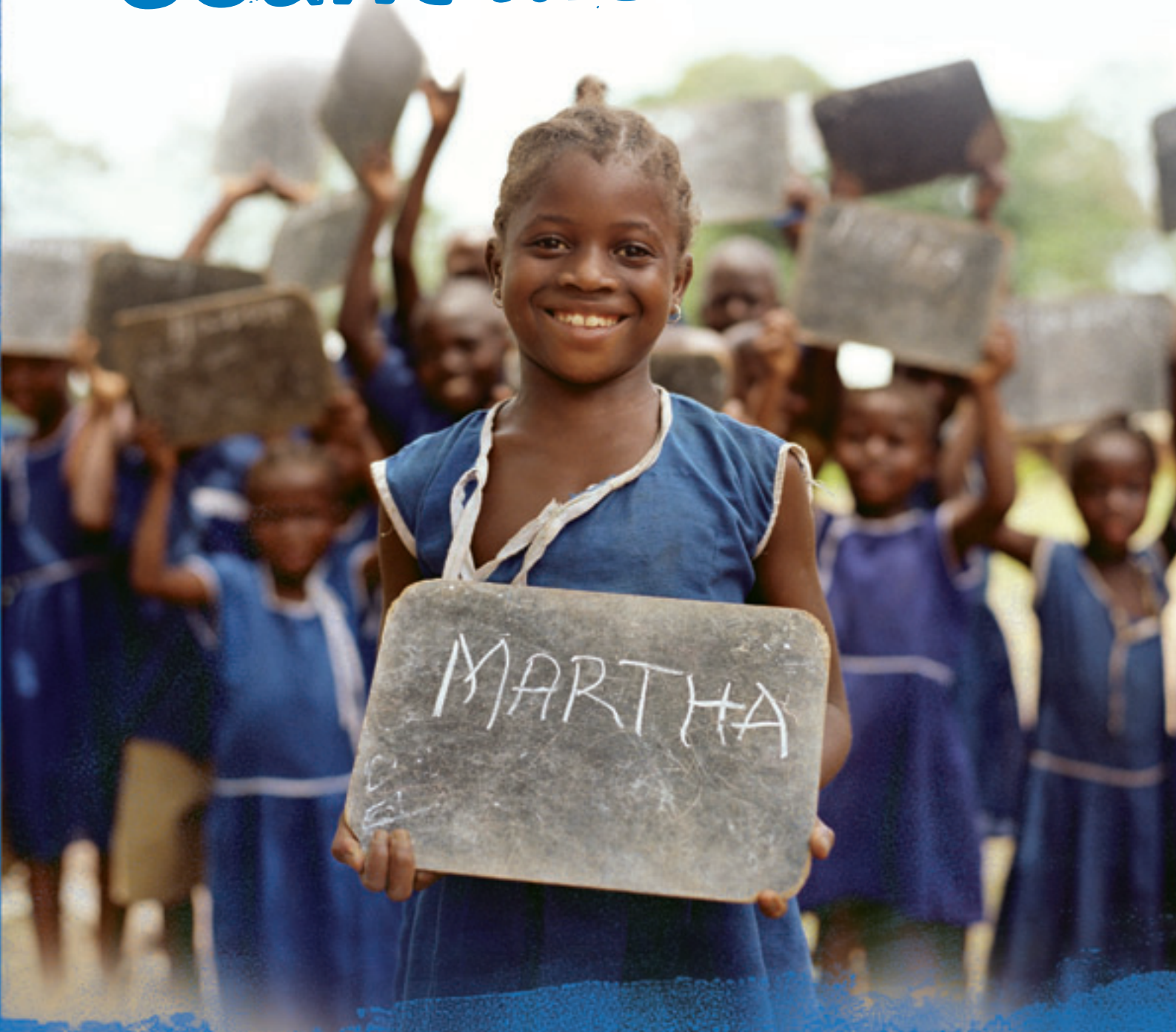


Count me in!



The global campaign for
universal birth registration

Interim campaign report 2005-06



Plan
Be a part of it.

About Plan

Founded nearly 70 years ago, Plan is one of the largest child-centred community development organisations in the world. We work in 62 countries on projects and initiatives that address the causes of poverty and its consequences for children's lives.

This means working in partnership with children, their families and communities, and at national and international levels, to bring about sustainable change.



At a local level, we work directly with all groups in a community to identify the priority issues affecting children. We actively encourage children to analyse their own situations and raise their awareness of the fundamental rights to which they are entitled. We then support the community to build the skills and access the resources it needs to implement projects that will lead to positive change in children's lives.

