Fulfilling the Rights to Identity and Social Protection

Building a Civil Registration and National Identity Management System along with a Child Benefit Cash Transfer System in South Sudan

Juba, September 2011

CONTENTS

Photo cover page: UNICEF South Sudan

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

This report documents the recommendations from a consultancy mission commissioned by the UNICEF-office in South Sudan to scope out opportunities for accelerating the registration of births of children in the newly independent country.

While the mission took place in the second half of August 2011, a UN-team and the government were just finalizing an innovative Child Benefit Cash Transfer Program. The program, which is a major social protection initiative under the 2011-2013 South Sudan Development Plan, assumes that infrastructure will be in place to register children's births and identify households with one or more children under the age of 30 months eligible for the cash grants, while at the same time the transfer program will form a strong incentive for parents to register the birth of their children.

The recommendations that follow are based on two broad premises:

a. The country is committed to establish in the shortest possible time a modern civil registration system, of which registration of births of children will be a component.

b. Recognizing that the cash transfer scheme is scheduled to be operational by mid 2012, the leadership, personnel and resources necessary for establishing registration of births throughout the country where the cash transfer system will operate will be available in time.

This report first provides a logical framework for building the civil registration system in the country and shows an "ideal" civil registration system blueprint. These are the main building blocks for the report's recommendations, which include strategies for rapid scaling-up and a timeframe for establishing the basic infrastructure for the civil registration system.

In the second part of the report the links between the child cash transfer scheme and the birth registration process are examined. The design discussed and agreed on with the cash transfer consultant and the UN-team is presented. The key dates for both initiatives that need to reconcile are also listed.

The report includes suggestions for the ("late") registration of older children, linking this with other planned initiatives in the country. The report concludes with a brief discussion of cost estimate methodology and monitoring and evaluation.

The task at hand is challenging, to say the least. South Sudan has a small population of 8 million scattered, and partly living nomadic lives, across a vast area of over 600,000 km2, with severe infrastructural constraints. Nevertheless, based on the commitment of the government and development partners, the consultants believe that South Sudan can achieve its goals in social protection and civil registration, and build a model that could be a model to be emulated by other countries in future.

DESIGNING A CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM

1   SOUTH SUDAN IN A NUTSHELL

Sudan's population is very young, with 16% under 5 and 32% under 10. The infant mortality rate is 102 per 1,000 live births. The under-5 mortality rate is 135 per 1,000 live births and the maternal mortality rate is high and persistent 2,054 per 100,000 live births.

- Population[1]   8.3m
- Land area   644,329 km2
- Population below 18 years of age   51%
- Population below 30 years of age   72%
- Population in rural areas   83%
- Below the poverty line   51%

There is a wide variation in the population between "States" in the country, with *Jonglei* having the largest population (1,358,602, 16% of the total) and *Western Bahr-El-Ghazal* (333,431, or 4% of the total) having the smallest population. The average number of members in a private household is 7.

The population density of Southern Sudan is only 13/km2, less than one tenth of neighboring Uganda (136/km2) to take just one example, and among the 13 out of 62 African countries with the lowest population density.

The map below shows the population distribution across South Sudan, which evidently is all across. There are only limited communication and physical infrastructures that link the South Sudanese population. That makes the tasks of establishing a civil registration system and carrying out a nationwide cash transfer program (in parallel) particularly challenging.

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[1] Source: 2008 Census, Sudan Household Health Surveys (SHHS), 2006 and 2010, National Baseline Household Survey (NBHS) 2009.

