordination
- Governance and accountability mechanisms
- Prioritisation and commitment

Supply-side Factors
- Birth notification process
- Birth registration and verification process
- Level of awareness amongst main informants and stakeholders
- Accessibility and continuity of registration services
- Internal processes and control checks
- Technical systems and capacities

Demand-side factors
- Public awareness on birth registration
- Sociocultural practices and norms
- Incentives and costs

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR BIRTH REGISTRATION

Limited or non-existent legal and policy framework

The Births, Deaths, and Marriages Registration Act 2002 is the only legislative document guiding the birth registration process in Samoa. Rules and regulations, policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are currently limited, hindering the effective implementation of the law.

According to the Statistics Act 2015, the Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBS) is responsible to manage the registry of births. SBS staff reported having limited knowledge on roles and responsibilities of other ministries and stakeholders in the implementation of the birth registration process.

The birth registration laws should be supported by relevant policies, rules and regulations, and SOPs providing definitive guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved ensuring there is no room for latitude or discretion.

This ensures quality and timely cooperation between SBS, ministries and other relevant stakeholders.

Gaps in the legislative framework

At present, the legislation on birth registration proposes a two-step centralized process and places the primary responsibility on parents. Such a complex process is more likely to result in significantly low birth registration unless supported by policies making provisions for a decentralised system, for instance through the establishment of primary and secondary registration units. It is also important that legislation or regulations allow for flagging of unregistered births and opportunistic birth registration which is not accounted for in the current legislative framework.

Secondly, while the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2002 allows for any individual to apply for a certificate of registration, it does not mandate the issuance of a certificate upon registration. The issuance of an official birth certificate is a distinct activity that should follow the registration of a birth as it serves as proof of identity and legislation should explicitly mandate that the official certificate be delivered as proof of registration.

Additionally, the current legislation does not define a process for late and delayed registration of births, including standards of evidence that are achievable. While regulations and relevant procedures should not be restrictive in that they prevent late or delayed registration, it is important that clear guidance and requirements are articulated in the laws. Such laws should take account of the difficulties in finding or verifying evidence of past events while striving to maintain the integrity of the records.

Divergence from UN Standards and international best practices

UN principles on CRVS state that there should be no charge for registering a birth or a death within the designated timeframe, nor there should be any charge for issuance of an original birth certificate or original death certificate. At present, Samoa charges a fee to issue birth certificates. Registrars may charge a fee for the issuance of a duplicate birth or death certificate, but the original certificate is advised to be issued free of charge. This can in turn encourage registration because obtaining a birth certificate is a significant incentive to registration as it may be needed to obtain services.

The UN also recommends that countries collect details on the place of occurrence and place of registration which is currently not a legal requirement for birth registration in Samoa.

GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Lack of coordination between Ministries

The mandate for birth registration and vital statistics in Samoa sits with the Samoa Bureau of Statistics as lead agency and other key implementing partners which include the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Police. They also make up the national CRVS steering committee responsible for overseeing and supporting the CRVS system. However, there is a limited coordination mechanism set-up among ministries to ensure effective collaboration for prompt birth registration. For example, while the birth registration process relies heavily on MoH for information on birth notification and verification of the birth parents for hospital and home births (where mother and child are immediately admitted to the hospital after birth), there are no institutional mechanisms ensuring timely flow of information between MoH and SBS.

Lack of Institutional Capacity and Memory

Most of the ministries with a role in the birth registration process, including SBS, are heavily under-resourced in terms of personnel, equipment, vehicles, infrastructure, and technology. BDM staff reported being overloaded with numerous tasks which affect their productivity.

The lack of sufficient learning and training opportunities with regards to key knowledge and skills required to effectively deliver on BDM's mandate was also highlighted.

Additionally, SBS does not have any mechanisms to organize and preserve practical and technical knowledge. For instance, it was reported that training sessions on birth registration are led by senior staff without any standard manual or pre-approved content based on their own expertise and experience. While this allows for some level of information sharing between experienced staff and new staff members, it can result in inconsistencies and the loss of crucial details.