We campaign for children to achieve their rights and work at national and international levels to influence policy decisions that will lead to improved resources for children and their communities. In this way, we create and maximise all opportunities for children to speak out on their own behalf and participate in decision-making that affects their own development.

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Executive summary

Birth registration is essential to a child's place in the world and his or her access to legal, political, social, health, educational and other rights.

For the past 18 months Plan has campaigned for universal birth registration as part of its program of ensuring children's rights throughout the world. With birth registration enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Plan is now calling for a global push to win universal birth registration.

This report outlines the case for the campaign and presents an overview of the barriers and recommended approaches to overcome these. It uses evidence gathered from all Plan offices to outline the achievements so far, best practice strategies and the challenges that remain.

Based on Plan's grassroots experiences, a range of best practice strategies for increasing the rate of births that are registered are suggested. These are: influencing policy and legislation; effective cooperation; involving communities and children; responding to the different circumstances in which people live; the need to remove the cost of the process; integrating the campaign into the child rights agenda and into public services; training and capacity building; and sharing best practice.

The report concludes by identifying the strengths and successes of Plan's approach to the issue, the challenges that remain, and next steps to achieving an international approach to universal birth registration which would give all children access to their rights.

The global campaign

“In the developed world it happens automatically ... It is a right to an identity and it is something that will from then on give you access to the privileges and rights of a citizen ... it’s a small little paper, but it actually establishes who you are and gives access to the rights and the privileges, and the obligations, of citizenship.

“... we know that amongst you are those who were very committed to, for instance, the struggle against apartheid and we won! We won! How about using the same commitment for this?”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu launching Plan’s universal birth registration campaign, United Nations, February 2005



When a child is born, its whole future could depend on what Archbishop Desmond Tutu called ‘a small little paper’. Without registration of its birth, that child could lose out on its basic rights before the law, as well as access to education, health and social services. A child who is unregistered can be more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, and be denied their rights to a family and name. The lack of registration threatens a child’s very being.

It was because Plan believes that every child should be guaranteed these rights that it set up its global campaign for universal birth registration – launched by Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the United Nations (UN) in New York in February 2005.

Plan believes that birth registration should be compulsory, timely and without discrimination for all children. In addition, the process should be free and accessible to all parents.

“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.”

Article 7, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

“... ensure the registration of every child at, or shortly after birth, and fulfil his or her right to a name and a nationality.”

A World Fit for Children, UN General Assembly

A child rights issue

Birth registration is a critical first step in ensuring a child's rights to survival, development and access to quality services. Registration means proof of identity. It is vital to secure recognition before the law, protect rights such as inheritance and access to public services, and make children less vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, especially if separated from their parents.

The importance of birth registration is raised in the preamble of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 7 of the Convention, and the UN General Assembly resolution A World Fit for Children.

Despite this attention to birth registration, provision for registration of all children at birth is still a major challenge for many countries and regions.

Essential for national statistics

Birth registration is not just about child rights, it's also essential for the statistics that countries need to plan their services. Registration provides demographic data that allows a country to keep track of the condition of its population, including vital information about the situation of children. The use of this data can lead to more accurate planning and implementation of development policies and programs; and greater success in securing development funding. Vital statistics can also assist in monitoring progress towards international targets, such as the Millennium Development Goals.



UNICEF estimates that over 48 million children under five – more than a third of the world's under-five population – are not registered at birth. The percentage varies by region. In some cases there are even greater disparities of birth registration rates within regions and also within countries themselves. These range from three countries – Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia – with no registration system or a nascent one, up to a reported 100 per cent registration in Uzbekistan and Cuba.

Region	Percentage of unregistered children	Number of unregistered children
Sub-Saharan Africa	55	Nearly 15 million
Middle East and North Africa	16	Over 1.5 million
South Asia	63	Over 23 million
East Asia and Pacific	19	Nearly 6 million
Latin America and Caribbean	15	Over 1.7 million
CEE/CIS and Baltic States	23	Over 1.2 million
Industrialised countries	2	Over 0.2 million
World	36	Over 48 million

Children's voices on birth registration



"I am happy that my father took the initiative of registering the entire family when the team came to our village. Tomorrow I will ask all my fellow pupils and teachers in school what they think about birth registration."

"None among my seven brothers and sisters have a birth certificate. Our parents decided not to register our births until we are about 10 years old, as they do not want to waste time registering births of babies who might die at any moment."

