

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of the MEASURE Evaluation PIMA Update (MEval-PIMA) showcases MEval-PIMA's work to strengthen the civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system.

Birth registration is essential for public health as it allows authorities to estimate the size and scope of epidemics and other health issues. Governments rely on a robust civil registration system to know where to distribute resources that will most effectively overcome disease and provide health services to those who need them most. According to the World Health Organization, a country should have registration of births and deaths coverage above 80 percent for its data to be considered complete and reliable.

Free Birth Registration Helps Improve Data Collection for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

Meet eight-month-old Yusuf and his mother. The two have come for medical treatment at Fafi District Hospital in Garissa County, Kenya. Yusuf is the last born in a family of seven and is his mother's only child born in hospital. Yusuf's family is also among the first beneficiaries of free birth registration in Fafi sub-county. Both Yusuf's birth in a hospital and the registration of his birth are important events that will help to shape the future of health services delivery in Fafi sub-county and in Garissa.

A fully functional civil registration system with complete birth registration provides information on local demographics (such as the age and gender of a population) to allow program managers to better plan health service delivery. At least eight out of every 10 births in a given area should be recorded so that a true picture of population trends can be drawn. Civil registration (the continuous, universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events, such as births and deaths) provides the "denominator" of the population, from which more accurate statistics can be derived for various subsets of the population.

The national average of birth registration in Kenya was 58.4 percent in 2014, while the average birth registration in Garissa was only 29.7 percent. According to Dr. Erick Ochieng, the medical officer in Fafi sub-county, the cost of registration and the long distances to the civil registration office contributed to the low percentage of births registered in the sub-county. "The long distance and cost of accommodation for the night is too



Photo by Yvonne Otiemo, MEval-PIMA

Yusuf and his mother attend a clinic at the Fafi sub-county hospital. Yusuf's family is one of the beneficiaries of free birth registration in Garissa.

expensive for the community," explains Dr. Ochieng.

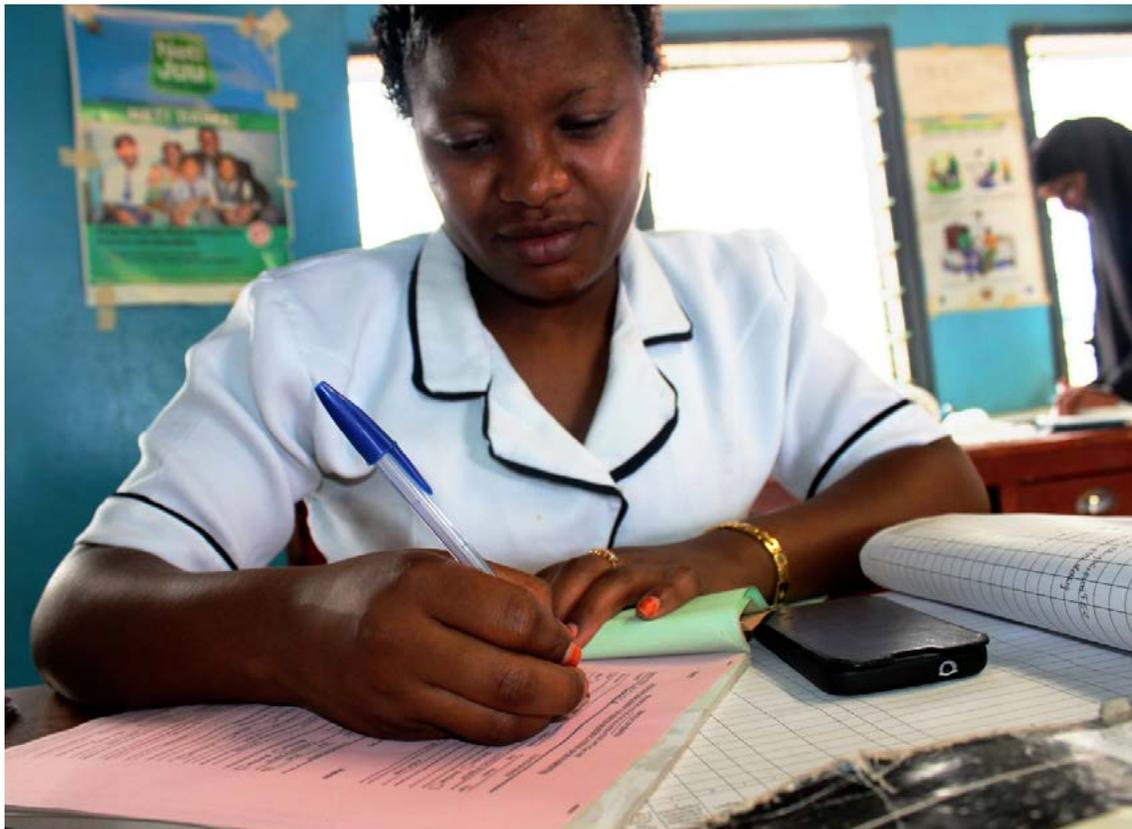
Yusef's mother explained the difficulties for her family: "To get the birth registration certificates for Yusuf's siblings, my husband had to travel to Garissa town and stay for almost a week for the paperwork to be processed before he could return home. He would then come back and stay for a month before returning to Garissa to collect the birth certificate. This means another two days of travel."

Garissa approached the issue of low birth registration by offering free birth registration at the hospital for women who chose to deliver in hospital, attended by a skilled birth attendant. Mothers were informed about the importance of birth registration and were also told that registration fees would be waived for those delivering at the facility, and that they would have the birth certificate in hand before the mother left the hospital. This shift led to a notable increase in the number of birth registrations and the number of women delivering in hospital.

MEval-PIMA has been supporting the Garissa County Department of Health and the local civil registration office to address the challenge of low birth registration. The project has brought various stakeholders together to discuss gaps in civil registration and action plans to improve the system. These include training local registration agents and engaging facility health officers to register births as stipulated in the maternal child health (MCH) strategy on birth registration.

Civil Registration Services (CRS), in partnership with the Ministry of Health, is seeking to increase birth registration by taking advantage of the high child immunization coverage in MCH centers. In this strategy, as they interact with the mothers during immunization clinic visits, health service providers ask about and register births that occurred outside health facilities, such as home births.

Yusef's mother is happy with the results. "I am very happy that my son got his birth certificate within a short time," she said. "When I told my husband that our son's birth certificate was ready for collection at the hospital, he couldn't believe it. My husband doesn't like hospitals. But on that day he accompanied me to hospital to confirm it was true. Since then [because of less resistance from my husband] it is easier for me to bring my son to the clinic."



Mary Koki, a trained health worker, completes a birth notification at Fafi District Hospital in Garissa County.
Photo by Yvonne Otieno, MEval-PIMA

Yusuf is just one of the children who has benefited from the free birth registration. According to Dr. Ochieng, 172 births have been registered between June 2014 and January 2015. This rate of registration was previously difficult to achieve. But the better data will lead to better planning and decision making at the county and national government levels. Other sub-counties in Garissa are planning to apply the same intervention to improve birth registration and skilled delivery.

For more information

In Kenya, the MEval-PIMA project works closely with the CRS to compile annual vital statistics reports.

[CLICK HERE](#) for information on the project's support to civil registration and vital statistics, or

[CLICK HERE](#) for information on MEval-PIMA's support to Garissa County.

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MEval-PIMA works closely with Civil Registration Services in Kenya to build its capacity and strengthen the civil registration and vital statistics system to be comprehensive and accurate throughout the country, allowing public services to be effectively administered and public policies to be targeted and informed.