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Compendium of **Good Practices** in Linking **Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)** and **Identity Management Systems**



NAMIBIA

CASE STUDY 4

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**Global
Partnership**
for Sustainable
Development Data

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Acronyms

eGSAP	e-Government Strategic Action Plan for the Public Service of Namibia
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ID	Identity document
MHAI	Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration
NIDS	Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey
NPRS	National Population Registration System
SWA ID	South West Africa Identity Document
UN	United Nations
UIN	Unique Identification Number

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Executive summary

Namibia has a fully integrated civil registration and identity management system to register, process, and update the identity information of citizens, permanent residents, and refugees. Centralized processing of registered vital events has enabled all relevant identity data to be compiled in a single unified database: the National Population Registration System (NPRS). The NPRS was created by combining various databases that held different types of personal information linked by a unique identification number (UIN). Registered vital events data form the core of this database. As a result, the

civil register is the most important (if not the only) provider of identity information for other processes, such as issuing identification credentials.

Namibia faces some challenges to ensure that marriage and divorce registration is complete,¹ but major progress has been made: birth and death registration rates are high. This progress was achieved by ensuring birth and death registration became a key prerequisite for offering people social grants. This allowed Namibian authorities to resolve major issues on the demand side of the registration process.

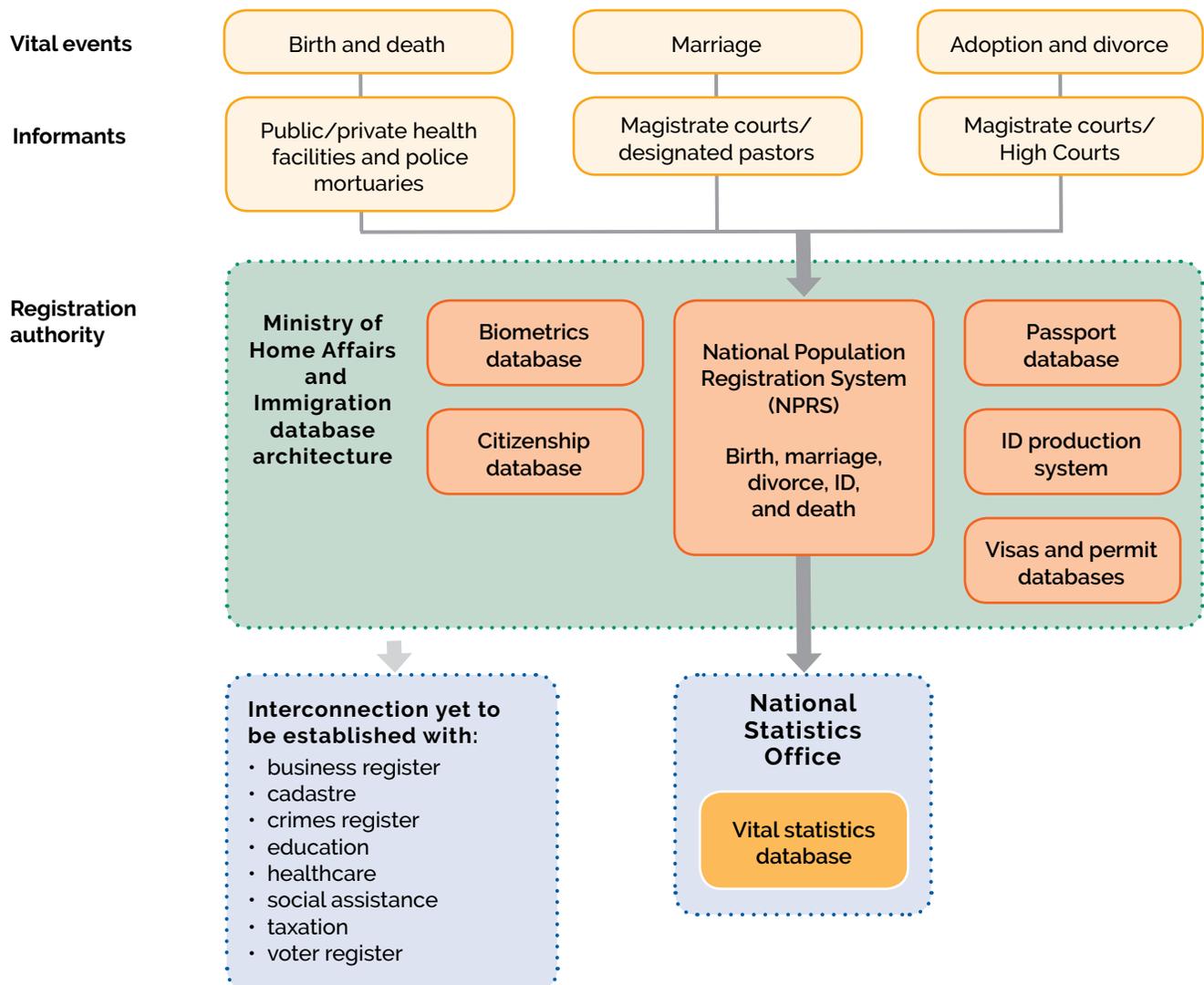


Figure 4.1: Namibia's identity system.