"I have no birth certificate and I don't know my date of birth and accurate age. As a result, I did not get timely admission into school."

"My father is an educated man, but people did not keep records of the date and year of birth, much less register their child. My father said that he wrote down the dates of all his children's births but he lost the diary. He was never able to tell us accurately our date of birth."

"I have a birth certificate which my parents keep safely in a cupboard."

"I don't have a birth certificate because my father believes that a piece of paper does not feed a child, and that farming activities are more useful for children."

"My younger brother and I do not have birth certificates, but I will tell my parents about birth registration and ask them to take me to register."

"I have my birth certificate. My mother brought me to register at the office. My birth certificate is important to me."

Campaign goes global

The campaign for birth registration is not a new one for Plan. The organisation has been working on the issue since 1998, when it was invited by the NGO (non-governmental organisation) group on UNICEF to support the Unregistered Children Project in Asia. Plan's work on birth registration has since extended to Africa and the Americas, with work in close collaboration with local communities, national governments and other partners.

Plan's global campaign for birth registration takes this existing local, national and regional work worldwide. Based on Plan's campaign report 'Universal birth registration – a universal responsibility', the global campaign for action complements upward pressure for achieving universal birth registration with downward pressure through donor governments and regional and international institutions, such as the African Union, the European Union (EU) and the UN.



Aims and recommendations

Plan's global campaign aims to reduce the barriers to the registration of every child at birth and to build capacity in countries to ensure that children are registered. 'Universal birth registration – a universal responsibility' identifies the barriers to the achievement of this goal, and makes clear recommendations to overcome these.

International level

Barriers

- Lack of recognition, support and priority for achieving universal birth registration by the international community
- Absence of clear global leadership for achieving universal birth registration, and lack of coordination among the stakeholders working on the issue

Recommendations

The international community should increase efforts to achieve universal birth registration through:

- prioritising and supporting the achievement of universal birth registration
- incorporating birth registration into appropriate policy
- making birth registration a reporting requirement
- advocating for universal birth registration

National level

Barriers

- Lack of political will for achieving universal birth registration and coordination between relevant government ministries
- Lack of financial and human resources for operating effective birth registration systems including: number of trained registrars; administrative capacity; and technology for data management
- Legislative barriers including: absence of legal framework and systems for birth registration; lack of enforcement of current legislation; discriminatory legislation based on sex, race, origin and religion; and unsupportive policies
- Geographical barriers
- Problematic country context due to social unrest, war and conflict, or disaster

Recommendations

Ratifying states of the Convention on the Rights of the Child should renew their commitment to register the child immediately after birth by:

- increasing political will for birth registration
- matching legislation on birth registration with local realities
- building trust for birth registration
- engaging in advocacy on birth registration

Local level

Barriers

- Lack of awareness about birth registration
- Few incentives to register children
- Incompatibility of birth registration systems with local realities, such as: highly centralised systems; bureaucratic registration procedures; and little regard of local culture and societal norms
- Lack of resources for: the cost of registration; fees associated with late registration; and travel costs associated with travelling to civil registries
- Fear of discrimination and persecution as a result of registration
- Corruption of civil registrars and inaccurate civil records

Recommendations

Grassroots organisations working directly with children and their communities at local level should:

- raise awareness of birth registration
- demand action from government on birth registration
- build capacity of local systems for birth registration
- ensure participation in birth registration activities

Achievements so far

Plan's campaign for universal birth registration was launched at the UN on 22 February 2005. Over 18 months later, the vast majority of Plan's offices are active in the campaign.

It targets the governments of those countries where universal birth registration has yet to be achieved, calling on state parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to recognise their responsibilities under Article 7. It calls on these governments to create the conditions required to enable other duty bearers, such as civil registrars and parents, to fulfil their responsibility of registering the child at birth.

The campaign is proving hugely successful, both in influencing national policy on birth registration and ensuring real change on the ground. This success is due to Plan's ability to complement advocacy locally and nationally with action regionally and internationally. The global campaign is combining upward pressure for achieving universal birth registration with downward pressure through donor governments and regional and international institutions, including the African Union, the EU and the UN.

Success to date

Reports from Plan's offices around the world show how its advocacy work for universal birth registration has included a wide range of activities, and has addressed the recommendations of the campaign report. The following are the key achievements to date.

Over 90 per cent of Plan countries involved

A sign of the global nature of the universal birth registration campaign is that Plan is now involved in substantive action on the campaign in 45 country and regional offices. Campaign activity is also planned in Plan's four remaining country offices. Plan's national offices, European liaison office and international headquarters have also been involved in activity such as awareness raising with sponsors, fundraising for projects in the field, and advocating for policy change by national governments.