## Map 1—South Sudan's population scatter
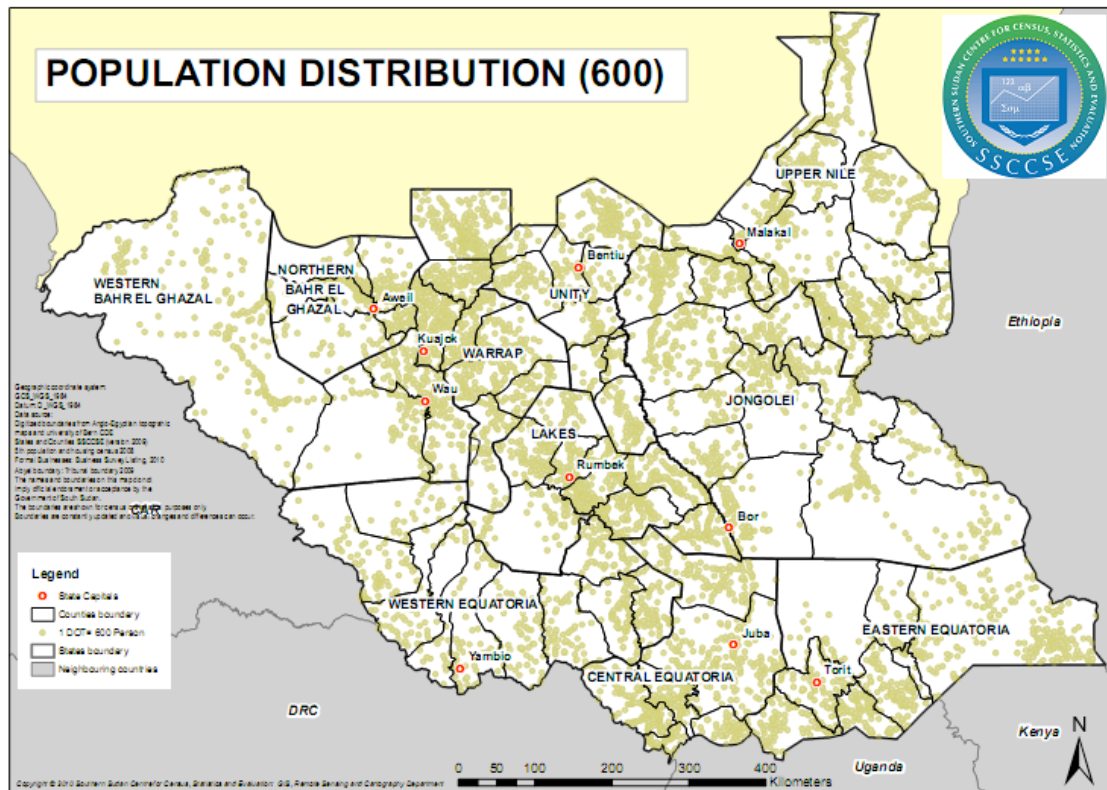
2   DESIGNING A CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM FOR SOUTH SUDAN

Undergirding the envisaged civil registration system in South Sudan are the following logical framework (table 1) and systems linkages (figure 1).

Table 1—Logical framework for civil registration building

Level	Narrative summary	Indicators	Methods of Verification	Risks and Assumptions
Goal	1.Rights of children of South Sudan to a name and nationality realized through families registering their children immediately after birth 2. Updated information on births and deaths by age and sex is available for governance and national planning purposes	More than 80% of children below age of 18 registered by 2016 More than 80% of deaths registered and causes of death reported according to international standard	MICS 2015	Political will and resources support swift establishment of civil registration. The national ID system and other outreaches work in tandem with the civil registration authorities in registering children under-18
Outcomes	A civil registration system in place that is easily accessible to all and in which all first-time birth and death registration is free of charge	1. Policy and legal framework for civil registration in place 2. Digital data base of births and deaths established	Self-evident	There are no delays in the process for adopting a policy and enacting legislation for this purpose
Outputs	1. Births and deaths taking place in health facilities and homes notified in due time. 2. Birth and death registration and provision of first-time birth certificates to families done free of cost and within prescribed time limits	Results of randomized trials or sample surveys.	Randomized trial or sample survey results	Technical and financial resources available for conducting randomized trials and sample surveys
Inputs	1.Promotion of registration of births through all means including the Child Benefit Cash Transfer (CBCT) Program; other outreaches to register births of older children through links with the National ID and other means 2. Promotion of registration of deaths including cause of deaths through means such as verbal autopsy	Periodic progress reports on specific measures adopted to accelerate birth and death registration.	MIS linked to performance of CBTB Program Monitoring of other means adopted to accelerate birth and death registration	Assumptions regarding resource availability for the CBCT program and time frame for its start up Assumptions relating to other measures including roll out of National ID