In another example cited, it was highlighted that presently, the BDM division does not have access to the user manuals for relevant software being used in their work. This negatively impacts the BDM IT team's ability to resolve software-related technical issues in a timely manner. With no institutional memory, the continuity of service is at risk as the organization's workforce changes and evolves over the years.

Poor Governance and Lack of Accountability

With limited policies and guidelines outlining the specific roles of various government ministries in birth registration, it is assumed that SBS has sole responsibility as the leading agency. Most of the BDM staff hold the view that other ministries have a supporting role with no strict obligation in implementation. Such perceptions can negatively influence the level of accountability especially in the absence of institutional mechanisms to monitor and enforce the successful implementation of birth registration.

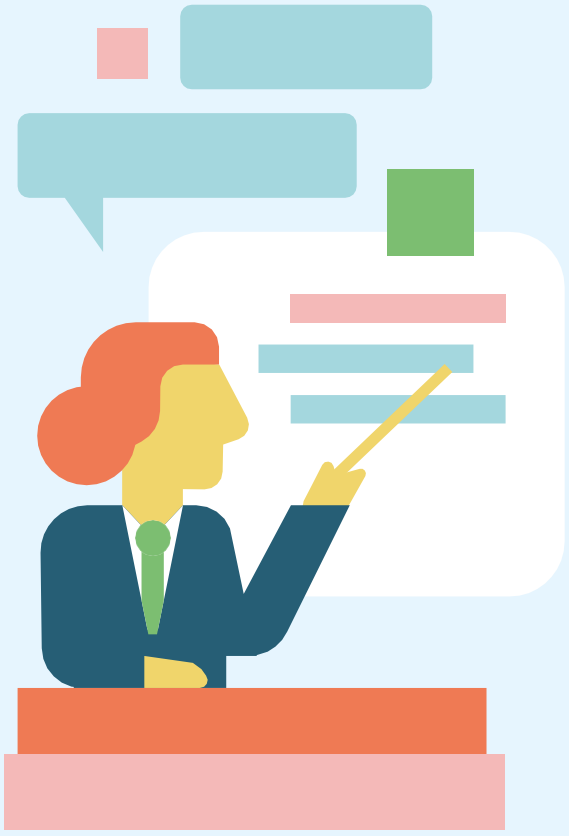
The existing legislation gives the registrar full executive authority to ensure the successful registration of all births in Samoa.

This means the registrar can make executive decisions on the implementation of the birth registration process including such that responsibilities are formally delegated to relevant government agencies. This will allow enforcing bodies or lead agencies, in this case the Samoa Bureau of Statistics, to ensure greater accountability.

Lack of Prioritisation and Commitment

At present, all citizens of Samoa do not have a unique identity code (UIC) that is linked to civil registration and other vital statistics. In recent years, the Government of Samoa has introduced numerous initiatives such as the National Digital Identification System which focuses on one or more components of CRVS with many of these efforts being done in silos. However, there is a lack of prioritisation and commitment towards improving birth registration as such, while it remains a pre-requisite for any CRVS or identity management initiative to work. For instance, in the budget for 2022-2023, it does not have an allocation for strengthening CRVS systems including birth registration.

Similarly, the Corporate Business Plan (2016 -2020) of the Samoa Bureau of Statistics lists revitalizing CRVS committee and mass registration of all BDM events as outputs for strengthening the birth registration system. The corresponding activities included continued strengthening of partnership with the main informants (village representatives, church ministers, NHS) and key implementing agencies (NHS, MWCSD) to improve birth registration and training for newly elected informants. There was limited provision for improving business processes or technology upgradation, etc. The new Business Plan for 2020-2024 was under formulation at the time of the study.



SUPPLY-SIDE FACTORS RELATING TO BIRTH REGISTRATION

Delayed Notification of Birth

The current three-step registration process relies on the successful notification of birth to move forward with birth registration. In the year 2009, B10 forms were introduced to streamline the birth notification process. Main informants were required to directly submit a copy of the B10 form to BDM or through assigned ministries.

Delays in submission, or failure to submit the B10 forms, are currently a significant challenge for timely birth registration.