Plan's financial commitment to achieving universal birth registration has also increased significantly with the launch of the global campaign. Expenditure reported by 25 of Plan's country and regional offices increased more than six-fold between 2005 and 2006, to over \$5.3 million. This does not include additional expenditure by governments and other partners.



Policy and legislative changes

Ten country and national Plan offices have achieved changes to policy or legislation, and a further 21 are working towards change.

Costs waived or reduced

Eleven countries have addressed cost barriers, including costs of registration at birth, issuing of certificates, and retrospective registration fees.

Cooperation

Plan has become a recognised authoritative voice on the subject of birth registration and is participating in national level collaborations on the topic in 37 country offices. Twenty-nine offices also report working in partnership with UNICEF.

More children now registered

The huge efforts since the launch of the global campaign in February 2005 have produced excellent results. By mid 2006 over five million registrations had been achieved with impetus provided by the global campaign. This figure is in addition to many more children who have been registered since 1998 in countries where Plan's activity has boosted national and local registration efforts.

Numbers of child registrations supported by Plan

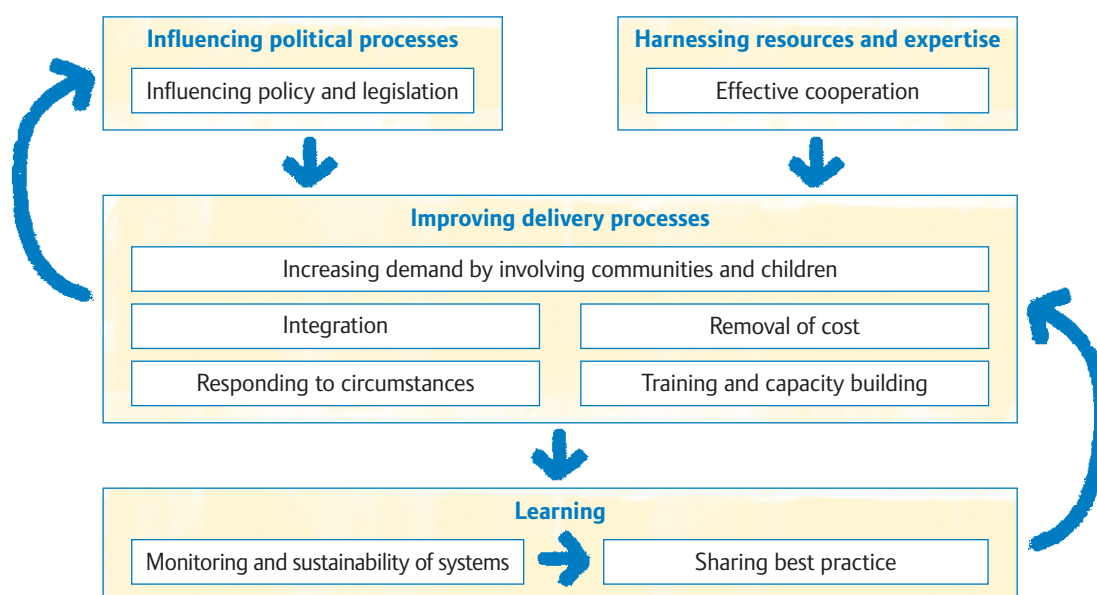
Bangladesh 100 per cent registration of children under six in some communities since 1995	Ghana 1 million plus children registered, 31–57 per cent increase since 2004	Nicaragua 13,270 children registered since 2005
Benin 8,200 children registered since 2003	Guinea 87–92 per cent increase in registered births receiving certificates between 2003 and 2005	Niger 25,000 children registered since 2002
Bolivia 431,576 children registered since 2003	Guinea Bissau 77,722 children registered since 2002	Paraguay 23,000 children registered since 2005
Burkina Faso 82,821 children registered since 2004	India 3.2 million children registered, 33–83 per cent increase since 2002	Senegal 60–78 per cent increase between 2000 and 2004
Cambodia Over four million children registered since February 2005	Mali 8,572 children registered since 2005	Sierra Leone 110,068 children registered, representing 80 per cent of formerly unregistered children since 2005
Cameroon 3,353 children registered since 2005	Nepal 100 per cent registration in some communities since 1999	Togo 107,314 children registered since 2002
Colombia 1,700 children registered since 2005		Vietnam 1,200 children registered since 2005

Identification of best practice

In addition to these direct project successes, the campaign has enabled Plan to gain considerable expertise in increasing rates of birth registration.

