



COUNT ● ● ●
EVERY
● ● ● CHILD

the **right** to birth registration



Plan



REGISTRO CIVIL DE LAS PERSONAS

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Cover photo: © Plan/Alf Berg
Young girl from Bokèo Province, Laos.

Inside front cover photo: Jenny Matthews
Meyling shows off her new birth certificate, Nicaragua.

Inside back cover photo: © Plan/Alf Berg
Newborn with birth certificate: Plan's pilot birth registration project in Shaanxi Province, China.

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About Plan

Founded more than 70 years ago, Plan is one of the oldest and largest international child-centred development agencies in the world.

Operational in 66 countries, the organisation works in 48 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas and has offices in another 18 developed countries in Europe, North America, East Asia and Australia.

Plan is independent, with no religious, political or governmental affiliations.

Plan is a Child Centred Community Development (CCCD) organisation working with children, their families, communities, organisations and governments to promote child rights to end child poverty. When children and adults work together as part of the change process, it is more likely that programmes will be successful and sustainable.

Plan's work is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Guide to abbreviations


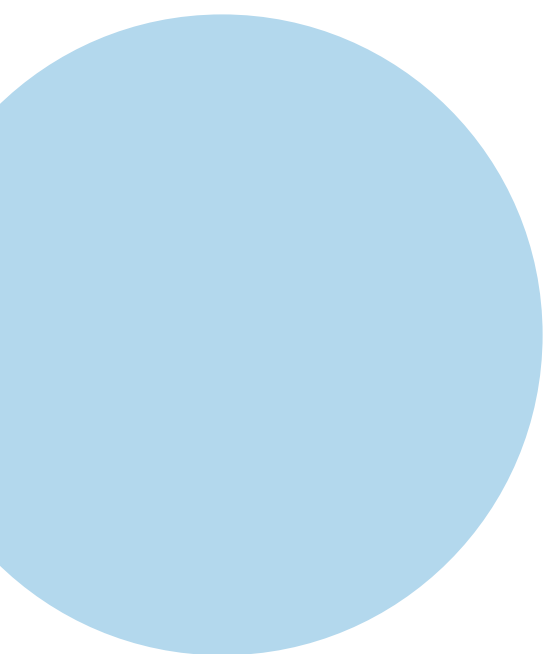
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CBO	community-based organisation
CCCD	Child Centred Community Development
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICT	information and communication technologies
ID	papers (often a card) certifying the identity of the bearer
IDP	internally displaced people
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
RITA	Registration Insolvency and Trusteeship Agency
TBA	traditional birth attendant
UBR	universal birth registration
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Acknowledgements

This campaign report could not have been put together without the help of Plan colleagues from all over the world. We are thankful to our birth registration focal points for completing the questionnaires and surveys needed to compile the results. Thanks are also due to the Marketing and Communications department and Nadya Kassam at Plan's international headquarters for helping to shape the contents of this report.

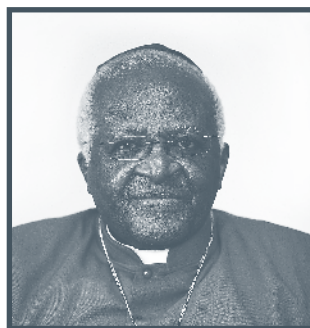
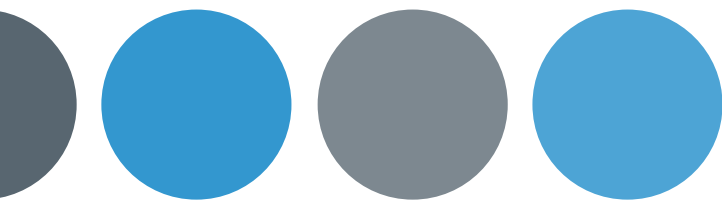
In addition, the campaign's success in every country where Plan took up the challenge was due to the role played by Plan's partners. National governments, local organisations, civil society, and UNICEF in particular, joined Plan to tackle the barriers to registering all children.

Finally, we are deeply indebted to all our colleagues who have been dedicated to the cause of achieving universal birth registration since its inception in 1998 and helped to make it the first global campaign for Plan. Their efforts in delivering successful registration projects, holding regional conferences and facilitating real political change to register children have been nothing short of exceptional. The names are too numerous to mention, but they know who they are.



For the latest information
on the continuing impact
of Plan's birth registration
work, please visit:

**[plan-international.org/
birthregistration](https://plan-international.org/birthregistration)**



“universal birth
registration
is impossible to ignore and
entirely possible
to achieve”

Foreword

When I helped Plan to launch a global campaign on universal birth registration in 2005, it was clear that a mammoth task lay ahead of us. At that time, some of the statistics were appalling – in some areas of the world more than 90 per cent of children remained unregistered.

Being unregistered denies children access to so many of their rights – education, health, participation as active citizens in their countries, to name but a few.

Plan started to work consistently and tirelessly on the issue, collaborating with partners at all levels of society. This work ranged from empowering individual children to demand their right to a certificate and educating parents on the need for registration, to providing technical support to governments to improve systems and processes and to take steps towards achieving universal birth registration.

And it has been a real challenge; one that found Plan responding by investing millions of dollars over four years to create grassroots programmes that have been both practical and innovative. In fact, many of the pilot projects and methodologies devised by Plan have been picked up and used in other settings to improve registration.

The successes have been remarkable, as this report will show. Millions of children have been registered directly through mobile registration services, while registrars have been trained to increase capacities and infrastructure, reaching children even in remote areas. In some countries, Plan's efforts have led to registration fees being waived and the law being changed to assist parents and guardians to register children as quickly and as easily as possible. This is all great work which I applaud wholeheartedly.

It has been a pleasure to be associated with this wonderful campaign. Even though the work will continue where it is needed most, this report marks the end of the formal global campaign phase for Plan. Yet, it is my hope that governments and others who hold responsibility for the rights of children in their countries read this report and learn from the experiences and practices it describes.

Universal birth registration is impossible to ignore and entirely possible to achieve. If countries have the political will to make it happen, Plan will pledge to help make it a reality.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Desmond Tutu', followed by several horizontal lines indicating the end of the signature.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, 2009

Introduction

The campaign

Plan has been promoting birth registration since 1998, when we were invited by the NGO Committee on UNICEF to support the 'Unregistered Children Project' in Asia. Plan's work on birth registration subsequently extended to Africa and the Americas and became the focus of Plan's first global campaign, 'Universal Birth Registration', in 2005.¹ The global campaign was launched by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu at the United Nations in New York, and ran until 2009. Campaigning and advocacy on a national level is still on-going.

Plan's campaign aimed to:

- act as a catalyst for birth registration and work towards ensuring more children and adults were registered
- promote birth registration at grassroots level to increase awareness and therefore demand for certificates
- directly support governments to increase numbers of registrations and certificates issued
- create innovative programmes for registration that were effective and sustainable yet reached even the most remote populations
- explain the importance of registration as a child-rights issue to duty-bearers

This report

This report documents Plan's ground-breaking work with children, parents, communities, partners and governments throughout the campaign. It examines the issues and the impact of non-registration for children today and in the future, and highlights the challenges faced in achieving birth registration for every child. In this report, we share the learning and successes achieved by Plan and the organisation's many partners in overcoming these obstacles.

The aim of this report is to help future campaigners to build on our knowledge and many examples of good practice. We encourage you to replicate and adapt the campaign's successes, to ensure that the right to birth registration becomes a reality for all children.

We hope that this report also enhances understanding and promotes action on the issue of birth registration by governments, donors, international agencies, academics, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals.

Statistics in this report

The integrity of official birth registration statistics varies from country to country, and numbers of children registered since the campaign's launch in 2005 are hard to verify. In response to the lack of reliable official data, Plan has sourced the statistics in this report mainly from information collated from our programme staff in the field, and from our own internal monitoring and evaluation systems. A summary can be found in Appendix 1.

Why birth registration?

Registering a birth is a critical first step in ensuring the rights of a child. Registration means proof – not only of identity, but of existence. A birth certificate is confirmation of a child's nationality, place of birth, parentage and age. In many countries it is seen as the key identity document, outweighing any other – a birth certificate is often needed to apply for a passport, driving licence or national identity card, as the child becomes an adult.

Registration entitles a child to their rights and bestows the responsibility for that child, throughout his or her life, on the state in which they are born. In many countries, proof of identity is essential to gaining access to basic services and to exercising their fundamental human rights. Without a birth certificate a child may not be able to sit for school exams, receive immunisations or free health care or claim rights to inheritance or legal protection in courts of law. Proof of age is critical in successfully prosecuting perpetrators of crimes against children such as child trafficking, sexual offences, early recruitment into the armed forces, child marriage and child labour.

As an adult without a birth certificate, a person may not have the right to marry, vote, be employed in the formal sector (for example, to work legally or pay taxes), access credit and loans from banks, acquire a passport to travel outside their country of birth, or even to register their own children's births.

“With a birth certificate I can get my passport and with my passport, I can go [to] study or work overseas and in turn benefit my parents, family, community and country at large.”

Child advocate, Sierra Leone

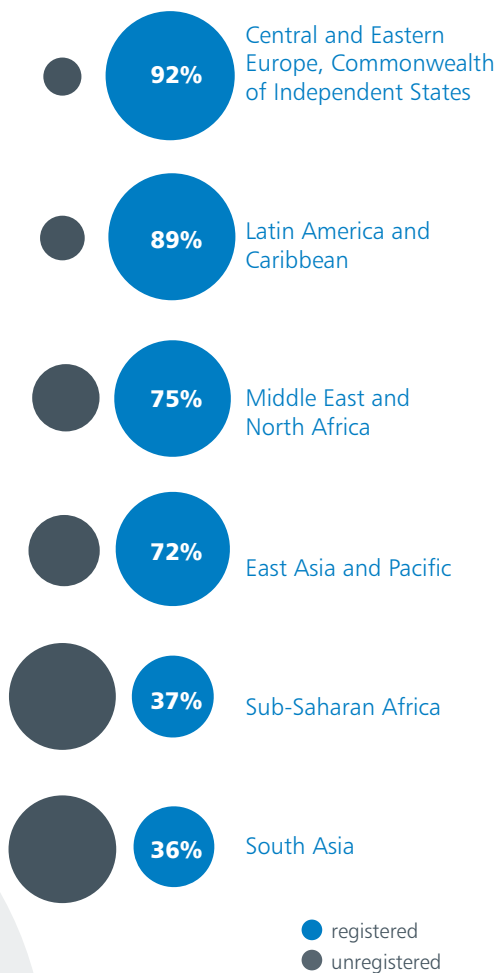
Birth notification, birth registration and birth certificates – definition of terms

A **birth notification** is the notice of the occurrence of a birth by midwives or others to civil registrars, who then register the birth.

Birth registration is the official recording of the birth of a child through an administrative process of the state and is coordinated by a particular branch of government. It is a permanent and official record of the existence of a person before the law.

A **birth certificate** is a personal document issued to an individual by the state to prove birth registration. The document includes the individual's parents' names, dates and places of birth, nationality, and may include further details.

Birth registration rates by region⁹



case study

In 2005, before Plan began the global campaign, only 19 per cent of children under the age of 6 had their births registered in Tanzania; of these, only 7 per cent went on actually to obtain a birth certificate.² Due to the success of Plan's campaign with RITA*, over one million new registrations have been achieved since 2005.³

*Registration, Insolvency and Trusteeship Agency

Human rights law on birth registration

Birth registration was first acknowledged as a human right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1966, the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) ensured that birth registration became a legally binding obligation for states. In 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), one of the most widely ratified conventions, included similar provisions:⁴

Article 7

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

Article 8

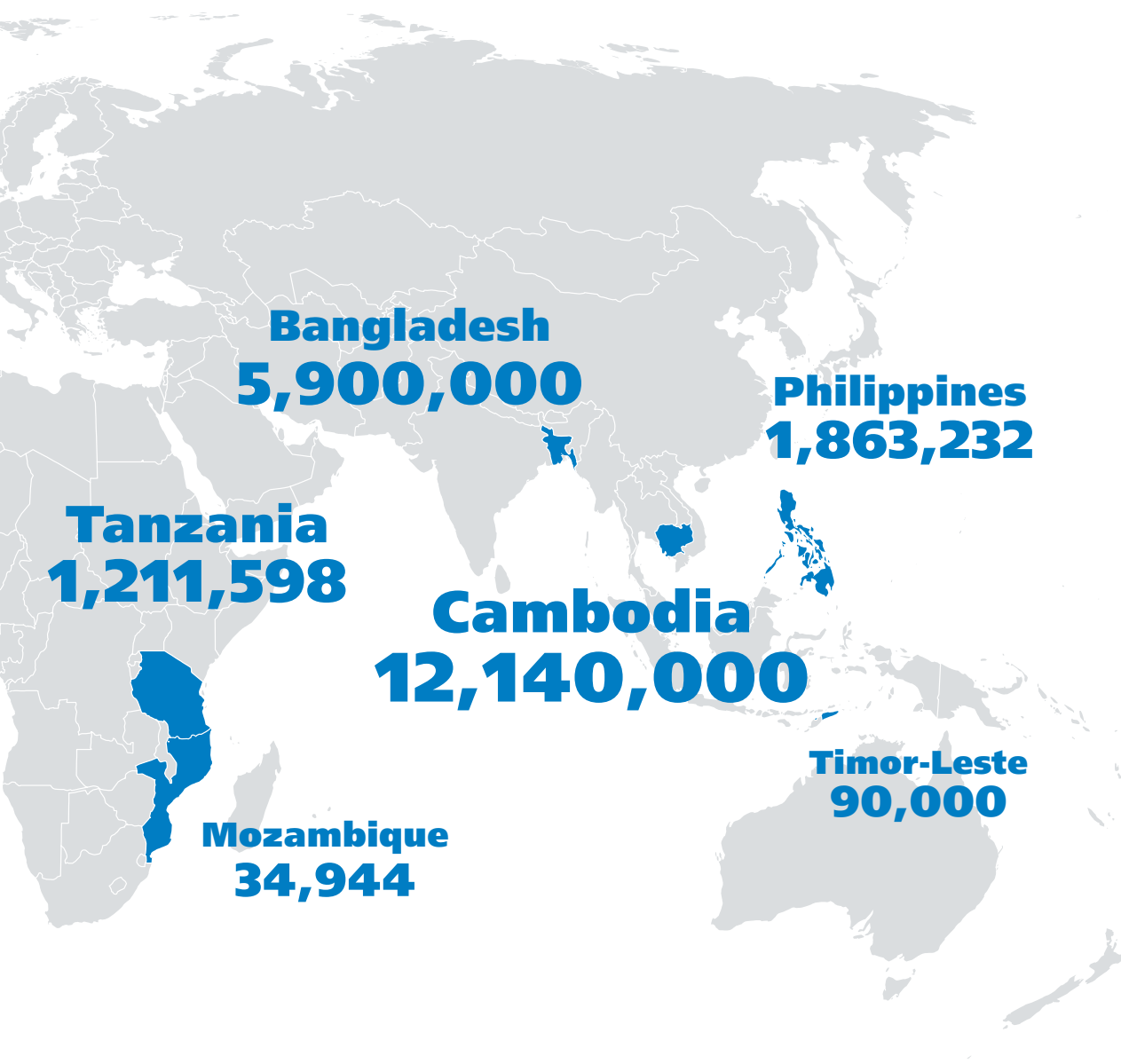
1. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognised by law without unlawful interference.
2. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.⁵

Legal proof of existence is fundamental to gaining respect, protection and the fulfilment of all the other rights in the Convention.⁶ Regional treaties such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) also highlight the importance and responsibility of the state towards birth registration. Plan has been instrumental in advocating for states to safeguard the right to birth registration and fulfill their duty under law.

Despite the legal obligations on states, 51 million children a year are still not registered at birth.⁷ This lack of birth registration is both a symptom and a cause of underdevelopment in the countries where it occurs. In Africa, inadequate civil registration systems and the resulting lack of reliable statistics, particularly relating to health, are a major concern. These systems must be improved in order both to address development issues and to measure the positive effects of different programmes and interventions in Africa.⁸

**Plan has facilitated
the registration
of over 40 million
people in 32 countries
including:**





Full list on page 89

Executive summary

Plan's five-year global campaign, 'Universal Birth Registration', had one simple ask – for every child to have a birth certificate.

Plan's campaign and our results

Throughout Plan's global campaign, which ran from 2005 to 2009, our aim has been to work with our partners to tackle low rates of birth registration.

Using innovative techniques, which are described below, and relying on the ingenuity and determination of Plan's staff and our partners, we facilitated the registration of over 40 million people, mostly children, during the campaign. Together, we also made the case for significant changes to legislation in some of the countries where the campaign was active, ensuring access to a free birth certificate for future generations of children.

In addition, working with our partners, Plan:

- successfully highlighted the importance of birth registration to duty bearers, convincing the state of the benefits that registration can bring, as well as it being the right of every child
- helped to increase understanding of the importance of birth registration within communities, resulting in increased demand for registration services
- created innovative pilot schemes for maximum outreach to populations, improved systems and increased the capacity of local and national services
- encouraged and enabled coordination and cooperation between different levels of society to improve registration services and to enhance health and social services planning

The case for birth registration

Although a child's right to an identity is set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991), millions of children every year are not registered at birth. Without proof of citizenship through registration, children struggle to realise other rights under the Convention, for example their parents may not be able to access essential child health services, such as immunisation programmes. A child may be denied their right to education, barred from enrolling in class or taking exams. Unable to prove their parentage, an orphan may be denied their right to inherit land. Fleeing across borders in times of conflict, or trafficked for money, it may be impossible for a child to be reunited with their family.

As the child becomes a young person, they may find it harder to get an identity card, driving licence or passport without proof of their identity. They may not be able to travel or work legally, and may be forced to take low-paid, hazardous jobs, or become involved in criminal activity. They may not be able to access financial services. They may not be able to vote. They may not even be able to register the birth of their own child. In this way, being unregistered directly impacts on their rights even as an adult.

For states, having a proportion of their population that is not officially registered as citizens has major implications. They are unable to accurately count their population or to predict trends such as rising birth or death rates. This may lead to under-resourcing of local services and uneven distribution of aid funding. States may be unable or unwilling to fulfill their duties under the CRC towards unregistered children. In addition, governments miss out on essential taxation revenue when young people are forced to work illegally or in the informal sector.

The reasons why children are not registered can be complex, and barriers to registration occur at all levels of society. The centralisation of registration services is a major factor for families – with offices far from rural communities, families face a long journey and the loss of essential income to register their children. Lack of awareness, ethnic and social barriers, complex administration systems and economic pressures also contribute to low registration rates. States may not have the resources or infrastructure to support an effective civil registration system, and the political will to prioritise birth registration may be low. Registration data may not be coordinated with other systems, such as health or social services, meaning that service planning is much less effective than it could be.