Figure 1—The ideal structure for civil registration and ID management
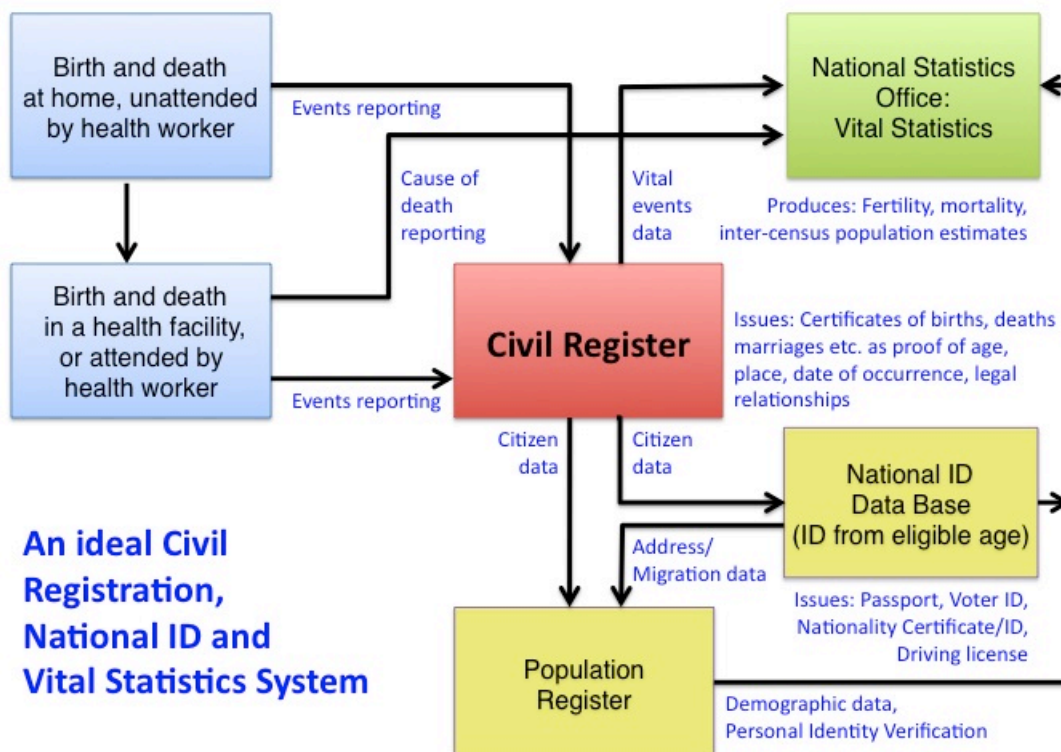
This report recommends for South Sudan to adopt the above ideal model for linkages within the civil registration and identity management systems as it is drawn from international best practice.[2]

While the logical framework and the figure depicting "ideal" civil registration and identity management structure are self-explanatory, some details are discussed below for the sake of clarity.

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[2] For simplicity's sake linkages with the electoral system are left out, as are international and nationality aspects, i.e. the registration of aliens and vital events occurring to them in South Sudan as well as the registration of vital events occurring to South Sudanese nationals residing abroad.

1. At present there is no **policy or legal framework** to guide the registration of births and deaths in South Sudan. It is therefore necessary that a policy and a legislative framework vesting responsibility and authority within a specific ministry of the government for civil registration and spelling out the modalities of registration are put in place as soon as possible.

2. Births and deaths take place either in **hospitals or health facilities or at homes**. In the case of South Sudan, the percentage of births and deaths that happen within health facilities is still relatively small. Therefore it is necessary to have a system that can capture the many births and deaths that occur outside of health facilities. This should also take care of the fact that sections of the population live pastoral, semi-nomadic lives.

3. A National ID system is being prepared for roll out on short notice in the country.[3] Learning from experience in other countries, it is important to establish **clear links between National ID and civil registration**. The process of identification and enrollment of adult people[4] all over the country for/in the ID system presents an opportunity to register the births of children (the under-18) in these locations at the same time at lower additional cost than any other alternative, while also laying the essential groundwork for affordability and reliability of the national ID system over the longer term.

4. Experience from other African countries and elsewhere clearly points to the **civil registration process being digitized for mutations and data storage**, to ensure that the records are transmitted, stored and retrieved with optimal timeliness and efficiency. It is recognized that this may not be possible at all levels of the civil registration system immediately, but it is expected that with the expected rapid expansion of computerization and digital phone networks in the country this will be possible sooner than later. As a rule no paper should be used other than for the extracts from the register, unless as a temporary measure.

5. The **continuous monitoring** of the progress of project implementation in order to effect necessary course corrections is assumed to happen concurrently with implementation.

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[3] According to sources within the Ministry of Interior the first IDs will be issued by end f October 2011 in Juba. A contract with a German firm would have been entered into. Priorities within the ministry are first and foremost, though, to help South Sudanese citizens with travel documents now their Sudanese travel documents are no longer valid.

[4] According to sources within the Ministry of Interior the national ID will be issued to the adult population from 18 years of age.

# 3 STRATEGIES FOR ESTABLISHING THE CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM

3.1 Responsibility for civil registration

The policy and legal framework developed and adopted by the government will determine the ministry with prime responsibility for civil registration and the authorities that will be entrusted with the function of registration.

In many an African country civil registration is underdeveloped and incomplete because the service does not reach the populace, and the people cannot reach the service. This is also the case because of the limited financial potential of the population out in rural and remote areas, and the limitations to levy fees to make the service viable for government. South Sudan is no exception in this regard. For decentralized delivery of government services local government and the health sector often offer the best potential. Their outreach for witnessing births and deaths is second to none. It is therefore logical to decentralize the authority for the registration of births and deaths by using the outreach for local government and health, and making the service available as close as can be to the communities whose births and deaths should be registered.