According to BDM staff, in the year 2018, a decision was made to collect the copies of the B10 form themselves directly from the main hospital 10 days after every month as a step to address the delays. Despite the efforts, delayed or failure to notify births continue to be a recurring problem.

Complex Registration Form and Verification Process

The present birth registration form (B12 form) requires detailed information including that of the parents, from maiden name, occupation, to date and place of birth. The form also requires details of the parents' marriage and siblings. For birth registration to be approved, both birth and genealogy need to be verified by cross checking all the information provided.

At present, the verification process requires confirmation from relevant authorities in case the records are not available in the online system or BDM's archives.

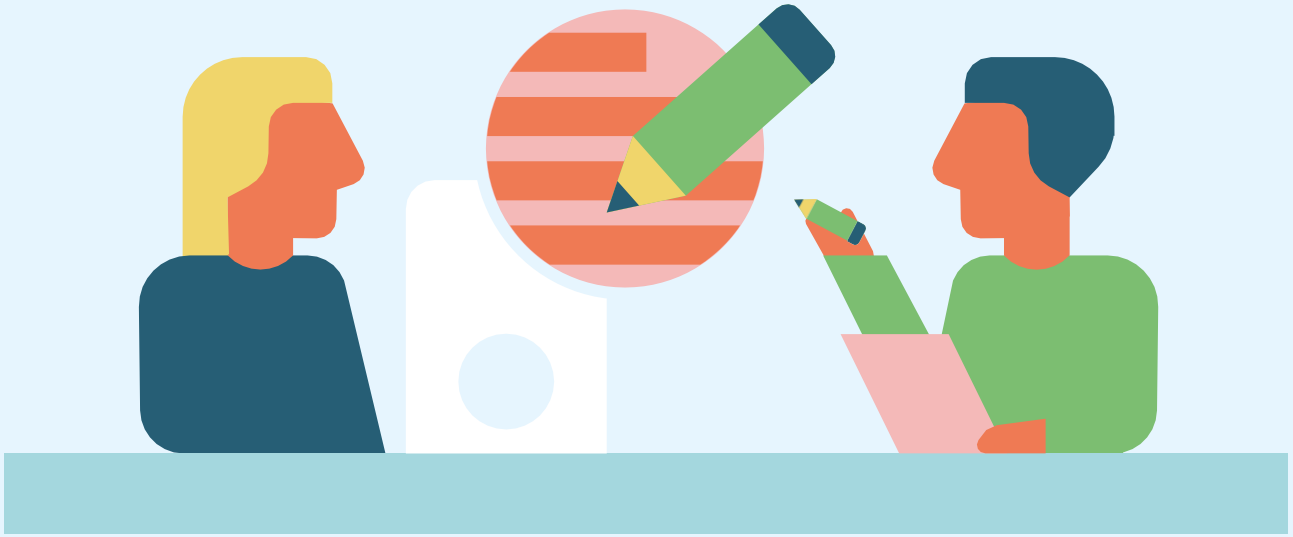
The verification process can take from a few days to a few months which significantly delays the birth registration process given the lack of integrated medical records and limited awareness among various actors.

Lack of Awareness amongst Main Informants and Stakeholders on the Birth Registration Process

Medical attendants (NHS staff), president of women's committee of a village, church ministers and parents are main informants identified in the birth registration process.

Consultation with the main informants highlighted a significant lack of awareness on the birth registration process.

For instance, baptism certificates, issued by church ministers, are one of the most important documents needed for verification, especially in the case of registering home births post validity of B10 forms issued. Church ministers are unaware



of this and hence do not have much incentive to ensure accuracy of information recorded. They confirmed being requested to use details of others and not necessarily birth parents in the baptism certificate. This can undermine the right of every child to know their birth parents as well as the validity of birth registration.

Lack of Easy Access to Registration Services

With the requirement of parents to submit several documents along with birth registration forms to verify and approve registration, there are no economical mechanisms, or platforms allowing for easy access to the services. At present, BDM follows a manual first come first serve approach. Parents are required to bring original copies of the documents for verification and wait at the BDM office for their turn. Since the documents are un-vetted and are verified on the spot during registration, it increases processing time, resulting in long queues. This is further complicated in the case of insufficient documents where parents often must redo the entire process after arranging all the necessary documents. All of this increases the time needed for the birth registration process discouraging individuals to register.