Plan has facilitated the registration of over 40 million people – mostly children – in 32 countries during the life of our 'Universal Birth Registration' campaign. This is more than the entire population of Canada.

Plan's birth registration innovations

To overcome the barriers to birth registration, Plan used innovative techniques during the campaign.

- **Using new technology** – in Kenya, mobile phone networks set up for banking were used to text birth notifications to authorities. In Ecuador, ten groups from the civil registration office were supplied with satellite kits, mobile phones and internet access to record and store data in remote areas. Between 2006 and 2008, these teams registered 304,000 people.
- **Using media such as radio, internet, film and cultural events to convey messages** – in Malawi, the message was spread at football matches; in Burkina Faso, films were shown at Africa's largest film festival and ten West African countries broadcast special radio programmes made by children.
- **Harnessing local knowledge and systems** – in Tanzania old and new practice came together as traditional village registers were optically scanned to update the population figures.
- **Involving children and encouraging them to participate** – in Indonesia, children were educated and supported to become advocates for birth registration. These children are now spokespeople in schools and on radio shows.
- **Generating increased political will by persuading and supporting duty-bearers to change laws** – in Bangladesh, after persistent lobbying, the government passed the Birth Registration Act 2004 which allowed registration to be free when it came into force in 2006.
- **Training members of the community to increase capacity and infrastructure at local level** – in Zambia, the community now approach midwives and birth attendants to register newborns, and also learn about child rights. In a single project in Paraguay, 492 birth attendants were trained to ensure prompt registration.
- **Increasing understanding about the value of identity documents among diverse populations** – in Cameroon, hundreds of marginalised *Baka* people became registered citizens for the first time and in Dhaka, Bangladesh, more than 20,000 street children signed up for their birth certificates.
- **Challenging defunct technology, outdated administrative systems and social norms from colonial times** – in Indonesia, Plan was actively involved in a legal review that put an end to colonial laws that discriminated against children born of minority groups. In one area of Brazil, where one-third of families are headed by women, mothers could not ask for child support unless the child's father was named on the birth certificate. Plan worked with partners between 2007 and 2009, setting up centres where men could confirm their paternity, quickly and for free. As a result, state law for the recognition of paternity was modified and fees for paternity registration lifted.
- **Creating mobile registration projects to reach out to the population** – in Mozambique, Plan's mobile units cut the distance travelled in order to register from up to 75km to just 1km in many instances.

- **Persuading governments to decentralise registration** – sometimes one of the biggest constraints to registration. In Sierra Leone, health workers have been mandated to issue birth certificates in order to overcome this.
- **Promoting registration despite the fear of persecution** – a remnant from brutal regimes such as those of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Changing the law

Some of the countries where Plan's campaign has been active have shown dramatic changes over short periods of time. One area in Indonesia saw registration rates soar from only 3 per cent to 72 per cent in two years. In Cambodia, around seven million people (56 per cent of the national population) picked up their birth certificates in just ten months.

But none of these initiatives would have been worthwhile unless they led to permanent and sustainable change in law and practice, ensuring that future generations will be automatically registered and owning a birth certificate would be the rule, not a rarity. So improving and introducing new legislation to make registration easier, closer and cheaper was a vital strategy in Plan's campaign.

Partnerships, where many stakeholders were involved, were important for gaining widespread support for Plan's innovations. Plan called on governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations, local groups and corporate partners to engage in the issue and help in the push towards universal registration.

Plan's call for continuing action

Despite the successes of Plan's global campaign, work is still ongoing to achieve universal birth registration. As a first step, Plan aims to share our learning from this campaign, through this report. Plan calls on everyone engaged with child rights, to replicate and adapt the campaign's innovations, and to share initiatives and resources.

In addition, Plan urges:

- global organisations, such as UN agencies, multi- and bi-lateral donors and multinational corporations, to increase their efforts to make universal birth registration a reality
- national governments to increase their efforts to register children as soon as possible after birth
- local organisations to engage communities, in order to explain the importance of a birth certificate to the lives of their children and the future of their families

Birth registration is not an expensive exercise, and for states, effective systems are an investment in their country's development. With the right effort and commitment, states can ensure that children realise their right to have an identity. This report demonstrates that with the right political will, small interventions can have a large, lasting impact and lead to a successful future for everyone.

Plan hopes that this report may prove to be the incentive to make 'Every Child Count'.

The impact of non-registration on children

Lack of birth registration presents real obstacles for many children around the world, barring them from receiving education, health care or protection from harm.

And with states becoming more stringent in their border controls, birth registration, as a proof of citizenship, is essential.

“Who am I? Where did I come from? What’s my nationality? All I know is that my name is Murni, but I don’t have proof for that.” Child in Indonesia

Education

There are many reasons why children are not in education, including not having the right piece of paper to enrol in school. For example, in Cameroon, to be admitted to school, each child needs a birth certificate which carries their name and proves their age. In many cases, particularly in rural communities, children enter primary school without birth certificates; yet they later find they are unable to sit government exams for secondary schools due to their lack of legal registration. In Nepal, even if school principals use their authority to allow unregistered children to attend, these pupils will not be eligible for scholarships, free books or uniforms.⁹

“It is for this reason that some young girls get discouraged with school and drop out at a lower class in the primary school as they cannot write the Class 7 final examinations for lack of a birth certificate. They then choose to accompany their mothers to the farms or marry. What fate awaits these young girls at this age when they are not able to continue school because of the birth certificate? Knowing that educating a girl is educating a nation – what type of a nation are we building if the young girl is not educated?”

Nan, aged 15, Cameroon¹⁰

Health

Health is critical to children’s development and future. In some countries, children may miss out on immunisations and their right to free or subsidised healthcare if they do not possess a birth certificate. In Vietnam, for example, a child under five years old with a birth certificate can access free healthcare services at all health stations and hospitals throughout the country. Those who do not have a birth certificate may not receive vital childhood vaccines and immunisations, leaving them more vulnerable to preventable diseases.

“For children, poor health hinders their performance in school. Malnourished and ill children miss more days of school, often under-perform when at school, and are at greater risk of falling behind their peers. This leads to a greater likelihood that they will drop out of school earlier.”¹¹

Employment

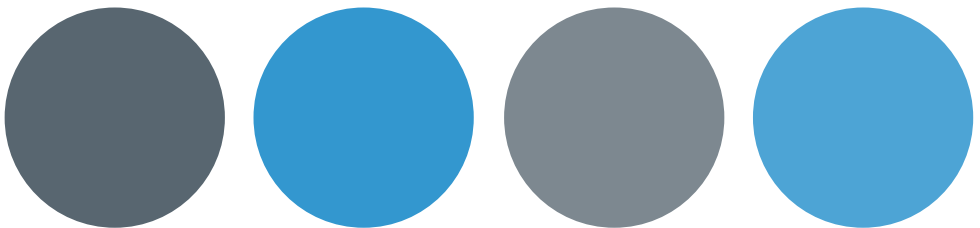
When children miss out on a good start to life in terms of education and health, this also limits their future employment opportunities:

“When children leave school early, they enter the workforce earlier with fewer skills, where they are at greater risk of various forms of exploitation, including being drawn into the sex trade.”¹²

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that more than 200 million children globally are involved in child labour, which is damaging to their mental, physical and emotional development.¹³ Plan has supported several studies on working children in Nepal. In 2005, a survey of 1,074 children working in brick kilns between the ages of 5 and 16 found that one-third had never attended school and, of those who had, only 20 per cent had completed education to Grade 3. The many reasons given for not attending school included migration-related problems and legal issues of citizenship.¹⁴

A birth certificate in some countries is a prerequisite for acquiring social security numbers required for employment in the formal sector. Such legal identity documentation may also be required in order to register a business, claim land in the case of a boundary or border dispute, access credit, open bank accounts, or to be eligible for microfinance assistance and loans.

Many countries' economies rely on the money sent back home from family members working overseas. These remittances in effect support whole families and communities. Indeed, the scale of such remittances can be substantial – for example, according to the World Bank, sub-Saharan Africa took US \$19 billion in remittances in 2007, or 2.5 per cent of gross domestic product.¹⁵ Encouraging remittances is one strategy that has been highlighted as a means of developing the poorest countries in the world.¹⁶ In order to work legally abroad, a passport is required, and without a birth certificate, applying for a passport is troublesome or impossible. Registration, therefore, has an impact on economic growth and development, and is vital in helping families, communities and countries to pull themselves out of poverty.



Child protection

The benefits of having a birth certificate are particularly clear in the area of child protection, where proof of a child's age is a pre-condition to effective law enforcement. A birth certificate documents a person's age and, as children under the age of 18 are entitled to particular rights and legal protection, proof of age can go some way toward protecting children who are exploited or come to harm in a variety of ways.

Child soldiers

The latest estimates suggest that 300,000 children are directly involved in conflicts around the globe.¹⁷ The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict increased the age for recruitment and deployment of soldiers from 15 to 18 years old. Without proof of a child's age, however, the protocol cannot be enforced.

Research by the Asian Development Bank in Nepal found that the lack of birth registration among Dalits (a term used to define people of low caste) and internally displaced children – who are homeless within their own country – had increased their risk of military recruitment. However, the research noted that conscription was likely to involve severe coercion, and possession of a birth certificate was therefore unlikely to prevent recruitment.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the Committee on the Rights of the Child¹⁹ has maintained its concern that children who have not been registered at birth are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, including recruitment into armed groups in Nepal, as their ages cannot be legally established.²⁰

Even if a birth certificate cannot directly protect a child who is kidnapped or coerced into the armed forces, for children who are rescued from such exploitative conditions, proof of identity and age can help in efforts to reunite them with family and reintegrate them into their former community. This may not be possible for those who cannot prove their identity or status as a child. In Uganda, reports suggest that children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army had continuing traumatic experiences even when rescued due to the collapse of the registration system. As these children had no identity papers, it was difficult to get them back to their homes and families.²¹ In addition, prosecutions against abductors will only succeed if there is proof that alleged child soldiers were indeed children at the time of recruitment.

Child labour

The determination of age is key to the fight against the worst forms of child labour. Research by Plan in Ghana investigated the link between birth registration, child trafficking and child labour in the cocoa industry. Plan's study discovered that attempts to monitor implementation of child labour laws or prosecute employers were heavily dependent on ascertaining a child's age, which was virtually impossible in the absence of a birth certificate. The research also identified that some farmers used lack of birth registration as a loophole for hiring minors as cheap labourers.²²

Child trafficking

Determining proof of age becomes vital when dealing with child trafficking. According to the UN, a child has been trafficked if he or she has been moved within a country, or across borders, whether by force or not, with the purpose of exploiting the child. When trafficked between countries, the lack of identification means that the process of repatriation may be prolonged. In India, Plan has learned of cases where Nepalese and Bangladeshi girls, rescued from brothels, languish in institutions for months or even years, due to administrative processes to establish nationality and who takes responsibility for the child.²³

For those children who are trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation, it is very hard to prosecute those who abuse children if the age of the child is challenged by the courts and there is no proof available. Plan has learned of one prosecutor assigned to handle child rights cases in the Philippines who noted that about 50 per cent of child abuse cases, mostly those in the areas of child sexual abuse, child labour and prostitution, did not succeed due to the failure of concerned parties to show birth certificates during the investigation phase.

Trafficking is sometimes linked to the desire to migrate. Those individuals who do not have proper legal documentation but who want to migrate for work or other reasons may be more likely to fall into the hands of traffickers. Without papers, individuals become dependent on illicit intermediaries to facilitate their migration and therefore their vulnerability to trafficking increases.

Juvenile justice

Children who come into contact with the law may be subject to prosecution as adults if there is no proof of age. There are many ways to estimate a child's age in the courts, but the only reliable method for age verification is birth registration or a certificate. Accounts from Bangladesh have reported cases where boys as young as 7 have found themselves in court on charges of murder, rape or arson, despite the age of criminal responsibility in the country being 13 years old.²⁴

"I feel so insecure when I walk in the street, because at any time a police officer can stop me and ask for my ID, which I do not have, and if he finds out that I do not have ID he could then arrest me. Thank God this has not happened to me before, but it could."

Ibrahim addressing the Plan Egypt birth registration conference in July 2007

Child marriage

It is widely held by international convention – for example in UN recommendations and in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child – that 18 is the minimum age for marriage.²⁵ However, across the world many girls are married before the age of 18, and the prevention of inappropriate early marriages requires proof of age. UNICEF has generated regional averages and found that among women aged 15 to 24, 48 per cent are married before the age of 18 in South Asia, 42 per cent in Africa and 29 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.²⁶ Many countries face challenges

in stopping the practice due to customary law, which does not give a clear minimum age for marriage. However, even when civil laws have been put in place to prevent child marriage and overrule customary law, it is very hard for those involved to be brought to justice if the children affected cannot verify their age.

Plan's partners in Bangladesh have found that the opposite can also occur, where women over the age of 18 are prevented from making marriage decisions and parents accuse chosen boyfriends or husbands of abduction or child marriage, insisting their daughters are under 18 years old.²⁷

“The provision of legal birth and marriage registration certificates is critical for the protection of young women from the deeply rooted problem of early marriage and related problems of fistula.”

Ubah Mohammed, State Minister in the Ministry on Women's Affairs in Ethiopia²⁸

Children with disabilities

In many countries, children with disabilities have the right to special provisions or services under national legislation. In India, the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and full Participation) Act 1995 outlines the Indian Government's plans to address the rights of persons with disabilities. This includes access to free education for a child with a disability in an appropriate environment, special books and equipment, as well as transport facilities. A study by Plan interviewed social workers in India who worked with children with disabilities, 80 to 90 per cent of whom did not have birth certificates. Children with disabilities are often invisible to care services and excluded from mainstream society. Without birth certificates, these children will find it difficult to access the services and provisions put in place to ensure equal opportunities in education and employment.²⁹

Children affected by HIV

There are many other vulnerable groups of children who require special protection, such as children affected by HIV and AIDS. Birth and death registration have proved to be crucial for children in a recent Plan-supported study commissioned by the Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on Children and HIV and AIDS in Eastern and Southern Africa.³⁰

There are two reasons why registration is especially important for this group. First, birth certificates can be a means of protecting children, particularly girls, from being drawn into commercial sexual exploitation. This is because children without certificates are less likely to access education and health services and are possibly more likely to start working at an early age in illegal sectors, making them vulnerable to exploitation and infection.

Second, a child's birth certificate, along with the death certificate of his or her parents, is needed to inherit land or property. The IATT study also showed that HIV affects the availability and efficiency of civil registration systems at the national and district levels. When civil registrars are ill or die of HIV-related illness, the resources to replace and train new registrars are not always in place.³¹

Statelessness, nationality and citizenship

A stateless person is a person who is not recognised as a national by any state, does not have any nationality or citizenship rights, and is therefore not protected by national legislation or able to participate as an active citizen in society. In some countries, no birth registration means no nationality, while in others, you are still considered a citizen without a birth certificate. Individuals who are stateless are especially vulnerable, because they are overlooked by states and other service providers.³² Estimates suggest that there are between 11 and 15 million stateless people worldwide who are ignored in this way. Many more are likely to be *de facto* stateless (i.e. stateless in practice, but not in law).

People may become stateless due to legal differences or conflict between countries, renouncing their nationality to take another and failing, or simply not being registered at birth and therefore not being able to prove parentage or place of birth. Parents who are themselves stateless are likely to pass this status on to their children. Stateless people are considered to be the ultimate 'forgotten people'.³³

The principles for granting citizenship at birth are usually based on *jus soli* (the law of earth) or *jus sanguinis* (the law of blood). *Jus soli* means that those born in the territory of a country have the right to citizenship of that country. The principle of *jus sanguinis* means that children inherit their nationality from their parents. Most legal systems adopt a mix of these principles.

"I am happy to have a birth certificate.
It makes me feel that I am a Zambian."

Shem, Zambia



Any connection between birth registration and statelessness is therefore dependent on country context. Plan commissioned research in Thailand and the Dominican Republic to study this connection in more depth.

The pronounced poverty levels and instability in Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, have driven many Haitians across the border to the neighbouring Dominican Republic, which is thought to contain up to two million Haitians. In the Dominican Republic, the principle of *jus soli* prevails. However, birth registration and nationality are closely entwined and a Dominican birth certificate has become the required proof of Dominican nationality. Children of Haitian origin, or children suspected of having Haitian roots, are being systematically denied birth registration as a means of denying them Dominican citizenship. This is creating new cases of statelessness in the country every day. In early 2008, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted its concerns about the Dominican Republic's policy on birth registration. It urged the state to adopt a policy in which all children born in the country could receive a birth certificate. This included children from marginalised and vulnerable groups, so that they could acquire a nationality in order to prevent them from becoming stateless.³⁴

In Thailand, too, the issue of statelessness is a problem, with a suspected one million stateless people residing in the country.³⁵ Plan's research found the relationship between birth registration and nationality to be complex and that the link is not so clear cut as in the Dominican Republic. However, in both cases, children of migrants are at increased risk of statelessness due to their lack of access to the birth registration system. Our research concluded that the underlying reasons for a restrictive policy on birth registration and access to nationality for the children of migrants were political and economic motivations and concerns over national security.

“Without documents we have no value, we cannot exercise our rights.”

Child in Nicaragua

Conflicts and natural disasters

During turbulent times proof of identity becomes paramount. When wars, hurricanes, earthquakes and floods strike, identity papers become essential in order to qualify for emergency assistance, for example, for receiving food aid or claiming compensation, and proving property and land rights.

Children who are orphaned or separated from their families during conflicts and disasters, like the tsunami in Asia in 2004 or the earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005, become more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. Serious cases of child trafficking followed the tsunami, and in both situations, there emerged cases of many adults coming forward to collect the same child. In addition, after the earthquake it was reported that it became difficult for children in Pakistan without a birth certificate to inherit what was rightfully theirs, especially for girls.

During conflicts and wars, identity becomes important as children and their families are often displaced. When children do not have the right documentation it may be very difficult for them to be reunited with families or repatriated to their rightful communities or countries.

“Timor-Leste is a country that has suffered many years of emergency, conflict and social turmoil, in which many thousands of children were separated from families and communities. The fact that there were no records of their birth or citizenship has greatly hindered attempts to repatriate them to Timor-Leste and to reunite them with their families.”³⁶

Development planning and governance

Civil registration is important not only for citizens, but for the state. In order for countries to plan their services, such as health and education facilities, appropriately, the state must have accurate population statistics. In order to plan how many primary schools are needed, it is essential to know how many children, of what ages, are living in which locations. Data on birth registration can assist with this, in addition to census data. Given the lack of accurate statistics, it is hard to measure progress towards development indicators such as the Millennium Development Goals, while understanding birth rates and trends is also difficult. Plan has found that, even though such information on birth registration could be useful for planning and monitoring child welfare, many governments still see birth registration as a purely legal function rather than a useful source of information for improved planning.