3.2 Suggested model for registration of births and deaths

Fig 2—Suggested model for the notification and registration of vital events

Suggested Registration Process (a): Below County Level
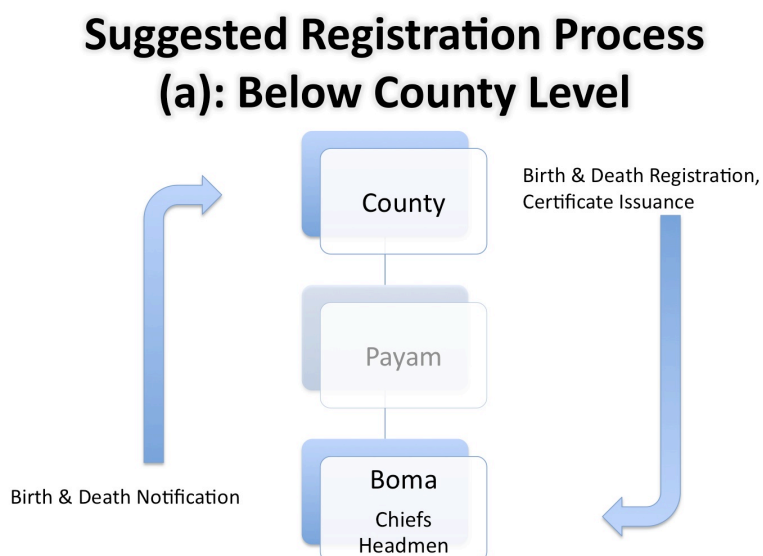
(b): National Level
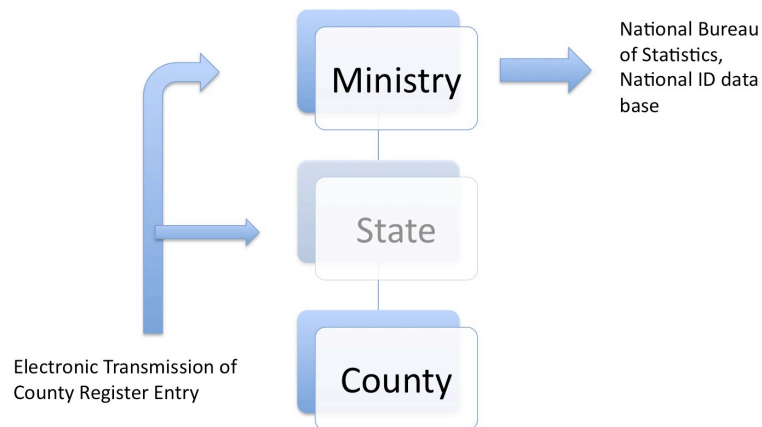
This model of registration of births and deaths at the county level is suggested as the facilities for electronic data transmission are currently available at that level, and not lower than that as yet. The notifications of births and deaths would be collected through village headmen and chiefs—or by health workers—at the so-called "Boma"-level and transmitted to the county through the network of health units and health facilities. Once the notifications are received at the county office, the information can be entered onto digital, county-level civil registers that are linked to the central civil register.

At the county each registration of birth and death will be transformed into an electronic record and each newly born child will be provided with a unique identification number. Birth- and death certificates will be printed and sent back to the headman of the community where the notification originated, for distribution back to the families.

The county-level electronic data can be transmitted real-time to the civil register as well as to databases held at the state level for storage, the production of reports and transmission to the National Bureau of Statistics for the production of vital statistics and demographic data.

3.3 Accelerating birth and death registration

It is suggested that all opportunities be explored to ensure that registration is scaled up to cover the entire country in as short a time as possible. This paper does not go into the modalities for accelerating death registration, where expertise is available from the World Health Organization and its partner the Health Metrics Network.

4 TIMEFRAME FOR DEVELOPING THE CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM

Table 2—Suggested activity schedule for 2011

Action	Involved	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1. Determine ministry with primary responsibility for civil registration	MoI, MoH, MoGCSW, NBS	■			
2. Form Steering Group (SG)	Led by ministry with primary responsibility for civil registration	■			
3. Identify technical assistance (TA—i: Local, 2 years; ii. International as required)	SG	■			
4. Policy development	SG, other stakeholders, TA	■	■	■	
5. UNECA technical mission (invitation Foreign Affairs ministry Sep)	SG, UNECA, UNICEF, other stakeholders, TA		■	■	
6. ToRs for legal, technical implementation consultancy, software supplier	SG	■			
7. Organizational design	SG, TA			■	■
8. Program planning	SG, TA			■	■
9. Systems design	SG, TA			■	■
10. Developing legal framework	SG, TA		■	■	■

It is assumed that the key decisions regarding **identification of a lead-ministry** responsible for civil registration and the formation of a Steering Group led by that Ministry would have been taken in the month of September 2011. A suggested list of stakeholder-ministries and -partners for membership of the Steering Group is given in Annex A.