Source: Zoran Đoković

Determining identity data and registering it has major ramifications for an individual's citizenship in Namibia. The registration authority must decide carefully when determining legal identity. Also, providing financial benefits when people register vital events creates complex challenges: fraud prevention measures must be in place. Namibia addressed these challenges by digitizing civil registration business processes and setting up a database architecture that connects different databases. This ensures that they all use the same identity data stored in the civil register. The NPRS consists of all civil registers and ID registers on one profile, and includes information on registered place of residence and issued national identity cards.

Births and deaths are registered using notifications from the innovative e-birth and e-death notification platforms hosted at health facilities, police mortuaries, and civil registration offices. These platforms are linked to the National Population Registration System (NPRS). Birth and death notifications are used to ensure correct identity data from health and police authorities. The notification is the first step in the creation of a vital event record. The NPRS is the key building block of the interoperability framework. It uses the National Data Exchange Service Bus interoperability data layer, which allows it to link the population register with functional registers that the government and the private sector run. This makes it easier to share data and verify identity data. Linking other registers to the population register is underway. While there are no legal obstacles to sharing identity data with other government authorities, laws are in the works to improve the regulatory framework for data sharing. This includes legislation on privacy and data protection, electronic transactions, and the use of digitized identity tokens, such as signatures.

Summary of good practices

Namibia has a sound, nation-wide administrative and decentralized institutional framework in place in regional offices, health facilities, magistrate courts, and police offices. This framework brings services to the people, enabling efficient civil registrations and identity card enrollment. It is also behind the rollout of the country's e-birth and e-death notification systems.

Namibia's civil registration and identity system is further reinforced with strong government leadership on the value of strong systems. This led to the country building a homegrown national population register with internal resources.

The country has achieved improved customer service and efficient service delivery as a result of restructuring its identity management business processes. This has been facilitated by the adoption and implementation of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHAII) Turnaround Strategy in 2015. The NPRS is a solid infrastructure ready to take on linkages with functional registers as required, both within government and with registers in the private sector.



4.1 Introduction

General Information

Country name	Namibia
Surface	825,615 km ²
Geographic location	Southern Africa: it borders the Atlantic Ocean to the west, South Africa to the south, Botswana to the east, and Zambia and Angola to the north.
Total population	2,324,388 (Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey [NIDS] 2016)
Share of urban population	1.1 million (48%)
Official language	English
Civil registration and identity management agency	Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHA)
Birth registration rate (under 5 years)	76.9% (NIDS 2016)
Death registration rate	93.5% (NIDS 2016)
ID coverage	87.8% (NIDS 2016)

Table 4.1: Namibia country information.

The Namibian Constitution provides for an election of the president as head of state, with a term of office of five years. The Namibian Parliament has two houses: the National Assembly and the National Council. The basis of the Namibian economy is mining for uranium, gold, silver, and base metals, as well as agriculture and tourism. Namibia is a member state of the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Commonwealth of Nations. The currency is the Namibian dollar while the South African rand is also accepted as legal tender.



Figure 4.2: Geographical map of Namibia.

Disclaimer: The boundaries used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Historical context

After gaining political independence from South Africa on 21 March 1990, the Republic of Namibia embarked on a journey to design its path to deliver socio-economic development to its citizens. Key to this journey was setting up human capital, institutional infrastructure, and legal frameworks to drive its development agenda.

The Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHAII) was created to deliver civil registration and identity management functions. Six years

after independence, Parliament adopted the *Identification Act 21 of 1996*. It was carefully crafted to ensure harmony with the existing civil registration law, the *Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act 81 of 1963*. The *Identification Act* repealed and replaced the *Identity Documents in South West Africa Act (1970)*, the *Identification of Persons Act (1979)*, and the *Identification of Persons Amendment Act (1980)*. However, any identity documents issued under these acts remained in force.

KEY DATES

1963	<i>Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act</i>
1979	<i>Identification of Persons Act</i> – issuing of the first IDs for all persons permanently residing in the territory of South West Africa, today's Namibia
1990	Independence
1993	The government launches nation-wide mobile campaigns to register all citizens with birth certificates
1996	<i>Identification Act</i>
2000	The government designs and develops its own National Population Registration System (NPRS)
2010	An e-governance policy is launched, and the automation of historical birth records begins
2011	The birth registration module of NPRS is designed and piloted in the Khomas Region
2012/	The death module of NPRS is designed and deployed
2013	The birth registration module is deployed nation-wide
2014	The marriage module of NPRS is designed and deployed 18-month Turnaround Project begins
2017	Piloting and deployment of e-birth notification system
2018	Piloting and deployment of e-death notification system

Figure 4.3: Timeline of civil registration and identification in Namibia.

