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The civil registry

**A neglected dimension of
international development**

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CIVIL REGISTRATION AND IDENTITY MANAGEMENT



The civil registry: A neglected dimension of international development

The right to a name and nationality is not only one of the most fundamental human rights but also a requirement to access to basic and essential services such as health and education. This right is exercised through an effective and universal civil registration. It also allows for reliable vital statistics and higher levels of transparency and efficacy that provides the foundation for inclusive public policies, especially social programs. Thus civil registry, legal identity and identity management (Id-M) are central elements for social and economic development.

On the international stage, the creation and dissemination of knowledge around the civil registration and legal identity field has evolved from a single paper produced by UNICEF in 2000, to several knowledge sharing initiatives where the IDB has played a pivotal role. The launching of a webpage (<http://iadb.libguides.com/registros>) in 2011 that provides access to all IDB publications and projects on the topic is just one example of it. Birth under-registration rates has dropped from 18 percent to 9 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) since the IDB, through its legal identity and registry team took on the topic in 2002 . Though the Bank cannot claim the exclusive credit for this achievement, the fact that a development bank took on the issue is of major consequence.

Background



Civil registration and the vital statistics they yield are key tools for transparent and efficient public policy design and development. Civil registries provide the basis for identity documents that are necessary to participate in society. Moreover, civil registries are critical as the data they provide are used to make public policy decisions in areas such as health, education, finance, employment, and land use regulation. Significant anecdotal evidence and some initial more definitive research indicate that lack of identity documents contributes to exclusion of citizens from social services and benefits, justice services, and exercise of civil rights.

The recognition of the topic's relevance within the Bank grew out, in 2002, from a casually posed question while waiting in line in the cafeteria, "Does a birth certificate or an identity document play a role in the access to social services for the traditionally excluded?" Many people initially met this question with a blank stare, but with time it became obvious that there was something to the conundrum. The Bank not only decided to explore the idea, but also took on the challenge of responding to the question with grant resources for initial research and pilot projects. The main problem encountered by IDB in this field was the lack of both qualitative and empirical data, and the response was to delve into the topic, and over time this work has become a, if not the, point of reference for discussion on the issue.

In 2007, when the Bank launched "Opportunities for the Majority,"¹ the issue gained tangible prominence by calling attention to the plight of the "invisible" among us. With the creation of the Institutional Capacity of the State Division (ICS) in the same year, the topic of identity and identification was formally incorporated into the Bank's work.

¹ The "Opportunities for the Majority" initiative promotes and finances market-based sustainable business models to deliver products and services for the Base of the Pyramid in LAC. <http://www.iadb.org/en/topics/opportunities-for-the-majority/idb-opportunities-for-the-majority-serving-the-base-of-the-pyramid-in-latin-america,1377.html>

The importance of the ongoing work on registries was highlighted in 2010 with the Ninth General Capital Increase of the IDB (GCI-9), which established as one of its priority areas “institutions for growth and social welfare.” One of the areas for intervention is defined by this strategy as “enhancing citizenship and property rights by strengthening public registries”, especially civil registries. GCI-9 states that “having a legal identity is a basic human right, and birth registration and identity documents are essential to participate in the formal economy, provide access to public services, and exercise citizen’s rights. The lack of such basic documents severely limits the potential economic and social development of both the undocumented person and the country.” An indicator being used to measure progress in the implementation of the strategy is the percent of children under five whose birth is registered.

