



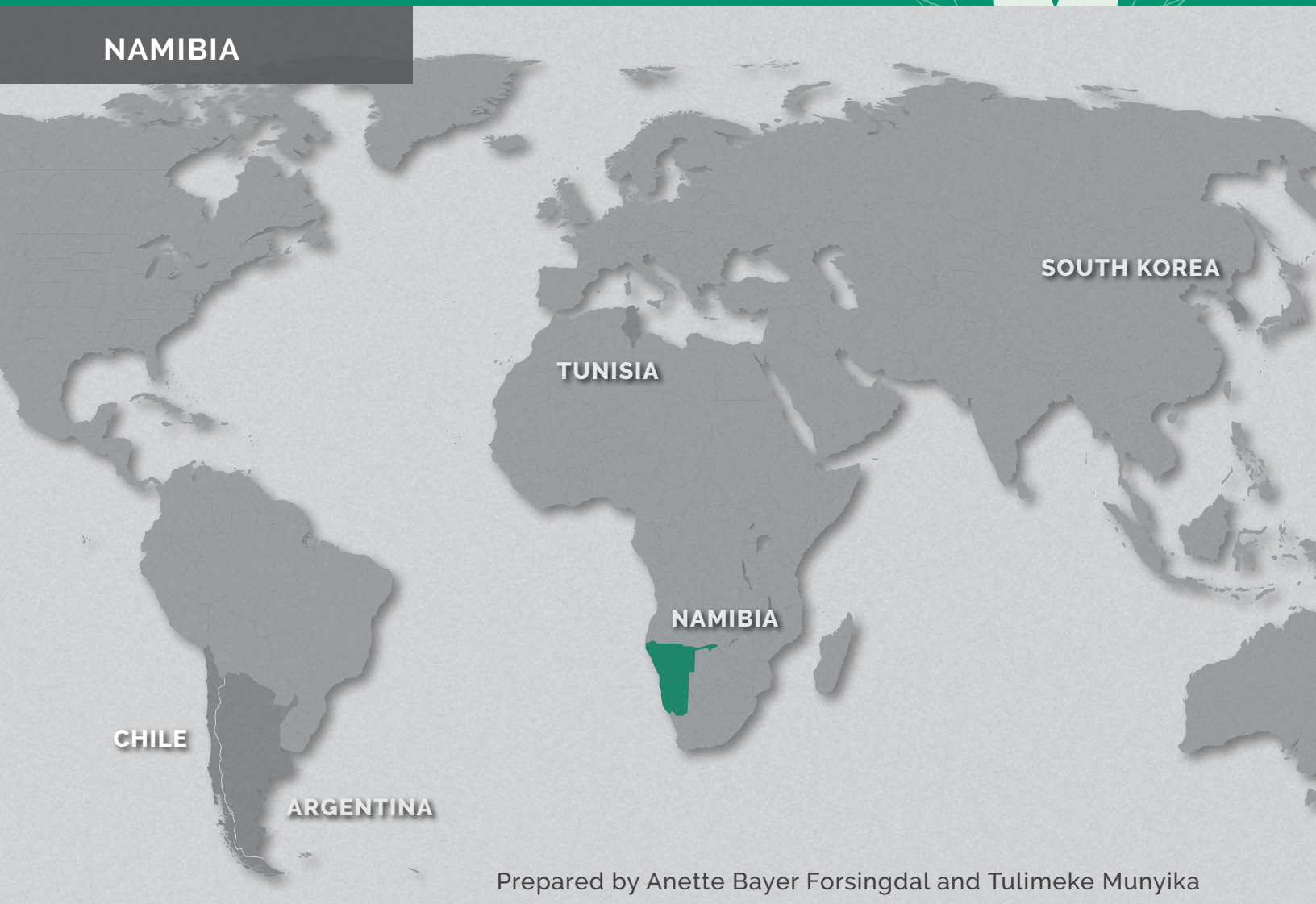
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The Nexus Between Civil Registration and Social Protection Systems: **Five Country Practices**



NAMIBIA



Prepared by Anette Bayer Forsingdal and Tulimeke Munyika



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This publication is a single chapter in a larger body of work. *The Nexus Between Civil Registration and Social Protection Systems: Five Country Practices* is available at CRVSystems.ca/SocialProtection.

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PO Box 8500, Ottawa, ON, Canada K1G 3H9

crvs@idrc.ca

www.CRVSystems.ca

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Case Study 3



NAMIBIA

The Synergy Between Civil Registration and Social Protection: A Case Study of Namibia

Anette Bayer Forsingdal
and Tulimeke Munyika

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3.1 Introduction

Thirty years after Namibia's independence, the new civil registration system is playing a key role in helping the country recover from the injustices that the apartheid government's civil registration policies created. Before independence, registration of vital events was voluntary for Black people and was largely inaccessible in rural areas. This practice has had far-reaching consequences for many individuals and their families. Some waited for years to be documented. Others have remained trapped in poverty because they do not have documentary proof of their existence and of their family's origins to prove nationality or get access to government social services and programs. Over the years, it has become more difficult to seek employment, access banking services, and get public or private insurance without a birth certificate and a Namibian identity document (Namibian ID). However, the universal health program makes health services available for all in the public sector.

When the Namibian Constitution came into force on 21 March 1990, it became a right of children born within the territory to have a name and nationality from birth.¹ This was in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Namibia that same year. Recognizing that civil registration ensures access to rights, benefits, and basic services, the Government of Namibia launched a series of programs to redress past injustices and improve civil registration coverage.

Poverty reduction has a central role in reaching Namibia's Vision 2030. Vision 2030 was launched in the early 2000s to lead Namibia towards being a just, moral, tolerant, and safe society that has legislative, economic, and social structures in place. The aim of these structures is to eliminate marginalization and ensure peace and equity between women and men, diverse ethnic groups, and people of different ages, interests, and abilities by 2030.²

The current and fifth National Development Plan sets out a roadmap for achieving improved living conditions for all in 2017–2022 through

- achieving inclusive, sustainable, and equitable economic growth;
- building stable and healthy human resources;
- ensuring a sustainable environment and enhancing resilience; and
- promoting good governance through effective institutions.

Identity for all from birth is one of the indicators under the good governance pillar. The aim is to reach 95 percent birth registration immediately after birth by 2022.

1 Namibian Constitution, Article 130.

2 In a statement to the Namibian Cabinet in January 1998, former and founding President Sam Nujoma urged the development of a national vision that could take Namibia from the present to the future: "A vision that will guide us to make deliberate efforts to improve the quality of life of our people to the level of their counterparts in the developed world by the year 2030."

The National Agenda for Children 2012–2016 was a call to action for the constitutional rights of children. It also stressed the importance of birth and death registration to alleviate poverty. The Agenda closely linked poverty reduction to issuing cash grants to vulnerable and orphaned children.³ One of the five priority commitments was for all children to have an adequate standard of living and legal identity. This was to take place through

- a comprehensive national social protection system;
- access for all vulnerable children to grants;
- registration of all children at birth; and
- access to the deceased parent's death certificate, if needed.

One of the instruments chosen to fight poverty is e-governance. The National Population Register⁴ is a cornerstone of Namibia's e-governance policy.⁵ This policy states that e-governance will play a key role in attaining the country's development goals, including eradicating hunger, poverty, and child mortality, and improving health. Another key strategy document is the five-year strategic plan on civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS).⁶ Following the 2012 resolution for all African countries to do comprehensive assessments and draft strategic plans for their CRVS systems, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHAI) and the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) agreed to reform the wider civil registration system in Namibia.

In 2014, a technical working committee for CRVS was set up. The committee, which included all key stakeholders, laid the foundation for a more holistic and collaborative approach to comprehensive registration of vital events in Namibia. In doing this, it reached far beyond the mandate of the Department of Civil Registration in the MHAI.⁷ This was the first strategy on civil registration and vital statistics, where all stakeholders sat around the table, collectively agreeing on to how to improve the systems and agreeing to the strategy's significance.