In developing their birth registration programs, all of Plan's country offices have followed a process which involves gaining an understanding of the local situation, identifying non-registered children, examining actions needed for effective registration, mapping activity on the issue, and evaluating their own experience, skills and capacity. From the actions which have followed, nine key best practice strategies to increase birth registration have been identified.

Strategies to increase birth registration



Influencing political processes

Influencing policy and legislation

Governments may need to make substantial changes to their policies and legislation to increase birth registration in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN Statistical Office's four principles of registration – that it is universal, compulsory, permanent and continuous.

To comply with these principles, national governments have to be influenced – and the political will generated – to change current policy and practice, create new legal frameworks for civil registration, review and amend existing legislation, and adapt the design and operation of birth registration systems.

Plan Asia, for instance, has been particularly effective in achieving policy change. In the Philippines, significant gains have included: the passage of law that allows children born out of wedlock to use their father's name; authorisation of the city/municipal registrar or the consul general to correct errors in a civil register entry; and the suspension of birth registration fees and penalties for late registration. In Vietnam, the government is about to issue a new decree on registration procedures to simplify the process. In Bangladesh a new birth registration law is being implemented.

Policy changes are also taking effect in other regions. In Kenya, Plan is one of the key organisations involved in reviewing the current Birth and Death Registration Act. A review team in Malawi is working on a draft National Registration Bill. In Bolivia, Plan, the National Electoral Court and partners have successfully advocated for: a gratuity clause to make birth registration free for children up to 12; a three-year amnesty for the registration of children aged 12–18; and legislation to allow single mothers to register their children with the family name of a relative.

But influencing legislation and policy is a real challenge in some countries. For example, in Ethiopia, where there is currently no official birth registration system, the Africa Child Policy Forum, Plan Ethiopia and partners are making considerable efforts to establish a registrar office – an action that is currently pending with Parliament.

Harnessing resources and expertise

Effective cooperation

The goal of universal birth registration requires broad, ambitious and long-term work by a range of stakeholders at every level. Alliances and cooperative work mean that resources can be combined and expertise shared for a strong and effective campaign.

Internationally

Plan's collaboration with partners brings a combination of high profiles, global level political roles, and Plan's long-standing experience of working with partners at the grassroots. Plan also recognises children themselves as important stakeholders. This partnership approach is effective at the international, regional and country levels.

Plan is now calling for coordination in the work of the wide range of UN agencies and international NGOs involved with the issue of birth registration. A common framework is needed to best harness and harmonise these collective efforts.

Country and grassroots levels

At country level, the successful partnership between the Ministry of the Interior, Plan Cambodia and the Asia Development Bank is an approach that could be adopted in other countries.

Cambodia has been struggling to reconstruct institutions such as civil registration following their destruction under the Khmer Rouge. With support from Plan Cambodia, UNICEF and the Child Rights Foundation, the Ministry of the Interior formed mobile registration teams and agreed to institute free birth registration as part of the campaign. Concerted joint efforts, with support from the Asia Development Bank, led to the issuance of birth certificates to over 9.5 million Cambodian children and adults between October 2004 and July 2005 (over 76 per cent of the population).

Even where partnerships have not yet been developed, there may be a role to harness collective efforts to achieve universal birth registration – for example, through a national steering committee or task force. Plan has been involved in this process in Pakistan, Ghana, Niger, Bolivia, El Salvador and Peru.

Partnerships at grassroots level can also be highly effective. For example, Plan in India and its partner NGO, the People's Rural Education Movement, have supported an NGO network on birth registration in 15 districts of Orissa since 2002. This has resulted in the collection of birth registration information for over 3.2 million children, and an overall increase in birth registration levels from 33 per cent to 83 per cent.

Technical support

Cooperation can also bring beneficial technical support, especially from UN agencies. Such agencies are supporting the campaign at country level, for example in Colombia the UN High Commission for Refugees is working with the government and Plan on birth registration.

Plan also harnesses other partnerships and technical support; other examples include research work with Xi'an University in China, and working with the Inter American Children's Institute in Central America.

The presence of these technical experts boosts the morale of the campaign teams and helps to share professionalism with community members.



Improving delivery processes

Increasing demand by involving communities and children

To be a success, it is vital that the campaign for universal birth registration involves local communities and children themselves, right from the outset. Their role is crucial to raising awareness. Communities and children should be involved in the design and implementation of legislation, policies and programs on the issue. Such involvement ensures compatibility with local realities, and helps build trust in the systems for registration.