Process Complexity and Lack of Control Checks

At present, the three-step birth registration process puts the responsibility to complete registration solely on parents with them having to submit the original B10 form to process the registration.

The system also does not have sufficient control mechanisms and checks to ensure continuity of the birth registration process.

For instance, there is no formal way for BDM to follow-up with parents on delayed registration regardless of birth notification.

At the least, B10 forms do not include contact details of parents and BDM is left to wait for parents to come to them. The severity of the problem can be seen in the significant discrepancies between birth notification and actual birth registrations within a given period of time.

Month/ year	Birth notification in the system (Single Key)	Birth Registrations in the system (Double Key)
September 2021	7	21
October 2021	206	17
November 2021	732	24
December 2021	293	18
January 2022	91	25
February 2022	943	23

Individuals can go unregistered for years without being detected as there are no laws or procedures effectively implemented to flag unregistered individuals and allow for opportunistic birth registration.

For instance, while a birth certificate is mandated for school admission, exceptions are made to ensure no child is denied education.

Additionally, there are no mechanisms in place to monitor the timely delivery or submission of B10 forms by the main informants or relevant institutions. For instance, when visiting Tuasivi, where the main hospital in Savaii is located, it was reported that no B10 copies from 2009 – 2021 were submitted by the hospital to BDM as the hospital staff were unaware of this requirement. The disruption was left undetected for over a period of 12 years with serious implications on the number of unregistered births in Savaii during this time.

Ineffective Utilisation and Adoption of Technology

BDM began computerizing its records in the year 1993 prior to which all records were kept only in paper format. While attempts have been made to scan the past records and digitize them, not all records have been transferred. These paper-based records require a lot of space and are vulnerable to loss or damage. Although the recent birth registration data is now stored

and backed up on cloud or server, paper documents are still stored as an additional back-up which adds onto the issue of limited space. It also takes away from the benefits from digitalizing the records.

Additionally, software used by BDM, that is Life Data System (LDS) software for the management of vital events registration, has only been recently upgraded. BDM was under the purview of the Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration (MJCA) when it first shifted to software in 1999 following which it was transferred to be under the Ministry of Finance (MOF) in 2004. It was only from 2007 that BDM has been housed and administered by the SBS. During these transfers, the software has now become obsolete but is continued to be used by BDM staff with limited access.

Lack of Integrated Information System and Interoperability

Samoa's current health information system is largely fragmented, unreliable, and paper based. While several information systems have been implemented including the Patient Administration System (PATIS), Community Health Nursing Information System (CHNIS), Pharmacy Dispensary System, National Electronic Immunization Registry (NEIR), Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) - there is currently no interoperability between the systems. Additionally, data is predominantly paper based; manually collected, analysed and reported through paper or spreadsheets (Excel). Patient information is also manually created and stored separately at individual facilities. The current e-health strategy includes provisions for planned HIS (Health Information Systems) within the eHealth environment of Samoa, but considerable progress is yet to be seen (eHealth Strategy report).

The inability to share information between systems and over reliance on manual record keeping across the health care system often results in the delayed verification of birth required to complete registration.

Additionally, LDS software currently being used by BDM is not interoperable with other software systems. The coding language used for the software is obsolete and thereby cannot be upgraded to share or receive automated information from

other systems such as PATIS (medical record system used at the hospital). In the absence of automated interoperable systems, all the birth notifications are done manually using paper-based solutions like a copy of the B10 forms, which are constrained by availability of human resources and subject to human error.

Backlogs of Unregistered Individuals

In addition to solving the challenge of registering all newborn children, birth registration in Samoa is also challenged by a backlog of the unregistered individuals in Samoa. The birth registration is Samoa is less than 60% indicating that there are several unregistered individuals especially in the rural areas and in Savaii.

Service Disruption

As seen in the recent past, Samoa is prone to natural catastrophes including health emergencies such as the measles epidemic in 2019. During such emergency situations, disruptions can be expected in services, especially non-critical tasks like birth registration, especially in the case of no business continuity plans.