Finally, in 2016 a complete and interoperable National Population Register became a strategic objective in the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare's Blue Print on Wealth Redistribution and Poverty Eradication, signaling that welfare for all relies on universal civil registration.⁸

3 [Namibia's National Agenda for Children. sisternamibiatest2014.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/namibias-national-agenda-for-children.pdf](http://sisternamibiatest2014.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/namibias-national-agenda-for-children.pdf)

4 The National Population Register records all vital events (birth, marriage, divorce, and death), including data used for issuance of ID cards, under one demographic profile.

5 opm.gov.na/documents/108506/113906/2E-Governance_Policy_Final.pdf/9904df6f-eecc-4653-81fd-f134e0b23f9b

6 Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration and Namibia Statistics Agency. Comprehensive Assessment of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System in Namibia. 2014. cms.my.na/assets/documents/CRVS_Comprehensive_Assessment_Report_Final.pdf

7 Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration, Ministry of Health and Social Services, Namibian Police, Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, and Namibia Statistics Agency.

8 info.ndp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/NAM/Blue%20Print%20on%20Wealth%20Redistribution%20and%20Poverty%20Eradication%20%20PDF.pdf

The purpose of this paper is to

- document the synergies between the health, civil registration, and social protection systems in Namibia;
- showcase how Namibia has systemically built its civil registration and vital statistics systems since independence; and
- show how this is improving more equal access to social services.

3.2 The national legal and institutional framework

3.2.1 Right to birth registration: The Namibian Constitution

Article 15 of the Namibian Constitution states that children have the right from birth to a name and a nationality. The article also guarantees such rights as protection from economic exploitation and from preventative detention for children under age 16.

Article 4 provides a detailed set of criteria for Namibian citizenship by birth, descent, registration, marriage, and naturalization. Civil registration and various citizenship issues intersect with these criteria.

3.2.2 Births and adoptions

The *Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act, 1963* (Act No. 81 of 1963) regulates the registration of births, deaths, and marriages. Like the name suggests, this covers the registration of vital events.

For adoptions, the *Child Care and Protection Act, 2015* (Act No. 3 of 2015) applies. This Act, which is administered under the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW), provides for an adoption register. A registrar is appointed for the register, which is not under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety & Security (MHAI&SS).⁹ The MHAI&SS obliges the clerk of the Children's Court that grants the adoption order to transmit the order to the Minister of MHAI&SS. The Minister must then alter the birth register to reflect the adoption.

- Where the adoption is for a child whose birth was registered in Namibia, the MHAI&SS must note the adoption.
- Where the adoption is for a child whose birth is recorded outside Namibia and who is adopted by a person living in Namibia, the MHAI&SS registers the birth and notes the adoption.

⁹ The Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration merged with the Ministry of Safety and Security to become the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety & Security in March 2020.

3.2.3 *The Aliens Act, 1937 (Act No. 1 of 1937)*

Among the only three surviving provisions from the Aliens Act is Section 8 which provides for name changes.

3.2.4 Identity documents

The *Identification Act, 1996* (Act No. 21) regulates the issuing of identity documents and the creation and maintenance of the National Population Register. Namibian citizens and permanent residents who attain the age of 16 must apply for and be issued an identity document.

3.2.5 Marriages and divorces

The solemnizing of marriages, designation of marriage officers, and revocation of these designations are regulated by the *Marriage Act, 1961* (Act No. 25 of 1961). This Act applies only to civil marriages. After a marriage is solemnized, it is registered in terms of the *Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act, 1963*. Only the High Court can dissolve a marriage. When a divorce order is granted, the order needs to be transmitted to the MHA&SS so the divorce can be recorded in the population register.

3.2.6 Deaths

Deaths that occur in hospitals and other health centres are first recorded by health or medical personnel, who electronically notify the MHA&SS of the death. The family registers the death with the MHA&SS, which then certifies it by issuing a death certificate. For unnatural deaths, the *Inquests Act, 1993* (Act No. 6 of 1993) applies. The inquest involves both the police and the Magistrates Court.

The CRVS legislative environment is evolving to keep up with changing technology. A Civil Registration and Identification Bill is being written to consolidate laws relating to civil registration and identity management. A new Marriage Bill will also be passed soon. It will repeal the current *Marriage Act*.

3.2.7 Vital statistics

The *Statistics Act, 2011* (Act No. 9 of 2011) created the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) and mandated the development of the national statistics system. The NSA has statutory power as the central repository for all statistics produced in Namibia. It is mandated to collect, produce, analyze, and disseminate official and other statistics in Namibia. The NSA is also responsible for official vital statistics that relate to civil registration.

3.2.8 Social protection

As this paper discusses the benefits of linking the population register and the social protection sector, it is fitting that it also puts forth the framework for social protection.

The *National Pension Act, 1992* (Act No. 10 of 1992) provides for a national pension. This includes any basic state pension, blind person's pension, disability pension, or allowance payable under that Act. The Act is administered by the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare. The Act further states that the pension is payable to Namibian citizens and permanent residents. This makes civil registration a key part of facilitating positive identification for beneficiaries.

The MGECW also administers various cash grants related to the *Child Care and Protection Act, 2015* (Act No. 3 of 2015). These include

- state maintenance grant;
- child disability grant;
- foster parent grant;
- short-term emergency grant; and
- assistance in kind.

Beneficiaries must provide positive identification for this purpose. They must provide proof, if orphaned, and therefore rely on a functioning civil registration system.

The same is true for veterans of the liberation struggle and their children who receive assistance from the Veterans Fund under the *Veterans Act, 2008* (Act No. 2 of 2008). Also, the live/dead status needs to be verified to ensure that there are no ghost beneficiaries under the social protection nets.



Table 3.1:
Overview of
applicable
legislation and
institutional
frameworks.

Source: Authors

	Key applicable legislation	Responsible	Institutional framework
Births	<i>Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act, 1963</i> <i>Aliens Act, 1937</i> (for change of surname)	Health professionals (MoHSS) MHAI&SS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MoHSS birth occurs in a health facility or happens at home but is later reported to a health facility. MHAI&SS verifies, registers, and certifies.
Adoptions	<i>Child Care and Protection Act, 2015</i>	MGECW MHAI&SS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoptions are facilitated by MGECW; Children's Court grants adoption order; MHAI&SS is notified (not yet electronic) and registers. <i>Child Care and Protection Act, 2015</i> places a legal obligation on the clerk of the Children's Court to transmit court orders to MHAI&SS.
Marriages	<i>Marriage Act, 1961</i> <i>Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act, 1963</i>	MHAI&SS Marriage officers (magistrates and some ministers of religion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Civil) marriages are solemnized in terms of the <i>Marriage Act</i>. Solemnization is done by a magistrate acting <i>ex officio</i> or a minister of religion who has been designated as a marriage officer by the Minister of Home Affairs. After solemnization, registration is done in terms of the <i>Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act</i>.
Divorces	<i>High Court Act, 1990</i> and Rules of the High Court	High Court MHAI&SS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only the High Court has jurisdiction to dissolve a marriage. When a divorce order is granted, the High Court should notify MHAI&SS. This notification is not yet electronic. MHAI&SS registers the divorce in the Population Register.
Deaths	<i>Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act, 1963</i> <i>Inquests Act, 1990</i>	MoHSS NAMPOL (Namibian Police Force)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MoHSS (medical personnel) notify MHAI&SS electronically about deaths occurring in health facilities. MHAI&SS registers the death and issues a death certificate. The police handle unnatural deaths in terms of the <i>Inquests Act</i> and notify MHAI&SS electronically.
Issuing of ID	<i>Identification Act, 1996</i>	MHAI&SS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration for ID cards is done at the regional and sub-regional levels. Biometric validation and production of cards is done at the national level.