The Steering Group may have the responsibilities as listed in Table 2 relating to strategic directions for development of a policy framework, and for development of the terms of reference (ToR) for various kinds of technical support. The ToRs required would need to include those for:

- Legal expertise for drafting the new laws for civil registration

- Technical expertise, including for a Project Supervisor and for software development for the civil registration system and for the supporting ICT hardware needs

- Technical assistance for UNICEF-support to these initiatives that will include both long-term local as well as short-term international expertise as required

Once the Steering Group has agreed on the strategic directions, a **technical team from the Economic Commission for Africa** could be invited to Juba for further refinement of the proposed policies, frameworks and technical assistance requirements. The invitation for this team should however go out as early as September, if the team is to come to Juba by October or early November.

Another responsibility of the Steering Group is to develop a detailed **budget and financial plan** for resource mobilization before the end of 2011, to ensure that the resources required for the civil registration system investment are accurately estimated and sources for required financial support are identified.

Activities envisaged for 2012 relate to creating capacity to be able to launch the civil registration operations by midyear. The activities planned here pre-suppose that the resources for financing the investment have been secured before the end of 2011.

Table 3—Suggested activity schedule for 2012

Action	Involved	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
11. Build Juba central register [Recruitment, hardware, housing, training]	SG, local TA, software consultant, lead ministry staff	███	███	███	███		
12. Build NBS vital statistics module [Hardware, housing, training]	SG, local TA, software consultant, NBS staff	███	███	███	███		
13. Build state registers [Hardware, housing, training]	SG, local TA, software consultant, state administration/staff		███	███	███		
14. Build county registers [Hardware, housing, training]	SG, local TA, software consultant, county administration/staff		███	███	███		
15. Sub-county capacity building [Training]	SG, local TA, software consultant, county administration/staff, sub-county staff, headmen		███	███	███		
16. Inception phase	All	███	███	███	███	███	███

STRATEGIES FOR ACCELERATION OF CIVIL REGISTRATION

5 LINKAGE WITH THE CHILD BENEFIT CASH TRANSFER PROGRAM

The Child benefit Cash Transfer Program (CBCTP) is the lead component of the social protection system that the Republic of South Sudan seeks to implement under the Social and Human Development Pillar of the South Sudan Development Plan[5].

The target group of the CBCTP is households with one or more children aged 0-30 months. It is estimated that 550,000 households will meet this criterion by 2012, amounting to 38% of all households. The program aims to cover 10% of the households (145,000) in 2012/13 and 20% in 2013/14 (300,000 households).

The CBCTP concept paper explicitly states that targeting these households will be linked to the introduction of birth registration. Cash transfers will serve as a very powerful incentive to registration for eligible households.

The concept paper recommends that the same institution should do the birth registration, targeting and registration of beneficiary households in order to "make full use of the potential for synergy and cost-effectiveness". A decision on this recommendation is yet to be taken at the time of drafting of this document. The consultants believe that strong interoperability between agencies (when relevant) is required indeed—a Memorandum of Understanding needs to be in place at least.

On the next page is a depiction of the link proposed between the birth registration process and the CBCTP project (see figure 3 next page).

The suggested process is as follows. A notification of birth will be sent by the village headman via the *"Boma"* chief, to the county (if necessary using the channels of the health units or health centers) when a birth takes place in the community. The county upon receipt issues a Unique Citizen Number to the newborn that is printed on the birth certificate. The birth certificate is then sent back to the family through the same channels as the notification came to the county.

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[5] See the Concept Paper, *A Child Benefit Cash Transfer Program for South Sudan*

The county in turn notifies the CBCTP Secretariat of the birth. Upon receiving the notification of birth from the county, the CBCT Secretariat arranges for the issue of a Cash Transfer Card to the mother of the baby at the Boma-level. The mother brings the birth certificate as a proof of her eligibility to participate in the program and receive the Cash Transfer Card which is handed over. It has her biometric identification and certain credit charged on it.

Banks interested in supporting the cash transfer project arrange for distribution of electronic card-reading machines to local shops across the country. Once the CBCT Secretariat is satisfied that the transfer of the card has been handed over to a properly identified mother, they will electronically release funds from the credit charged on the card. The mother is then able to use the card in these shops and draw money or purchase food and other necessities for the family.

The timeframe for the CBCTP proposed in the Concept Note[6] is as follows for major key milestones as shown in table 4.