Civil registration

Civil registration and, in particular, death registration plays an important part in a child's life. For example, in Kenya, Plan has found some communities do not report deaths in an official capacity. This means that no death certificates are issued, which causes problems when it comes to assisting orphans and ensuring inheritance rights.

Rates of death registration, like birth registration, are shockingly low in most developing countries. Around 51 million births (40 per cent) go unregistered worldwide every year, and about 38 million deaths a year (two-thirds) go unregistered.³⁷ The World Health Organization (WHO) currently receives reliable cause-of-death data from only 31 of its 193 member states. Without this data, governments are not able to design effective public health policies or to measure their impact. However, an initiative launched recently by the Health Metrics Network and backed by WHO hopes to change these low rates of reporting worldwide.³⁸

“Without the statistics that these systems produce, we can only have a partial view of the impact of US \$120 billion spent annually in official development aid.”³⁹

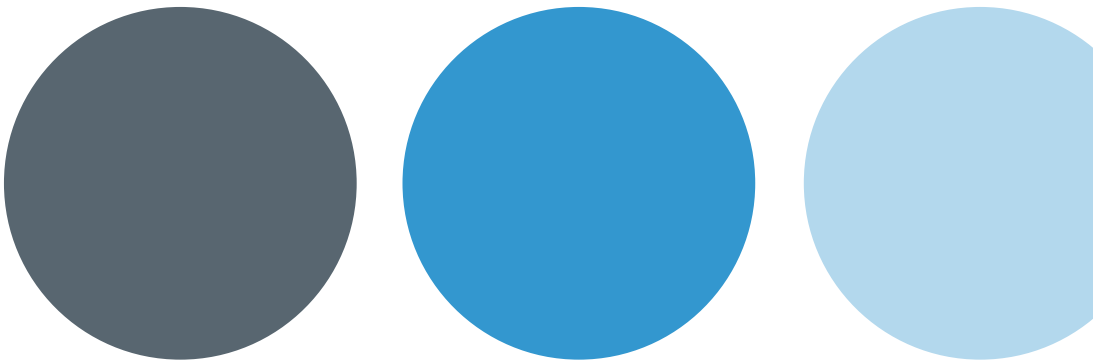


Table 1: reasons to achieve universal birth registration

<p>The international community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances census data and the targeting of overseas development aid. • Assists in monitoring progress towards international targets such as the Millennium Development Goals, particular MDG 4, reducing under-five mortality by two-thirds, but also MDG 2 and 3. • Acts as a tool for child protection through documenting age, parentage and nationality (and sometimes also ethnicity). • Provides the key legal fact (age of child) in the courtroom in order to prosecute those who abuse and exploit children. • Allows for global monitoring of birth rates and health trends. • Supports accountability processes by monitoring impact of spending on aid and development. • Aids in the assessment of effectiveness of various programmes (for example, a child mortality programme needs to know how many children were born and died to prove effectiveness).
<p>The state</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists accurate planning and implementation of government policies and programmes. • Helps promote democracy and citizenship by giving all citizens an identity and right to vote. • Helps promote inclusion of those most marginalised in society. • Illustrates that the state recognises and respects the lives of those for which it has a responsibility.
<p>The child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a legal identity and establishes a child's existence. • Gives access to education and healthcare. • Offers protection against exploitation, including trafficking, illegal adoption, child labour, early marriage and early military recruitment. • Speeds up repatriation, reintegration into communities and improves the likelihood that a child can be reunited with his or her family (in cases of trafficking, for example). • Helps in accessing services and special provisions for children in difficult circumstances. • Helps in times of crisis to provide access to aid and food assistance. • Ensures the inheritance of property and land rights. • Helps establish citizenship and nationality. • Allows for future employment in the formal sector. • Facilitates future financial assistance, including access to credit, loans and microfinance schemes.

Is it really that simple?

Does a birth certificate really make that much difference to a child's life or is it a good idea only in theory?

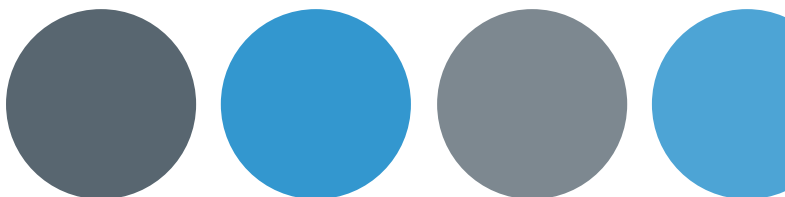
A study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on legal identity documents, including birth certificates, in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Nepal aimed to answer some fundamental questions. These included 'what can legal identity realistically deliver in terms of promoting social and economic inclusion?' and 'how, when and under what circumstances does legal identity actually improve lives in concrete, meaningful ways?' ADB explored these questions in relation to the promotion of access to benefits and opportunities, the protection of human rights, and the generation of demographic statistics for development planning.

ADB found that individuals only benefit from having legal proof of identity if the benefits and opportunities that accrue from being in possession of a document exist in the first place, which currently is not the case in many developing countries. However, as ADB point out, as countries become more able to provide basic services and opportunities for those living in their country, such documentation will become increasingly essential.⁴⁰

Birth registration is not the solution to all problems children face, yet it is the first step towards promoting child rights and ending child poverty. Plan's work has shown that a small piece of paper can make the world of difference for many children across the globe.

"I have no identity. How will I get education? How many other children will be like me who have no identity. How can I live without my identity? How many children need education, health and other basic necessities in life? How many children need immediate protection? If we are termed the future of the country, why are we deprived of our identity? And if we are citizens of this country, who will ensure our rights?"

A girl speaking at the launch of the universal birth registration project in Peshawar, Pakistan, 2005



Registration challenges and good practice

As a result of Plan's pioneering research and advocacy in the field of birth registration, it has become clear that there are many reasons why parents and guardians do not register their children at birth.

Depending on the specific context, parents face varying challenges to registration. These may be social, legal, economic, political and geographical.

During the universal birth registration campaign, Plan has worked with children, parents, communities, partners and states, applying a variety of different strategies designed to overcome these barriers. Our goal is to make birth registration compulsory, timely, free and accessible for all.

The following sections highlight the challenges and barriers Plan has faced during the campaign, each accompanied by key strategies we have employed to overcome them and examples of good practice.

Lack of awareness and incentives

In many countries, the main reason for non-registration is simply the general lack of awareness among parents and guardians of the need for and importance of birth registration and certificates for their child's future. This lack of awareness and understanding leads in turn to a low demand for registration, as the short- or long-term benefits are not clear.

A survey by Plan showed that the main causes of non-registration in Vietnam were poor awareness of child rights and birth registration, with individuals unaware of the benefits a birth certificate brings.⁴¹ In Zambia, Plan found that one of the primary reasons for not registering children is that parents are able to use alternative documentation such as their own national identity cards to access services and therefore do not see the value of birth registration.⁴² In Sudan, many see it as purely another legal formality without any practical value.⁴³

In addition to the general lack of awareness, high rates of illiteracy act as another barrier obstructing access to any information that is available. At the same time, minority groups and migrants are often isolated when information and documentation is presented in the national language or languages they do not understand. All of these aspects need to be taken into account when devising awareness-raising strategies.

Plan's good practice: increasing awareness

A key strategy during the campaign has been to increase awareness and highlight the importance of birth registration to show that it is more than just expensive bureaucracy or a legal formality. Public information campaigns have promoted messages linking birth registration with better access to jobs, education, travel, inheritance and legal protection. We have used a variety of approaches, not only to reach the communities where we work but also to reach beyond these areas, creating an impact upon as many people as possible.

Successful approaches employed by Plan to raise awareness include:

- mass rallies and mass registration
- radio, television and film
- working with community leaders and celebrity ambassadors
- messaging to reach diverse ethnic groups
- using existing groups and structures
- working with the media
- creating incentives to increase the demand for birth registration
- linking registration with other rights and services

A circular blue icon with white text that reads "Plan's good practice".

Plan's
good
practice

Mass rallies and mass registration to raise awareness

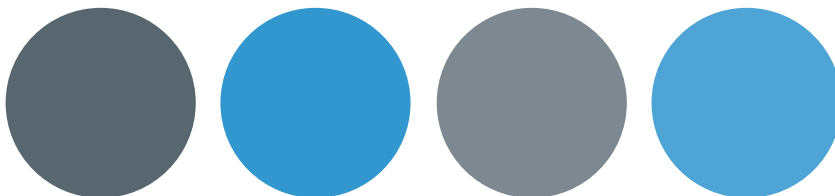
In order to animate the campaign, Plan organised and participated in mass rallies and coordinated mass registration in a number of countries.

In Cambodia, to celebrate Universal Children's Day (20 November), a children's fair was organised in Phnom Penh in 2004 under the theme Birth Registration: The Right of Every Child. More than 4,000 children participated and learned about their right to birth registration. Based on the success of this event, Phnom Penh Municipality and Plan organised another children's fair the following year under the theme Birth Registration: Participation, Opportunities and Development. More than 6,000 children participated in that event.

In Uganda, districts received support from Plan on birth registration as part of the Child Health Days conducted countrywide from October to December 2008. Children were immunised, registered and issued with birth certificates. A total of 2,991 children were registered and 2,142 of these received 'short' birth certificates (which are the most basic type of preliminary certificate containing minimum information about the child and their parents) during this three-month period.⁴⁴

In Haiti, for two consecutive years the country's National Children's Day has been celebrated under the birth registration theme. In 2003 the Day of the African Child was on the theme of birth registration.⁴⁵

The campaign 'The Right to Legal Identity for Children and Adolescents', implemented by the Electoral National Court, Plan and UNICEF in Bolivia reached more than 65 per cent of the adult population and more than 70 per cent of those aged under 18.⁴⁶



Plan's information campaign was critical in Uganda

In Uganda, Plan used innovative communications and media to spread the word about registration.

As a member of the National Taskforce, Plan identified effective communication as critical to the success of the 'Revitalisation of Births and Deaths Registration' project. In 2006, we developed a six-month campaign, a key element of which was a communications kit, which included audio and print materials such as adverts, role plays, jingles, posters, tee-shirts, a brochure and stickers. Local radio stations ran the messages in local languages to improve coverage.

The radio programmes were a huge success, with many requests for repeats and many call-ins during the broadcast of the birth registration shows.

The campaign's success is reflected by the statistics, which show an increase in birth registration from 45 per cent in November 2006, to 69 per cent by June 2007. This included 551,796 children aged from birth to 8 being registered.

Plan raises awareness at Africa's largest film festival

In 2007, Plan co-sponsored two short films at FESPACO, Africa's largest and most important film festival, which takes place every two years in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. This was part of a joint campaign with UNICEF and UNFPA to raise awareness of the need for birth registration.

The films, both called Broken Dreams, focused on two children, a 12-year-old girl who wants to be a doctor, and a young boy who wants to become a footballer. Their dreams are broken as the girl realises that she cannot even sit for the primary school completion exam, and the boy is not selected for the national junior football club. The reason: neither of them has a birth certificate.

Radio, television and film messaging

Illiteracy has been found to be a serious barrier in achieving universal birth registration. Given the high rates of illiteracy in many countries, radio has proved to be a key communication tool for raising awareness on child rights and in particular birth registration.

In Sierra Leone, Plan carried out an assessment prior to starting its community-awareness campaign on birth registration. We found that radio was the most effective way to reach the majority of households, hence its awareness-raising efforts focused around the use of radio. In Cameroon, we managed to reach more than 800 communities through our radio campaigns during 2007 to 2008.⁴⁷

Plan has used radio not only as a means of sharing information, but as a mechanism to get children involved directly in the campaign. Children and youth have been involved in the production of their own radio shows, enabling them to share their stories and experiences on registration and to acquire new skills at the same time.

In India, a survey by Plan India had found that 58 per cent of respondents* sampled were illiterate in Andhra Pradesh, 68 per cent in Karnataka and 72 per cent in Rajasthan.⁴⁸ Children who had been engaged in child labour, as well as orphans and out-of-school children, participated in a workshop to produce their own school radio programme on birth registration. The project led to 407 broadcasts of school radio programmes in 270 villages. From the recording of the initial school radio programmes, these shows were later broadcast on the All India Radio (AIR) station.⁴⁹

In Vietnam, using audio-visual technologies was found to be the most effective means of communicating with people living in rural areas, especially remote mountainous regions. Plan produced TV adverts and films carrying messages around the topic of birth registration. In India, animated films were aired at cinemas in Delhi and Maharashtra, and Nepalese national TV broadcast an advertisement produced by Plan featuring the nation's most popular comedians Hari Bamsha Acharya and Madan Krishna Shrestha on the importance of birth registration.

“Since the launching of this radio campaign on the rights of the child by Plan Cameroon, the piles of birth certificates in my office, which had been abandoned by parents, are gradually reducing each day.”

A civil status registrar in Bouam Moundji, Diang division of the East Region of Cameroon

*Heads or other responsible members of the household

Kids Waves: Plan's work with Nokia

Kids Waves is a regional radio project hosted by children in ten West African countries. The project helps children be heard and allows them to learn about issues that are relevant to them.

It is a weekly programme of 30 minutes, broadcast in local languages. The broadcast is hosted by children and visits a different village every week. The village children are also invited to take part in the broadcast with the presenters and reporters.

In Burkina Faso, following a Kids Waves broadcast on birth registration, a youth group was inspired by the programme to contact households in the town of Kongoussi to verify that all children were registered. Where they were not, the group assisted adults in completing registration for all children.

Kids Waves is just one of many programmes supported through Plan's partnership with Nokia, one of the world's leaders in mobile communications, to empower children and youth in developing countries to bring about positive change.

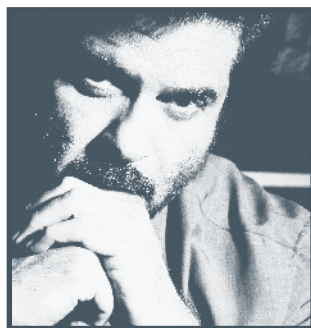
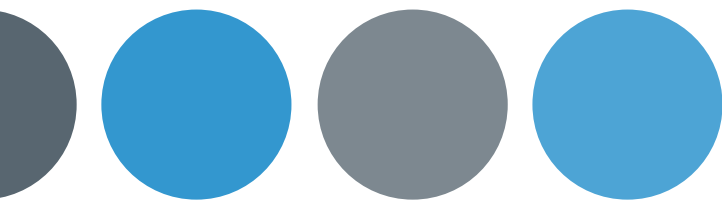
Working with community leaders and celebrity ambassadors

Where media penetration is low, Plan has found alternative ways to get child rights messages across, for example by enlisting the help of highly regarded community members such as village elders and locally elected councillors who have played a crucial role in promoting birth registration. For example, in Pakistan, Plan worked with the influential Ulema (Muslim religious scholars) in northern parts of the country at the community level. In Guinea, Plan has worked with religious leaders, who spread messages about the importance of birth registration during sermons in places of worship.

In addition, Plan has ensured that national celebrity ambassadors have raised awareness among people in many countries. In India, the Slumdog Millionaire film star Anil Kapoor was appointed as Plan India's Goodwill Ambassador for birth registration. Anil's celebrity status ensured that there were high levels of coverage and interest in the campaign.

"When celebrities lend their names to a cause, the public and the media take note. [Anil Kapoor's] support will help bring much-needed attention to the issue."

Mr Govind Nihalani, an eminent film-maker and a member of Plan's governing board in India



“impossible
to imagine
... life
without
an identity”

Message from Anil Kapoor

As an actor I have received many tempting offers to advertise products, which I have persistently refused. Yet, when the Chair of Plan India asked me if I would do a television advertisement promoting universal birth registration, something about the issue really touched my heart. I found it almost impossible to imagine how one would go through life without an identity.

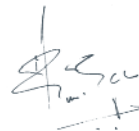
At first glance, a birth certificate looks like any other bureaucratic form – but it is actually a vital, powerful document that gives children proof of identity. Yet in India nearly 10 million children every year used to be denied the right to be registered at birth. I willingly agreed to do the advertisement – the first and only one I have done so far.

On my visits to Plan projects, I have met children from communities on the very margins of society – many of them are already in extremely vulnerable situations because they are homeless or estranged from their families. Many have no idea of their real age or even who their parents are. The lack of a birth certificate makes them invisible to government, and therefore unable to benefit from services that could improve their lives.

Now, as Plan India's ambassador for birth registration, I highlight the need for every child to be registered at birth at every opportunity I get, from national and international events to interviews with the media. From a situation where only 19 per cent of children were registered in India, the figure has now reached more than 58 per cent – thanks to the combined efforts of parents, the government, Plan and its partners.

Being a public figure brings with it a tremendous sense of responsibility because people look to you for inspiration. I have received a lot of love and support from people who have helped me in my life and career, and helping this cause is one of the most meaningful ways in which I can repay this love and make a very small contribution to society.

Because of this campaign, I believe children will be better protected from all kinds of age-related discrimination, exploitation and abuse and I will continue to champion this cause until we achieve 100 per cent registration!



Anil Kapoor, 2009

Messaging to reach diverse ethnic groups

Population diversity makes some communities harder to reach because they may speak in different dialects, manifest different lifestyles or values or live in remote areas. To deal with the issue of diverse languages, in Sri Lanka, Plan used posters in both Sinhala and Tamil to advertise the importance of obtaining a birth certificate in a variety of circumstances.⁵⁰ In Nepal, Plan produced birth registration messages in five different local languages: Nepali, Tamang, Awadhi, Bhojpuri and Maitheli.⁵¹ In Mali, Plan produced and disseminated 11,600 copies of a citizen's guide in five languages: French, Bamanankan, Fulfulde, Sonrai and Tamasheq. In order to ensure that those who were illiterate could benefit from the guide, more than 1,000 audio copies and 600 video copies were also distributed.⁵²

In addition to the development of materials targeted at diverse groups, Plan has also conducted mobile registration campaigns to reach out to these groups. Minority ethnic groups often live in remote rural areas, as is the case in Vietnam and Thailand, making them harder to reach which is why mobile registration campaigns have played an essential role in Plan's work.⁵³

Using existing groups and structures

In many cases, instead of having to design new forums to raise awareness on birth registration, Plan has been able to use existing community structures. Health teams, youth organisations and police have been mobilised to take action and advocate at local level. In India, the police inform the local registrar about new births in some villages.

Children's clubs have proved to be an effective tool in spreading awareness in the neighbourhoods and communities where children live. In India, Bal Panchayats (children's forums) discuss and take decisions on various child rights issues, irrespective of their social background. During Plan's 'Universal Birth Registration' campaign, these forums played a vital role assisting the local Panchayats (forum of elders) to raise awareness. In Senegal, children's associations continue to play a crucial role in informing and sensitising communities on the importance of birth registration, and in Zambia child-to-child campaigners have helped to spread the message.