3.3 Early reform initiatives

3.3.1 Improving registration rates

In the first decade after independence, Namibia embarked on mass registration of its population to address the apartheid government's systematic discrimination against Coloured and Black people. The main objective was ensuring equal access to rights and government benefits. By law, registration of vital events (births, marriages, and deaths) was compulsory only for Whites and the Coloured population before independence. Births and deaths were recorded in separate manual registers according to racial groups. It is estimated that at the time of Namibian independence, approximately 75 to 80 percent of the population had not had their birth registered.

An identity card system based on biometrics was introduced in 1979. This was the South West African Administration's attempt to control the movement of various population groups and their differentiated rights to services. The South West African Identity (SWA ID) card's 13-digit number contained a 2-digit "racial code" and biometrics. This identity number enshrined the apartheid era ideal of racial registration, control of movement, and access to resources. It resembled the South Africa Identity Number and was brought into effect by the *Population Registration Act, 1950* which identified ethnic groups by two digits.¹⁰ The law seems to indicate that the SWA ID was a resident card for all persons living permanently in the territory, but it is not clear what process was followed to grant permanent residence. In many cases, there is no evidence of permanent residence permits issued in terms of the *Aliens Act, 1937*. SWA ID cards were issued to around 600,000 persons over the age of 16 by 1990.¹¹

The institutional footprint at the time of independence was limited. In smaller towns, clerks at the Magistrates Court registered births and deaths under the Ministry of Justice. The organizational structure of civil registration authorities was not expanded until 2010 when a new, enlarged structure was approved to improve access to civil registration and ID card services. The new structure now consisted of new sub-regional and hospital-based offices. The 2010 structure was reviewed again in 2017, and more positions were added in high-volume offices.¹²

In the 1990s, in an effort to provide registration services across Namibia, mobile units were dispatched annually to all regions in the country. The goal was to register all eligible citizens in urban and rural areas. These mass enrollment campaigns were a clear sign of the Namibian government's political will to ensure registration for all. The mass campaigns focused on birth registration and enrollment in the identification system (for issuing Namibian IDs).

In some regions, the responsibility of birth registration was delegated to the local councillors (lowest political unit) and teachers. From a civil registration perspective, the registration environment was highly complex due to the various credible "source documents" in

10 [thoughtco.com/south-african-apartheid-era-identity-numbers-4070233](https://www.thoughtco.com/south-african-apartheid-era-identity-numbers-4070233)

11 Statistics from the Namibia National Population Register.

12 Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration. Operational Framework 2012–2013.

circulation. Some persons had birth certificates only, while others had SWA IDs. Many only had baptism cards, while returnees from exile had repatriation forms issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Others had multiple records (passports issued by the UN, repatriation forms, and baptism cards). Sometimes the personal information didn't match. A large group was undocumented. Where no documentation existed, two witnesses older than the applicant would vouch that the person was born in Namibia.

The mass campaigns reduced the enormous backlog of unregistered persons. Hundreds of thousands of persons of all ages were registered with birth certificates and new Namibian IDs. A new *Identification Act* that governed the issuing of Namibian identity cards came into force in 1996, replacing the various pieces of legislation on identification and identity management that existed before independence. These documents gave all citizens broader access to social services and paved the way for better management of public and private services and rights by the Namibian government.

The large mobile enrollment campaigns were a necessary investment. They laid the foundation for a new, modern society with equal access to rights and services and thus redressed past injustices. People now needed documents to access the many new social grants. Despite the high costs, it was an efficient method to reduce the massive backlog of unregistered and undocumented Namibians and residents. Namibia today has one of the highest birth and identity card registration rates in Africa. This is partly due to ongoing efforts to improve access to registration services since independence.

Yet the outreach methodology for reducing civil registration backlogs has led to legal and operational challenges over the years. These included low integrity and effectiveness of the civil registration system, and individuals' access to services being blocked due to discrepancies in the records. The key challenge was that a large number of persons were issued multiple birth certificates: in some cases, these did not correspond with the identity information on their South West Africa Identity record, which is linked to their biometric record. The mismatch between birth and ID records meant that for a long time, many people were unable to convert their old SWA ID card to a Namibian ID card: their applications were rejected when their biometric information was checked. Biometrics are verified and ID cards are produced centrally at the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security (MHAI&SS) headquarters.

In hindsight, some of the long-term challenges with multiple issued records could have been mitigated by setting up validation processes. As part of a nationwide initiative to phase out the SWA ID cards in 2016, the MHAI&SS set up new procedures. It waived amendment fees to effectively manage the amendment of thousands of records. Cabinet endorsed the initiative. To calculate the number of citizens who had only the SWA ID, the National Statistics Agency included a question about this point in the inter-census survey in 2016. The survey showed that 0.8 percent of the population still had only a SWA ID.¹³

13 Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey, 2016 Report, p. 55.

To address the lack of evidence of birth details for the notification, an inter-ministerial agreement was set up for maternity wards to issue proof of birth in the early 2000s. This brought together the two manual systems. Birth details, such as date and place of birth and the mother's identity, were now validated, and no longer based on verbal statements by parents or caregivers. Before this system was introduced, no supporting documents to verify date of birth, place of birth, or the mother's identity were required when a birth was registered. This resulted in a high number of errors, which still exist today. These errors hamper the Ministry's improvement efforts, as thousands of persons claim that their date of birth, surname, and names were registered with errors.

The validation of birth and ID records on mobile campaigns remains a challenge for the Ministry. However, the digital and integrated National Population Register, which was introduced between 2010 and 2014, has led to massive improvements in authenticating identification and validating documents.

3.4 Mid-term reform initiatives

3.4.1 Strengthening the system

In 2008, the Department of Civil Registration under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security (MHAI&SS), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS), launched several standalone initiatives to improve the rate of timely birth registration by strengthening the system. This was a response to the 2006 Namibia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), which estimated that only 73.7 percent of children under the age of 5 were registered, while 57.6 percent of children were registered before their first birthday. This late registration rate showed major regional disparities.¹⁴ The low birth registration rate was a key barrier to increasing cash grants for children, especially in the northern parts of the country.

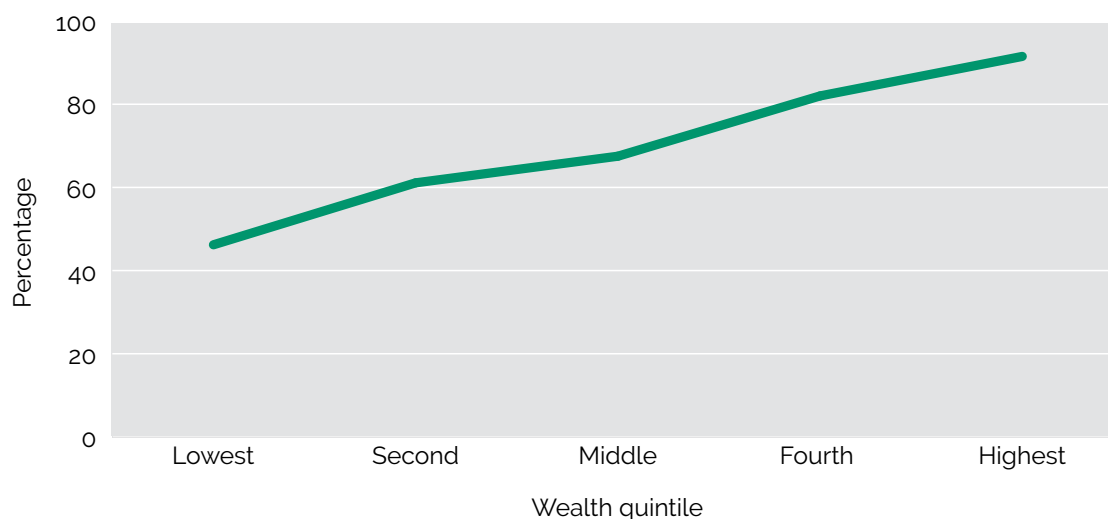
One key intervention was the opening of hospital-based birth registration facilities in high volume maternity wards. From 2008 to 2011, 21 hospital-based facilities were opened, along with new sub-regional offices in rural communities. At first, only birth registration was offered in the hospitals; death registration was added later.