From the start, civil registration and legal identity were of key importance. Namibia's vision was to integrate civil registration within identity management because of the mutual benefits of the two. In 2000, the Office of the Prime Minister, working closely with the MHA, led a bold move to design, develop, and build the locally grown National Population Registration System (NPRS) using internal resources.

- At first, it processed only information relating to the issuing of ID cards.
- The civil registration system (births, adoptions, marriages, divorces, and deaths) was built on the identity management platform step by step from 2010 to 2014. It became a key part of the NPRS.
- In 2015, the track-and-trace system of IDs was added.
- From 2016 to 2018, the e-birth and e-death notification components were developed and launched. This ensured that public and private health facilities across the country – as well as police mortuaries, which are responsible for the notification of unnatural deaths and deaths occurring outside of health facilities – do all birth and death notifications electronically in a timely way in the NPRS.

This report presents the results of integrating identity management with functional registers, which contributes to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals – in particular, goal 16.9. It also helps create the potential to generate accurate vital statistics from civil registration records.

4.2 Legal and institutional arrangements

Legal framework

In Namibia, civil registration and identification legislation is found in various laws, including:

- Article 15 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, on the right to a name from birth as well as the right to acquire nationality;
- the *Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act 81 of 1963*;
- the *Identification Act 21 of 1996*;
- the *Marriage Act 25 of 1961* (amended in 1987);
- the *Aliens Act 1 of 1937*, which covers change of surname; and
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Namibia adopted in 1990.

The purpose of the *Identification Act 21 of 1996* is to provide for the compiling and maintaining of a population register for Namibia to issue identity documents to persons who are in the population register, and for related matters.²

As noted above, the *Identification Act 21 of 1996* repealed and replaced previous legislation. However, any identity documents issued under these acts remain in force. The SWA ID documents were issued to all citizens and persons residing permanently in today's Namibia from 1979 to 1990. Before independence, not all population groups had to register births: the SWA ID was the first and only legal document for most of the black population at independence. The Namibian government started a campaign to phase out the SWA ID in 2016, but this has not happened yet. There are legal challenges related to the status of foreigners who were issued SWA IDs but do not qualify for Namibian citizenship and are therefore not eligible for the Namibia identity

document. According to the Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey 2016, 0.8% of the population above 16 years still had a SWA ID in November 2016; many of them are over the age of 85.³

Namibia has no comprehensive legislation on public information, electronic transactions, or data protection and privacy to allow for controlled digital data sharing. However, there are some provisions for data protection and privacy in other acts, such as the *Identification Act 21 of 1996*. Section 14(1) provides for secrecy of information found in the population register. However, a sub-section of the same Act gives the Minister the power to share information from the population register with any Ministry, regional council local authority, statutory institution, or body established by or under any law for any purpose of that Ministry, council, authority, institution, or body. The section does not allow for data sharing with organizations outside the government sector. Also, the section is not comprehensive enough when it comes to prohibiting the disclosure or misuse of information about data subjects by institutions, authorities, or bodies with their third parties. By the time of writing this study, comprehensive data protection and privacy legislation was being developed. Respondents from the MHAI said that, as of now, the government may share data internally with its agencies, but may wait for the necessary laws to be enacted to connect the functional registers outside government to the National Population Registration System (NPRS). The new legislation aims to bring the current legislation under one law. This would reflect the design structure of the current civil registration system, including the e-birth and e-death notifications, as well as the NPRS.

Institutional arrangements

The Department of Civil Registration, which sits within the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHAI), has two directorates:

- The Directorate of National Registration is the regional arm. It is responsible for registering and issuing birth and death records, and enrolling IDs.
- The National Population Register, Identification and Production is broadly responsible for producing IDs, amending birth records, and registering and amending marriage records that are submitted by the Magistrate Court and designated pastors.

Good practice: Institutional arrangements allow for harmonized leadership within the MHAI

The MHAI has a network of 55 offices across the country:

- 14 regional offices;
- 23 hospital-based facilities; and
- 18 sub-regional offices, of which 9 offer ID enrollment.

The Ministry still works with a few Magistrate Courts on the registration of births and deaths. However, over the past 15 years, the Ministry has opened more offices and taken over this responsibility.

The hospital-based offices were opened from 2008 to 2012 to make it easier for people to register births in a timely way. The Department regularly runs outreach programs to connect with hard-to-reach communities. It often works with social protection and health authorities on these programs.