In Togo, for example, Plan brought together separate groups of boys and girls, women and men to discuss the root causes, examples and consequences of the lack of birth registration; this process led to the development of action plans. Plan Nepal helped to create village networking groups for birth registration, which resulted in a high level of awareness.

In Guinea, Plan has worked with communities to integrate birth registration into local development plans. Local people are also involved in birth registration efforts in Benin, where Plan has helped to provide books for communities to track the details of newborn babies.

However, such involvement must be based on local ownership of the project. Where this is lacking, the involvement of communities remains a challenge to the success of the campaign.

Involving children

A campaign on children's rights needs to include the children themselves. Children's involvement – through education, publicity and child-to-child campaigning – is instrumental to birth registration efforts.

For example, in Cambodia, young volunteers have educated friends and elders by displaying posters highlighting the importance of birth registration and holding children's fairs on this issue. In Egypt, Plan is helping to set up children's committees on birth registration within local community-based organisations, with the aim of children spreading the message of the importance of birth registration across the neighbourhood. In Zambia, children and young people have been visiting different communities during their school holidays, and talking to adults and children about the importance of birth registration.

A survey by children in some of the communities where Plan works in Brazil found that the absence of a birth certificate was one reason why children were not in school.

As a consequence, the children wrote a report on their findings and presented it to top government officials, demanding action to improve education and protect children's rights.



Responding to circumstances

People's circumstances vary, and birth registration systems need to be flexible in recognition of the difficulties and differences in people's lives. Systems need to:

- overcome geographical barriers and distances from administrative centres
- identify and cater for the needs of hard-to-reach groups (often indigenous or nomadic populations)
- enable retrospective registration to account for historic difficulties in registering births



Decentralised and mobile registration

In rural, remote and hard-to-reach communities, decentralised birth registration systems and mobile registration can help to improve accessibility.

In Zambia, the government is decentralising birth registration to speed up the issue of birth certificates. In Niger, villages in which Plan works have been made into auxiliary birth registration centres. This has made birth registration easier and saved long, costly journeys for local people.

In Honduras, Plan has identified the remote rural areas with the lowest rates of birth registration and helped the National People's Registry plan and implement an effective strategy for systematic and organised mobile registration. A national mobile registration campaign is also under way in Cambodia, where Plan is working with the government to target minority groups in the eastern and north eastern provinces.

Hard-to-reach communities

Even where birth registration rates are high, there can be pockets of unregistered children, typically within 'difficult-to-reach' communities, such as nomadic, indigenous, refugee and immigrant groups.

In Thailand, Plan has been researching the birth registration needs of disadvantaged ethnic groups, as well as Burmese migrants affected by the tsunami. Plan is using the results to build a network of local authorities, NGOs and community representatives in specific provinces with large ethnic minority populations. The aim is to coordinate activities specific to hill tribe ethnic minority populations, refugees and migrant worker families.

Plan Sri Lanka, supported by its partner organisation, Sewa Lanka, and government officials, is also targeting vulnerable groups, including the internally displaced and indigenous populations. It is helping to organise a mobile registration campaign in six districts.

Retrospective registration

Special and flexible measures are necessary where there is a backlog of children whose births have gone unregistered. In Senegal the government, supported by Plan, has aimed to facilitate retrospective registration through free local court hearings. The number of unregistered children has reduced considerably as a result.

In Sierra Leone, the government gave the National Office of Births and Deaths special permission to issue birth certificates to children over seven. Following a month-long campaign by Plan Sierra Leone and partners, over 100,000 children up to 18 years old were registered as a result. Plan in Bolivia has supported a successful three-year amnesty for the free registration of young people aged between 12 and 18.

In El Salvador, Plan is working with a national committee on new legislation to enable the late registration of minors, with an amnesty from payment of fines and legal proceedings.



Removal of cost

Time and again, the cost of registration, and fees associated with late registration, are mentioned as a barrier to registering children.

Free registration and birth certification for every child makes birth registration possible for every part of the population – especially poorer people. It also demonstrates that a state is committed to ensuring the rights of every child.

Plan has been working towards free registration in many countries. In Africa, campaign successes include: Ghana – free registration for all children up to 12 months; Guinea – free birth registration for six months; Burkina Faso – reduction of birth registration fees; Togo – reduction in the cost of late registration; and Guinea Bissau, whose government is now committed to free child registration.