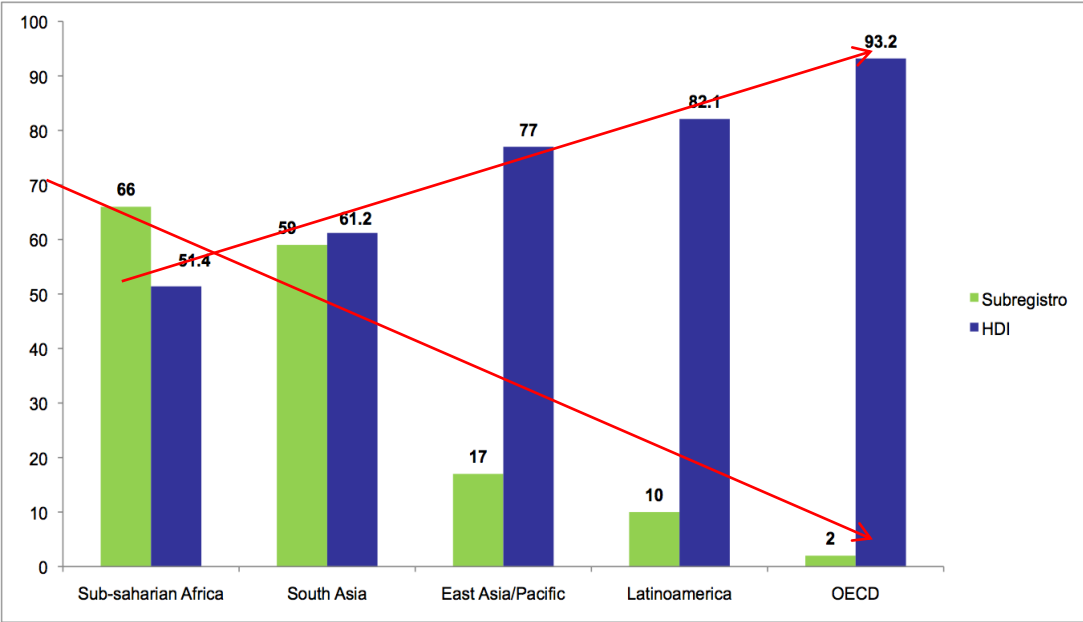


Fig. 1 The higher the Human Development Index, the lower the rates of under registration of births

Results to date

- The IDB has played a key role in the region in bringing the topic to the forefront, through financing interventions and publications.
- Birth under-registration rates have dropped from 18 percent to 9 percent in the region since the IDB took on the topic (around 10 years ago). In Uruguay, universal birth registration rates are now on par with OECD countries. It should be noted that the IDB is not claiming all the credit for this important achievement, however the Bank’s role should not be underestimated. The IDB is currently known and recognized worldwide for its cutting edge work in promoting civil registry and legal identity, as a precondition for social, economic, and inclusive development.

These results were achieved through the implementation of the following cutting edge projects and initiatives among others:

- In Peru, registration services are now available to the poorest and most remote populations in the municipality of Huancavelica.
- In Jamaica, bedside registration has brought under-registration rates down and the Registrar Generals Department reporting information on births and deaths to the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN) is improving the quality of the vital statistics. Furthermore, Jamaica is also receiving financing and technical advice for the design and development of a national identification system (NIDS).
- El Salvador has standardized registration forms and developed software that will link all registry offices in order to increase document security for citizens.
- Ecuador is updating services of civil registration and civil identification by improving the physical environment and the back-office structures, as well as increasing outreach programs and security of identity documents.
- Chile is developing a bedside registration system that will use e-signature and will exemplify efficient inter-institutional coordination. It will also develop and test a methodology that can be adapted and applied in other countries.
- Recently the Civil Registry topic was included in the preparation of country strategies as El Salvador, Chile and Mexico
- Ensuring that all beneficiaries of Bank financed projects have identity documents is one of the safeguards in the Bank's environmental and social impact assessment process.
- The launching of a webpage (<http://iadb.libguides.com/registros>) in 2011 provided access to all IDB publications on the topic. The web page, developed through collaboration between ICS and the Bank's Felipe Herrera Library, also provides links to the registry projects, current news relating to the topic, links to other organizations that work in this area, and relevant publications. The number of citations and web hits to the IDB produced publications is an indication of their quality.
- The Bank sponsored a call for proposals in December 2011 to develop a set of indicators to measure institutional capacity and quality. This initiative has been signaled as one of the most cutting edge initiatives in the area in terms of quantitative research. The number of hits the website received through the application period was "off the charts".
- The IDB has piloted and fine-tuned identity management workshops for public officials, decision makers, and civil registry employees, which have been carried out by request of the national authorities in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. The objectives of the workshops have been to contribute to the national dialogues around civil registration and civil identity, resulting in a deeper and wider technical engagement between the IDB and the countries involved.
- The IDB has consistently delivered quality products by bringing in high level experts as panelists and creating synergies between registries in the region. The projects have also

involved cutting edge technology in topics ranging from biometrics, smart-cards, inter connectivity, interoperability, to traditional topics like sociology, demographics, communication and logistics, to mention a few. The main objectives of all the projects have been to strengthen the administrative and institutional capacity of the registries to enable them to bring their services closer to the citizens, and provide a faster and more secure service.