Children born to Namibians outside of Namibia are not issued birth certificates. Those who meet the requirements in article 4(1) of the Constitution must apply for citizenship by descent.⁴

4.3 Civil registration

Birth registration

Birth registration was previously done in South West Africa in terms of the *Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act 81 of 1963*. The Act is still in force in Namibia today. Sections 4 and 5 provide for mandatory notification and registration of births in legally prescribed timeframes and for the issuing of a birth certificate free of charge. Birth registration is done at the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHAI) offices across the country in regions, constituencies, and hospitals. In 2016, birth registration levels were 87.8%.⁵

Good practice: An innovative e-birth notifications platform at health facilities to validate identity in real time

The e-birth notification system that nurses use notifies the National Population Registration System (NPRS) of the birth in real time. This makes it easier to register births in the legally prescribed timeframes. Birth notification is linked with the NPRS through a number that is generated during the birth notification: this is treated as a unique identification number (UIN) in the NPRS. This approach integrates the e-birth notification system and the birth registration module in the NPRS. The UIN connects all the modules in the NPRS (births, identity, marriages/divorces, deaths). All health personnel and registrars are issued the individual user's name and password and are given rights that are in keeping with their responsibilities.

The e-birth notification platform was designed to allow health workers to validate the mother's identity against the NPRS before a birth takes place.

- The data is collected when a pregnant woman is admitted into the health facility. After the birth, the mother who has a newborn child leaves the hospital only after all the child's identity information has been entered into the e-birth notification system.
- The mother or both parents must return to the birth registration office at the health facility to add any missing information about the child's identity, such as the child's name, before the registration is completed. In this second step, which is completed at an MHAI office, an important set of verifications is done. These affect the relationship between parents, paternity, and, more importantly, the child's citizenship. According to Namibian law, a father must declare paternity in front of a registrar or in writing. This step forms part of the legal registration.

The NPRS ensures that the same event cannot be registered more than once. This real-time connection also allows the operators of the system to verify that the identification credentials parents present are authentic. As well as the already mentioned ID documents of the parent(s), a marriage certificate is required, and/or an affidavit giving parental consent for each parent not present. Resident non-citizens must present their immigration status documents and their passport.

If health personnel cannot validate that a mother has given birth to a child, the parents must go to the MHA regional or sub-regional office. Sub-regional offices are only allowed to register children under the age of 5. If a notification from the health facility is not available, the registrars will consider other documents, such as the baptism card, first school reports, or a statement made under oath. The workstations used to enter registered information electronically, as in the case of the e-notification system, are permanently linked with the NPRS. This allows for real-time data communication and a range of electronic validations that are used to prevent fraud.

Demand for the birth registration service has been created by making a birth certificate a requirement or a source document for getting identity documents, passports, social services, and some educational services. This has made birth registration attractive and valuable for people. Other incentives include child maintenance and orphan and vulnerable grants under the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare.

Although adoptions fall under the children's court (Office of the Judiciary), the *Child Care and Protection Act 3 of 2015* makes it mandatory for the MHA to note the adoption. The clerk of the children's court is under a legal obligation to transmit adoption records to the MHA within days of the adoption order.

Death registration process and practice, including cause of death

Mandatory death registration is done under the terms of the *Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act 81 of 1963*: a death certificate is issued by registrars or assistant registrars. The particulars indicated on a death certificate are

- name;
- surname;
- sex;
- ID number of the deceased;
- date of birth;
- marital status;
- date and place of death;
- cause of death;
- registrar's signature;
- place and date of certificate issue; and
- entry number.

An online death notification system that uses the same platform as the e-birth notification system is directly linked with the NPRS. This extends the death registration process to the Ministry of Health and Social Services and to mortuaries: it is the first official point of contact with the deceased to electronically verify his or her identity, classify the cause of death, and notify the MHA electronically of the death.

Good practice: e-Death notification system leading to real-time information on deaths and cause of death

The introduction of the e-death notification system has also helped to make it more efficient to ensure up-to-date identity information in the NPRS. Also, the Statistics Namibia Population System gets immediate or real-time updates on death and cause of death from the NPRS. The e-notification registration is electronically linked to the population register through a unique death record number. Once a death is registered, the status of an individual changes from "live" to "deceased": identity and all other records in the population register for the person remain inactive and archived. The identity of the deceased is validated and populated directly from the NPRS.

The relatively high level of death registration, 93.5%,⁶ is due to the many incentives attached to it. These include the financial benefit of N\$1,500 (US\$104) for the death of a pensioner and insurance that covers a death benefit. Also, the MHA or Police Service requires a death certificate to issue a burial permit when a person dies of an infectious disease. In a renewed effort to ensure that all deaths go through the notification process and are registered, the police attend to all deaths that happen at home and transport the deceased to the nearest mortuary.

Marriage registration

Civil marriages are solemnized under the Marriage Act 25 of 1961 and registered under the *Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act 81 of 1963*. Marriages can only be solemnized by marriage officers appointed by the Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration: these are magistrates acting ex officio and some ministers of religion (mostly pastors). Registration of civil law marriage is integrated with the population register and done by the MHA; the *Marriage Act 25 of 1961* is only applicable to civil marriages and does not cover customary marriages (marriages performed under customary law). According to the Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey 2016 Report,

- 5.9% of the population aged 15 years and over are married under customary law;
- 16.4% are married with a certificate; and
- 63.5% have never been married.