A cash grant for children who had lost one or both parents was introduced in 2000 to address the financial woes of thousands of children orphaned by the raging HIV epidemic. The DHS 2006 also exposed a strong correlation between wealth and birth registration (Figure 3.1). The higher a child was on the wealth quintile, the higher the likelihood that the child was registered before turning 5. Many orphaned children from the lower wealth quintile group were not eligible for registration because their parents were undocumented.

14 Namibia Health and Demographic Survey, 2006–2007.

Figure 3.1:
Birth registration and wealth quintile in Namibia (2006).¹⁵

Source: Namibia Demographic and Health Survey 2006.



The strengthening of the birth registration system was the single most significant factor for the successful implementation of the cash grant system for children that the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW) manages, as a birth certificate is required to get the grant. A 2010 study on the effectiveness of the child cash grants provided evidence of this early assumption: caregivers receiving grants were more likely to have an ID document than eligible caregivers without an ID document (95 percent compared to 80 percent). In the Kavango regions in the northeast part of the country, this was even more pronounced: 93 percent compared to 56 percent, respectively. A child's birth was not registered if the parents were undocumented.¹⁶

Only a handful of hospitals have kept their old maternal registers prior to 2000. Most other hospitals have discarded the records, unaware that they should be regarded as permanent records. That means unregistered persons may land in administrative limbo, unable to prove their affiliation to Namibia. The fact that a higher number of births took place at home at that time makes it difficult to determine the correct date of birth. Finding the date depends on approval of the person's social footprints. According to the Namibia DHS 2011, around 85 percent of all births occur in health facilities.¹⁷

3.4.2 Collaboration with the social protection system

Over the past 10 years, close collaboration between MHAI&SS and MGECW has had a positive impact. It has improved coordination at the lowest administration levels for children who were abandoned by their biological parents or were orphaned and, having no extended family to care for them, were placed in the state's care. In 2010, there was no noteworthy collaboration between these two ministries. State social workers were highly unsatisfied with the services

¹⁵ Unregistered children are more likely to come from low-income households. Source: Namibia Demographic and Health Survey 2006.

¹⁶ Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. "The Effectiveness of Child Welfare Grants in Namibia," p. 12.

¹⁷ Namibia Demographic and Health Survey 2011.

that the MHAI&SS provided. In some regions, it was nearly impossible to register children who were in the care of the state, which led to children being excluded from being placed in foster care or for adoption. Some children were detained in prisons because they had no proof of their age. The social workers complained about standing in endless queues and not having clear guidelines for getting birth certificates for abandoned children.

Based on consultations and a number of outreach trips to orphanages in Windhoek, requirements were created to accommodate undocumented children who were placed in the care of the state. To improve collaboration at the regional level, all regional registrars of births and social workers were brought together to discuss the challenges and propose new procedures. Then each region came up with its own action plan on future collaborations. Since then, the number of complaints has dropped. At the national level, this initiative was strengthened when the MHAI&SS was included as a permanent member of the Permanent Task Force for Orphans and Vulnerable Children.

These first steps later resulted in including strengthening the civil registration system as a strategic objective for eliminating poverty in the Blue Print on Wealth Redistribution and Poverty Eradication in Namibia in 2016. For the first time, civil registration was recognized on paper as an important driver of social protection and poverty reduction. Today, the MHAI&SS is a member of a task force to reform the social protection system. The Ministry took part as a key stakeholder for developing the new integrated social protection system. The system was developed by the Office of the Prime Minister and will soon be interfaced with the National Population Registration System (NPRS).

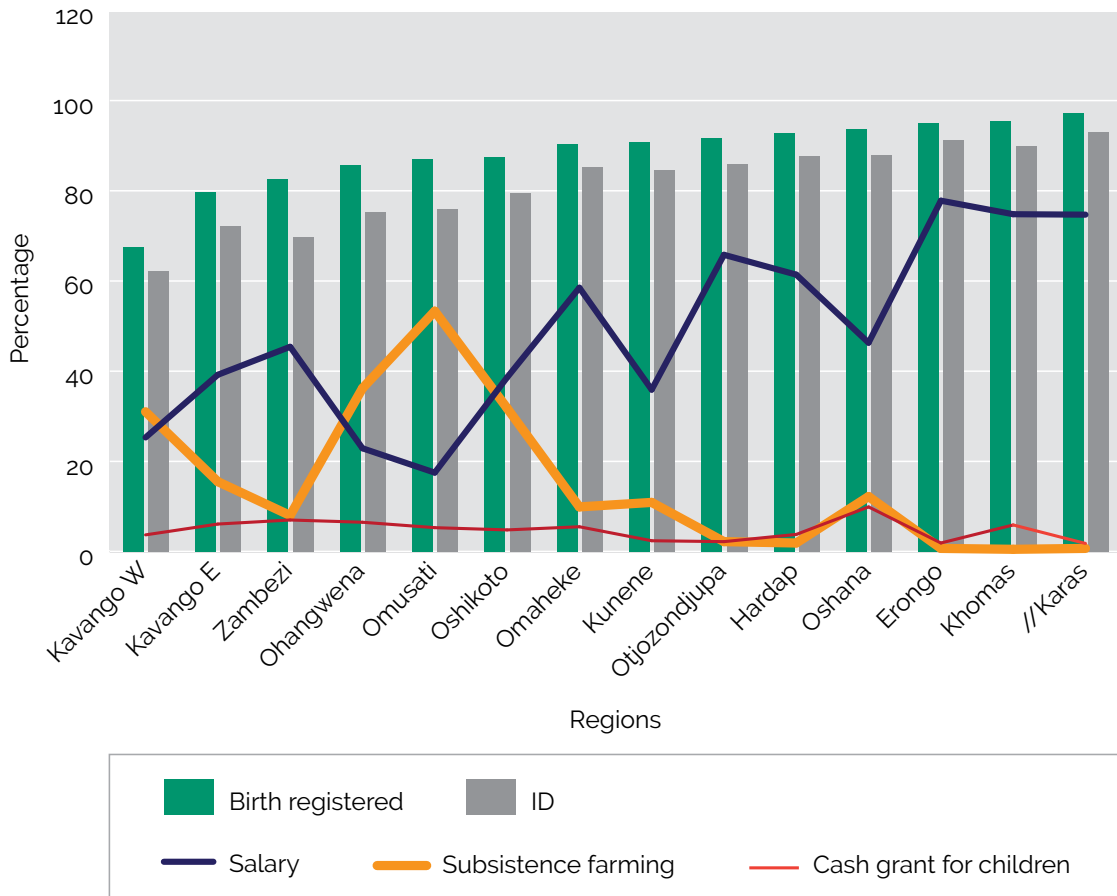
The consultations on the blueprint also led to new ideas and consensus on how to create incentives for previously disadvantaged population groups. Statistics showed that there was a strong correlation between low birth registration and low registration for cash grants in some regions. Figure 3.2 is based on statistics from the inter-census survey. It compares birth registration, ID registration, and three main sources of livelihood and survival. The graph shows a correlation between salary as the main income of survival and level of documentation. The regions of Karas, Khomas, and Erongo have the highest numbers of persons with a salary as their income. They also have the highest numbers of birth registrations. In Namibia, a person must produce an ID to get formal employment and open a bank account.