- As part of the effort to enhance project design and technical dialogue the IDB published a glossary currently available in the Bank's intranet. The glossary will be updated to a Dictionary in 2013, with the support of an external editorial committee.
- In 2013 the IDB will lead the development and organization of an international conference on identity management, in close collaboration with the other development banks, with the technical and financial support of the Government of South Korea. The objective is to bring together the borrowing member countries of the three regional banks with the goal of boosting South-South collaboration.



Civil Registry: Capiibary

Critical factors and Lessons Learned

- There cannot be “cookie cutter” projects in this area given that the right to identity and the registration projects are issues defined in the national legislation, starting with the constitution.
- Civil registry is a principal institution for the compliance of the Millennium Development Goals, because 10 of the indicators originate from the registration of births and deaths. Sound identity management is a challenge for both developed and developing countries, but obviously with a greater burden for the latter.
- The civil registry is also a principal institution for the issuance of the machine readable passports, given that the identity of the individual originates in the civil registry. One of the main problems the passport issuing authorities face is in the trustworthiness of birth certificates, which in the cases of developing countries are often of dubious quality.

Developing countries will have to invest considerable amounts in their civil registration and identification systems to bring them up to internationally acceptable standards.

- Since there was no lead agency in this field, it was up to the IDB to develop technical expertise, generate knowledge and take on the role as trailblazer, a role that today is widely recognized.
- The knowledge was generated by a series of qualitative studies on the consequences of under registration that were validated by the countries, thus establishing a technical dialogue with the member countries in the area of identity management. The IDB has become the reference on the matter, and even where it has not been directly involved in the financing, the Bank has been working closely with governments in the region, and over the years the importance of the Civil Registry has become increasingly recognized, which had had positive budgetary and legislative results for the institutions.
- Considerable awareness-raising efforts by the IDB in the area of identity management resulted in the design of cutting-edge projects that have been successfully implemented.
- One of the challenges was the multi-sectorial approach that a registry project entails. This signifies that more detailed preparatory work is needed for each project than is customary in the Bank. The number of stakeholders is high, and it is essential to involve them from the start. Once under implementation these projects also require a great deal of backstopping and counseling, which is often limited by the administrative budget assigned to project development and follow up.
- Although the organizational structure and processes of the IDB sometimes generate delays and restrictions for effective responses to the countries, flexibility, pro-activeness and creativity among IDB have favored the design and execution of projects in this area.
- Perseverance has paid off to date, but there is still a lot the IDB can do to ensure a unique and legal identity for all citizens and residents in the region, which will allow the governments to have better planning tools and structures.

Recommendations for the Bank

- Consolidate the team and review resource allocation, in order to respond to increasing demands from our borrowing member countries.
- Increase and improve cross-sector work within the Bank. Much more could be done to promote registration in projects in areas such as health and education.
- Generate more research – to obtain better data - to improve project design. This is vital to IDB’s continued lead role. What cannot be measured cannot be improved.
- Enhance IDB’s capacity to contribute to the strengthening of inter-agency collaboration to improve South-South collaboration. Civil registration and identification are highly specialized tasks, and initial cooperation with the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank has already produced promising synergies between member countries.

Enhance internal and external knowledge and capacity. This can be done by institutionalizing the training course on “Identity Policies” we developed in 2011 with the help of London School of Economics and Michigan State University.

- Enhance the Identity Management workshops that have been developed for borrowing member countries; consider the identification of an expanded set of human and financial resources that can contribute to these workshops.



Civil Registry



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