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Research, Network and Support Facility (RNSF)

“Support to enhance livelihoods per people dependent on informal economy and improve social inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable persons”

Good Practices and Lessons Learned

RESEARCH QUESTION	1- ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
SUB-TOPIC (Research matrix)	<u>Institutions and Capacity Strengthening on Informal Economy (1.9)</u>
REGION - COUNTRY OF IMPLEMENTATION	Africa - Niger
RESUME OF GOOD PRACTICES	It is essential to conceive and implement a system that would economically secure and retain clerical employees and health workers in civil registration centres; to this aim it is necessary that remuneration and allowances be paid entirely and on time, that remuneration per act be increased and that volunteer clerical employees benefit of a kind of status entitling allowances similar to village chiefs'.
PROJECT NAME	Programme d'Appui au Renforcement des capacités du Système d'État Civil du Niger (PARSEC) (Programme of Support to Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Registration System in Niger)
YEAR	04/2012 – 11/2015
FUNDING AGENCY	European Commission
IMPLEMENTING AGENCY	UNICEF
KEY TARGET GROUPS	All populations, especially in rural and remote areas, and nomads
SUMMARY OF THE ACTION	Further to a pilot experience in 20 districts, and with the support of the EU, UNICEF engaged with the government of Niger towards the progressive implementation of a universal, compulsory, continuous and free of charge, statistically useful and reliable system of civil registration.
GOOD PRACTICES	
Informality is roughly defined by, and limited to the non-registration of the enterprise or the activity operated by the person. But in many developing countries, especially those with dominant rural areas, people themselves are not registered because of the lack of an efficient civil status registration. When a boy or a girl is born without civil status, he (or she) will be unable to claim his (her) rights because the person cannot provide the proof of his (her) name, age, residence, nationality, etc. Again, when he (or she) marries without civil status registration, no proof of marital status can be brought and finally when he (or she) dies without civil status, his (her) heirs will not be able to claim for the ownership of the land or the house. The rule of law, with its rights, freedoms and obligations, can apply if and only if citizens have a legal "existence".	
The project was focused on conducting training and incentivising local or central administrations (Civil status registration, health services) to search and convince populations to register births, marriages, and deaths, in order to secure the key	



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protection rights during the person's lifespan. It also included conducting outreach and incentivising populations to register births, marriages, and deaths.

For UNICEF and its specific mandate towards the protection of children, "the right to be registered is a key protection right. Without legal registration, other rights are difficult to claim. Birth registration establishes formal proof of a child's name, existence and age. This proof can help protect the child against child marriage, under-age recruitment into the armed forces, and against child labour. By having a national identity, it is easier to fight abuse and child trafficking. Proof of age can protect adolescents from being prosecuted and sentenced as adults. A birth certificate, as proof of birth, can assist in tracing support unaccompanied and separated children. Not being counted leaves a child vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, which is particularly crucial for children from marginalised groups. Birth registration may be required for children to access health care, education and other social services and social assistance. Birth registration contributes to gender equality, reinforcing equal treatment of girls and boys. Access to social services and transfers should not be made contingent on birth registration."¹ Moreover such a system of demographic data collection is essential for better implementation of social and development policies.

The parallel between non-registration of the person to civil status and informality (or non-registration of the activity of the person to official registries) is enlightening in the sense that for populations in remote rural areas (but also in poor urban compounds), there is no clear understanding of the usefulness and the necessity of having a civil status clearly identified in official papers. Similarly, for the poor in search of earning a living, there is no clear understanding of the reasons why they should declare and register their activities, if not for paying taxes even before starting collecting income, which is therefore felt as illegitimate. And by the way no government in developing countries would require from traditional farmers to register in order to obtain a license.

The issue is therefore a matter of sensitisation on the demand side (institutions), but it is also a matter of efficiency of the public services on the supply side (households), through the strengthening of capacities and the expansion of human and material resources.

UNICEF is involved in several projects designed for improving birth registration in Central and West Africa where coverage rates reach only 40% in average, whereas immunisation rates have reached 70% thanks to a better coverage of health services. It is observed that a growing number of countries in these regions are using immunisation and maternal and child health check-ups to register births as a more cost-effective way. Another innovation that is tested is the use of mobile phone text messaging to transmit information about new-born children to civil registration offices.

However such technical solutions cannot replace an efficient civil registration system itself. This is why projects such as the Support Program for enhancing the Civil Registration System in Niger 2012-2015 are important.