“The implementation of the child rights awareness project in Essang Ndibi community has brought an awareness that has affected parents, and no one is willing to be left behind. Since October [2008] not a single child has been born in this community without being registered immediately after birth.”

Head teacher of a primary school in
Essang Ndibi, Cameroon

Working with the media

In order to ensure that the media is aware and able to communicate the importance of birth registration effectively, Plan organised workshops on the issue. As a result of Plan's work in India, the media started to pay special attention to birth registration issues, which are now widely covered in the press. Following a conference held in Egypt in 2007, the nation's media began to include news stories around birth registration and encouraged the government to take action.⁵⁴ In Mali, 64 media representatives were trained by Plan on the issue of birth registration.⁵⁵

Creating incentives to increase the demand for birth registration

Birth registration is still viewed as a non-essential legal formality by many, and even when awareness is raised it is still challenging to motivate people to act on the information received. This is especially the case for those who are facing larger concerns such as poverty and malnutrition. As a result, Plan has been searching for ways to make birth registration more appealing to families, and in some cases benefits have accompanied the process of registration. For example, in Burkina Faso parents are encouraged to register children within the first two months following their birth by offering them a free insecticide-treated bed net to prevent malaria.

Countries have also started to link registration with family benefits. In China, the New Rural Cooperative Medical System, first piloted in 2003, aims to help the rural population benefit from medical services.⁵⁶ Without birth registration, individuals will not get official ID, which means they are not eligible for this new scheme.⁵⁷ Similarly, in India the government has launched new services, which require people to have birth certificates in order to access benefits, such as the Safe Motherhood and Promotion of Institutional Deliveries Scheme.⁵⁸

Different states across India have implemented schemes specifically to support girls, in order to raise their status in society and promote their right to survival. For example, the Ladli scheme involves the Government of Delhi depositing into an account for every girl, 10,000 rupees on her birth and 5,000 rupees at different stages throughout her education (dependent on her family's income). Parents must be able to produce their daughter's birth certificate to benefit from the scheme.⁵⁹ In October 2006, the Bono Juancito Pinto scheme was implemented in Bolivia. It gives the parents or legal guardian of a child who is studying at a government school, financial incentives to ensure the child stays in school. In order to benefit from this scheme, the child must have a birth certificate.⁶⁰

Linking birth registration with other rights and services

In many cases the greatest successes have taken place when birth registration has been linked with other programmes, simultaneously tackling two different but equally important child rights issues (as, for example, with birth registration and health or birth registration and education).

The best time to raise or create awareness with parents is when the mother is pregnant. As most countries offer free registration during the days immediately after the birth, the sooner the parents are aware of the process the better. In Cameroon, health workers have been trained to talk to mothers during antenatal classes about the importance of registering their children at birth.

In many rural communities, women have little choice but to deliver their babies at home due to the distance to the nearest hospital or health clinic. Children born in rural areas or who are delivered at home are less likely to be registered compared to those born in cities or in hospitals.⁶¹ For those who do not give birth in a health facility, a health worker, midwife or traditional birth attendant (TBA) may be the first person to see the baby. These are the people best placed to talk with new parents about registration and are, in some cases, able to issue 'witness of birth' notifications, which parents can then use to register the child.

In Paraguay, Plan supported the training of 492 TBAs to ensure timely and immediate birth registration for all children. The training meant that TBAs were then able to issue a 'witness of birth' note to mothers and encourage them to register their children as soon as possible. In Egypt, Indonesia, Vietnam, North Sudan, Guinea and Benin, community health workers and midwives have also been trained and have participated in birth registration projects, which advise mothers to register their child after delivery.

"I used to notify births within seven days and bring the certificate back for the child, paying fees from my own pocket."

Midwife in Khartoum, who prior to Plan's campaign, had certificates dating from the period 1994–97 awaiting collection

In some areas in Kenya, community health workers are now issuing birth notification cards as well as raising awareness on the need to register children. They are able to do so during their regular health visits to families in the community.

Plan sees soaring birth registration rates in Indonesia⁶²

Sikka district in Indonesia, which has a population of 288,000, had a birth registration rate of just 3 per cent in 2004. By 2006, the rate had increased to 72 per cent.

The phenomenal increase can be attributed to new legislation which came into force in Indonesia in December 2004 following continued lobbying by Plan and other children's organisations. This new law made birth certificates free of charge for children under the age of 18, in addition to simplifying the registration process and ensuring that it could be carried out at village level.

This change to local-level registration meant that midwives in the area could play a more significant role at the community level to ensure immediate registration. Plan supported the Sikka government by organising a series of birth registration training sessions for more than 600 midwives, village heads and religious leaders in the district. These sessions included sharing information on the new birth registration procedures and how to fill in registration forms.

A technical agreement was also drawn up between village midwives, family planning officers and the Civil Registry Offices to register children at birth. As a result, local midwives helped 3,964 babies to be registered. Masni, a village midwife, said that when these simplified procedures came into effect, she "registered 43 babies out of 52 [in her village]; the other babies were civil servants' babies, who were registered by their parents".

Plan is working to make sure that the government meets its target to achieve universal birth registration by 2011 and is working with children's groups to monitor the ongoing implementation of the law.

In Sierra Leone, Plan's birth registration project has been integrated with existing community health services from the outset. Staff in health units have been trained as birth registration clerks, so that children born at the units can be registered immediately, while those children born at home can be registered when they are taken to the units for immunisation, other routine services or medical assistance.

In many Latin American countries, birth registration units have been introduced into hospital buildings allowing families to access this service as soon as the baby is born. In Ecuador, Plan worked with the Vice Presidency of the Republic, the National Institute for the Child and the Family, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF in designing a strategy to ensure newborns could be registered in the country's hospitals. A technical report was produced and a pilot project was initiated in 2009.⁶³ In Brazil, 550 units have been integrated into hospitals. The Ministry of Health financially compensates individual hospitals for the registrations that are completed in these units.⁶⁴ In Colombia, birth registration units have been developed in 200 hospitals.⁶⁵

Plan trains midwives and traditional birth attendants in Zambia⁶⁶

In Zambia, midwives and traditional birth attendants are often the first to be in contact with a mother and her baby. They are ideally placed to act as community birth registration officers.

Plan in Zambia worked with the Civil Registry Office to train midwives and traditional birth attendants. These health professionals were reached with the assistance of the Ministry of Health in the country and through Plan's frontline staff. During the training, they were taught about the importance of child rights, birth registration and how to fill in the relevant forms.

Community members now go to midwives and birth attendants when they want to register their children, who then pass on the completed forms to the registration offices. They also give talks on birth registration, especially to new mothers attending antenatal clinics.

In the district of Mansa, 600 children were registered in the first six months of the campaign, and many more have been registered since.

In the four districts targeted by Plan, the registration offices attributed the increase in the number of children being registered to our birth registration programmes.

Community members say that they appreciate the importance of birth registration, and want to see all children registered. They understand that if the government knew the demographics of the population, it would be better able to plan and improve services which ultimately benefit communities across the country.

Plan has also collaborated and shared learning and experiences with the International Council of Nurses (ICN). The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) and the ICN are now working together to raise awareness of birth registration among their members. Together they published *The Birth Registration Toolkit* in 2007 to raise awareness among nurses and midwives of the importance of birth registration, and to guide nursing and midwifery groups and associations in exploring and addressing the issue in their country by supporting organisations and agencies such as Plan.⁶⁷

Linking birth registration with female foeticide

Female foeticide (abortion of foetuses known to be girls) is caused by deeply entrenched discrimination against women and is still prevalent in some countries in the world today, including India and China. With the introduction of the one-child policy in China and the technological advances in prenatal sex detection equipment in India, this practice has become increasingly worrying. According to India's national 2001 census, 35 million women are missing in India through discrimination and neglect.⁶⁸

Plan's work in India has seen birth registration integrated with the issue of female foeticide. When there is rigorous tracking of birth registration, female foeticide can also be monitored. Plan's Kopal Project is a pilot project implemented in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, all four states have low birth registration rates, and all have a problem with a skewed gender ratio due to strongly held traditional preferences for males. For example, in Bihar, the female:male gender ratio is dramatically distorted at 600:1,000, compared to the world average of roughly 990 women for every 1,000 men.⁶⁹ The Kopal Project aims to register every pregnant woman in the area, who is then monitored until their delivery. Once the child is born, parents are advised and motivated to register the child. The project has seen great successes: increasing rates of birth registration and improving the gender ratio in these states, as well as building a coalition of more than 300 organisations to work on this issue, and training 4,800 youths to spread awareness and initiate campaigns in their own villages.⁷⁰ Following its success, this project has been replicated by UNICEF in four more districts across India.

Vinita is 19 and lives in a village in Uttar Pradesh in India. She was trained on the issue of female foeticide by a member of the coalition group supporting the Kopal Project. On returning to her village, she took a lead role in alerting people in the community to the decreasing numbers of girls in comparison to boys and spreading awareness about the importance of birth registration. She has campaigned to get all children in her village registered and was personally responsible for 50 children being registered in just three months. She has become a role model for other young people in the district.⁷¹

Geographical barriers

Geographical issues can also serve as barriers to birth registration. In many countries civil registration is centralised, meaning that parents must travel into the capital city to register the birth of a child. Even where district-level infrastructure exists, it may be poor and public transport non-existent. For people living in rural communities or remote areas, the trip to the civil registry office can be long, expensive and unsafe.

This is the case in Zambia, where the national registration headquarters are in Lusaka. Birth registration rates are low across the country, with no system in place at district level to issue certificates. Registration here is a challenge requiring a significant investment of both time and money.

case
study

Dominican Republic – 120km to register a birth

Twenty-eight-year-old Luisa is married with three small children. She lives in Canoa, a farming community in the province of Azua and spends her days looking after her children, doing domestic chores and tending to the small vegetable plot in her backyard while her husband is at work. Most people in the area work in agriculture or on tobacco plantations, earning less than US \$4 a day.

When she was 16, Luisa travelled 120 kilometres to Azua to stay with relatives, to get a birth certificate for her three-month-old son, but was not successful. The officials at the registration centre demanded photographs and parents' certificates, which she could not provide. Eventually, Luisa borrowed money which she used to persuade officials to process the registration. When Luisa's son was 2 years old, he died from malaria. While grieving for her child, Luisa faced similar problems getting a death certificate for him.

Canoa has a rural clinic but no facilities for parents to register births. Luisa was therefore reluctant to go through the same process of registering her other three children. Luisa decided to wait until her children officially needed the papers in order to attend school before starting the registration process. She was also discouraged by the amount of money she would need for transportation, accommodation and food. A bus to Azua costs the equivalent of a day's wage.

At a meeting with Plan in her community, Luisa learned that registration should, in fact, be free and that it has serious implications for her children's futures. Plan has since helped Luisa with the process of getting her children registered.

Plan's good practice: breaking down geographical barriers

In terms of geographical challenges, Plan has employed two major strategies: mobile registration and decentralisation of civil registration.

Mobile registration

One of the most successful strategies for Plan has been the use of mobile birth registration campaigns. Mobile birth registration units that move around the country bring many advantages. Parents do not have to pay for transport or take time off work to spend days or weeks travelling to the nearest registration office. Mobile units reach those living in the most remote areas who do not receive awareness messages and do not have access to services. They bring the service closer to communities, particularly to areas with high rates of unregistered children.

The idea began in Cambodia, where the results have been remarkable. The Ministry of Interior, with support from the Asian Development Bank, is now continuing the work.

Mass mobile registration in Cambodia⁷²

Plan has been integral to birth registration success in Cambodia. Following on from the national government's commitment to rebuilding the registration system, Plan piloted a mobile registration scheme in 2004. The scheme was supported by the Ministry of Interior and the Asian Development Bank and was so successful that the initiative was rolled out across the country.

Plan provided technical assistance including training volunteers to assist with local planning, undertaking public information campaigns and supporting the government to alter civil registration law accordingly. Throughout the campaign, birth and death certificates were provided free of charge.

The Ministry of Interior assembled 1,621 commune registration teams comprising over 13,000 people and trained them in registration procedures. These teams were mobilised to register Cambodians and create awareness on birth registration.⁷³

After 10 months of Plan's mobile birth registration programme, more than 7,000,000 Cambodians, close to 50 per cent of the population, had received their birth certificates.⁷⁴

The success of mobile birth registration campaigns has led to replication in many more countries in which Plan operates, including Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ghana, Mali, the Philippines, Tanzania and Timor-Leste.

In Bolivia, before the mobile birth registration unit reaches a community, their arrival is announced through the media along with awareness messages about the importance of registration and the information needed in order to register. The unit, or brigade, has a photocopy machine, computers, printers and an electricity generator, and in some cases the local official registration records to verify whether somebody has already been registered. Due to the success of these mobile brigades by Plan and partners, an agreement has been reached between the National Electoral Court and the UN in Bolivia to have in place a complete team to perform this job, with a permanent and fully equipped mobile unit, making the initiative sustainable.⁷⁵

case
study

Ecuador – mobile units and technology

In Ecuador, the campaign 'Juntos por el derecho a la identidad' (Together for the right to an identity) was launched in 2006. This campaign was initiated by the Ecuadorian government, supported by Plan and our partner, UNICEF.

Ten technical teams from the civil registration office were trained and supplied with the latest technology, including satellite kits, mobile phones and access to the internet, in order to assist them in recording and storing data in remote areas. After a pilot mobile registration project in Pastaza Province, the project was scaled up to cover 11 provinces.

In 2006, the brigades registered a total of 82,970 children; in 2007 130,150 children and adolescents were registered and 2008 saw some 90,850 registered.⁷⁶ In order to strengthen the process and continue progress, Plan signed a cooperation agreement with the Vice Presidency of the Republic, the National Institute for the Child and Family (INNFA), the Ministry of Health and UNICEF with the objective of designing a longer-term strategy to guarantee the immediate registration of newborns across Ecuador.

case
study

Mobile registration in Mozambique⁷⁷

People in the Inhambane province of Mozambique used to walk up to 75 kilometres to reach their nearest registration post until, using mobile registration brigades, Plan brought the service dramatically nearer.

Running the project in partnership with the provincial government between November 2007 and January 2008, Plan implemented the universal birth registration campaign in two areas of Inhambane province: Jangamo and Maxixe. Five four-person mobile brigades were organised in each of the districts. During the project, the brigades travelled to a total of 37 communities registering 35,000 children and adults, in some cases reducing the travelling distance for people to only one kilometre.

Decentralisation of civil registration

Birth registration processes are centralised in many countries, making registration inaccessible for many people. Such centralisation also means that it is slow functioning. During our ‘Universal Birth Registration’ campaign, Plan has supported decentralisation processes in more than nine countries, including Bangladesh, Niger, Guinea and Guinea Bissau.

In Kenya, Plan has raised understanding and awareness of birth registration among government officers in some of the communities where we work. The government has even facilitated some limited decentralisation of the process, by allowing local government officers (chiefs) to hand over birth notification cards and duties to community-based organisations (CBOs). Accordingly, CBOs are now able to document new births and support formal government registration by issuing birth notification cards. In Sierra Leone, the certification of births has been extended to health workers at community level as a means of decentralising the process. Centralisation has been one of the most serious constraints on the existing birth and deaths registration process in Sierra Leone.

In Liberia, more than 5,000 children under the age of 5 have been registered and issued with certificates after a decentralised birth registration system was piloted in the country. Plan, the government and our partners worked on a national communication plan to raise awareness of the new system. In Zambia, meanwhile, Plan has been lobbying the government to push for a parliamentary bill that will allow for the decentralisation of registration services and adequate staffing, and has supported mobile birth registration volunteers.

Once systems have been decentralised it is crucial that the information circulates between relevant offices. In Sri Lanka, Plan has been instrumental in creating a clear flow of information between decentralised registration staff and the Registrar General’s Department. This was achieved by creating a network between civil registration staff, grassroots organisations and other NGOs to exchange information. Plan also participated in coordination meetings to ensure that efforts were not duplicated.

“No one doubts my identity as long as I produce my birth certificate. Getting enrolled in Grade 1 was so easy! My mother just showed the teachers my birth certificate and there and then I was given a class. I also attended boarding school from Grade 10 to Grade 12, and it was always easy to prove my identity [to receive money from my parents, for example] ...”

Moono, an 18-year-old boy from Mazabuka district, Zambia, an area targeted by Plan. He was registered at an early age by his parents

Social and ethnic barriers

Marginalised populations, those living on the edge of society such as street children, children with disabilities, migrants, orphans, nomads and ethnic minority groups, often go unregistered, even in countries that have close to 100 per cent registration.

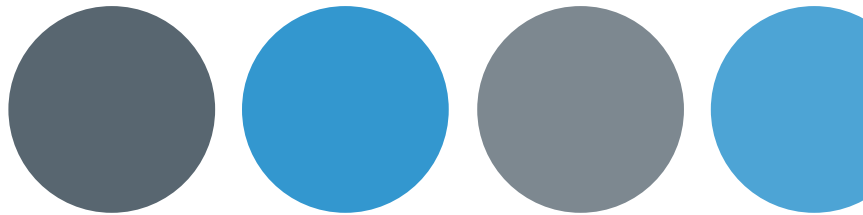
Plan's birth registration campaign and activities are non-discriminatory and therefore all members of society benefit from Plan's work. However, certain additional measures must be taken in order to register the hardest to reach populations. Minority groups are often over-represented among unregistered people and face a number of additional barriers, including language barriers. In Brazil, when people from the indigenous populations need a birth certificate, they first go to the National Foundation of Indians in order to be recorded, and then must visit the civil registry office – a doubling which leads to additional costs in terms of time and money.⁷⁸ A high level of birth registration coverage nationally conceals these pockets of vulnerability.

Plan has been working with many such hidden populations, aware that in many cases these groups start off more vulnerable to exclusion and exploitation due to family status and the situation into which they are born. For example, some children from these populations may be excluded from education and other opportunities based on their status or identity. In these circumstances, the importance of establishing legal identity is critical.

Plan's good practice: breaking down social and ethnic barriers

Plan's strategies in this area have successfully targeted a number of marginalised groups, including street children, nomads, children affected by HIV, internally displaced people, refugees and ethnic groups.

Plan's
good
practice



Street children

Bangladesh is the world's seventh most populated country, with a population of more than 150 million people. The government is making moves to ensure every person in the country has a birth certificate.

In 2007, the government declared 3 July as Birth Registration Day to highlight the importance of birth registration for every child and adult, with support from Plan and UNICEF. Since 2003, Plan has helped 5.9 million children and adults to acquire official identities. In two remote districts, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari, the government confirmed that Plan had achieved 100 per cent registration.⁷⁹

Since the Birth Registration Act of 2004, which came into force in 2006, there have been clear signs of progress, with reports indicating that 40 per cent of the population had received a birth certificate by the end of March 2008, while 30 per cent more had been registered and would receive their certificates soon.⁸⁰

To reach the final 30 per cent of the population, mostly from marginalised communities, we have been focusing our efforts to reach thousands of street children and children living in brothels, through our work with Dhaka City Corporation. Plan mobilised more than 20 local NGOs and between March and June 2008 more than 49,500 street children in Dhaka were recorded, and 28,000 had received their birth certificates.⁸¹

“With the kind of life we lead on the street, we forget that we also have an identity. I know this has a lot of value and it will be of use in every step in my future.”