The MHAI&SS has two regional offices, two sub-regional offices, and four hospital-based offices in the two Kavango regions. These are spread out over 350 km along the Kavango River. According to the inter-census survey, 89,313 people live in Kavango West and 148,466 live in Kavango East.

To address the low birth registration rates in Kavango West and East, a new outreach model was designed in August 2018. Its aim is to improve timely birth registration and cash grant registration of children at the same time. This model builds on the local health workers' in-depth knowledge of rural communities. For delayed birth registration, the greatest challenges are the lack of, or inadequate, proof of the biological relationship between mother and child and the place of birth when there is no notification from a hospital. These are key factors for determining citizenship by birth. If this information cannot be verified, the child may not be able to be registered.

Figure 3.2: Birth registration rates and ID rates versus main sources of livelihood and survival as a percentage and by region in Namibia.¹⁷

Source: Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey 2016 Report.



The two Kavango regions border Angola, separated only by the Kavango River. The communities on both sides of the river are ethnically intertwined. With few basic services provided on the Angolan side, many people living on the Angolan side tap into health and educational services in Namibia for low fees or no fees at all. To complicate matters, many Namibians are without documents, so it is difficult to distinguish who qualifies and who does not. To break this vicious generational cycle of poverty and despair, the government needs to make sure that more members of the eligible population can access welfare benefits.

Health workers' regular contact with and knowledge of the local communities is very important. In Namibia, regions are divided into health districts. On a weekly and regular basis, health staff from hospitals and health centres provide basic health care in the different villages.

The basic concept is that an outreach team two registrars of birth, a grant registration officer from MGECSW, and a police officer is based at the health centre for one week. Through the Office of the Councillor, the teams visit different villages on certain days to register births and grants for children under the age of 10.

Here are the steps for registration:

1. The nurse validates the birth details.
2. The police officer takes a statement under oath, if needed.
3. The MHAI&SS assistant registrar validates whether a birth entry already exists, then registers the birth legally.
4. The MGECW case worker checks to see if the child is eligible for a child grant.

This approach turned out to be very successful in terms of the number of birth registrations and grant registrations. However, what motivates parents to register a child's birth remains unanswered and should be answered through further qualitative and quantitative research.

3.4.3 Digitization of the civil registration system

To achieve the government's e-governance vision, digitizing the National Population Register became a top priority in 2008. Today, the register is seen as the cornerstone of the interoperability framework, starting with the notification of births by health facilities.

Digitization of the civil registers

Alongside opening the hospital-based facilities in 2010, the MHAI&SS started a major digitization project. The aim was to digitize all civil events under one biographical profile, including allocating a unique system-generated control number that links all civil events and family relationships. The project included scanning and capturing all historical records dating back to 1980. This new system, known as the e-National Population Registration System (e-NPRS), was built by the Directorate for Solutions Architecture in the Department of Public IT Service Management, under the Office of the Prime Minister. It was built on the existing ID registration platform. The system contains data as far back as 1979, when the first identity card was introduced. As of 2014, the online and integrated e-NPRS was fully functional: it is installed in 95 percent of all offices across the country. The integration of the civil registration system and identity system is covered in the *Compendium of Good Practices in Linking Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) and Identity Management Systems*.¹⁹

However, the system did not address the ongoing challenge of under-registration or the inability to compile accurate vital statistics, because the numbers of live births and deaths were not available. An electronic interface between maternal registers in the maternity wards and the NPRS was essential to ensure that all births were accounted for and later registered.

The assessment of the CRVS system and the five-year strategic plan paved the way for a better understanding and knowledge of the broader civil registration landscape by all stakeholders involved. When processes, institutional roles, and responsibilities were mapped out, it became clear that strong collaboration was a key success factor for building a well-functioning civil registration and identity management system that could identify and recognize every individual in society through registration of all vital events right after they

19 The Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems. International Development Research Centre. 2019. See: crvssystem.ca/sites/default/files/assets/files/CRVS_Compndium_e_WEB.pdf

occurred. Although details were sketchy at the time, the idea to develop the e-birth and e-death notification systems was essentially accepted and drafted on paper.

e-Birth notification system

The e-birth and e-death notification systems were launched in 2016. At that time, the design, development, and implementation of the systems was a project under the Harambee Prosperity Plan. It was led by a technical working group chaired by the Office of the Prime Minister and co-chaired by the MHA&SS.²⁰ Two and half years later, in December 2018, the e-birth registration notification system was fully rolled out. It deservedly won the Radiant Launch Award in Bangkok, Thailand that month.

The overall aim of the e-birth notification system is to notify the NPRS electronically when a birth has occurred at a hospital. This secures the birth details of the child, verifies the identity of the mother, and collects accurate data about all children born in Namibia. This is the first step in establishing a child's legal identity.

The system also supports ongoing efforts to reduce late registration of birth: the collected data can be used to pinpoint population groups or areas where non-registration is common. Just as important, the data collected will enable the government to meet the United Nations' standards for compiling vital statistics.

It is the responsibility of the nurse who attended the birth to record the birth details for each child. Only a few pieces of data about the child's health are captured; this is to minimize the administrative burden for nurses. When the birth is registered, all the data captured in the e-birth notification system are extracted using the reference number generated by the system or the mother's ID.

Parents later submit more information to the civil registration office. This office is responsible for establishing the child's first name(s), surname, citizenship, and paternity. As soon as the registrar has captured all the data, an electronic printed birth certificate is issued. The process takes less than five minutes.

The e-birth notification system has been implemented in 51 maternity wards at health centres and 19 clinics across the country. Clinics will only attend deliveries of births in cases where the women will not be able to reach a hospital. When this system was introduced, the MHA&SS and the MoHSS signed a new memorandum of understanding. By March 2020, notifications were made for more than 137,995 births since the system launched. In 2019, a total of 69,232 birth notifications were captured, only 70 being home births. Police notified the system of five dead infants, presumably live home births where the mothers abandoned the babies shortly after birth. Nurses can notify the system of births as long as they can medically validate that the mother presenting the baby has given birth to the baby. It is common practice that mothers giving birth at home will visit a health facility for a post-natal medical check and to get the child vaccinated.

20 Harambee Prosperity Plan 2016/2017–2019/2020: Namibian Government's Action Plan Towards Prosperity for All. Launched by President Hage Geingob.

The 2019 birth notification data is an accurate count of the number of births occurring in Namibia. Figure 3.3 shows the number of live births in Namibia reported by health authorities per health facility to the e-birth notification system. The graph shows that most births occur in the major urban centres: Ondangwa, Oshakati, Rundu, Windhoek, and the two coastal towns, Swakopmund and Walvis Bay.