Further to a pilot experience in 20 districts, and with the support of the EU, UNICEF engaged with the government of Niger towards the progressive implementation of a universal, compulsory, continuous and free of charge, statistically useful and reliable system of civil registration. A preliminary assessment revealed a birth coverage under 30% and death coverage under 5% due to the weaknesses of local public services on the supply side as well as an opportunistic demand. Demand was restricted by the direct and indirect costs of access to civil registration as well as cultural and traditional obstacles such as the non-transmission of the first name of the child before baptism or the shame for the mother of the child to pronounce the first name of the child. Niger decided to make of civil registration a national priority since 2007.

The strategy of the project has been to consolidate the supply of civil registration by strengthening their capacities and material resources and also incentivising the development of new centres for registering, nearer the populations. Simultaneously the sensitisation of populations and community mobilisation intended to increase the demand for civil registration.

¹ (https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/english/overview_6592.html)



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Once means of travel, knowledge of techniques and laws were allocated as well as recognition of the importance of their work, the executives and officials in charge of civil registration in the centres were motivated to accomplish their tasks. In three years, the coverage of births increased from 48% to 65% and seems to be on an upward trend. Forensic audiences held during traditional meetings among nomadic populations, but also among rural sedentary populations and among school children and their parents, were organised in collaboration with regional jurisdictions in order to regularise acts of civil status beyond regulatory deadlines.

During the three years of the project, 189 outreaching campaigns were organised, equivalent to 10 per centre (with more than 1,250,000 participants), and that were as many opportunities for people to share their experience: "Oumarou tells that those who went to gold sites had to come back because they had not identity card. A village teacher said that he did not accept children to be registered at school if they had not a birth certificate. A couple witnessed that they were rejected at the border because they had not a marriage certificate. Another couple indicates that a death certificate (...) allowed them to obtain a tax relief. A matron explained that thanks to her birth certificate, she got an identity card and consequently received money thanks to the proof of affiliation with a deceased parent".

LESSONS LEARNED

However, it seems that many beneficiaries have not come to withdraw their acts (40 to 60% in Niamey, and up to 80% in some districts). Several factors explain why progress has not been as fast as expected: Where the rate of non-withdrawal is lower, it is mainly due to the fact that the agents of civil registration come and withdraw the acts at the district level and then distribute them to the beneficiaries in the villages, without any obligation to do it. For instance the agents in charge of the transcription of the acts, who are volunteers (and paid 100 Francs per act, an amount that does not comprise costs of delivery), and health workers in the villages transmit, at their own expenses, the acts to the beneficiaries: in some cases it is done by walking and despite long distances; in other cases, it is done with the motorbike made available by UNICEF, but without any budget for gas provided by the district. In other districts, distance explains the high rates of non-withdrawal. Another weakness is about delays that have been particularly long in health centres. And since the exam for the entry at secondary school has been suppressed, school children have no more the obligation to present their birth certificate and teachers cannot play anymore their role of relay in the accomplishment of formalities in this regard.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Among the lessons learned, the evaluation report identifies the wrong level of governance of the programme: to be effective and operational it should be located at ministerial level and coordinated with the Ministries of Justice and Health because it was observed that declaratory judgments were not transcribed into acts of civil status, judges did not supervise and control some parts of the acts, health workers did not sign the notebook of declaration.

As for the recommendations, it is essential to conceive and implement a system that would economically secure and retain clerical employees and health workers in civil registration centres; to this aim it is necessary that remuneration and allowances be paid entirely and on time, that remuneration per act be increased and that volunteer clerical employees benefit of a kind of status entitling allowances similar to village chiefs'.

Also it would be wise to put in competition the villages in a district in view of awarding a prize to the villages with the best score for civil status registration.

It is recommendable to coordinate action with Ministries of Interior, Justice, Health and Education in order that all major actors in the field of civil status registration contribute to and aim at the universalization of civil status, as a key protection right for the poor and destitute.

FURTHER TAGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness raising, behaviour change communications methods, dissemination of information methods- including on social inclusion in the IE (3.1, 4.3)
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REFERENCE	EUROPEAID Project page: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/programme-dappui-au-renforcement-du-systeme-detat-civil-au-niger_fr UNICEF - Evaluation du programme d'Appui au Système d'Etat Civil au Niger: https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_92872.html