Sabina, who received her birth certificate at a ceremony held by Plan and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) at the city's national theatre on 17 June 2008

In India, part of Plan's birth registration efforts focused on children in difficult circumstances living in Delhi and Mumbai. Both cities have a large migrant population that survives on the streets or in slums, and few if any of these people have any form of identification. Plan India designed special activities to raise the level of awareness of birth registration among these groups, including street theatre and engaging Anil Kapoor as birth registration ambassador, ensuring mass media coverage.⁸²

Nomads

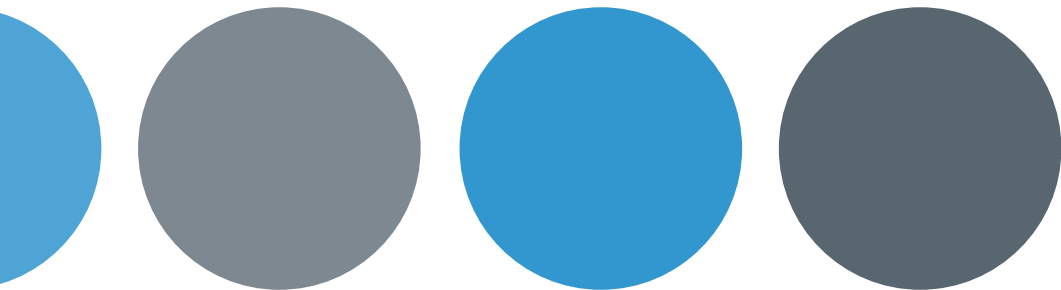
In Cameroon, Plan has been working with the *Baka* people in a broader rights and dignity project. The *Baka* are a nomadic people from eastern Cameroon. Traditionally they move between forests and nearby *Bantu* farms. *Baka* communities were not legally recognised as official villages, and this meant that it was difficult for them to establish themselves in legal terms and make a claim to their indigenous land. It had been estimated that around 98 per cent of *Baka* children did not have a birth certificate.

Plan has been working with the *Baka* for more than six years, helping them to gain official recognition from the government. In 2008, hundreds of *Baka* children were registered with Plan's help.⁸³ In addition, the project enabled thousands of adults to receive their national identity cards and register children for school.⁸⁴

In Mali in 2007, Plan worked on a study of birth registration among nomadic tribes. Plan held a workshop to look at how the civil state engages with these tribes, in order to adopt an appropriate strategy for birth registration in nomadic zones.

Children affected by HIV

In many African countries Plan has been working to ensure that orphans are registered so that they can access the support and benefits to which they have a right. In Uganda, Plan has been actively involved in linking birth and death registration with other programmes relevant for children, including legal aid to people affected by HIV.



Internally displaced people, refugees and ethnic groups

In Sri Lanka, Plan identified that despite the country's high national registration rates (96 per cent) increased efforts were needed to target specific groups with low registration rates – internally displaced people (IDP), refugee returnees, street families, gypsies, ethnic groups such as *Veddahs*, *Rodi* (low-caste) people and tea plantation workers in order to ensure that these groups were not excluded.

Plan commissioned a study of more than 1,400 children, including those living in IDP camps, refugee returnees previously displaced by war, children living on tea plantations and street children. The birth registration of these children indicated an overall registration rate of 68 per cent. By group, the breakdown shows 82 per cent registered among IDPs, 44 per cent among refugee 'returnees' (those who have crossed a border but then come back), 84 per cent of children on estates and 37 per cent of street children. The study also looked at a sample of children from three vulnerable and marginalised groups: the *Veddahs*, *Rodi* and gypsies. Of these groups, parents claimed that 76 per cent of their children were registered, with the *Rodi* highest at 97 per cent, *Veddahs* at 74 per cent and gypsies the lowest at 61 per cent.⁸⁵

The main reasons cited by respondents to the Sri Lanka study who failed to obtain birth certificates were the following: they were unable to apply for registration, they failed to receive certificates after submitting applications, they simply weren't aware, they didn't apply, or that they weren't interested. The study also found that for those eligible persons who did not hold a Sri Lankan National Identity Card (NIC), more than 31 per cent noted that the absence of a birth certificate was the main reason why they did not hold a NIC. Plan's work in Sri Lanka will therefore continue to focus on these marginalised populations.

In Honduras, Plan's campaign concentrated on six municipalities which have a mostly indigenous population made up of the ethnic group *Lenca*. They live in the highlands and other remote locations so are not aware of registration nor can they travel to offices. Fourteen auxiliary (satellite) vital record offices have now been established in the communities of these hard-to-reach populations on frontier zones.

In Guatemala, at the time of writing, Plan is ready to start a pilot project in the municipality of San Pedro Carchá, where the majority of the population is indigenous *Mayan* who face similar issues to the *Lenca*.

In Colombia, Plan's work has focused on those who have been displaced due to armed conflict. In many cases when these families leave their homes, their identity documents are left behind and lost forever.

In Vietnam, Plan's focus on specific groups has led to 19,000 children in 66 ethnic minority communes in Quang Ngai Province, and 10,000 children in Lang Son and Lai Chau mountainous provinces being registered during 2007–08.⁸⁶

Economic pressures

For many families who are already living in poverty and struggling to provide for their children, the added cost of birth registration is not seen as a priority and this acts as a barrier to registration and certification.

Birth registration carries costs, which can include the registration itself, the certificate, and 'hidden' costs associated with registration such as taking time off work and paying for transport to a registry office. A survey in India showed that, in some cases, to get a child registered parents had to miss work to visit offices three to four times a month over approximately six months.⁸⁷

When registration is delayed, fees tend to be even greater. In Kenya, Plan has found that the late registration penalty fee for families who do not register their children within the first six months acts as a hindrance to registration.

Plan's good practice: helping to waive and reduce costs

Understanding that cost acts as a barrier to birth registration for many people, Plan has worked hard to waive or reduce costs permanently or for a specific time during the campaign in at least 21 countries where we work.

Key strategies have included support to, advocacy and consultation with governments to encourage free registration, changes in legislation, simplified late registration processes and reductions in associated fees.

Support to and consultation with government

Plan has been working on birth registration in Burkina Faso since 2004. One of the results of Plan's support to the government was an announcement in 2009 of a new US \$5 million government programme to provide free birth certificates in the country. In Pakistan, the government of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) declared 2006 as the year of birth registration, making birth registration and certification free for all children up to 18 years old. By May 2007, over 1,064,000 birth registrations had been reported from NWFP.⁸⁸

Fees in Tanzania⁸⁹

Even when registration is free, late fees may act as a barrier beyond a certain date, especially when the fees can be a quarter of a household's monthly income.

In Tanzania, registration is free, although birth certificates must be collected from the district's headquarters within the first 90 days after birth. The fee for a certificate that is collected within this time is 3,500 Tanzanian shillings (US \$2.70). For those parents who collect the certificate after 90 days, and up until the child turns 10 years old, costs increase to 4,000 shillings (US \$3.05). If the child is over 10 when the certificate is eventually collected, the cost is 10,000 shillings (US \$7.60). Tanzania's per capita average income is less than US \$25 a month.

Plan's
good
practice

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In Bangladesh, the Birth and Death Registration Act was amended in December 2004 and enacted in July 2006. Plan advocated enactment of the law and provided input into its drafting. Amendments include free registration for children and nominal fees for those above the age of 18, valid until July 2010. As a result of Plan's efforts, over 76 million Bangladeshi children could now have access to a birth certificate, the possession of which is a prerequisite for obtaining access to a number of state services, including education and health care.

In Vietnam, Plan supported the Ministry of Justice's circular on birth registration for children. In November 2007, the Prime Minister announced that birth registration would be free for all children. In El Salvador, the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents law, guided by Plan during the consultation process, was approved in April 2009. It is due to come into effect one year after its approval and includes an article waiving registration costs, a ruling which Plan foresees will have a dramatic effect on registration rates. In Mali, the law governing the civil statute was adopted in June 2006. This law makes original marriage, birth and death certificates free of charge.

Positive changes brought about by Plan interventions are currently occurring across the globe. For example, there is now no fee for birth registration within 30 days of the birth of a child in Cambodia. In India, the Rajasthan government, taking on board Plan's recommendations, simplified late registration processes and reduced its late registration fees by amending Rule 9 of its Registration of Births and Deaths Rules 2000. Plan's support for legal reform also led to changes in Indonesia in 2006, with the introduction of the new Administration and Population law which provides free birth registration for babies up to the age of two. The estimated number of children who could now benefit from this is almost 18 million.

In Africa, Plan Cameroon and partners worked to reduce the fees charged by doctors for issuing medical certificates that establish the age of the child, which are required by the courts in cases of late birth registration. In South America, thanks to a campaign by Plan and partners, the state of Pernambuco, in Brazil, has eliminated costs to establish the paternity of the child, which are usually around US \$50 per child.

Just one rupee – reduced fees for late registration in India

In India, one of the major challenges in reducing the backlog in registration was found to be the late fee and the processes involved. Plan India brought this problem to the attention of state governments and the Registrar General of India.

Based on Plan's experience and expertise, recommendations were made for simplifying the process and waiving or reducing the late fee. The Rajasthan state government introduced group affidavits for registration of school-going children under ten, involved school authorities in identifying and registering children, and reduced the problematic late fees to just one rupee.

case
study

Complex administration procedures

In many countries, registering the birth of a child is not a straightforward exercise. The administrative process is often technical, confusing, complicated and long, even for those with the correct information. For those who do not have the necessary paperwork or who do not register within the given time frame, the obstacles cannot be surmounted.

In Kenya, for example, Plan has found that the lack of ID cards or other forms of identification inhibits registration. There are requirements for parents to provide proof of their nationality either by ID card or birth certificate and when they cannot do this, the child goes unregistered.

In Cameroon, if a child is not registered in the first 30 days, additional requirements arise – a certificate of the child's apparent age by a medical doctor and two signatures recognising the child through a court judgment – before the birth certificate can be issued. Similarly, in Benin, a child must be registered within just ten days of birth, an unrealistic timeframe for many. Such bureaucracy acts as a barrier to registration.

In some circumstances, registration is complicated at every stage of the process. In China, during the period of economic reform, birth registration became an effective measure to monitor and control China's population increase.⁹⁰ Traditionally in China, births had to be registered with three different administrative authorities: Health, Family Planning and Public Security. Blood samples from newborns were required for each of these registration processes and administrative fees charged at each stage. If a child's birth exceeded the local birth control quota, his or her parents had to pay a fine before the Public Security Bureau would issue a household residence permit, a key identity document in China, important for accessing a range of services from the state.⁹¹

Research commissioned by Plan in China, in 2005, highlighted the complexity and rigorous requirements for birth registration in the country.⁹² Such restrictions make it impossible for many people (including the floating population of 120 million who have migrated from rural areas to urban centres in recent years) to register a child, because parents must show a household registration certificate. Such populations often have the incorrect certificate, as a rural household registration certificate is not acceptable for a child born in a city.⁹³

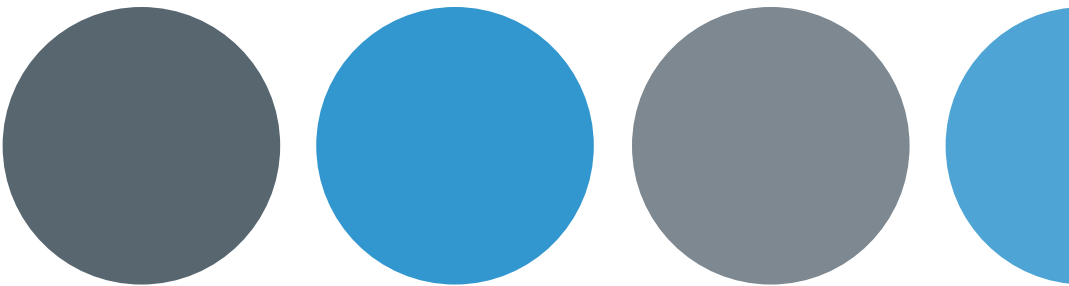
Birth registration doubles – Plan pilots a simple model in China

In response to the research on birth registration completed in China in 2005, Plan established a pilot project for a simpler registration process in Qishan County in 2006.

Plan's initial research identified complexity as one of the main barriers to registration. For the pilot project, the process was simplified – parents were able to register their children on a single visit to the local government office, using just their ID cards and the birth notification from the hospital or village committee (if the child was born at home). The project cancelled all administrative charges and allowed household registration certificates to be issued for children whose birth exceeded quotas before parents had paid the outstanding fines.

During this time, the registration of children in this rural area doubled. Only 47 per cent of children in five townships of Qishan County had been properly registered with the authorities before the pilot project. By the end of the year, 98 per cent were registered.⁹⁴

As a result of the success of the pilot project, the Chinese government is now looking to scale up the project across the county.





Plan's good practice: making registration simple

Plan piloted two strategies to tackle bureaucracy: extending the period of registration and reducing clerical errors.

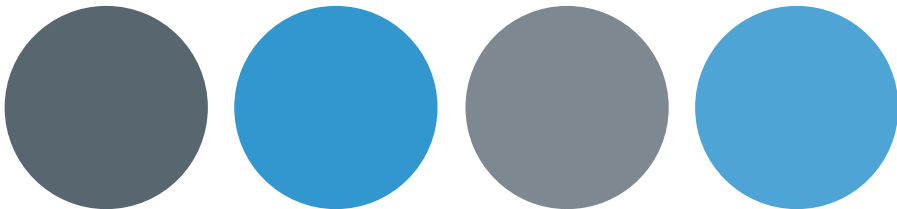
Extending the period of registration

Plan has been successful in making birth registration processes less bureaucratic, simply by advocating for the extension of the registration period. This gives those who live further away or who are waiting to name their child, longer to register without having to go through additional complicated and expensive procedures which are often the penalty for later registration.

In Sierra Leone, as a result of Plan and partners' intervention, the government reviewed the existing Births and Deaths Act in order to align it with good practice, which include extension of the registration of births from one month (30 days) to three months (90 days). At the time of writing, this amended act was ready and waiting to be passed by parliament.

In El Salvador, Plan was invited to participate in writing the proposal for a new birth registration law. The law extends the period for the registration of births from 15 to 90 days.

In Honduras, the law approved by the National Congress to separate the Vital Records Office (VRO) from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, simplifies administrative procedures around late registration. It also makes the process more independent and harder for politicians to interfere. This is considered by Plan Honduras to be one of the most important achievements in their birth registration campaign to date. In Bolivia, a toll-free number was supported by Plan so parents could ring up and request information from the VRO on birth registration procedures and how to complete registration of their children.



Helping to reduce clerical errors

In the context of birth registration, clerical errors generally arise either from straightforward mistakes, or from registrars lacking information or procedural experience. Research supported by Plan in Bolivia, in 2007, found that the three main obstacles to obtaining valid birth registration in the country were the cost, complex bureaucracy and the problem of clerical errors on certificates. Errors are classified in Bolivia as either administrative or judicial. Prior to the study, it was not envisaged that errors would be a major cause of problems. However, 33 out of the 35 respondent groups identified errors as a major problem.

Administrative errors are those that require a minor correction, such as a changed letter or an added accent on a letter in a given word. A judicial error is classified as anything that would change the identity of an individual. This is an important distinction because each requires a different process, but more importantly, the judicial correction requires a lawyer and a court procedure, which can be costly. The underlying cause of errors on birth registration was found to be the limited capacity of civil registrars.⁹⁵ In January 2009, the Political Constitution of Bolivia, which Plan advocated for and supported, came into force. The constitution outlined that it was the government's responsibility to amend any mistakes made by staff.⁹⁶

Plan has developed guidelines and manuals for civil registrars in many countries. In Indonesia, for example, training was developed for birth registrars in every district and at national level in order to improve their knowledge, skills and attitude and to share examples of good practice on birth registration. In Togo, training has been carried out with registrars covering the importance of civil registration, national standards and best recording techniques.

Plan trains civil registrars in Pakistan⁹⁷

In Pakistan, many civil registrars were not adequately trained, resulting in errors and poor levels of awareness about the importance of registration.

Prior to launching the universal birth registration campaign in the country, a baseline study was conducted to gauge existing registration practices. The study included a training needs assessment of civil registrars at community level.

The baseline concluded that registrar training was needed, so Plan developed a new training manual on child rights, birth registration and child-sensitive planning that was specifically designed for the needs of registrars. The process involved reviewing existing training materials, books, manuals, government instructions and related bylaws. Modules were then prepared through a consultative process with future trainees, child rights experts and government experts on birth, marriage and death registration.

As a result of Plan's campaign, 3,339 officials were trained in the North West Frontier Province and Sindh.

case
study

Legal and political obstacles

In some cases, barriers are harder to break down as they are enforced by the state and are therefore not merely physical, but political. Such barriers affect numerous groups disproportionately including migrants, ethnic minorities and women.

Plan's
good
practice

Plan's good practice: breaking down political barriers

Plan's key strategies in dealing with legal and political obstacles address gender discrimination and the barriers encountered by migrants and other excluded populations.

Gender discrimination

Many countries still do not have gender-neutral citizenship laws in place, meaning that the nationality of a child is usually determined by the father's citizenship or nationality. Although the situation is improving, with at least 20 countries changing their laws in the last 25 years to give women the right to pass their nationality on to their children, in other countries barriers remain.⁹⁸ Single, unmarried women, as well as those who become pregnant due to rape, may face difficulties registering their children.