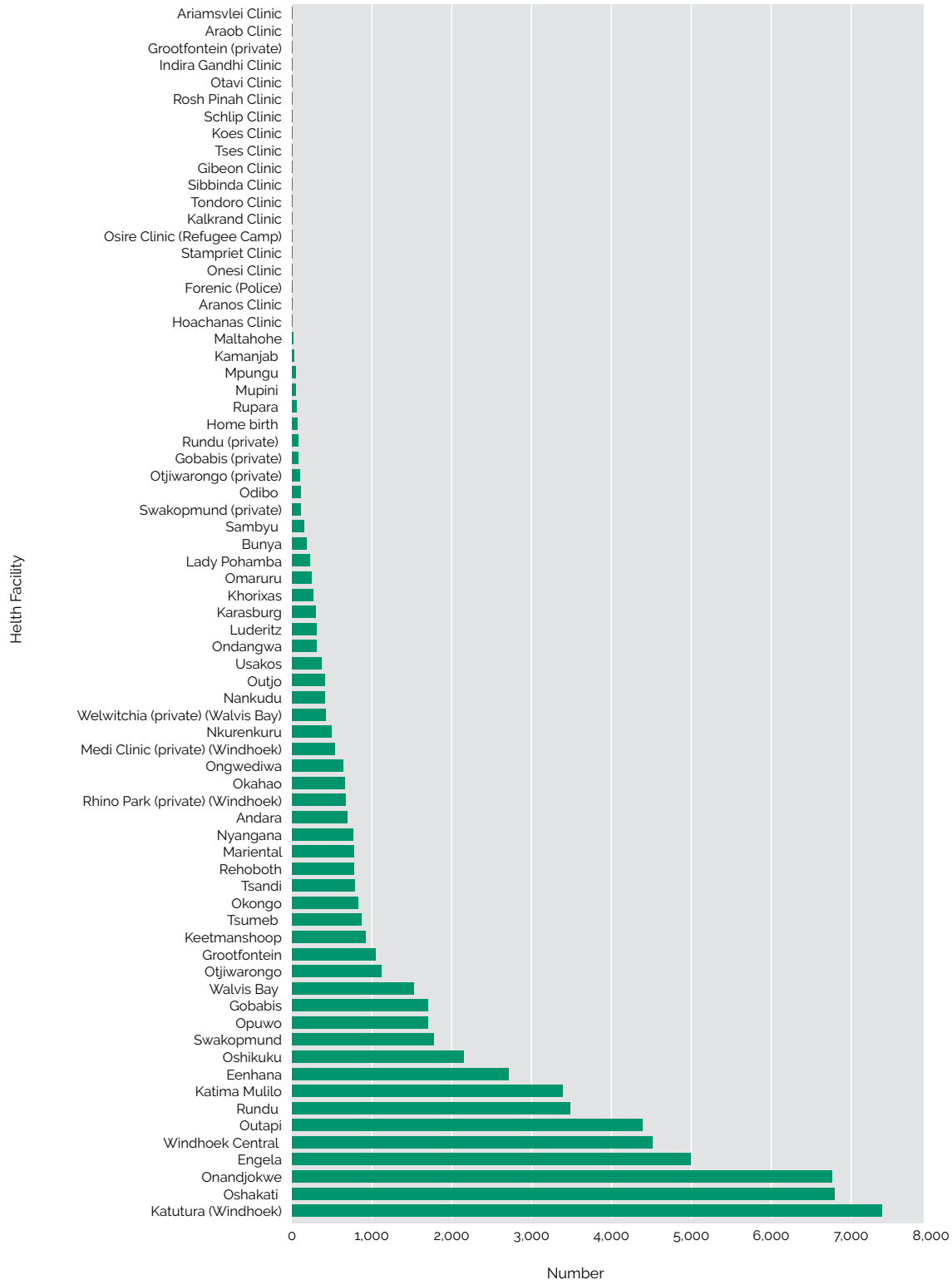


Figure 3.3:
Live births reported electronically by the MoHSS in Namibia in 2019.

Source: National Population Registration System (NPRS)

The NPRS ensures that the same event cannot be registered more than once. The real-time connection also allows registrars to verify that the identification credentials that parents present are authentic. Also required is a marriage certificate or an affidavit giving parental consent for each parent not present. Non-citizens or permanent residents must present their immigration status documents and their passport. This new process has made the registration of a birth much quicker, as the registrars only need to capture a few extra pieces of data.

e-Death notification system

Namibia has almost reached universal death registration. According to the Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey 2016 Report, 93.5 percent of deaths were registered in a timely way in 2016.²¹ This paper will later look at how the demand side is facilitating the high death registration rates. Capturing accurate data about death details is important for managing government social databases, demographic statistics, and elections.

In June 2018, after an extensive consultation process, the development of the e-death notification system was concluded. The system was piloted in the two state hospitals and at the police mortuary in Windhoek. With a fully functional information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure, the Namibian Police Force swiftly deployed the system to 14 mortuaries across the country. The staff are required to collect information on all deaths occurring outside of the hospital and to notify the government. The system is being rolled out in stages to the hospitals. Inter-ministerial teams from the police, the MoHSS, and the MHA&SS are leading the training of registrars, nurses, morticians, and doctors.

The purpose of the e-death notification is for all health facilities and police mortuaries to notify the NPRS electronically right after a death has occurred. This is to verify the identity of the deceased at the time of notification, and to limit the issuing of fraudulent death certificates. The data captured in the e-death notification system, including cause of death, will be linked with data about the deceased in the NPRS at the point of death registration. This allows for operational statistics as well as comprehensive vital and mortality statistics to be produced in a timely manner.

Lastly, this new process improves the turnaround time for issuing a death certificate. To prevent delays in registering and certifying deaths, notification can be done without filling in the cause-of-death section. This gives the health practitioner time to determine the cause of death and gives the trained coders time to finish the coding. After the coding is done, the data is saved in the profile of the deceased. This data is not viewable by civil registration staff; a cause-of-death certificate is issued only upon request by the health facility or the police mortuary. The coding is now done in accordance with ICD11, the International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision. MHA&SS has stopped issuing death certificates that indicate a cause of death.

21 Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey Report 2016, p. 83.

In Namibia, only the courts are responsible for determining the manner of unnatural deaths through inquests. An application has been designed to allow the manner of death to be captured by the magistrates' courts as soon as the ruling has been made.

Once the notification of the death has been done, the informant must report to an MHA&SS office to register the death. The death certificate, and a burial order that is simultaneously issued together with the death certificate, allows the relatives to have the body released for burial. In cases where no one claims the body, the police complete the registration.

3.4.4 Improving service delivery: The turnaround initiative

Largely inspired by the improvements at the Department of Home Affairs in South Africa, the MHA&SS launched a high profile 18-month turnaround project for all MHA&SS services in May 2014. The key aim was to improve all ministry services and reduce the turnaround time for issuing documents. All ministry processes, including administrative and management processes, were reviewed. Bottlenecks were addressed, and new management tools were introduced. The turnaround strategy was largely a success. Service delivery improved overall through better management of queues and service times.

3.5 The nexus between civil registration and social protection systems

Economic inequality and poverty in Namibia have declined in recent years with support from government policies and heavy investment in social safety nets. The government is spending around 2 percent of GDP annually, one of the highest levels in the African region. This is up from 1.2 percent in 2009–2010. Combined with a decade of robust economic growth, social spending has contributed to a decline in poverty from close to 60 percent at independence, to 28.8 percent in 2009–2010, to 17.4 percent in 2015–2016. However, child poverty remains higher. Economic inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, has also declined: from 0.58 in 2009–2010 to 0.56 in 2015–2016. Still, Namibia is one of the most unequal countries in the world.²²

- Fifty percent of the increase in direct transfer spending went to the old age pension from 2009–2010 to 2015–2016. All Namibians aged 60 and over qualify, no matter what their income. This pension reduced poverty by 19.1 percent and inequality by 2 percent; it costs 1.3 percent of GDP and covers more than 60 percent of spending in direct transfers.
- In 2019, about 180,000 children accessed direct cash transfers. Data from the Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2015–2016 suggests that more than 170,000 poor children are not benefiting from the grant. The reasons for this are not mentioned.

22 Namibia. 2019. Article IV Consultation. Press release and staff report.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), child poverty declined from 34 percent in 2009–2010 to 20.6 percent in 2015–2016. The IMF concluded that the overall fiscal policy in Namibia significantly reduces poverty and inequality, but the degree of effectiveness of different fiscal instruments varies widely. Direct cash transfers, such as those for foster parents and disability grants, are seen as very progressive, while the veterans' grant is the least progressive direct transfer. Interestingly, the decline in poverty coincided with increases in the birth registration rate.

3.5.1 Birth registration

Government and private medical plans are strong incentives for parents to register the birth of their child in a timely way. A birth certificate is required within 24 hours of birth to settle the hospital bill. This extends to women working in the formal sector who can claim maternity leave benefits from the Social Security Commission, a government maternity pool fund to which all workers contribute. Sadly, for most of the population, few incentives exist to register within the legally set timeframe.