Divorce registration

Divorce under civil law is only granted by the High Court. There is no legal requirement on the courts to send the divorce record to the MHA for subsequent registration. However, there is an agreement that all divorce orders should be forwarded on a regular basis to be captured in the marriage and divorce module of the NPRS. In the same way, the Ministry does not register customary law divorce.

The legal framework is under review to redress identified legal challenges when it comes to registering customary marriages and divorces as well as sharing these records to make it easier to integrate the divorce module with the NPRS.

Digitization of the civil registration system

With the NPRS, identity data had to be in digital format, which historically was not the case. To address the lack of digital data before 2010, the MHAI began to digitize paper civil registration records from the 1980s to 2012. The paper archive of some 4.5 million birth records has been digitized using M-files records management software. These birth records are still kept in a dedicated M-files database: they are added to the NPRS only after a person applies for a duplicate or an amendment and after more verifications are done.

The M-files database is designed to store a large number of scanned documents in a single database. The information in the database is organized using tags that link to a specific scanned document. During the scanning process, each record is tagged with a critical set of identity and vital event information that corresponds to the information on the scanned paper. Tags are kept in a separate searchable database that links to individual scanned records. The marriage and death records were scanned and captured directly in the NPRS. Birth records could not be uploaded to the new digitized NPRS because the birth records and ID records did not have a unique identifier.

Vital statistics

The MHAI has worked closely with the Namibia Statistics Agency since 2014 to strengthen the civil registration and vital statistics system. In 2014, this culminated in the drafting of a five-year civil registration and vital statistics strategic plan.

From 2015 to 2016, the Namibia Statistics Agency, working with the MHAI and the Office of the Prime Minister, began producing a vital statistics report from administrative records of the NPRS. The report aimed to identify challenges in the data set. New edit controls were later developed to improve the

quality of the data. The same organizations have developed the ability to generate vital statistics from civil registration records by linking the NPRS to the Statistics Namibia Population System. The first vital statistics report, for the year 2017, is being developed and is undergoing quality assurance. Demographic and socio-economic information will soon be produced at disaggregate levels.

4.4 National Population Registration System

Namibia has a comprehensive and interoperable National Population Registration System (NPRS) that integrates the civil registration and the identity management system. The register was created in keeping with section 2 of the *Identification Act 21 of 1996*, which provides for the compiling and maintaining of a population register for Namibia, which is to contain citizens and permanent residents.

Section 3 of the Act lists the information to be recorded in the NPRS:

- Birth;
- Citizenship status and/or permanent residence;
- Marital status; and
- Identity document information and biometric data, such as photograph, fingerprints and palm prints, live status, departure dates from Namibia, revocation of identity cards, and any other information the Minister may prescribe by notice in the Government Gazette, including information about conditions, exceptions, or exemptions he may determine.

The birth, ID, marriage, divorce, and death records in the NPRS are interlinked with children's and parent(s)' records. Spouses' records are linked to one another. This means that marital status is automatically updated in the event of divorce or death of one spouse. This approach has also built a family tree over time.

These linkages may prevent forgery and fraudulent transactions related to personal identity and the delivery of public and private services. This protection increases the integrity of the data.

The NPRS was designed to ensure that the system addresses registration needs on-the-ground at all times and produces relevant data for statistical purposes. The Office of the Prime Minister is responsible for e-government solutions, including developing and maintaining the NPRS.

The NPRS is extensively built on the principles recommended by the UN Statistics Division, such as permanence and continuity. Enrollment in the NPRS covers the entire population: citizens, permanent residents, and refugees. The NPRS can create a unique identity once and can enable multiple uses of the one unique identity created.

Unique identification number

An identity document with an assigned 11-digit unique identification number (UIN) is mandatory when a person turns 16 under section 5(1) of the *Identification Act 21 of 1996*. The format of the UIN is a logical construct based on date of birth. The UIN is linked to the birth record number, which is manually generated based on the area where the person was born and the year the person was registered. This represents an organic link between birth registration, identity enrollment, and the population register: the result is an integrated approach to identity management. It ensures the integrity of both the birth register and the population register. This organic link improves the integrity of functional registers connected to the population register. Data is verified against the population register through the unique birth entry number.

4.5 Identity management

Before independence, the government issued an identity card for all persons aged 16 and over who were permanent residents – with or without a permit – in South West Africa. These are still valid legal documents, and a few cards remain in circulation. About 600,000 cards were issued from 1979 to 1990; all records are stored electronically in the National Population Registration System (NPRS). All cards have a six-character identifier starting with A, which was continued on the Namibian ID card. The ID number was 13 digits, including a radial code: this was removed when the Namibia card was introduced to reflect the country's new and unified reality.