In Nepal, for example, current laws mean that Nepali women married to non-Nepali men cannot pass on their citizenship to their children. The extent of the gender discrimination in Nepali law means that married women themselves cannot receive a citizenship certificate without approval from their husband or father-in-law. Plan Nepal has been working on gender equity and advocacy initiatives over several years, helping women receive their citizenship certificates, which are crucial for the success of projects such as microfinance initiatives. Due to Plan's advocacy at all levels, women are now able to provide citizenship certificates to their children.

case
study

Plan's advocacy – gender and birth registration in Nepal

In 2005, the Committee on the Rights of the Child noted its concerns over the existing provisions of Nepal's Birth, Death and other Personal Incidences (Vital Registration) Act of 1976 and the Citizenship Act of 1964, which did not allow a child to claim nationality from his or her mother. This meant that children born to foreign fathers, abandoned children, orphans, children born to single mothers and children from the *Badi* community (a caste involved in traditional forms of prostitution), who may not have been able to identify their fathers, were unable to obtain citizenship. In addition, the Committee expressed concerns over the status of Bhutanese refugees as a result of their lack of registration.⁹⁹

Lobbied by Plan, the Supreme Court of Nepal, in a landmark ruling in 2005, declared that in the absence of the father, a child's birth must be registered based on the mother's citizenship. The court ruled that the registrar must register the birth of a child with uncertain paternity, including those born to women engaged in prostitution. However, due to lack of awareness and direction subsequent to the ruling, problems still remain.¹⁰⁰

In Pernambuco, Brazil, around one-third of families are headed by women, yet mothers in Brazil cannot ask for child support unless the child's father is named on the birth certificate. So Plan, the state of Pernambuco Public Prosecutor, the Association of Public Notaries, the Justice Tribunal, the state Human Rights Secretary, UNICEF and three municipalities organised the campaign 'He is my father: recognise this right' in 2006. The campaign ran again in 2007, 2008 and 2009, setting up centres where men could confirm their paternity. Normally this would be a time-consuming and expensive bureaucratic process costing US \$50 per child, but the new centres provide this service quickly and free of charge. As a result of the campaign, the law for the recognition of paternity in the state of Pernambuco was modified in 2008 and fees for paternity registration lifted. The campaign was nationally recognised and awarded the National Human Rights Award in December 2006. In 2007, almost 6,000 paternity acknowledgments were made as part of the campaign during just six days of campaigning, up from 1,700 in 2006.¹⁰¹

After two years of Plan's working in alliance with local partners in Nicaragua, not only were more than 40,000 children registered during the campaign, but through its working in collaboration and coordination with the National Assembly, parliamentarians and the Commission for Population, Development and Municipalities, Plan contributed to addressing the root causes of the country's birth registration problem. These included updating a 100-year-old law which limited access to the fundamental right to a name and a nationality.¹⁰² In 2007, Nicaragua saw the introduction of Law No.623 on responsible paternity and maternity, which gives children the right to have first and last names, and to the immediate registration of those names. In Peru, Plan also saw success in helping to amend and change laws, after birth registration was finally declared a government priority in 2007. One improvement is that mothers are now able to register births without needing the father present. Plan Peru also trained 800 staff of the children's ombudsman and other civil servants, which meant that there was capacity in 13 municipalities to register children for free. There was also mass distribution of materials (2,500 registration manuals, 2,000 videos and 11,000 sets of material for primary and secondary schools) to raise awareness.¹⁰³

Barriers for migrants and other excluded populations

In some contexts, especially where birth registration is directly linked to nationality and citizenship, certain groups are excluded on purpose. In some countries, civil registry is not seen as a priority until pre-election periods, when political parties want to see new citizens registered to include them on the electoral roll. Once elections are over, the registry is without support and resources once more.

Individuals may also suffer when they are not legally recognised by the state, as is the case for the *Baka* people in Cameroon. The country as a whole is believed to have a 70 per cent birth registration rate. However, children of *Baka* communities are not legally recognised as citizens and their parents cannot have them registered. Furthermore, birth registration forms are only available in Afrikaans and English, just 2 of the country's 11 official languages. See page 50 for information on how Plan and our partners worked to support the *Baka* people.

Table 2:
Examples of Plan's role in changing law and policy on birth registration

Country	First step	Plan's contribution	Result
Bangladesh	Plan Bangladesh started working on the birth registration initiative in 2001, working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government and UNICEF.	Plan advocated enactment of the law and provided input into its drafting.	Birth and Death Registration Act amended in 2004 and enacted in 2006 including free registration for children.
Cambodia	The Ministry of Interior, with the support of Plan Cambodia and UNICEF, organised a national workshop on civil registration.	Ministry requested support from Plan, which brought in an expert to review existing laws against international standards.	Amendments and recommendations have been presented to the Ministry to take forward.
Malawi	In collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, Malawi Human Rights Commission and UNICEF the drafting of a new bill was initiated.	Plan advised in the drafting of the National Registration Bill, 2005.	The Cabinet has approved the bill, making birth registration compulsory for all children. The bill is awaiting consideration by Parliament.
Paraguay	Under Paraguayan law, children required a certificate of live birth issued by a hospital in order to be registered. This was identified as a factor in the non-registration of children, as 40 per cent of births in Paraguay occur at home.	Plan hired a legal consultant to prepare a draft amendment to Article 55 of the Civil Registry Law 1266. Plan lobbied parliamentary authorities and advocated for the amendment to the law.	The law was amended within two months, a record time.

Country	First step	Plan's contribution	Result
Paraguay	Plan's research found that there were a large number of schoolchildren without birth certificates.	Plan supported the Technical Office of the Ministry of Education and Culture to draft a resolution requiring education authorities to ensure that all schoolchildren should be registered.	Plan lobbied for the approval of Resolution # 1131-09, calling for all principals of educational centres to ensure that every schoolchild has a birth certificate by the end of the school year.
Togo	The Ministry of Interior with the support of Plan Togo and UNICEF organised a national workshop on civil registration.	Plan participated in the workshop, which led to a process of legal review.	In 2009, a new law on organisation of civil status was adopted by parliament, and includes bringing civil registry centres closer to communities through decentralisation.
Uganda	Workshop held with key stakeholders and government officials to review draft policy document and make proposals to amend the Birth and Death Registration Act.	Plan guided the consultation.	The proposals made during this workshop have been compiled into a working document awaiting discussion and cabinet approval.

Fear of persecution

In more extreme cases, unwillingness to register a child may be attributable to fear of persecution, or because such information may be used against the family. Under the regime of Pol Pot, many Cambodians destroyed their documents in an attempt to hide their identities and escape persecution.¹⁰⁴ When Plan started working on birth registration in Cambodia, less than 5 per cent of the population were registered. More recently in Rwanda, during the genocide in 1994, birth certificates were used to identify the ethnic origin of children and adults in order to commit atrocities.¹⁰⁵ Given these examples, it is no wonder that some people are afraid to register their children.

In China, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented that many children of Chinese men married to North Korean women go unregistered because of the risk of exposing the mother, who could be arrested and repatriated to North Korea for her illegal migrant status. HRW found that these fears are not simply based on unfounded suspicions – real penalties await some who take the first step towards securing their child’s rights. These penalties come in the form of arrest, prosecution, fines and possible deportation.¹⁰⁶

Other fears over legal constraints can also be seen in cases in Sudan, for example, where uncertified traditional birth attendants who attend deliveries in rural settings are afraid to provide birth notifications because they are working as midwives illegally.

Plan’s good practice: overcoming fear

Fears can be overcome when the right strategies are put into place. In Cambodia, Plan worked in an holistic way with communities and the government to raise awareness of the importance of registration at local level, training officials and engaging the village chief. These strategies helped to build trust and confidence in order to overcome fears. Following the resulting mobile birth registration programme that took place over a period of ten months, more than seven million Cambodians, close to 56 per cent of the population, received their birth certificates.¹⁰⁷ The Asian Development Bank estimates that 90 per cent of the population is now registered in the country.¹⁰⁸

Cultural and historical traditions

There may also be cultural or social practices that result in birth registration being a low priority. For instance, parents may prefer to hold a naming ceremony or traditional rite of passage that takes precedence over formal registration. Families and individuals may use alternative forms of legal identification, such as citizenship certificates or identity cards, parents may wish to use horoscopes, which document the date and place of birth, or they may not want to name their child within the stipulated timeframe for registration (usually between 30 to 90 days), as is the case for the Lambadi in India.¹⁰⁹



In countries where child mortality rates are traditionally high, parents may wait to see if the child survives rather than registering him or her straight after birth. For example, Sierra Leone was ranked first in the under-five mortality rating in 2007 (262 deaths per 1,000 births). For many of these parents, who are already living in resource-poor environments, the time and money spent on birth registration may seem worthless.

“None [of] my seven brothers and sisters has a birth certificate. Our parents decided to register our births only when we [reach] about 10 years old, as they do not want to waste time in declaring births of babies who might die at any moment.”

A child who took part in a Plan Cameroon consultation for the birth registration campaign

Birth registration may also carry negative associations with past events or practices. Registration records were traditionally the basis for mandatory recruitment into military service. During the colonial period, it was not uncommon for legislative instruments to include provisions on birth registration, especially in Africa. Birth registration tended to be discriminatory, whereby it was mandatory only for non-Africans, such as the Europeans and Asians living in the countries at the time. A similar legacy has been recognised in Indonesia, where birth registration was based on race, religion and social status until 2006, when a new law was passed. Up until that time, newborn babies of families whose religion was not included in the list of those officially recognised, or children from unlisted ethnic groups, were not registered. These provisions dated back to the time of Dutch colonisation, as early as the 17th century.

Discrimination presents a large barrier, which may be based on traditional preferences. In many countries, the strong preference for boys is evident in the ratio of boys registered compared to girls. In Peru, of those children not registered, 56 per cent are girls.¹¹⁰ In China in 2004, a survey was conducted of the unregistered population in one province over the previous ten years: about 530,000 unregistered people were identified, of whom 70–80 per cent were females.¹¹¹

Plan’s good practice: challenging cultural and social norms

In China, Plan’s efforts – such as research, building government capacity, influencing UBR policy and public awareness raising – have led to birth registration becoming part of a national programme, ‘Caring for Girls’. In some areas of China, the local government has taken action to improve its policies and procedures in the area of birth registration.

In Malawi, Plan’s campaign began by recognising that there was a need to introduce a new law to replace the outdated 1904 Act, which was a piece of colonial legislation that applied only to white settlers and Asians living in the country. Following lobbying by Plan and partners, this law was replaced in 2005 by the National Registration Bill which Plan helped to draft.



Protecting vital documents

In countries that suffer from rainy seasons, humidity or extreme weather conditions which result in households being prone to flash floods, hurricanes and cyclones, protecting vital documents such as birth certificates is a challenge. In times of conflict and war, records may also be destroyed. In Guinea, for example, during the riots and looting in early 2007, most registry departments in the country were ransacked leading to the loss of data.

Plan's
good
practice

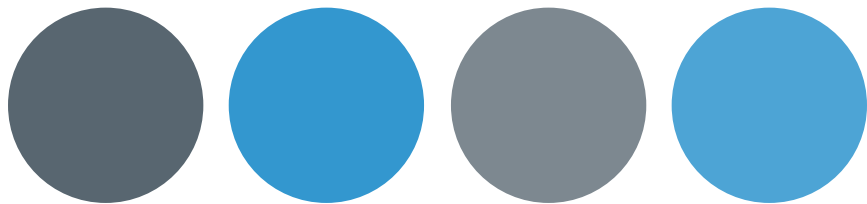
Plan's good practice: helping to protect documents

In countries where flooding is a constant concern, such as Vietnam, Plan has facilitated the lamination of certificates to protect them and keep them dry. Traditionally, families in Vietnam would store birth certificates and other important documents in the rafters of their homes to keep them safe from floods. In many West African countries, Plan laminates birth certificates as part of their birth registration work. In Togo, Plan laminated all the certificates they facilitated producing. In other countries, registration work consists of distributing special folders for family papers, not only to help people keep them safe, but also to help them realise the value of such documents.

In Cambodia, one million plastic covers were distributed by Plan to the same number of households encouraging them to protect civil registration documents. The covers carried a child rights message: Right of your Child – Registration within 30 Days of Birth. Based on this idea, UNICEF entered into a partnership with Plan and a further 170,000 plastic covers were printed and distributed to families across the country.¹¹² In Sri Lanka and Indonesia, Plan has not only provided new birth certificates for children whose documents were lost in the tsunami, they have also distributed plastic covers and protection for these new certificates.

“These documents are very important for my children. It floods here so often that I have had them laminated.”

A father in Vietnam



Why the state struggles to ensure birth registration for all

Even though there are many factors which may influence a parent or guardian's decision on whether to register their child, it is the responsibility of every state to ensure all children are registered at birth. However, national governments also face challenges. Plan has found that not only may there be a lack of political will or resources initially, but also, when the demand for birth registration increases, the state struggles to cope because of inadequate and ineffective systems. Plan's response has been to work with governments to build their capacity so that they can deal with the current birth registration situation, but also so that they are prepared for the future and have the ability to take full ownership of a functioning and effective birth registration system.

Lack of resources

Lack of resources for birth registration may be due to lack of political will to allocate them, to the general absence of finance or infrastructure in a poor country, or a combination of the two. In some states, birth registration is not given priority: the government may allocate this function to a small ministry which is overlooked at budget allocation time, for instance. There may be other, pressing matters such as disasters to deal with, or it may be that registration is not seen as a vote-winning policy.

For these reasons and more, civil registration tends to suffer from an inadequate allocation of financial resources, and this can dramatically affect the functioning of the system. For example, the state may be effectively excluding certain groups from a range of services and rights, including the right to vote, by its relegation of birth registration. In other cases, the political will may be there, but countries simply do not have the funds to ensure that resources are in place, as is the case in Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone.

Resources play a vital role in ensuring the system works well. Without them, offices will be ill-equipped with a lack of computers, photocopiers, furniture and a shortage of basic essential materials including application forms, pens and even birth certificates. Civil registry offices are also likely to be staffed by poorly trained, unmotivated staff, resulting in a high turnover of registrars. This general lack of staff, training and equipment to record and store information securely may lead to insufficient or inaccurate registration records. It can also leave records susceptible to fraud, corruption or destruction. In some countries where Plan works, it has been noted that civil registry officers often charge illegally for birth registration, even when the law states that registration is free. As children become adults, they may have to pay bribes in order to obtain essential identity documents without a birth certificate.

Plan's good practice: encouraging states to prioritise birth registration

Where the state has not taken the lead in these activities, Plan has worked hard to show the importance of birth registration as a political priority and a child rights issue and has involved the state as a key stakeholder throughout the campaign.

In Pakistan, Plan has advocated for the state to allocate an appropriate budget for birth registration in the country,¹¹³ including US \$1 million for the computerisation of birth registration.¹¹⁴ In addition, Plan has supported the training of government functionaries (see page 57). The birth registration system is now functioning throughout the North West Frontier Province, including the remotest parts where birth registration rates in the past were zero. Not only is this now a sustainable activity because the provincial government has taken on registration, but just one year on from the declaration of 2006 as the year of free birth registration, more than 1,064,000 births had been registered.¹¹⁵

Plan has also been keen to promote birth registration to government officials by sharing good practices learned from other countries where we work. Plan facilitated a trip by Cambodian Ministerial Officials to the Philippines where they could see the computerised birth registration system in practice and the benefits of such a system.

Plan has also provided a range of essential resources as part of a longer-term strategy to support state structures and practices. The Luwero District in Uganda received 21 motorcycles as part of the campaign for birth registration.¹¹⁶ Plan also provided each village with a bicycle to help those involved in recording and reporting birth registration in Luwero.

Lack of systems or their breakdown

In Ethiopia, there is no civil registration system. In fact, Ethiopia is the only African country with no law that demands the registration of vital events including births, deaths, marriages and divorces. This has huge implications for children in the country. Even when civil registration systems are in place, these systems can easily break down in fragile environments, as when there is conflict or unrest. In Sudan, political instability and civil war has led to inaccessibility of some areas impacting on registration rates. At the same time, with the forced displacement of many people including registrars themselves, registration processes collapse. Similarly, during Liberia's 14-year civil war, the structural civil registration system buckled as a result of the consistent civil crisis. Birth registration remains low in the country: in the Demographic and Health Survey in 2007, birth registration was estimated to be around 15 per cent.

In Sri Lanka, many government institutions lost civil registry records during two decades of fighting. These problems were further aggravated by the fact that almost everyone directly affected by the tsunami in 2004 lost proof of personal identity, including birth certificates and national identity cards.¹¹⁷

Plan's good practice: strengthening capacity

Plan staff presented Plan's experiences of working on birth registration in other African countries during a seminal workshop on the establishment of a national vital events registration system in Ethiopia. In response to the pioneering meeting, a legal drafting body and a committee have been established to start working on the law, which will be in place in the coming years. Plan in Sudan also supported learning and sharing for Ethiopian delegates in a study tour to Sudan; here they learned about registration methodology and stakeholders' involvement in the vital registration system.

In Liberia, Plan has supported the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to improve the birth registration system in the country. After an initial national assessment, Plan and its partners worked to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry and its health teams, which included training, creating awareness and providing logistical support. In Liberia, the government's National Birth Registration Strategy (2008–11) to "revitalise a sustainable decentralised UBR system as part of vital registration in Liberia" includes making sure that 90 per cent of children under 5 in all counties are retrospectively registered and birth certificates issued. Plan's work in Liberia will continue supporting community-level awareness and sensitisation, and building capacities of birth registration functionaries at the community and district levels in order to ensure that children are registered at birth.

Lack of effective information systems

While most countries now have civil registration systems in place, many remain simplistic in nature and registry offices continue to suffer from poor record management practices. A lack of computerised records for birth registration is a challenge, as this makes the process slower and there is a risk that birth notifications will be lost or certificates not processed and issued. Non-electronic records are harder to retrieve automatically and may also be damaged by insects, fires, floods, or in periods of conflict and unrest.



Plan's good practice: piloting computerised record keeping

In Uganda, the information and communications technology (ICT) system for registration is poor. The processing, analysis, movement and storage of birth and death records are inadequate and various systems are incompatible with each other. The Central Registry of Births and Deaths in Kampala is still being managed manually. With huge amounts of data being brought in from districts ever since the birth registration campaign launch in 2005, the Central Registry is increasingly becoming overwhelmed and unable to process long birth certificates efficiently.

Plan provided support to the government and the Uganda Registration Services Bureau to conduct a study assessing the requirements for improving the infrastructure, data production processes and data management, analysis and presentation at the Central Registry. This study was conducted by an ICT consultant and a report was shared with key stakeholders. However, implementation of these recommendations awaits the development and approval of the country's National Strategic Plan.

In Nepal, Plan collaborated with the Ministry of Local Development and others in the development of software for vital event registration, including birth registration. This software is compatible with other information systems in Nepal, which will significantly improve the overall utility of data in the country.¹¹⁸

Plan's innovation and the use of ICT in Kenya¹¹⁹

Despite successes in birth notification at community level, there is still a lack of technology and capacity to store such data in Kenya. In a new national programme, all birth registration records as far back as 1996 are due to be updated. At district headquarters, however, the process is still mainly manual and leads to delays in issuing birth certificates.

For example, at district headquarters in Kwale, the three-person staff have just one computer and can only process around 200 birth records a month. This work can only be done after they finish serving clients, who come to register new births and deaths, and it is evident that better data management is urgently needed.

Responding to these challenges, Plan is piloting community-led computerised birth registration. By using mobile phone technology, it is possible to record data for birth notifications and track the registration process. This takes advantage of the good mobile phone network connectivity in Kwale and draws on other successful models for enhancing services at community level, as has been proven through mobile banking, which is well developed in many African countries.

Weak coordination

It is not unusual for several government departments and ministries to be involved in some way in the civil registration process. In many cases, roles and responsibilities of each ministry are not clear and coordination between them remains challenging. In Zambia, for example, the links between ministries are weak and there is no mechanism for coordination of efforts surrounding birth registration. In addition, there is a total absence of interaction between the systems of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the system of manual record keeping via village registers.