DEMAND-SIDE FACTORS RELATING TO BIRTH REGISTRATION

Lack of Public Awareness and Information

There is a limited understanding among the general population of the benefits and importance of birth registration. Birth registration is not seen as a child's inalienable right that can ensure protection and exercise of all other rights; instead, it is seen just as a requirement for accessing other services such as school enrollment or getting a passport when traveling overseas.

There is also no clear understanding of the birth registration process. For instance, many assume the B10 form issued at birth as the birth registration certificate. The B10 form has no instructions on the next steps that can be referred to later as well. Additionally, while legal provisions are there for single mothers to register without the details of the father, they are often not aware of this.

Lack of awareness on the importance of birth registration and unclear information on the birth registration process can discourage parents from registering their newborns.

Sociocultural Practices and Norms

Like in many societies, social issues such as underage sex, incest, domestic abuse, sexual assault, or rape is considered taboo and is not spoken much about in Samoa.

Children born from pregnancies owing to any such event often result in hesitancy towards birth registration or attempts to register the child under someone else's name to avoid societal pressure and stigmatisation as reported by participants of the focus group discussions. This can also be seen in the case of single mothers especially if the father is married to another woman.

Additionally, cultural adoption is a widespread practice in Samoa. Anecdotal evidence suggests that around 5% of the children are culturally adopted within the extended family. Since legal adoptions are lengthy and expensive, birth registration is often delayed so that on a later date, they can register the child with names of culturally adopted parents instead of the birth parents.

Sociocultural practices such as cultural adoption can undermine the credibility of birth information.

It can also delay the verification process, increasing the time taken to complete birth registration. For instance, naming traditions in Samoa are such that individuals can have multiple names resulting in varying names used across different documents or purposes. In cases where names on the birth notification or registration form do not match with the supporting documents, it can significantly complicate and delay verification and thereby the birth registration process. However, it should be noted that the current software makes provisions to change the first name without additional changes up to two times post birth notification.

Lack of Incentives

There is no immediate incentive for the parents to promptly register birth. Basic health care services such as immunization, access to child and maternal health care, etc. are made available without mandatory birth registration. A late registration fee of WST 20 is the only punitive measure which aims to encourage parents to register births within 3 months to avoid paying the late fee. However, this late fee is also seen as a financial barrier deterring registration.

Direct and Indirect Costs

While the birth registration process is free within the first three months from the date of birth, a nominal fee of WST 15 is charged for printing and issuing the birth certificate. Beyond the three months, a penalty or late fee of WST 20 is charged.

Adding on, against the centralized registration process that requires citizens to travel to the main SBS office in Upolu or Savaii, the costs incurred can further increase in terms of expenses and time spent. The increase is greater in cases where parents must travel back and forth due to insufficient documentation.

These direct and indirect costs act as a deterrent especially when birth registration is not seen as a right or of having much benefit to the parents or child.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR DESIGNING A PORTFOLIO OF SOLUTIONS

Systems thinking allows for a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected, dynamic nature of systems. It involves looking at the patterns, linkages, and interactions between the different elements that comprise the system as a whole.

Why?
Systems thinking can help us to better understand the interconnected, dynamic nature of systems that we operate in and to navigate and work with - instead of against - the forces in the system to facilitate change.

Portfolio-based approach is a methodology that seeks to develop, test, learn and scale a suite of interventions that are complementary and can shift complex systems by focusing on multiple intervention points at a given time.

Why?
"The most extensive challenges we face today are comprehensive and systemic, which means that our response to these challenges must reflect similar principles."[6] A portfolio-based approach is a response.

Solutions Mapping is an approach to look for bright spots and see what is already working that could be scaled to solve a problem.

Why?
Solutions Mapping is focusing on finding the answers, rather than dwelling on problems, and looking for what is Inspiring, Interesting, and Intriguing, that can address the problems.

6. For additional information, see Mikael Seppälä, Radical Uncertainty Requires Radical Collaboration: Stepping Stones Towards System Transformation with Innovation Portfolios (Sitra, May 2021).