Figure 3—Linking the cash transfer program and birth registration

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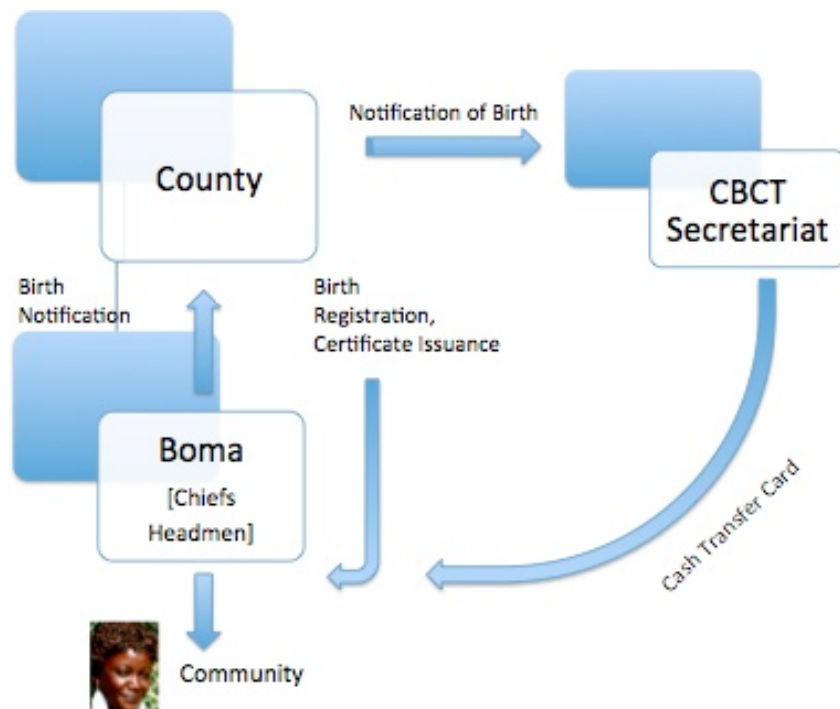
Table 4—Child Benefit Cash Transfer Program Timeframe

	Activity	Time schedule
1	CBCT Secretariat and the Civil Registration Unit work out detailed procedures for targeting and registration	November, 2011
2	MIS set up linking CBCT with the Civil Registration/Vital Statistics unit	December, 2011
3	Field testing of procedures for targeting, registration, delivery, accounting and monitoring	January—February, 2012
4	Improving the procedures based on test results	March, 2012
5	Equipment for registration procured	April, 2012
6	Training of targeting and registration staff	May, 2012
7	Birth registration and targeting starts in States a, b, and c	July, 2012
8	Birth registration and targeting starts in States d, e and f	August, 2012
9	Birth registration and targeting starts in States g, h, l and j	September, 2012

The CBCTP timeframe is integrally linked to the timelines shown in Tables 2 and 3 for establishment of the civil registration system in the country. The timely ability of civil registrars to register births depends on the following elements in particular:

- Responsibility for civil registration to be determined, personnel and financial resources made available to start the registration processes within the planned time period.

- The central birth and death register—and the county registers at least in the areas where the CBCT program will initially function—are established and made functional.

- The transmission of data electronically between the counties involved and the central registration office is functional.

- Government staff at the county level, in health units and -facilities and others involved in the program—including headmen and chiefs at the Boma level are oriented and trained.

6   CIVIL REGISTRATION AND THE NATIONAL ID

It is understood that the National ID is to be issued to all citizens of the Republic of South Sudan who are 18 years of age and above. It was not possible for the mission to obtain details of the proposed National ID system. Reportedly the first IDs will be issued by end of October 2011, starting in Juba.

From experience in other countries in Africa it is expected that a countrywide program will be devised for the population in the country above 18 years of age to be enrolled with biometric data and photographs. The ID cards will then become an important document to establish and verify identity and provide access to respectively secure access to a range of government services.

Whenever the operation to document the population for the ID cards takes place, the entire population in enrolment sites will be gathered together. Traditional community leaders including headmen and chiefs as well as local government officials will attest to the identity of the adult population in their jurisdiction, who will be provided the cards.

This is an eminent opportunity to also register the births of children and youth whose births have not been registered earlier. This will require preparation and planning. One of the key challenges will be the determination of age of previously unregistered persons, whether adult or minor. Accurate estimation of age is very difficult. In most countries some rough and ready means are adopted, including using the ages of others in the peer group or by triangulating the date of birth with events that people in the community recall.

It is necessary to identify and train the persons responsible for registering the births of children at the same time that the National ID enrolment will take place. This has to be done in a way that both processes can be carried out with a minimum of interference between them, including financial arrangements when different ministries are involved.

An important consideration linked to the National ID is about the linkage between the civil registration system and the National ID. Ideally registration of birth and a birth certificate should be a pre-requisite for any person to qualify for a National ID. Since the National ID will be provided at the age of 18, all young people who become 18 should automatically transit to the National ID. In this way the two key databases remain organically linked and South Sudan can have a system that is superior to some other countries where the civil registration database and the National ID database stand independent of each other, creating contradicting identity documents and legal and other confusion.

7   CIVIL REGISTRATION AND HEALTH

Even though at present in South Sudan the number of births taking place within health facilities is still limited, this will improve going forward with investment in the health sector, including that aimed at lowering the high infant and maternal mortality rates.