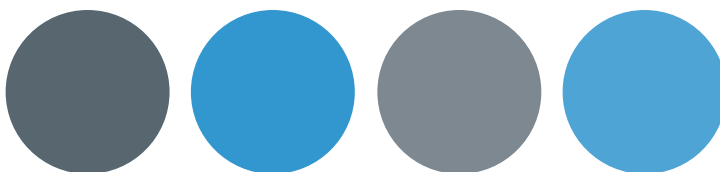
Although decentralisation is seen as beneficial in most contexts and a key strategy to increase rates of birth registration, it can also lead to poor coordination if the central office is not efficient. For example, in Laos, there is no management or centralisation of registration data and this data often stays at village level as a result.

Plan's good practice: facilitating partnerships

The role of Plan throughout the birth registration campaign in Sri Lanka has been primarily as a key facilitator. Plan established networks between civil registration staff, grassroots organisations and other NGOs to conduct birth registration activities and facilitated the exchange of information among these networks.

Plan has been instrumental in creating a clear flow of information between decentralised registration staff and the Registrar General's department, and ensuring that duplication of activities does not take place.

Roles and responsibilities also need to be defined. In Pakistan, Plan has created partnerships with the federal, provincial and district governments and the semi-independent territories of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as a range of NGOs and UNICEF. Here, Plan worked to define the roles of the National Database and Registration Authority at local and national levels so that efforts were not duplicated nor duties omitted. This was achieved via a series of meetings with the government, with the agreement that the birth registration function should be played by the provincial governments through the Union Council.



Plan's campaign challenges

Ensuring sustainability

As Plan's birth registration campaign phases out it has been particularly important to work with the state, as well as with children and communities, to make sure that positive changes are sustained. It is the state's responsibility to register all children at birth, but it is not always easy for Plan to step back, especially when our technical skills and support are still needed. In Cambodia, Plan was asked to continue to assist with resourcing civil registration beyond the life of the original, very successful, project. Instead, we encouraged Cambodian officials to take charge of the civil registration process.

Working within our limited resources, Plan has learned that the greatest impact can come from initiatives such as:

- piloting projects/models, which can be replicated by the state and others
- building capacity within local or national organisations and groups to carry on the work
- designing mechanisms into our projects to ensure sustainability, and training volunteers
- sharing the lessons learned with others working in the area

Plan's good practice: ensuring sustainability

Models that can be replicated and scaled up by others

In many cases, Plan's pilot projects have been well received by governments, who have then gone on to take over and/or scale up the models developed by Plan. In Vietnam, the model for birth registration in mountainous areas is set to be replicated in other mountainous provinces by the Ministry of Justice. In Sri Lanka, Plan provided the initiative, model and financial support for a project to computerise the system of issuing birth, marriage and death certificates. The government is now replicating this system all over the country with the support of donor agencies, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. In Guinea-Bissau, a pilot project designed by Plan on early birth registration was implemented in 2007 in 20 more communities in partnership with the Ministry of Justice.¹²⁰

Supporting existing local and national organisations and groups

In a few cases, when Plan decided to take up the issue of birth registration in a country, it found that there was already a national alliance, campaign or movement already working on this issue. In these circumstances, Plan partnered and supported existing groups. In Peru, for example, Plan supported the existing national campaign, 'My Name'. As part of a wider alliance, Plan managed to create a bigger impact and could be confident that local groups would remain committed to the cause once Plan's programming evolved to concentrate on other child rights issues.

Plan's
good
practice

In Vietnam, 128 local professionals in six provinces completed a course to become trainers. In turn, 2,653 community staff, including community leaders, justice staff, policemen, child protection officers, teachers and health workers attended professional training courses to increase their knowledge and skills in birth registration.¹²¹

Designing mechanisms and processes to ensure sustainability

In Sierra Leone, birth registration rates have continued to increase because of the sustainable design of Plan's project. Registration offices were integrated with health units, allowing registration to continue even after campaign resources were withdrawn. Plan's partners adopted the same strategy in their project design throughout Sierra Leone, and it appears to be working effectively.

In Pakistan, as a result of Plan's work to get Memorandums of Understanding signed with three provincial governments, these governments now take the lead role and actively support birth registration and child rights. In addition, a greater number of government employees are involved in birth registration activities in the country – another way to ensure sustainability.

Training and supporting volunteers

Plan trains community volunteers in Pakistan

To increase birth registration rates in Pakistan, Plan helped local councils with registration application forms, registers and certificates to cater for the millions of unregistered children. To support this initiative, Plan trained union councillors in child rights and the importance of birth registration.

Wazir Khan is one such committed councillor. He lives in the mountainous area of Chitral district, in the extreme north of Pakistan. He has literally taken birth registration to the doorstep of people living in the area, encouraging parents to register their children. In the winter, he has only a limited time to campaign as the area becomes inaccessible when the roads are blocked with snow, but he is still determined to visit households and spread awareness. He personally registered 3,000 children between the ages of one day and 18 years during the period from April to August 2007.

"When I register a newborn I feel satisfaction because I think I've secured the future of a human being", he said.

case
study

Volunteers based in communities are integral to ensuring that registration projects have the capacity to keep going after we have scaled down our involvement.

Plan Zambia, working jointly with the Department of Registration Office in the districts for Mansa, Mazabuka, Chibombo and Chadiza, trained community members as birth registration volunteers. These volunteers, including traditional birth attendants and community health workers, now assist district registrars to educate community members on the registration processes and fill out the forms.

In Togo, a Committee for Registration of Births (COSEN) has been set up in every community to raise awareness and educate communities on birth registration.

In Egypt, community volunteers are the link between children, families, communities and civil registrars. They are ideally placed to make home visits and inform families about the barriers that children face if they are not registered. The volunteers are based in the local area and have strong relationships with community members, factors which lead to better data collection. At the same time, this method ensures that community members can find their own solutions to problems, which strengthens their sense of 'ownership' and leads to achievements being more sustainable in the long term.

There are other numerous examples referred to in this report where community-based volunteers have been trained to collect birth registration data.

case
study

Community-led birth registration model in Kenya¹²²

In Kenya Mukembau, a community-based organisation and Plan partner, discovered that many parents did not know their children's date of birth and many did not have health clinic cards. And as a result, young people were struggling to get identity cards when they were 18 years old, as they were required to supply both their own birth certificate and those of their parents.

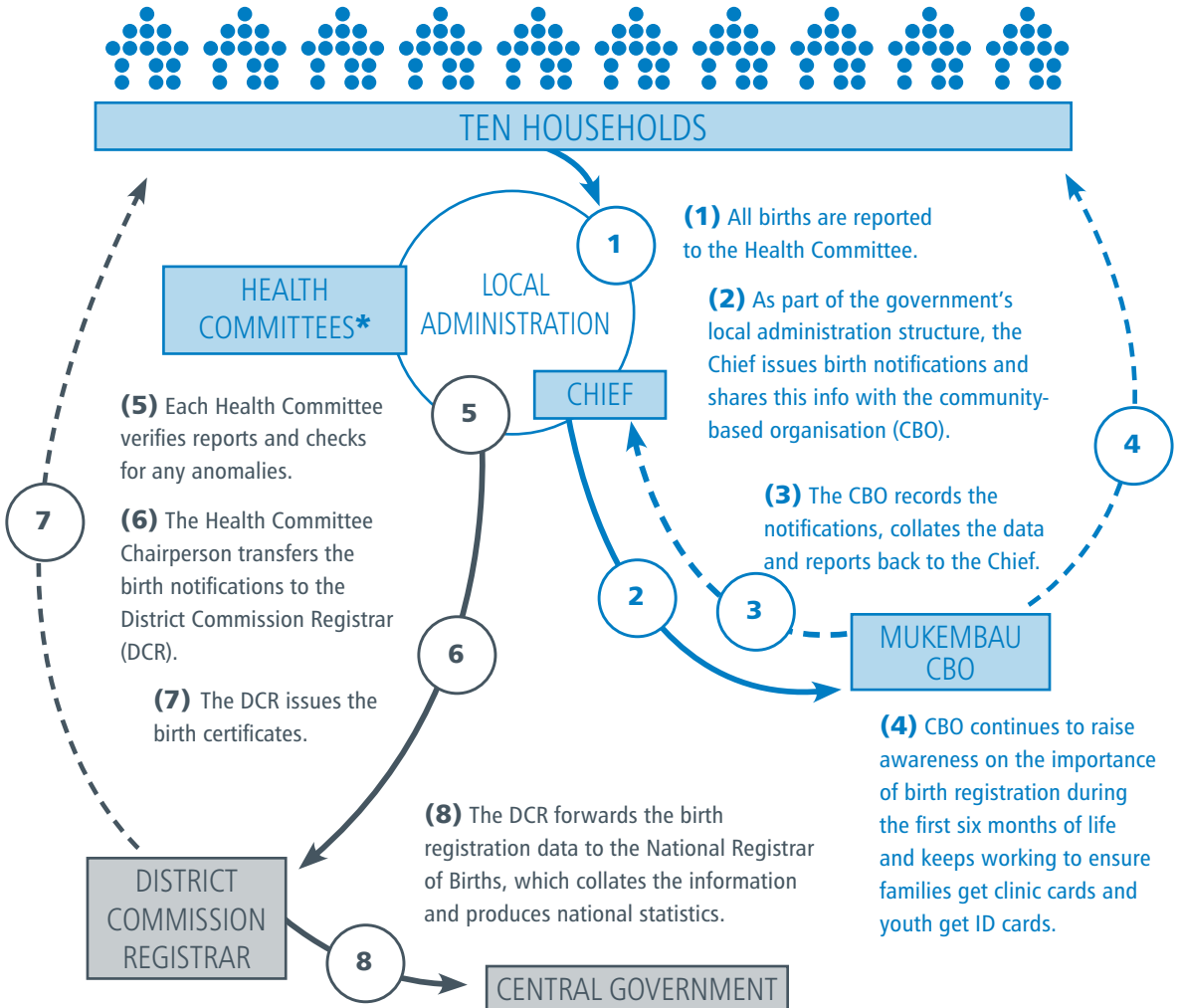
Working together, Plan and Mukembau developed a successful project to train a network of volunteers to collect birth registration data. The network involved villages, children's clubs, volunteer child officers and community health workers.

This project has become a key link between the community and local registration services (see diagram, opposite), and as well as promoting birth registration, they ensure that health clinic and identity cards are distributed to families and young people. Mukembau also holds a celebration ceremony when individuals receive their birth certificates, creating greater awareness and demand for registration services.

This model has strengthened genuine community participation, and Plan and Mukembau have facilitated the registration of more than 90 per cent of births in the project catchment area, far above the 45 per cent national average for Kenya.

Adaptation of Mukembaú's community-based birth registration model

— community level process
— government and community level process



*Each Health Committee serves ten households and is composed of a chairperson and children's clubs representatives, volunteer children officers, community health workers, religious groups, parents and village elders.

Sharing lessons learned

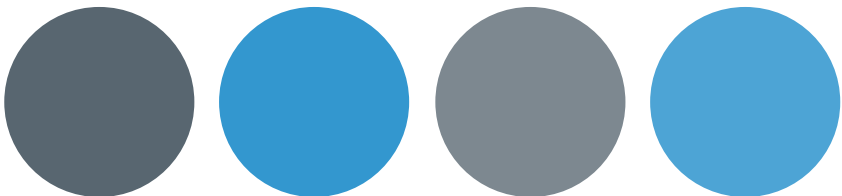
Plan, together with stakeholders and allies, have organised many national and regional conferences and workshops on birth registration, which have provided an important platform for the exchange of information.

Plan's Asia regional office organised regular birth registration conferences between 1999 and 2006, together with partners, to mobilise governments and provide opportunities for learning and sharing of experiences between countries in Asia. The conferences proved highly successful in advocating for policy and practice reform on birth registration and brought together ministers, civil registrars, practitioners, children and young people. The sharing of knowledge between those countries with good practices on birth registration polices and systems and others starting out on their reform work, such as East Timor and Cambodia, was an notable success.

In Africa, Plan and partners held the 'First Regional Conference on Birth Registration in West and Central Africa' in Dakar, Senegal in 2004, followed by the 'Second Eastern and Southern Africa Conference on Universal Birth Registration' in Kenya in 2005.

In 2007, the first 'Latin American Regional Conference on Birth Registration and the Right to Identity' was held in Paraguay. Plan organised this conference in conjunction with the Government of Paraguay, UNICEF and the Organization of American States. Delegates represented 18 Latin American countries and included government officials, technical experts responsible for the civil registers and civil society organisations.

Not only have these conferences stimulated interest and the exchange of ideas and good practice, they have also led to solid outcomes. After the 'Asia and the Pacific Regional Conference on Universal Birth Registration: Record, Recognise, Respect' in 2006, civil registrars in the region set up their own network to continue supporting each other in this vital work.



Partnerships and coordination

Partnerships are essential to Plan's work, allowing us to have a greater impact, for more children, through a collective voice and coordinated action. By working together with both stakeholders and partners, Plan applies resources effectively, and shares essential expertise and learning with local partners. A key benefit to our partners, including governments, in this particular campaign has been access to our research data. This research has supplied partners with invaluable information, particularly into barriers to registration.

Working together – Plan China and Xi'an Jiatong University

In order for Plan China to develop programmes to tackle the issue of non-registration in the country, it was critical that the organisation had a clear understanding of the problem. In 2005, Plan commissioned Xi'an Jiatong University's Population and Development Research Institute to lead a research project in areas across Shaanxi province on children's birth registration.

The results of the study led to the design and implementation of a successful birth registration project in the province, which saw rates doubling in some villages. The partnership with the institute ensured Plan's work received wide coverage in the media and in academic journals and conferences.

case
study

Plan's good practice: developing partnerships

Plan's programmes are strengthened by partnerships in all the countries where we work. During the birth registration campaign, our main partners have included local and national government, including health, justice, social affairs and education officials, the development banks, UN agencies including UNICEF, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), local NGOs and CBOs, academic institutions and children's and community groups.

The partnerships have proved extremely successful, with Plan's programme activities augmented by the expertise and influence of our partners. Each partner has played their part in increasing the impact and success of the campaign. The outcome has been sustained and concerted efforts at every level of society and government has resulted in true social change.

Plan's
good
practice

Plan Malawi's partnership with the Football Association

Plan Malawi partnered with the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security, UNICEF, the Ministry of Justice, Office of the Registrar General, Ministry of Information and others, to promote the government's national registration and identification programme through a national campaign.¹²³

As a result of this partnership, the National Registration Bill, making birth registration in the country compulsory, safely passed through parliament.

Plan and partners formed an alliance with the Football Association of Malawi for the campaign. While this may not have been an obvious relationship, birth registration has real resonance in the world of football, where it has the potential to prevent age-cheating (entering youth to play in age-specific competitions when they are over the age limit).¹²⁴

The campaign launched with a two-day charity football competition involving four leading Malawian teams. The matches were broadcast live on national radio and television channels, and specific jingles promoting registration were aired throughout the broadcasts. Live interviews with Plan staff, as well as with the Football Association of Malawi, were broadcast before and after the matches.

Football proved to be an innovative way to popularise Plan's advocacy messages on birth registration. In just two days, the whole population of Malawi had received information about the importance of birth registration.

Not only do partnerships at national level benefit Plan's work, but many governments have recognised the unique benefits that partnering with Plan can bring.

Plan Haiti is recognised by the national government as an expert on birth registration at community level. In Nicaragua, Plan's birth registration campaign forms an integral part of the government initiative, 'My Name is My Right', and Plan's strategy and recommendations for improving birth registration have been discussed by the government.

In Cambodia, a new legal framework for civil registration was put in place to register the entire population. But two years after implementation, less than 5 per cent of the population had been registered and issued with their civil registration documents. In response, Plan worked with Cambodia's Ministry of the Interior to put a new civil registration strategy into practice in October 2004, which saw exceptional results.¹²⁵

In 2007, Plan India organised a national consultation, 'Promoting Government-Civil Society Partnerships to Achieve Universal Birth Registration', which included 50 civil society groups from across the country. The results of the consultation made it clear that organisations such as Plan play a critical role in partnering with governments to promote birth registration, through:

- mobilising public opinion
- identifying gaps where awareness must be increased
- building the capacity of stakeholders
- integrating different government departments
- conducting mass media campaigns
- supporting the government to reach the most vulnerable children¹²⁶

And partnership is also key to increasing birth registration within communities, by bringing together community-based organisations, local government and the communities themselves to work on the issue.

In Vietnam, through Plan's work with local partners, there is now coordination and cooperation between justice staff, policemen, teachers, health workers and midwives at community level. The result is that all newborn children are registered after birth. In Bangladesh, Plan has brought together 20 NGOs to look at the issue of birth registration for street children in Dhaka.

There are many more examples throughout this report of Plan's partnerships at the local level.

Slow-moving decisions and lack of monitoring

Plan has been involved with proposed amendments, and changes of legislation and policy, in 30 countries. We have found that, even when decisions and actions are signed off, political will subsides when the decisions reach national decision-making bodies. It may take years for changes to be implemented. At the time of writing, the reviewed Births and Deaths Act in Sierra Leone is yet to be passed by parliament, even though agreements were made in 2006. In Cambodia, recommendations have been agreed to improve the quality of civil registration data, although the Ministry of Justice is still considering these proposals. Work must continue to support these states.

When a law changes, there may be remarkable effects in response. This was the case in Niger, where the adoption of Law No. 2007-30 on the civil statute saw the level of birth registration, in communities where Plan works, increase from 25 per cent in 2002 to 77 per cent in 2006.¹²⁷

The introduction of a new law does not automatically lead to immediate behaviour and attitude change. A degree of monitoring is essential to check whether duty bearers are fulfilling their role in relation to the legislation and whether there is an associated increase in birth registration rates.

Plan's good practice: contribution to monitoring

Plan uses a variety of approaches to contribute to monitoring birth registration processes at the national level, in countries where we work. Examples include representation on steering committees, providing technical and logistical support, commissioning research and compiling reports for the UNCRC alternative reporting mechanism. In Nepal, Plan is a partner in the National Steering Committee, which includes representatives from local development, health, education, women, children and social welfare government departments as well as the Planning Commission. The Committee ensures the implementation of birth registration policy, and plans and monitors the progress of activities. In El Salvador in 2005, Plan helped to set up the National Registry of Natural Persons (COSEDINS), a committee to support government institutions to organise specific activities in order to increase birth registration rates. Government practices have reportedly improved since the creation of the committee.

In Uganda, Plan is a member of the Birth and Death Registration National Taskforce. This Taskforce has developed tools to monitor the implementation of activities, from community to national level. The Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs is responsible for organising regular monitoring and evaluation visits to districts, and these visits are also used to provide technical support in specific areas. Plan has been providing logistical support at district level for technical teams to conduct regular monitoring of birth registration programmes.