Transforming the Birth Registration System in Samoa

IMPROVED TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITALIZATION OF THE BIRTH REGISTRATION PROCESS

Appropriate technology is one of the most significant enablers of an efficient and prompt birth registration system.

The technology for the birth registration system cannot be looked at in isolation and needs to be considered as part of the broader Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) System. Therefore, revamping the current technology and software system used for capturing vital events and generating vital statistics is of the utmost importance.

Below are some suggestions to revamp the CRVS technology:

Deploy open-source software

Replace the current custom built and proprietary solution for CRVS with non-proprietary software to provide a standardised alternative that reduces implementation and maintenance costs.

Automated systems

All births, especially institutional births, to be recorded electronically and shared with BDM via automated systems to improve data collection and accessibility of birth records, increase efficiency to improve user experience and standardise the CRVS process. This will also reduce delays and chances of human errors.

Invest in system interoperability

Enable common data to be shared across health and civil registration functions (linked through a master person index) to reduce duplication and registration effort.

Generate electronic records

Capture all the birth registration records electronically to reduce workload and costs while increasing data security and accessibility for BDM and other government ministries. Comprehensive electronic records will also expedite the verification process essential for birth registration.

STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES AT ALL LEVELS

Since the birth registration system in Samoa is multi-level and layered, it is critical to engage and build the capacity of individuals across all levels of administration to provide effective and efficient birth registration services. Suggestions for capacity building include:

Standardised training for the BDM staff

Capturing BDM's institutional knowledge and memory into standardised and digitized information guides for the staff would prevent the loss of information due to staff attrition and/ or change in governance. There is also a need to develop standardised training courses and training manuals for the BDM staff with updated information on international commitments towards universal birth registration and innovations in birth registration/CRVS processes.

Capacity building of the main informants

Creating information material with standardised, up to date and regular training for main informants such

TANZANIA

PROBLEM

Complex three-step birth registration process: notification, registration, and certification. The system had several bottlenecks including:

- Long distance to registration centre
- Need for a second visit to the centre to get certificate
- Paper-based processing and storage of information

SOLUTION

Decentralised digitalised one-step registration

- Introduced trained registration assistants in wards, executive offices and in hospitals and health clinics enabling children to be registered at birth or during scheduled immunizations for delayed registrations.
- Enabled registration agents to register the births of children and issue birth certificates, all in one visit.
- Digitized registered data using custom-built android applications on smartphones that are distributed to all registration points enabling instant transmission of collected data to the main registration center.

IMPACT

As of 2020, this new system has been implemented in 18 regions yielding good results.

Seven regions reached 95–100 percent birth registration/certification rates	**Three regions reached 80–89 percent**	**Two regions reached 70–79 percent**	**Three regions reached 50–69 percent**	**One region reached 29 percent**

7. https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/assets/images/CRVS_Webinar_Tanzania_e_WEB.pdf

as medical staff (nurse and medical officer) at the hospital, mid-wives, medical officers, Sui Tamaitai o Nuu (STN) or Sui o Nuu (SN) and church ministers to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities in the system and be the intermediary link supporting both the communities and the BDM staff in the birth registration process.

Investing in digital capacity and literacy as part of the change management process

Training, digital readiness and change management for the staff needs to go hand in hand when migrating from a legacy system to more appropriate technology for the birth registration and CRVS.

ADOPTING A WHOLE-OF SOCIETY APPROACH

Although SBS is the lead responsible agency for ensuring 100% birth registrations, the onus of having every child counted falls on the whole society. To ensure 100% timely birth registration, it is critical to have a whole of society approach which includes:

Engaging all the CRVS producers and benefactors for birth registration and CRVS functions

Citizens go through several touch points engaging with the government system that generates and/or uses CRVS.

It is critical to create a system that securely captures citizens' vital data once and uses it effectively for offering critical services to the citizens.

To do so, it is imperative to have a whole-of-society integrated approach. Samoa has a CRVS steering committee comprising of representation from various ministries such as Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Ministry of Justice & Courts Administration, etc. as well as agencies such as the Land Transport Authority. There is a need to revitalise the CRVS Committee and engage it for strengthening the birth registration system.