Early reform of the birth registration system was closely linked to enhancements of the child grant system that were introduced in 2000. Birth registration rates for children under 5 years increased from 73.7 percent in 2006 to 88.4 percent in 2014 according to the Demographic Health Surveys published in 2006 and 2014. In the same period, child welfare grants increased by 40 percent.²³ This suggests that efforts to help more people access social protection services by expanding civil registration offices were largely successful. Still, more research is needed to document whether the child cash grants system has encouraged people to register births.

The inter-census data from 2016 shows a slightly different picture. It noted that only 78.1 percent of children are registered before the age of 5. The 2006 and 2014 Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) show that children from low-income households are more likely not to be registered but are likely to be eligible for grants.

3.5.2 Death registration

In the past, poor rural communities did not have the funds or resources to bring a body to the mortuary. Their only option was to bury the body as soon as possible. Now, Namibia has almost reached universal death registration coverage, with 93.7 percent of all deaths within its borders being registered (Figure 3.4). In 2019, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security (MHAI&SS) reported 19,109 deaths.

23 National Planning Commission. *The Root Causes of Poverty*, p. 41.

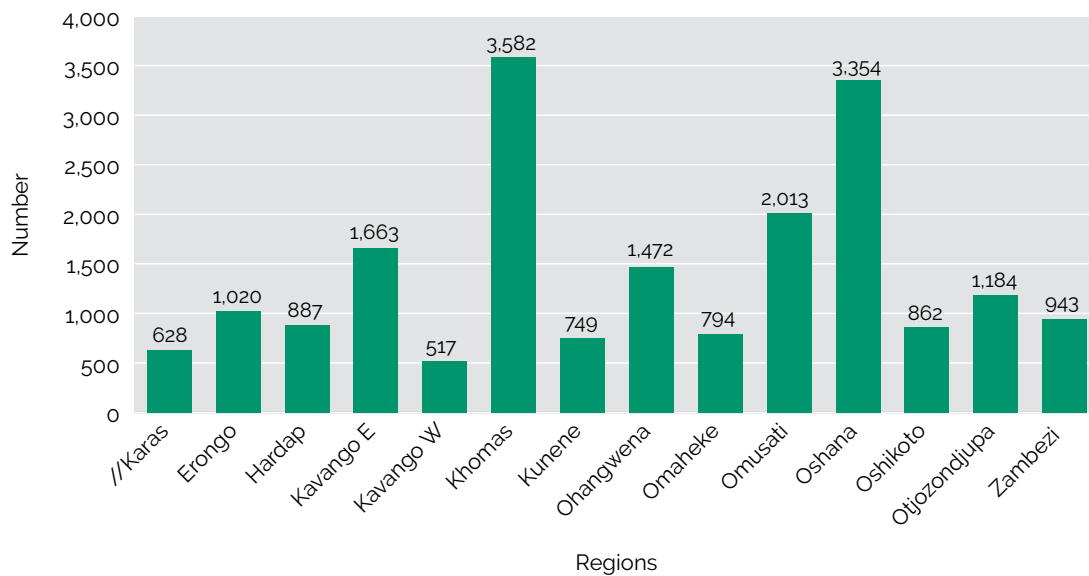


Figure 3.4:
Number of deaths registered in Namibia per region in 2019.

Source: National Population Register System (NPRS)

The high death registration rate in Namibia most likely relates to two key factors:

- Demand is very strong. Many public and private death benefit plans exist, and the claimant's government issued ID and the death certificate are required for a claim to be processed. The policies or plans that contribute to the high death registration rate are funeral benefits for pensioners and registered veterans of the liberation struggle, the Social Security Commission, and the Motor Vehicle Fund. The Namibian Social Network, which covers different groups of society, requires civil registration and an ID card to register. Also, the *Social Security Act, 1994* (Act No. 34 of 1994) provides for maternity benefits, sick leave, and death benefits.
- Identification of the deceased is not required at the time of death registration if no ID exists. However, it is an established procedure that biometrics are always taken to check if a record of the deceased exists in the NPRS. In almost all cases, a body cannot be released from the mortuary without a death certificate. If the body is not collected within a certain period, penalties are enforced.

The death registration rate is expected to increase further: the police have implemented a new policy that obliges mortuary police to collect bodies where the death occurred outside of a hospital, such as at home. In the past, police would typically not collect bodies if a crime was not reported.

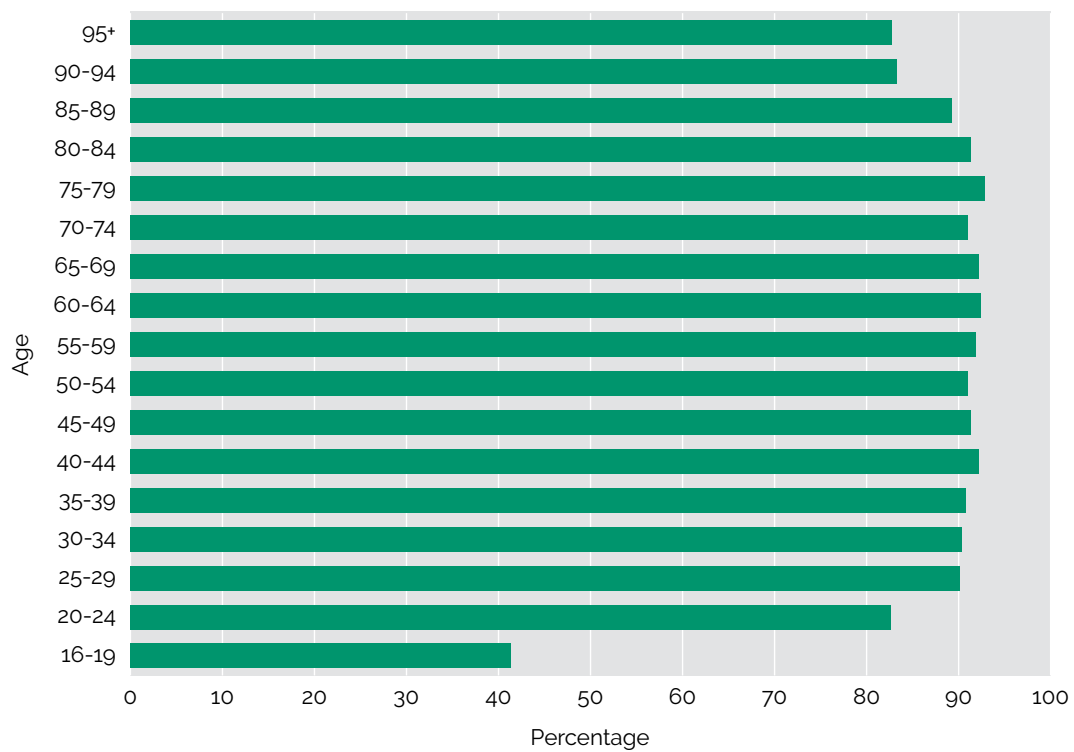
Although no research exists to directly prove that there are correlations between access to civil event certificates, identification documents, and poverty reduction, one can safely assume that strengthening civil registration has indirectly contributed to lower poverty rates. In the same way, emphasizing proof of identity to take part in social benefits created a demand for civil registration that greatly contributed to the high registration rates.

3.5.3 Issuing of identity documents

All citizens and permanent residents of Namibia must apply for an identity card at the age of 16. Because of the high demand for positive identification by the public and private sectors, 82.9 percent of people have an ID card. The lowest rate of coverage is among persons aged 16 to 19 (41.3 percent), suggesting that many young people delay registration until there is an immediate reason to get it (Figure 3.5).²⁴ In Namibia, an ID, often presented along with a birth certificate, is required for most private and public services, such as passport, driver's licence, banking services, permits, direct cash transfers, and job seeking. Public health services are universal and do not require an identity document.