In Bolivia, Plan has worked closely with the National Electoral Court and UNICEF to make birth registration free for children up to 12. Plan Peru has obtained municipal decrees to make the issue of birth certificates free in three districts. In Haiti, Plan is supporting a five-year amnesty for birth registration without fees or fines.

Integration

Into the child rights agenda

The birth registration campaign has proved successful where it has been positioned within the wider child rights agenda. This demonstrates how birth registration is fundamentally important to the realisation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This positioning has also opened up a variety of advocacy opportunities.

A good example is in Belgium, where Plan has successfully linked birth registration to the issues of child soldiers and child trafficking. Similarly, Plan's European liaison office was successful in ensuring that birth registration was part of the European Parliament resolution on child labour and the Commission's policy on child trafficking.

Plan is also pushing internationally for increased recognition of the protective function of birth registration. One important outcome has been that the Global Partners Forum on Children affected by HIV and AIDS (DFID/UNICEF Feb 2006) now explicitly acknowledges the role of birth registration in promoting child protection. This has also already had an impact in Zimbabwe, where Plan is working with other NGOs, the Registrar General's Office and other government ministries on birth registration under the country's national plan of action for orphans and vulnerable children.

Into public services

The integration of birth registration into existing public services – such as primary healthcare, immunisation and school enrolment – is a cost-effective, efficient and sustainable way of ensuring birth registration.

Research shows that birth registration rates rise where the process is integrated with vaccination and medical assistance at birth, and this link is an important aspect of the campaign. In Ghana, for example, Plan has trained community health volunteers to record the information required for birth registration, and there has been similar work with health workers and traditional birth attendants in Benin. Plan Colombia has integrated birth registration work with vaccination campaigns, and Plan Albania is working with the government to increase collaboration between hospitals and registration offices.

The likelihood of birth registration also increases with education. For example, rates rise when children are taught about the importance of birth registration as part of the school syllabus. In Burkina Faso, for example, Plan has helped the distribution in school of magazines covering the birth registration issue to stimulate discussion and interest.

Birth registration can also be linked with school entry. In Timor Leste, Plan is campaigning to ensure the registration of children when they enrol in school. And in Paraguay, Plan is pursuing the idea that civil registrars work in schools throughout the academic year.

Training and capacity building

The training and capacity building of birth registration officials helps improve motivation and competence; reduces the possibility of fraud and corruption in the system; and ensures that registrars do not make mistakes in recording details about children.

In Cameroon, Plan has assisted in building the capacity of civil registrars by providing training and supplying the basic office materials they need to carry out their role effectively. In Sri Lanka, Plan has worked on a toolkit to help officials carry out mobile registration in areas of non-registered children. In Egypt, Plan is also working with local health offices on training for registrars to ensure correct registration of children's names and dates of birth.

The use of volunteers can increase personnel capacity. In Cambodia, professional UN volunteers are supporting registration processes, while in Niger, community members have been trained as auxiliary registrars. Such approaches can complement the vast amount of awareness-raising by community and child volunteers.



Learning

Monitoring and sustainability of birth registration systems

Birth registration systems need to be monitored to ensure that they continue to be responsive to the environment in which they operate. This involves making appropriate changes to overcome administrative and bureaucratic obstacles, and may include modernisation to ensure sustainability. National governments need information systems for birth registration that will allow better follow up and monitoring.

In Pakistan, Plan has supported the development of an online birth registration information management system that allows all levels of government to view and track birth registration data. In Guatemala, Plan is helping to modernise the civil registry with a computerised system.

Another monitoring technique is free telephone lines, through which birth registration procedures can be clarified and any complaints registered. Plan has helped to set these up in Bolivia and El Salvador.

Sharing best practice

One of the most effective aspects of this campaign is the sharing of best practice.

Plan and partners have organised regional conferences to bring civil registrars and others together to share their experiences and exchange innovative ideas. For example, Plan Cambodia's presentation of the national birth registration project in a number of regional conferences has provided a unique example for countries to consider when they are developing their own national action plans.

One of the special measures undertaken in Zimbabwe has been extended working hours in civil registration offices to clear the backlog of birth registration. In Togo, Plan piloted a mass registration event at an annual military manoeuvre, which resulted in the registration of 4,000 children in just one day. In another interesting initiative, Plan Malawi is working with the national Football Association on birth registration, as an effective system would help curb the problem of 'age cheating' in the game.