Engaging the village fonos or newly established District Development Centers

In identifying and listing unregistered community members for BDM's awareness and necessary action. These centers can also be explored to decentralise the birth registration services.

Roping in and engaging the religious establishments

Such as churches for community level awareness for birth registration, identifying unregistered children during religious ceremonies like baptism can be some of the ways to expand the cover of birth registration.

ADVOCATING FOR A SUPPORTIVE AND RIGHTS BASED LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION

Below are some of the areas for improvements in the legislative framework in Samoa:

- Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2002 is the only legislative document guiding the birth registration process in Samoa. Detailed procedures should be set out in regulations or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to allow for greater flexibility in the system while ensuring clear flows of information.

- The current legislation proposes a two-step registration process and places the primary responsibility on parents to register births. This can result in low registration rates. Samoa would benefit from legislations that allow for a simplified registration process.

- In instances where members of the public are responsible for registration, it is important that services are accessible. Legislations should allow for a decentralised system through the establishment of primary and secondary registration units.

- Legislations or regulations should allow for flagging of unregistered births and opportunistic birth registration.

- While the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2002 allows for any individual to apply for a certificate of registration, it does not mandate the issuance of a certificate upon registration. The issuance of an official birth certificate is a distinct activity that should follow the registration of a birth as it serves as proof of identity and legislation should explicitly mandate that the official certificate be delivered as proof of registration.

- To enable a more robust use of the registration data, including better in-depth statistical analysis, the UN recommends that countries collect details on the place of occurrence and place of registration. At present, this information is not legally required for birth registration.

- Current legislation does not define a process for late and delayed registration of births, including standards of evidence that are achievable. The procedures should not be so restrictive in that they prevent late or delayed registration and should take account of the difficulties in finding or verifying evidence of past events while striving to maintain the integrity of the records.

- UN principles for a civil registration system state that there should be no charge for registering a birth or a death within the designated timeframe and that there should be no charge for the issuance of an original birth certificate or original death certificate. At present, Samoa charges a fee to issue birth

KIRIBATI

PROBLEM

Among the countries with the lowest birth registration rate in the Pacific in 2009

SOLUTION

Partnerships promoting high birth registration in Kiribati

- Formal partnership via MOU with the Health Ministry allowing registry staff to be stationed at the central hospital to help capture the births on site
- Formal partnership via MOU with the Ministry of Education mandating the formal registration of children for school enrollment which helped clear backlog
- Actors in the birth registration process were trained on the process
- Series of mobile campaigns to the outer islands were conducted to clear backlogs and to create awareness on significance of birth registration

IMPACT

Moved up to being one of the highest birth registration rates in the Pacific with 87 per cent coverage rate for children under five years of age in 2014

8. https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/991/file/Case-Study-Kiribati.pdf

certificates. Registrars may charge a free for the issuance of a duplicate birth or death certificate, but the original certificate is advised to be issued free of charge. This can in turn encourage registration because obtaining a birth certificate is a significant incentive to registration as it may be needed to obtain services.

- The present legislation does not allow any consideration for a unique identity code (UIC). Regardless of which entity generates the UIC, legislation should require the registrar to ensure that a UIC is assigned and entered into the birth record for every child born within the territory of the country, regardless of citizenship, ethnicity, nationality, or residency status. Laws should also determine how the UIC will be provided to the parents. For example, the UIC may be included on the birth certificate or may be provided on a separate document.

PAKISTAN

PROBLEM

No standardised birth registration process with multiple challenges across different areas:

- Limited institutional capacity with lack of transparency
- Limited public awareness on the birth registration process
- Multi-step and time-consuming registration processes

SOLUTION

Digital birth registration pilot through multi-sector partnership

- A Future State Technology Architecture for CRVS was developed, using appropriate technology to simplify registration processes and make them more accessible to communities
- A registrar network including marriage registrars and lady health workers was established introducing community-based 'gatekeepers' to act as either mobile or stationary birth reporting facilitators making birth registration services effective and accessible
- A capacity-building programme was developed and implemented for individuals across all levels of administration to ensure effective and efficient birth registration services
- Advocated for a supportive and rights based legal and policy framework
- Launched an integrated marketing and communications campaign to create demand for birth registration

IMPACT

Successful pilot in the two largest and most populous provinces of Pakistan.