Figure 3.5:
Possession
of ID cards
in Namibia
by age group.

Source: Namibia
Inter-censal
Demographic
Survey 2016 Report.



3.6 Latest developments

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the National Population Registration System (NPRS) is seen as the cornerstone of Namibia's e-government policy. Using a new interoperability framework, data can be shared securely between government functional databases. The NPRS will authenticate all identity data entered in other functional databases and push relevant data on death registration.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security (MHAI&SS) has signed its first collaboration agreement with the Ministry of Health and Social Services, where the two ministries agreed to collaborate in areas of mutual interest. A similar agreement has been signed with the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare. Similar agreements are pending with other key stakeholder offices, ministries, and agencies, such as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Ministry of Veterans Affairs, and Electoral Commission of Namibia. The aim is to enable the institutions to authenticate all identities at the point of database entry, share essential information (such as death details), and improve the management and validity of the stored data.

The *Identification Act, 1996* (Act No. 21 of 1996) empowers the Minister of Home Affairs to share relevant data in the NPRS with some institutions for the purposes of conducting business. Still, the Namibian government has recognized the need for a data protection framework. This is being drafted under the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology. Moreover, legislation reform is underway to enable the private sector to verify identities using the NPRS.

Also, the Office of the Prime Minister, along with key stakeholders, is developing an integrated Social Register that is built on the same principles as the NPRS. This new register will validate identities at the point of entry and receive notification of the death of members. At this time, multiple user ID cards are linked to the service issued, such as a pension, social security card, orphan and vulnerable child card, or veteran's card.

3.7 Continuing barriers to civil registration

The low birth registration rates in the border regions is largely believed to be linked to statelessness and unauthorized or irregular migration across the borders. This situation has had devastating effects on these regions' social indicators, leading the statistics on stunting, unemployment, and school dropouts. Over the years, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security (MHAI&SS) has tried to find a legal solution for the large community of Angolans and their descendants who settled in Namibia before independence. They were given South West Africa ID (SWA ID) cards, indicating that they were born in Angola, but had no official documentation issued by Angola.

The new Namibian ID is issued only to citizens and holders of a permanent resident permit. Article 4 of the Namibian Constitution provides requirements for citizenship by birth, descent, marriage, registration, and naturalization, which a number of SWA ID holders do not meet. As they do not have the option of renouncing their Angolan citizenship, which many cannot prove they have, the application for naturalization cannot be finalized. This has also affected their descendants and has become a generational problem.

For birth registration, all children are registered and issued with certificates. In many cases, citizenship and family relationships are determined at a later stage. Officials are obliged to investigate all cases where parents claim to have been born in Namibia, but no official documentation exists. This is done through an on-the-ground investigation by immigration officials. The officials will, among other things, visit the village where the person claims they were born to do interviews.

Another factor that can lead to delayed registration or non-registration of birth relates to the father of the child. For cultural reasons, the mother may delay registration if the father denies paternity or is absent, as the child must be registered with the father's first name or surname. In most Namibian cultures, the father gives the name, usually after the birth. The *Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act* requires that for a man to be registered as father of the child, he must declare paternity in person or submit a statement under oath if he is not married to the child's mother. The majority of children in Namibia are born outside of marriage. According to the UNICEF Situation Analysis, a high number of children grow up with one parent.²⁵ The MHAI&SS is addressing this issue by encouraging mothers to register their children without the father's details. The details of the father can be added later at no charge. Or, if the mother is in contact with the father, she can ask him to declare paternity under oath in writing and present it at the point of registration.

3.8 Conclusion and key lessons learned

Over the past 30 years, the Namibian civil registration and ID production systems have been strengthened as part of a national strategy to have a more equal society with access to key government and private services. Since independence, poverty has been reduced from almost 60 percent to less than 20 percent. There is little doubt that strengthening the civil registration system has played an important role in giving citizens improved access to direct cash transfers, and thus reducing poverty. Namibia has yet to obtain complete civil registration coverage, but the country has created a solid foundation for its Vision 2030: to be a just, moral, tolerant, and safe society that has legislative, economic, and social structures in place to eliminate marginalization and ensure peace and equity.

25 [unicef.org/namibia/resources_14066.htm](https://www.unicef.org/namibia/resources_14066.htm)

Some of the main lessons learned from Namibia follow:

- **The health sector plays a key role in the timely and accurate registration of births and deaths.** This has ensured that Namibia today has one of the most well-functioning and advanced civil registration systems in sub-Saharan Africa. As of 2019, the Namibia Statistics Agency has been able, through an interface, to extract all this data in an anonymized format. If everything goes according to plan, the Namibian government should be able to produce accurate and comprehensive vital and mortality statistics, including causes of death, by the end of 2020.
- **There are mutual benefits to interlinking the civil registration and social protection systems.** Civil registration is needed to verify identification to manage entry to social protection databases and facilitate placement of children in foster care and for adoption. Access to social protection systems creates a need for civil registration and strengthens the demand for civil registration documents. An integrated social protection system, interoperable with the National Population Registration System (NPRS) through the national interoperability framework, is a result of the stronger collaboration between key institutions responsible for cash grants.
- **The National Population Registration System was built step by step.** It was a long process with various obstacles: fragmented systems, taboos, cultures, and practices that needed to be taken apart and rebuilt to address the socio-cultural reality of a diverse Namibia. But, as shown in this paper, small projects can have a major impact and can lead to the formation of the next block. The impact of the e-birth and e-death notification systems has yet to be proven and documented. If these systems are used based on the set procedures, it is estimated that 90 to 95 percent of children will have records that were created from birth. This will ensure that they can establish their legal identity and access rights, privileges, and services.
- **The validation of people's identities through comprehensive, well-considered, and standardized business processes from the start is extremely important.** This helps to avoid incorrect registrations. In an emergency situation like the one Namibia went through in the 1990s with extremely low registration, it is tempting to lower the requirements for validation. But, as shown above, this can have long-term consequences for individuals and authorities. It is important that all recognized source documents are listed and standard procedures for each case scenario are mapped out for consistent decision-making. A centralized database with remote access is a must to ensure that each person has only one record with one unique identifier. Outsourcing a crucial government responsibility such as civil registration cannot be recommended, as the risk of mishandling the records and procedures becomes higher.
- **The assessment and national strategy for civil registration prompted a more holistic and coordinated approach to strengthening the civil registration, vital statistics, and identity management systems in Namibia.** A number of reform initiatives have been launched over the years; just a few of them are highlighted in this paper. The legislative frameworks are also under review; policies, processes, and operational guidelines have been developed over the years to ensure solutions for all recurring case scenarios.

- **To a large extent, Namibia has addressed procedural bottlenecks in the system by reviewing and reformulating business processes within the parameters of the law.** This has been done to accommodate persons with double identities, discrepancies in documents, abandoned and orphaned children, and so on. The new legal framework is expected to be presented in Parliament in late 2020; it will examine and strengthen the legislation to ensure that all legal barriers to birth registration are addressed.
- **Finally, but often overlooked, is the importance of strong governance and administrative systems within the institutions responsible for civil registration and the production of IDs.** As with any organization, various resources are needed to carry out the mandate: solid human resources management, IT support to maintain the systems, central distribution of secure standardized forms and certificates, the purchasing of office equipment, and so on. In 2014–2015, MHAJ went through a huge turnaround project for 18 months, reviewing all processes to improve service delivery. This review also covered MHAJ&SS' financial and human resources mechanisms and processes. This has no doubt also contributed to a better functioning civil registration system.

Acronyms

CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
DHS	Namibia Demographic and Health Survey
ID	Identity Document
MGECW	Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare
MHAI&SS	Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security
MoHSS	Ministry of Health and Social Services
NAMPOL	Namibian Police Force
NPRS	National Population Registration System
NSA	Namibia Statistics Agency
SWA ID	South West Africa Identity Document
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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