Today, Namibia does identity management based on the *Identification Act 21 of 1996*. The Act combines identity management with a population register at a process level, treating identity management as a key part of the NPRS. As a result, identity cards are legally issued directly from a national population register. Unlike in other countries, there is no distinct identity management system. A person has one main profile in the NPRS with different modules – such as birth, marriage, identity, and death – organically connected to the NPRS with a unique and confidential reference number.

Namibia issues identity cards to both citizens and non-citizens who are permanent residents or refugees. The cards have different colour codes: blue for citizens, pink for permanent residents, and green for refugees. Namibian citizens living outside the country can apply for a duplicate card at any Namibian High Commission, embassy, or consulate. To apply for their first identity card, they must travel to Namibia.

When issuing identification credentials, it is crucial to ensure that

- the claimed identity is unique, real, and living;
- it is not a “ghost”;
- it can be linked to a real person who is “live” and entitled to claim the identity;
- the identity is used often; and
- after the death is registered, the identity is finally closed.

In Namibia, the validation is done electronically in the NRPS and using fingerprints. Information in the NPRS must be trusted and dependable so that functional registers connected to the data avoid transferring risks, such as ghosts' beneficiaries and inaccurate statistics on payrolls and social safety programs. Determining identity data when issuing identification credentials relies mainly on identity data in the civil register. This is usually the case for most of the population.

In cases where there are no legal records to use as proof of identity, social footprints are used. Not all individuals had to bring proof of their age. Government officials estimated age based on personal physical appearance. Social footprints are used for late and delayed birth registrations to build evidence of identity; this avoids issuing dual identities and contaminating the NPRS data.

The Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHAI) receives a high number of requests for change of dates of births. In most instances, it is from persons whose dates of births do not correspond with the birth record and ID record, typically because they were issued a SWA ID before a birth certificate, or because they had multiple birth records. Social footprints are then used to determine the correct age of the person. Today, all persons who seek to convert their SWA ID to Namibian ID, or apply through the late registration procedure, have their fingerprints

validated. Changing a date of birth on ID records jeopardizes the integrity of the NPRS and has various security risks as it undermines the ability of organizations to validate the identity of the person.

Death registration updates the status of individuals to ensure that they are living; this status is verified and updated by linked functional systems in real time. Also, the updating of live status to “dead” maintains data integrity and ensures that the NPRS is not bloated with “dead” status captured as “live,” which would introduce risks to operational integrity.

Also, the *Identification Act 21 of 1996* provides for the collection of biometrics for identity enrollments at age 16. Biometrics underpin the uniqueness of identity and bind identities to specific identity holders. Proof of identity is key to maintaining a robust national population register and upholding data integrity. This also ensures that documents such as birth and death certificates, identity cards, and passport and travel documents are trustworthy. In turn, population data integrity means that linked functional registers are accurate.

Individuals who are enrolled in the NPRS and have a UIN, but request a duplicate identity card, must complete an application form and have their fingerprints taken for biometric verification purposes and to validate their identity. To ensure that information on national IDs in circulation is current, section 5 of the *Identification Act 21 of 1996* requires individuals to present documents with correct and up-to-date particulars when they apply. They can validate that the information is correct when they pick up their identity documents; corrections are made if needed. The law requires information in the NPRS to be updated when any changes occur, such as marriage, change of surname, signature, nationality, and change in particulars. “Live” status of individuals is updated in real time in the NPRS using the e-death notification module. This invalidates identity cards issued to persons who have died.

Authorities face challenges during the ID enrollment process when a person does not have a birth certificate or if the person presents fake or stolen documents. The risk is higher if it is not possible to verify the network where the person enrolls. To deal with stolen or fake documents, applications are screened before they are processed. Also, all identity data on the application is verified against the information in the NPRS. If an application is found to be fraudulent, it is treated as a criminal matter and is referred to the police for investigation and prosecution.

Good practice: A turnaround strategy for improved customer service and efficient service delivery

In 2014–2015, as part of the MHA's decision to increase efficiency and reduce processing times, it announced its Turnaround Strategy. The Office of the Prime Minister and the MHA developed and put in place a track-and-trace system to track the application from when it is submitted to when the card is issued to the right owner. This tool allows applications or cards to be traced at all times and ensures that all steps are followed diligently to avoid fraud.

Issuing passports and travel documents

Passports and travel documents are issued to Namibian citizens and to refugees from the passport system, which is based on personal data in the NPRS. The passport is issued based on proof of identity:

- a birth certificate for those under 16 years of age; and
- an identity card, in addition to a birth certificate, for those aged 16 and over.

Once a death registration of a passport holder is processed, the holder's status is automatically updated from "live" to "dead." This invalidates the passport record. The passport system is linked electronically to the NPRS, which shows how the birth, death, and identification modules are integrated with the passport system and the NPRS. There are two types of passports in circulation:

- the old manual passport; and
- the electronic chip passport, introduced in January 2018, which requires standardization.