The initial four months saw registration rates increase by an average of 200%

Achieved target of 700,000 additional births after project was renewed from 2017-18

Less than 1% of rejected applications due to inaccurate or incomplete information

Approximately 48% of the children registered on the new system were girls

Compelling case for a nationwide scale-up

9. https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Roadmap-for-Digital-Birth-Registration.pdf

CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR BIRTH REGISTRATION

Taking necessary steps to reduce the existing barriers to timely birth registration from the demand side should go hand in hand with strengthened systems. Some suggestions include:

Increased awareness

Increasing the demand for birth registration through an integrated marketing and communication campaign can promote better understanding of the importance of birth registration. Increased awareness on birth registration process requirements like necessary documents, timeframe, responsible

agency etc. and information on legislative provisions, like provision for name change, or provisions for single mothers to register their child without mandatorily including father's name, can significantly promote the uptake of birth registration service.

Improved accessibility

Solutions such as using technology for remote/decentralised birth registration, or periodic mass registration drives for areas away from the birth registration office can be applied to overcome the accessibility challenges limiting timely birth registration.

Affordability

A fee of WST 15 for the issuance of birth certificate is seen as an additional barrier for birth registration. Issuing a birth certificate free of cost is aligned with the UN principles for a civil registration system and would encourage prompt birth registration.

REGULAR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

It is imperative to co-create a robust birth registration and CRVS model that is scalable and sustainable through rigorous monitoring and evaluation and continuous improvements.

BIRTH AT HOME

Family decides whether to take newborn to hospital or not

YES

NO

Newborn is taken to **National Hospital**

Identification information of the mother is obtained including physical record from PATIS

Nurse examines the baby and records information in the birth book and mother's medical records

Ward Clerk enters birth details in PATIS and fills in the B10 form

The nurse attending to the mother and baby, confirms the details and signs the B10 form

Ward Clerk makes a copy of the B10, gives the original to the family and keeps the copy in B10 form folder

All B10 copies are retrieved by BDM from the hospitals and also emailed within 10 days after the end of the month.

Newborn is taken to District Hospital

Nurse registers the mother and baby in their medical records

Upon discharge, family gets the baby's B10 form

Family calls STN to initiate registration

The STN fills in the B10 detailing all the details of the baby and gives it to the family

Family fails to call STN

Failure to obtain valid identity and other supporting documents

Parent(s) takes the B10 to the Registrar within 3 months for registration

Parent(s) fails to take the B10 form to Registrar within 3 months

Parent(s) does not submit baptism certificate to registrar

Parent(s) complete and sign the birth registration form (B12).

RO verifies all documents and request to submit any missing documents

All required documents submitted and valid

RO assigns parent(s) registration no

Parent(s) make payment for issuance of birth certificate and late fee if applicable

Parent(s) takes the baptism certificate to the registrar

BIRTH REGISTERED AND CERTIFICATE ISSUED

BIRTH AT HOSPITAL

District Hospital

Newborn's information is recorded in mother's medical record and the hospital register for birth

Nurse fills in the B10 form, signs it and hand it over to the parent(s)

Parent(s) decides not to submit B10 form to BDM

Parent(s) lose the copy of B10 form

Parent(s) travel to health facility where birth took place

Respective health facility fails to provide the b10 or birth confirmation

Respective health facility provides the B10 or birth confirmation

National Hospital

Newborns information is entered into birth book and mother's medical record on PATIS

Ward Clerk fills in the B10 form

The nurse attending to the mother and baby, confirms the details and signs the B10 form

Ward Clerk makes a copy of the B10, gives the original to the family and keeps the copy in B10 form folder

All B10 copies are retrieved by BDM from the hospitals and also emailed within 10 days after the end of the month.

Parent(s) takes the B10 to the Registrar

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BIRTH REGISTERED AND CERTIFICATE ISSUED

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