Some Plan offices now build a specific 'sharing' component into their strategy for birth registration. For example, Plan Sri Lanka is documenting the specific factors that contribute to the high levels of birth registration in the country and is planning to disseminate these to other countries. Plan Bangladesh and Plan Vietnam are also both organising government visits to best practice areas.



Conclusions

The strengths of Plan's universal birth registration campaign

A rights-based approach

Plan offices are increasingly adopting a rights-based approach to win universal birth registration. By addressing its root causes and targeting those who have the duty and are accountable for the issue, Plan is working to ensure that every child has the right to free registration at birth.

Ensuring government ownership

Plan's objective is to ensure that governments, as the primary entity responsible for birth registration, take ownership of birth registration projects. The example of Plan's work in Cambodia provides a potentially replicable model. Here the Ministry of the Interior, with the support of Plan and the Asian Development Bank, has taken the lead on birth registration and also demonstrated a high level of political will and commitment to the issue.

Grassroots work

Plan's international, regional, national and local activity is based on grassroots experience, and this has given the global campaign for universal birth registration a high level of credibility, as well as a unique approach. Plan works with children and local communities to raise awareness of birth registration, while at the same time it works with national governments and the international community to ensure that effective birth registration systems are in place. It can therefore address the 'demand' and 'supply' elements of birth registration simultaneously.

Partners at all levels

Tackling birth registration requires work between multiple stakeholders and at multiple levels. One of Plan's biggest comparative strengths is its global network, linking more than two million people around the world. Plan has links with other international NGOs and partners who can be mobilised for action on birth registration. The organisation has a strong grassroots presence, but also enjoys good relationships with the necessary governmental links required for action.

Ongoing challenges

Coordinating activity

In addition to applying upward and downward pressure for achieving universal birth registration, the campaign offers great potential for the organisations involved to better coordinate their advocacy activities. A good illustration of this within Plan is the opportunity for Plan's country offices to coordinate with its European liaison office during EU programming negotiations to promote birth registration in country plans.

Creating incentives

Creating incentives for birth registration is one of the challenges Plan has identified. Birth registration seems to have little importance in countries such as Zambia, beset by poverty, HIV and AIDS and other problems, or in Nepal, where high child mortality rates give parents little incentive to bear the expense of registering children.

Reaching the most marginalised

The registration of the most marginalised children is also a major challenge. This group includes nomadic and indigenous groups, migrant and refugee children, street children, orphans, and abandoned and separated children. This is a problem not only in countries with low registration rates, but also in those with higher rates, where these marginalised groups are likely to be over-represented among the remaining unregistered children.

Ensuring the implementation of policy and monitoring

Although there have been successes in winning legislative and policy change in support of universal birth registration, there needs to be ongoing monitoring to ensure effective implementation on the ground – turning ‘paper’ into a reality. This is a slow process and one that requires continuous and intensive follow-up as well as a sustained political will – something that can be hampered by political instability.

Ensuring sustainability

The most effective way of ensuring sustainability is government ownership of birth registration projects. However, community involvement is equally important to ensure the continuity of birth registration systems in times of disaster or conflict, when formal methods may become inaccessible. Sustainability also needs a modernised civil registration system that can guarantee the continuity of registration.

The issue of nationality

The issue of nationality is a sensitive one in relation to birth registration. The situation in Thailand and the Dominican Republic are good illustrations of this. In these cases the national government is reluctant to register the births of some groups of children (for instance, migrants and refugees) due to national security concerns and wariness that registration documents can be used to claim citizenship.

The next steps

Plan’s global campaign for universal birth registration is providing the momentum and opportunity for governments across the world to renew their commitment to Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to intensify their efforts to ensure they have systems in place for the registration of all children at birth.

The campaign is proving hugely successful both in influencing national policy on birth registration and ensuring the implementation of real change on the ground. Yet, many challenges remain.

National governments are showing the political will to achieve universal birth registration, and the issue is receiving growing attention from donor governments, regional bodies and international agencies, yet the campaign has still not received the global recognition and priority it needs.

Plan believes that it is imperative to continue with a global response to the issue of unregistered children. The setting of international guidelines for achieving universal birth registration would ensure coordination of effort for maximum impact. Guidelines would also create the political commitment needed for signatory states to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to implement Article 7 at the earliest opportunity – within years not decades.

Plan’s campaign for universal birth registration has achieved successes in its initial stages. However, we need to keep up the momentum in order to overcome future challenges. For all children to access their rights by being registered at birth, we need the continued cooperation of all partners. Plan looks forward to working with all relevant parties as we enter the next phase of the campaign.



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