The health sector has therefore an important role to play in ensuring that all the births that take place in the facilities are registered. There are many good examples from other countries in Africa, where the hospitals and health centers play a role in notification of the registration authorities of the birth of children, or sometimes even housing registration sub-offices.

When births take place at home, the child and mother will come in contact with the health facilities during immunization. Though the rates of full immunization may be low as is the case in South Sudan today (17% according the Southern Sudan Household Health Survey, 2006), the percentage of children who have at least one contact with the immunization outreach is usually much higher. In most countries in East and Southern Africa this will go over 90%. Thus, interoperability between the civil registration function and the health sector offers another fall-back opportunity to capture the births of children.

Opportunities where the health outreach extends to all sections of the population—like National Immunization Days—are a valuable opportunity to reach unregistered children for late registration. There are several examples of countries undertaking such campaigns to overcome the backlog of unregistered children.

When campaign outreach is combined with the use of digital technology, including the use of mobile phones to transmit data over distances, the consultants see the possibility of a rapid scale-up of registration. Admittedly, the mobile network coverage is still limited at present (August/September, 2011), but from trends all over the continent there is little doubt that the situation will dramatically improve within a very short period of time unless government would restrict private initiative in the mobile telephony industry (which the consultants consider unlikely in South Sudan).

8   MORE WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY

A significant movement of population is happening among **returnees from Sudan as well as from the South Sudanese Diaspora** residing in other neighboring countries following the many years of conflict in South Sudan. It is reported that over 300,000 persons have already come to the Republic of South Sudan [7] and more are expected. UNHCR is assisting the transition and rehabilitation of this population. It is understood that UNHCR plans not only to support adult returnees in acquiring their identity documents but to also conduct the registration of all children among this population group. It is necessary that the records of birth of these children be incorporated into the civil register when this is set up.

Registration of births of older children who have not been registered at birth is going to take a longer period to complete. It is therefore necessary to widen the network that can reach these children. The **school system** can play a major role in this by organizing efforts not only to register children who are unregistered but also using a child-to-child approach to locate unregistered children in the community and persuade them and their parents to pursue late registration. The **NGOs** present in South Sudan, e.g. Plan International, which have experience in promoting birth registration, can play a role as well. A network of such interested partners can be engaged in an effort to ensure that the country achieves a high rate of registration of births in a short time.

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[7] UN Radio Report, quoting UNHCR, August 2011

SUPPORTING CIVIL REGISTRATION

9   ADVOCACY AND FUNDRAISING

The consultants have not attempted to estimate what the establishment of the civil registration system will cost. This is something that will need to be done soon, perhaps with the help of some of technical expertise that the Steering Group will mobilize. Costs will depend on the design of the system, degree of interoperability with the national ID system and registration law and procedures. There are countries, including in Africa, where comprehensive computerized civil registration systems are in the process of being established that could provide some information on the costs. South Sudan is in a rather unique position when it comes to dependence on abroad for many goods and services, as a result of its relative poverty, small population and limited domestic demand for specialist services. Unit costs applicable in other African countries may only be a very crude indicator for what costs in South Sudan will be.

Once a reasonably reliable cost estimate is available the Steering Group would need to identify an appropriate fundraising strategy. Apart from resources that the government would like to provide for this purpose, donors with proven interest in supporting registration efforts could be approached for support. In this context it is important to note that a dialogue has been initiated between the African Union and the European Union on civil registration through the aegis of the ECA where the UNICEF Regional Office in Nairobi has provided some support. The issue of reliable identity documents for Africans is of much concern to the European Union as was witnessed at a major meeting in Warsaw in May[8].

Advocacy for birth and civil registration need to be pursued vigorously. An article by Jonathan Todres[9] provides a good summary for educating senior decision makers on the importance of birth registration. On the vital importance of strengthening civil registration, the series of four articles entitled "Who Counts?" in the **Lancet**[10] offers a well-reasoned and powerful set of arguments. The technical paper prepared by UNICEF for the first **Meeting of Ministers in Charge of Civil Registration,** organized by the African Union, the African Development Bank and the ECA in August 2010, also summarizes these arguments.

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[8] Meeting on Civil Registry to support the Rabat Process on Migration and Development, Warsaw, Poland, 9-11 May 2011.
[9] **Human Rights Brief**, Vol. 10, No 3, pp 32-55, 2003
[10] Starting with **The Lancet**, Volume 370, November 3, 2007

10   MONITORING AND EVALUATION

It is essential that an effective M&E system be in place for the civil registration investment project. The concept caper for CBCTP mentions an MIS system, a baseline study and monitoring processes. Coordination is recommended with the M&E system for civil registration investment.