4.6 Sharing information with other functional registers

Namibia has announced its plans for socio-economic development in several key national policy documents.

- **Namibia Vision 2030** envisions an "industrialized nation, developed by her people and enjoying peace, harmony and political stability," a "knowledge-based economy," and a "technology-driven nation" by 2030.⁷
- **Namibia's 5th National Development Plan** charts the way to achieving this national vision: it integrates and creates synergies among development facets and outlines key result areas to achieve. At the heart of the plan lies a key outcome: improved delivery of public services through the use of information and communications technology (ICT). The government has announced the e-Government project, which provides a platform for offering online government services 24/7 through a one-stop shop for citizens, businesses, government institutions, and visitors.⁸
- The **e-Government Strategic Action Plan for the Public Service of Namibia (eGSAP)**, led by the Office of the Prime Minister, is being carried out to achieve these goals. The plan prioritizes a number of strategic areas. For the purposes of this paper, two are critical.

The first is “impact and visibility”: this covers activities that affect citizens’ lives and needs and that increase government visibility. Its aim is customer-focused governance. The second is “collaboration and networking”: this champions an approach to service delivery where government agencies link up electronically to maximize shared resources and realize economies of scale. An interoperable National Population Registration System (NPRS), built on the foundation of an integrated identity management system, is a key part of achieving the national e-Government vision: “To be a Leading Networked Government, providing Client-centered, Transparent, Affordable and Efficient Services to all.”⁹

According to these documents, in the future, NPRS data could be shared with other agencies if a legal framework is in place, such as data and privacy protection laws. In the case of Namibia, civil registration, personal identification, and the NPRS are integrated.

Good practice: A population register with solid interoperability infrastructure

The NPRS is designed so that in the future it will be connected to other government ICT platforms: it will host their functional registers and take advantage of the National Data Exchange Service Bus interoperability data layer model around the Estonian X-road solution. Although these functional registers are created to deliver on a specific mandate and purpose, one of their central functions is to effectively authenticate personal data and validate individual identities to deliver efficient and targeted service through links with the population register. The NPRS is ready to take on linkages with functional registers as needed.

Three systems are linked to the NPRS:

- Ministry of Health and Social Services e-birth and e-death notification system (NAMPOL);
- Passport system; and
- Statistics Namibia Population System.

The Statistics Namibia Population System has recently started to use vital events information from the NPRS to generate the 2015 and 2016 Vital Statistics Report (not published). Identity cards, passports, and travel documents are issued based on the authority of data in the NPRS. The NPRS can support the online services that are planned under the Namibia e-Government project. The NPRS has the capability and potential for further links with functional registers within government and in the private sector.

The electoral management system makes it possible for people to register and vote for local, regional, and national elections under the provisions of the *Electoral Act 5 of 2014*. This determines whether individuals are eligible to take part in the electoral process. Verifying personal data from the NPRS – name and surname, age, place of residence, citizenship, and live status to facilitate voter registration, and validating from the ID if a voter is who they say they are to be allowed to cast their vote – is critical. The Ministry has electronic data on deaths to validate the voter role, as required by the *Electoral Act 5 of 2014*.

Namibia also has a number of social safety net programs.

- With the *National Pensions Act 10 of 1992*, aged, blind, and disabled persons are paid national pensions.
- The *Child Care and Protection Act 3 of 2015* covers payment of child maintenance and child disability grants.

- The *Veterans Act 2 of 2008* caters to the registration of veterans of the liberation struggle and their dependents.
- To provide for maternity benefits, sick leave, and death benefits, the *Social Security Act 34 of 1994* provides for the registration of employers and employees and for the voluntary registration of individuals classified as self-employed. The Act also provides for the payment of benefits relating to maternity leave, sick leave, a death benefit fund, and the operation of a National Pension Fund and Medical Aid Scheme.

A critical bottom line is that all these functional registers require links to the NPRS to:

- authenticate particulars of their respective beneficiaries;
- determine if they are eligible for the benefits against set criteria, such as age and parental details, including live status;
- generate beneficiary statistics; and
- validate holders' identities against identity cards.

Many government programs also produce cards – such as a medical aid card, voter registration card, and driver's license – that must be generated on the authority of a trusted source of personal data, such as a population register. Otherwise, some government agencies build their own personal identity registers at a huge cost that duplicate the available data – even though these agencies are not policyholders of identity information and do not have the capability for real-time updates for changes such as “live” status, change of particulars, and marriage status. They are at risk of having varying and stale personal data, leading to fraud, forgery, and ghost beneficiaries.

Systems must be internally changed to accept different requests from the service bus. They must be wired into the business logic of the service bus, connecting them to the NPRS to enable data sharing. MHA is finalizing memoranda of understanding with government ministries or agencies to link them to the NPRS. The first phase includes these four bodies:

- Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare;
- Ministry of Finance;
- Namibia Electoral Commission; and
- Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Services.