Plan's
good
practice

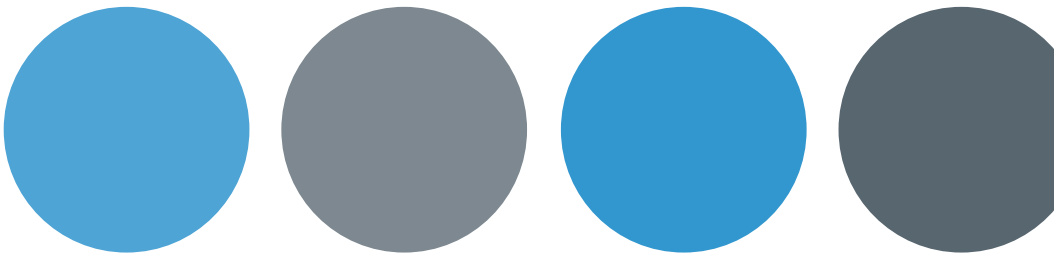
Monitoring in Bolivia

Capturing and using birth and death registration data was identified as an issue by Plan and the Ministry of Health in Bolivia. The data was not being integrated into the National Health Information System and therefore could not be used for planning services.

Plan supported the development of a national database and associated software, under contract with Bolivia's Ministry of Health. Plan also supported the Community Administration and Information System – community and municipal-level committees responsible for sharing and evaluating data on births, deaths, immunisations and sickness in their area.

The committees evaluate the quality of health services and participate in service planning.

The participation of community volunteers, 'monitoring mothers', has been identified as an important step for women's empowerment in the country, as well as an important mechanism for monitoring trends and changes in the health of the population and in birth registration rates.



Involving children in Plan's Universal Birth Registration campaign

When we can understand the importance of birth registration then why can't you?

Children who participated in a seminar on right to identity in India

Birth registration is a child rights issue, and Plan believes that children and young people should participate in making decisions on issues that relate directly to them. Participation increases ownership towards a project and helps sustainability, and, furthermore, can help ensure that young people are better informed, so that when they become parents, they will know why and how to register their children at birth.

Children and young people became key players in Plan's campaign, taking it upon themselves to promote birth registration to their peers and elders, and to mobilise their parents and communities. There were even instances where children themselves took younger siblings to registration offices when parents or guardians failed to register them, for example in Sierra Leone.

Raising awareness about the importance of birth registration and involving children and young people also gave Plan's campaign increased momentum and had additional benefits. For example, they assisted adults to design and develop child-friendly versions of information materials, including posters, songs, poems and plays, ensuring that even more children directly benefited from the campaign.

case study

Roopa's gift to her baby brother

In November 2007 a community volunteer from one of Plan India's local partner organisations, working in the Gulbarga district of Karnataka State, brought an audio presentation about birth registration into a primary school.

At the end of the presentation, the headteacher of the school explained the importance of birth registration and that children could not go to school without a birth certificate. He told the school children that the certificate could be obtained for just two rupees in their state.

After the presentation Roopa, a Grade 2 pupil, gave the community volunteer two rupees. When he asked her why she was giving him money, she told him that she had a new baby brother and she wanted him to be registered as soon as possible.

Plan's good practice: active participation by children

In India, a Plan-sponsored seminar was organised on the 'Right to Identity' for children in difficult circumstances during the World Social Forum. More than 500 children from various organisations actively participated. These children shared their concerns, recounted the problems they faced trying to acquire a birth certificate, and made recommendations for making the birth registration process more child-friendly.

In Indonesia, Plan worked with children's groups to train them as child rights advocates on the issue of birth registration. Members of the groups now speak in schools and on radio broadcasts. In some districts, these children have also been involved in lobbying policy makers about their right to birth registration.

In October 2008, Plan joined a coalition of international and local organisations in Uganda, promoting birth registration as crucial in protecting children against sexual abuse. The coalition brought together hundreds of primary school children, who presented a petition to the Speaker of Parliament, calling for a review of the Birth and Death Registration Act 1970. Specifically, the petition asked for birth registration to be made mandatory, so that proof of age could be determined in child sexual abuses case in court. The petition also asked for the registration process to be decentralised, and for birth certificates to be free. At the time of writing, the petition is being discussed by the Parliamentary Committee on Children and Social Affairs.

Raising funds and awareness in the 'Universal Birth Registration' campaign

Plan is operational in 66 offices across all continents. Plan's rights-based approach is strengthened by work at community, district, national and international levels. Through evidence-based advocacy, Plan is able to influence governments and promote the replication of successful programmes and approaches by sharing our learning from community level up.

Plan works in 18 countries, fundraising and advocating on child rights issues. Offices in Belgium, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands and UK have all been particularly active in the area of birth registration. Not only have they created the opportunity to donate the gift of a birth certificate, but Plan Belgium, for example, generated tens of thousands of signatures for a birth registration petition as part of a nationwide campaign. Plan Finland has also run a comprehensive campaign that has included lobbying Finnish politicians to promote birth registration at national and international levels. FinnChurchAid, Finland's largest NGO working on development issues, joined Plan to collect petition signatures and to work with schools to raise awareness of the issue. Finland's Minister of Foreign Trade and Development supports the campaign and has allowed Plan Finland to use his name and childhood picture in campaign materials.

Plan's European office has also been advocating on the issue of birth registration. They invited colleagues from Bangladesh to speak at a public hearing on birth registration organised by the Development Committee and Human Rights Sub-Committee in the European Parliament in Brussels. The European Parliament and European Union were urged to continue their support in linking birth registration to nation-building initiatives, such as access to better education, healthcare and other human rights.

“A child not counted does not count.”

Former UK member of the European Parliament,
Glenys Kinnock

Plan has also been advocating at the UN in Geneva and has worked with other NGOs, preparing joint statements on child rights issues. Plan helped draft a joint oral statement on child trafficking in response to the report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, in 2009. This statement included the importance of birth registration as a protective and preventative measure in the area of child trafficking, as well as the basis for data collection on this and other issues.

case
study

Fundraising and gaining support for birth registration across the world

Plan's fundraising offices have not only been funding birth registration projects across Asia, Africa and the Americas, but they have also been raising awareness among sponsors, donors and the general public in developed countries about the challenges and importance of birth registration. Activities have included starting petitions on universal birth registration and offering birth certificates as a form of alternative gift giving.

Alternative gifts, which can be purchased to directly support the birth registration campaign in Africa, are available from:
Plan UK – www.plan-uk.org and Plan Canada – www.plancanada.ca

Results, reflections and recommendations

Plan formally launched its 'Universal Birth Registration' campaign in February 2005. Since then, the campaign has had a major impact on birth registration rates worldwide.

Over 40 million people in 32 countries have now been registered through the direct efforts of Plan and partners – the majority of them children. Thirty per cent of countries targeted have changed their legal systems as a result of our advocacy work, resulting in free birth certificates and registration for more than 153 million children, born between 2005 and 2009 (see Appendix 1).

As Plan's birth registration efforts actually began in 1998, these figures represent the most conservative estimates of our achievements. Where laws have been changed to assist or ensure registration, the positive impact of Plan's work will continue for many years to come.

In addition, during the campaign:

Plan successfully highlighted the importance of birth registration to dozens of governments and showed how registration benefits the state and society as well as being the right of every child.

Plan helped to improve knowledge and understanding of the importance of birth registration to children, parents and communities so that demand for certificates grew significantly and increasing numbers of people were registered.

Plan created innovative pilot schemes for maximum outreach to populations and significant impact on registration rates, by running projects to improve systems and increase capacity.

Plan has enabled coalitions of government ministries and organisations from local to national level to work together to improve registration in many countries.

Specific examples of Plan's innovations and good practice, at community, national and international level, are summarised in Appendix 2.

Although our global campaign ended in 2009, Plan's involvement with birth registration continues in many of the countries where we work. Plan's programming has evolved to meet the unique challenges and gaps that remain.

For example:

Plan India's 2008–10 birth registration strategy focuses on registering those individuals and communities in difficult circumstances. This includes tribes and castes whose birth registration rates are particularly low (between 4 and 20 per cent).¹²⁸

Building on our initial success in Sri Lanka, Plan is shifting focus to ensure that stateless plantation workers are registered and become active and involved citizens.

Reflections

Although Plan has highlighted barriers and identified good practice for increasing birth registration, we continue to face new global challenges that affect children's rights, and which are, perhaps, harder to tackle.

In the last few years, in response to acts of terrorism, countries have introduced new systems and laws to increase border security. This has alienated groups of people already subject to discrimination because of their legal status, making it both increasingly important but increasingly difficult for them to prove their identity.

It has been argued that this denial of citizenship actually undermines, rather than strengthens, border security. Disenfranchising particular groups and populations may promote future unrest and conflict within state borders. Such feelings of separation and difference may perpetuate through subsequent generations. Ensuring that every child is registered at birth means that they can grow up with a nationality and sense of identity, are free to participate in society and have a positive sense of belonging and citizenship.¹²⁹

Restrictions on movement due, in part, to the response to perceived terror threats, coupled with the need to migrate for improved economic security or because of climate change, have put many people at risk of trafficking. In order to keep safe those who choose to migrate and prevent the trafficking of children, action has been focused mainly on raising awareness about potential dangers. In addition to this, a practical measure may lie in ensuring that people have the right identity documents, so that they can legally cross borders without relying on exploitative intermediaries.

It has been reported that some children, for example those living in chronic poverty, may choose not to use their real birth certificates when they are seeking out employment. Establishing their age could limit their labour choices, so birth certificates may be forged or details changed illegally. Forgery is also a real problem where there is no standardisation of documents issued from different offices. Variations make it harder to identify false documents and prevent multiple identities or identity fraud.

As states become better able to provide basic services and opportunities for those living within their borders, not only will birth certificates become increasingly essential, but measures will also have to be adopted to ensure forgery and falsification of these documents does not undermine the significance of them. High-quality documents and good systems help to guard against this. For example, in 2009 the Brazilian government began to standardise all birth records, producing a unique document with a code that identifies the issuer, in order to tackle problems created by identity fraud in Brazil.

Recommendations for future action

Plan's efforts have shown that registration is possible, even in the most difficult circumstances. Some actors will focus on registration for reasons that are not about the best interests of an individual child, but we must not forget that registration at birth is a child rights issue. Despite the success of the campaign, and the millions of births that have been registered to date, Plan urges all relevant actors to continue with this vital work to ensure that every child is registered at birth.

In particular, Plan urges the following actions.

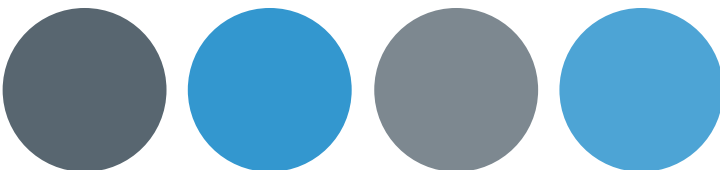
- The global community of UN agencies, multi-laterals, bi-laterals and international non-governmental organisations must increase their efforts to achieve UBR by incorporating birth registration into their own policies and practices and ensuring registration is included in partnerships and agreements with others.
- National governments with low registration rates must increase their efforts at registering children, for example, by changing the law or enabling access to registrars, or by raising awareness and waiving fees. Birth registration must become a national priority and be integrated into national development plans of action or poverty reduction strategy papers, while registration data must be integrated into national statistics systems. Systems put in place must be equitable, non-discriminatory and consistent with local realities, so that rates of registration increase quickly, are sustainable and the data is consistently used in service planning.
- Local organisations must work with communities to engage them on their rights to a birth certificate, the purpose of registration and the impact of non-registration. They should empower people to demand their rights from duty bearers and ensure that children and communities are consulted about appropriate methods and systems at local level. Children also have the right to participate in registration activities and they must be included in strategies and plans.
- Universal birth registration remains Plan's aspiration. A target of 100 per cent birth registration in every community, in every country across the world is something that will not be achieved in just five years of campaigning. However, Plan's work on birth registration has shown how it can be done and how it is possible to see rates soar from 5 per cent to 90 per cent in a matter of months with the right level of political will and resources. What is needed is a continued effort, with all actors working together. There is still a need to carry out relevant research, improve policy for better child protection and ensure better legal frameworks and simplified registration systems. It will take sustained determination to commit the time and resources to strengthen and implement registration systems.

- Universal birth registration is a joint responsibility and Plan will continue to provide technical assistance to all those continuing to work on the issue and to support governments in their structures and processes to improve birth registration in every country.
- Increased attention on international adoption over the last few years, highlights the importance of birth certificates as a measure to protect children and a way to combat trafficking for illegal adoption. Given the clandestine nature of these activities, much of the evidence available on the connections between birth registration, trafficking and migration is anecdotal in nature. Therefore, research to establish clearly the connection between birth registration and legal identity could significantly improve programming and interventions in the area of child trafficking and wider child protection challenges.
- Through Plan's work, it has become clear that it is imperative not to overlook the importance of registration for parents, whose proof of identity may be a requirement for registering their children. Broader civil registration schemes are also important, and Plan's work with the UN Inter-Agency Task Team around children affected by HIV, and the issue of early marriage, has highlighted the importance of death and marriage registration and certification. Much more work is needed to understand fully the impact of these on child rights.

Plan is immensely proud of the impact that we, together with our partners, have achieved during our global 'Universal Birth Registration' campaign.

The most significant changes and successes have included the paradigm shift towards improved legislation, and the greater levels of participation, partnership and commitment from states, local councils and organisations towards birth registration.

This is a wonderful legacy for the global campaign.



Resources

Plan Regional Offices

For information about Plan's birth registration activities in your region, please contact the following offices.

ASIA

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Main telephone number(s)

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Office email address

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LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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[plan-international.org/
where-we-work/africa](http://plan-international.org/where-we-work/africa)

Appendix 1. Plan's impact

Table 3: Plan and partners have had a positive impact on birth registration law in the following countries, where birth certificates are now free.

Beneficiaries				
	Country	Period	Age	Number of children eligible for a free birth certificate
1	Bangladesh	2006–09	0–18	76,474,699
2	Bolivia	2004–09	0–18	5,293,702
3	Burkina Faso	2009	0–18	7,274,759
4	Dominican Republic	2007–09	0–16	4,219,401
5	El Salvador	2009	Newborns	181,858
6	Honduras	2004–09	0–18	4,299,445
7	Indonesia	2006–09	Newborns	17,909,453
8	Mali	2006–09	Newborns	2,405,143
9	Niger	2007–09	Newborns	2,149,393
10	Vietnam	2007–09	0–18	33,099,780
TOTAL				153,307,633

Sources

www.unicef.org/sowc09/
www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook
www.indexmundi.com/es/

Table 4: Since the start of the global ‘Universal Birth Registration’ campaign in 2005, Plan and partners have facilitated the registration of millions of people.

Increase in registration attributable to Plan		
1	Bangladesh	5,900,000
2	Benin	18,500
3	Bolivia	1,036,112
4	Brazil	6,852
5	Burkina Faso	474,568
6	Cambodia	12,140,000
7	Cameroon	1,822
8	Colombia	3,415,428
9	Dominican Republic	5,500
10	Ecuador	903,970
11	Ghana	3,000
12	Guinea	13,673
13	Guinea-Bissau	4,080
14	Honduras	38,056
15	India	3,200,000
16	Liberia	5,000
17	Mali	12,059
18	Mozambique	34,944
19	Nepal	427,524
20	Nicaragua	38,879
21	Pakistan	1,500,000
22	Paraguay	300,000
23	Peru	5,794,000
24	Philippines	1,863,232
25	Senegal	49,775
26	Sierra Leone	110,068
27	Tanzania	1,211,598
28	Timor-Leste	90,000
29	Togo	13,131
30	Uganda	2,991
31	Vietnam	2,000,000
32	Zambia	600
TOTAL		40,615,362

Appendix 2. Examples of Plan's good practice in achieving universal birth registration at different levels

At the level of the community/civil society

- Raising awareness through information, education and communication (IEC) activities and media campaigns so that children know their rights.
- Listening to children and communities and understanding the obstacles they face in obtaining certificates.
- Using sensitive and innovative engagement when tackling cultural and historical issues and fears of registration.
- Helping to mobilise children and communities to act and claim their right to birth registration.
- Increasing demand among parents, community leaders and service providers for registration and certification by raising awareness.
- Piloting specific interventions that can be scaled up by the state, for example, those that will target the harder-to-reach children.
- Piloting mobile civil registration projects.
- Improving links between birth registration and social services such as immunisation and basic education.
- Developing ways to protect civil registration records.
- Helping to build capacity by training community members to collect registration data.
- Training volunteers to promote awareness and record birth notifications.
- Supporting local groups and organisations working on the issue.
- Using mobile phone and digital technology to collate data from communities.
- Advocating for increased resources from government.
- Working in partnership with others and sharing learning and good practice.

At district level

- Training and building the capacity of different stakeholders, including local government, health workers, midwives, registrars, the media, CBOs, NGOs, international agencies and volunteers.
- Supporting and strengthening civil society organisations.
- Offering technical and logistical support.
- Building partnerships, networks, coalitions and alliances.
- Facilitating the decentralisation of the birth registration system.
- Establishing monitoring committees to oversee birth registration activities.

At national level

- Researching the barriers to registration and making these visible.
- Creating awareness of and incentives for birth registration.
- Lobbying for adequate budget allocation for civil registration.
- Reviewing birth registration laws and initiating legal reform.
- Ensuring that birth registration is integrated into national plans of action.
- Simplifying the registration law and making it more user friendly (including through decentralisation of the registration process).
- Ensuring that laws are gender neutral and inclusive to minority groups.
- Establishing and strengthening the civil registration system.
- Helping to define government department roles and responsibilities.
- Scaling up good practice by developing demonstrable models.
- Promoting an increase in analysis, compilation and use of civil registration data for macro-level planning and programming for children.
- Waiving or reducing registration and certification fees, and extending the period of registration.
- Exerting extra effort to register those most marginalised in society.
- Modernising and computerising data systems, including birth records and training civil registrars and others involved in registration.
- Supporting mobile registration to reach those furthest away (both geographically and in terms of prejudice).
- Developing means to protect documents from natural disasters, damage and loss.
- Creating opportunities for children to have their voices heard on the issue of birth registration and other child rights.

At regional/international level

- Sharing information and disseminating lessons learned by organising conferences and workshops.
- Advocating at the EU and UN levels on the importance of birth registration.

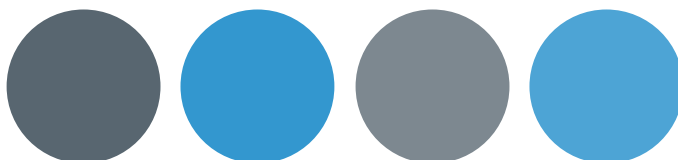
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出生医学证明
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