CRC4D discussed with Jamil Abdul Latif Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) of MIT in Boston, U.S.A[11] the suitability of birth registration interventions in general, and the cash benefit transfer-civil registration "twinned" project in South Sudan in particular, for the randomized trial approach J-PAL has pioneered in the context of both short-term output analysis and a longer term outcome or impact evaluation. J-PAL believes that good potential exist for collaboration in Africa between UNICEF and J-PAL Cape Town, and especially in close to a dozen African countries where J-Pal's sister organization IPA has branches.

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[11] Details of the organization and methodology are available at www.povertyactionlab.org.

ANNEX A—STEERING GROUP SUGGESTED COMPOSITION

Lead Ministry (to be defined) – Chair

Ministries and other government

1. General Education and Instruction (ministry)
2. Gender, Child and Social Welfare (ministry)
3. Health (ministry)
4. Interior (ministry)
5. Justice (ministry)
6. Local Government
7. National Bureau of Statistics

UN, other international agencies, NGOs, others

1. UNDP
   - Commission for the Legal Empowerment of the Poor; agenda to provide the poor with a legal identity.
2. UNECA/ACS (Addis Ababa)
   - Primary responsible UN arm in Africa for civil registration technical support
   - Driving the Africa-wide ministerial process for strengthening civil registration.
3. UNFPA
   - Support to civil registration and population statistics mandate.
4. UNHCR
   - Partnership with MoI, Returnee registration, mobile documentation clinics.
5. UNICEF
   - Worldwide promotion of birth registration
   - Birth registration as one of the priorities for MDG target year.
6. WHO
   - Lead in death registration technical support
   - Participation with Health Metrics Network in population and registration initiatives.
7. Plan International
   - "Universal Birth Registration" (UBR) in 2011-16 Strategic Plan
   - Collaboration proposal with UNICEF.
8. Save the Children, other NGOs

ANNEX B—CIVIL REGISTRATION FAQS

Why prioritize civil registration?

The World Health Organization[12] says "that countries need to know how many people are born and die each year…in order to have well-functioning health systems". The only way to count everyone and to track all births and deaths is through civil registration.

Civil registration that provides constantly updated figures of births and deaths by age and sex is also a cornerstone for planning an education system for the country.

Civil registration provides the basis for individual legal identity that is guaranteed through global and African human rights treaties.[13] It is crucial for establishing property and inheritance rights and for the protection it affords to children without caregivers and others at risk of exploitation, violence and abuse.

It is estimated that every year almost 40% (48 million) of 128 million global births and two-thirds (38 million) of 57 million annual deaths remain unregistered[14]. The vast majority of these unrecorded births and deaths occur in developing countries.

Civil registration systems exist in every developed countries and research shows that the transition to rapid economic development in many cases depended on the establishment of civil registration systems[15].

Defining civil registration

The United Nations Statistical Division defines civil registration as the continuous, permanent, compulsory recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events, namely, live births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, divorces as well as annulments, judicial separations, adoptions, legitimations and recognitions.

In simple terms, civil registration is the way by which countries keep a continuous and complete record of births, deaths and the marital status of their people.

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[12] The World Health Organization, Civil registration-Why counting of births and deaths is important, Fact Sheet No. 324, October 2007.

Birth registration & civil registration

It is clear from the definition that birth registration is one of the components of civil registration. Birth registration has been promoted in many parts of the world as one of the rights of all children and is perhaps more visible than other components of a civil registration system. However, the mechanism to register births is embedded in civil registration systems and at a minimum captures data on births and deaths. The framework that is recommended in this proposal envisages this coverage for a start in South Sudan.

What holds back civil registration?

There are many reasons that prevent people from registering births and deaths. Many countries do not have the necessary laws to make it obligatory to register births and deaths. Even when laws exist, it may be expensive for people to register births and deaths. This could be on account of fees charged for such registration. It could also be due to the difficulties and costs people have to overcome for registration at offices located far from their homes. In some countries, only people who live in cities have access to registration services.

Civil registration – risks

It should be recognized that there are risks associated with civil registration. The information it provides can be used to discriminate against certain groups, and therefore it is important to enact law and design systems to reduce these risks. This can be done through building safeguards for data security.

South Sudan and civil registration

Though it took centuries for civil registration systems in European countries to evolve, it is possible to set up modern civil registration systems in a much shorter time. It is possible to use the power of computers, mobile phones, the linking of registration with social protection programs and the outreach of health systems to accelerate civil registration within a much shorter time span. There are excellent examples of good practice from other countries in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

The role of the United Nations in strengthening civil registration

There is no single agency within the United Nations responsible for helping countries set up and manage civil registration. However, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development

Program (UNDP) all work with developing countries to improve different aspects of their population statistics. WHO, and its partner the Health Metrics Network, focus on improving health information systems and the ability of countries to track major causes of death. UNHCR focuses on the, often serious, issues of the lack of registration and a legal identity of refugees and displaced persons and their children.