Other ministries will follow in the next phases. System links within government are a work in progress.

A new law on data protection is in the pipeline to ensure further protection of the data shared between government agencies. The *Identification Act 21 of 1996* only allows for sharing of data from the NPRS, not between other government databases.



4.7 Benefits of strengthening the role of civil registration in identity management systems

Many benefits exist at an individual level, functional registers level, and country level when civil registration is integrated with the population register and legal identity. Integration has produced an interoperable national population registration system that can link to other systems. Also, through this integration, Namibia has developed the ability to uniquely identify individual citizens, permanent residents, and refugees.

- Registered individuals can exercise their right to birth registration, right to identity, and right to be counted and accounted for in government records.
- Secure documents are produced from the NPRS: birth and death certificates, identity cards, and passports and travel documents.
- Individuals can prove their identity through birth certificates and identity cards to get public and private services, access social protection programs, and exercise rights, such as the right to vote for those aged 18 and over.
- Through marriage certificates, individuals can prove marital status.
- Also, the country has adopted a holistic approach for improved service delivery across government agencies.

At a macro level, it is expected that vital statistics data will go a long way in helping the country to plan and design programs. While census data has been useful in supporting programming, it produced data that was spaced over time. It could not be used to monitor the changing character, size, and dynamics of the population between censuses.

The NPRS is a platform for launching online public services that will further improve the delivery of public services once they are fully implemented. Ultimately, the NPRS will become a central source for decision-making for governance, because it will collect accurate information on beneficiaries from the NPRS.

“Tighter cooperation with other government-operated functional registers will lead to better targeting of the correct beneficiaries for programs. It will also ensure that planning and designing of services is based on evidence. For example, one beneficiary, the Directorate of Child Welfare Services, provides maintenance grants to orphans, disabled children or children of disabled and pensioners, or of people serving more than six months in prison, and foster parenting grants for a child identified as being in need of care.”

Director, Directorate of
Child Welfare Services

Conclusion

Adopting ICT was key to building the National Population Registration System (NPRS). It was a major enabler in integrating and launching electronic birth and death notification platforms. If ICT is adopted correctly and applied to redesigned business processes, it delivers an overarching and interoperable population register that is an effective tool. It has high impact for governance and public administration, as in the case of Namibia.

Although a high number of newborn children are not registered in a timely manner, an almost complete birth registration is a critical base of the NPRS. Death registration allows for timely updates on the live status of individuals, which promotes good data integrity. Complete registration of marriages and divorces is critical for updating the marriage status of individuals and completing personal profiles for children born of the marriage.

Clear national policy direction and a national agenda, as in Namibia Vision 2030, the e-Government strategy, and the civil registration and identity legal framework, created strategic focus and alignment. This is a key enabler in delivering an overarching, integrated, and interoperable national population registration system. The Vision document underscores the importance of the country achieving universal birth and death registration to generate timely, complete, and accurate data to pave the way for national sustainable development. Universal birth and death registration give critical evidence of identity and closure for legal identity.

Another key lesson learned is that, as respondents pointed out, it is important to ensure that legal frameworks and technological advancements are kept in sync as much as possible, despite the fast pace of technology innovations. Fieldwork has revealed that many respondents in public and private institutions see the potential benefits of creating the NPRS and eventually linking it to other functional registers. The system is moving in that direction, but has not caught up yet, largely because technology has run ahead of the required legal framework to govern data sharing and authenticity of electronic datasets. However, the NPRS is technologically ready to support the implementation of e-government and to launch online services. ●



Endnotes

- 1 Divorce is 100% registered by the High Court, but not all of this data is in the National Population Registration System (NPRS). For marriages, the registration forms are often delayed by pastors and Magistrate Courts and at times not transmitted to the MHAJ at all.
- 2 laws.parliament.na/cms_documents/identification-159d98f225.pdf
- 3 Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey (NIDS) 2016 Report, p. 55.
cms.my.na/assets/documents/NIDS_2016.pdf
- 4 Government of Namibia. 1990. *Namibian Constitution* (Article 4).
- 5 NIDS 2016 Report. cms.my.na/assets/documents/NIDS_2016.pdf, p. 54
- 6 NIDS 2016 Report. cms.my.na/assets/documents/NIDS_2016.pdf, p. 83
- 7 Government of Namibia. 2004. Namibia Vision 2030.
www.namfisa.com.na/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Vision-2030.pdf, p. 38
- 8 Government of Namibia. 2017. *Namibia's 5th National Development Plan*.
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- 9 Office of the Prime Minister. Republic of Namibia. 2014. *e-Government Strategic Action Plan for the Public Service of Namibia*. www.gov.na/documents/10181/18040/e-Gov+Strategic+Plan+for+the+Public+Service+2014+to+2018/cce8facc-309d-43cd-ab3d-e5ce714eaf69



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