



MALI CASE STUDY REPORT

Evaluation of UNICEF Work in Strengthening Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems



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Mali Case Study Report. Evaluation of the UNICEF Work in Strengthening Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APAI-CRVS	Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
BR	Birth registration
BR4MNCH	Birth Registration for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
CTDEC	Centre de Traitement des Données de l'Etat Civil
CAAC	Children in Armed Conflict
CR	Civil registration
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
CHW	Community health workers
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
COAR	Country Office Annual Report
DNEC	Direction Nationale de l'Etat Civil
DHIS	District Health Information Software
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
ID	Identity document
ICT	Information and communications technology
INSTAT	Institut National de la Statistique
IDP	Internally Displaced Populations
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
Mou	Memorandum of Understanding
MATDRE	Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale, de la Décentralisation et de la Réforme de l'Etat
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NINA	Numéro d'Identification Nationale
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Acronyms continued ►

◀ **Acronyms** [back](#)

PAEC	Projet d'Appui à l'Etat Civil
PAPEM	Projet d'Appui au Processus Electoral au Mali
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WCARO	West and Central Africa Regional Office



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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A landlocked country in West Africa, Mali is a low-income country with a high annual population growth rate of 3 per cent.¹ More than half of Mali's total population is under the age of 18. The country suffers from a high incidence of poverty including in children, adverse weather conditions, protracted conflict and displacement of populations in the country and across borders. Since 2012, Mali has been facing an armed conflict led by jihadi groups fighting in the Northern and Eastern regions of the country. Given this context, Mali confronts serious challenges in upholding children's rights. In 2018, more than half of children in Mali suffered from at least three forms of deprivation.²

Since the early 2010s, the Government of Mali has overcome great challenges to improve children's rights, including the right to an identity. Considerable progress was achieved in strengthening civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems at the institutional and

community levels. Government coordination mechanisms responsible for overseeing CVRS initiatives were set up at the highest level of government and a National CRVS Strategy was adopted in 2018.³ The Strategy provides guidelines and serves as the key framework

¹ Population source: United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2019 Revision.

² UNICEF, Country Office Annual Report, Mali 2018.

³ La Stratégie nationale de l'état civil de la République du Mali (2018–2022).



document for all CRVS system-strengthening interventions. The Malian government has not only been able to maintain an upward trend in birth registration of children under five during a humanitarian crisis (84.3% in 2012 to 86.7% in 2018) but also to reduce inequities in birth registration between certain rural and urban areas of the country. From 2014 to 2020 (pre-COVID-19), UNICEF worked with development partners to ensure access to quality and equitable CRVS services, especially in the crisis-affected areas that had a weak government presence, while striving to maintain its neutrality and humanitarian space. To achieve this objective, UNICEF focused on strengthening institutional frameworks, supporting workforce capacity, securing the provision of adequate service delivery, and ensuring accessibility of reliable data through the use of innovative tools. UNICEF supported the government in conducting the comprehensive assessment of the CRVS system which led to the elaboration of the National CRVS Strategy. The document addressed the deficiencies in the CRVS systems and provided recommendations to improve the legislation in place and its application. The drafting of the National CRVS Strategy was based on the assessment's findings and was implemented in 2018. Another major achievement supported by UNICEF was the successful interoperability of systems between the health sector and CRVS, a collaboration that culminated in a Memorandum of Understanding between the two sectors. As agreed in the MoU, allowing community health workers to act as birth notifiers led to significant increases in birth registration in the targeted areas and among the most hard-to-reach populations.

Through a theory-based approach and desk review process, this case study examines UNICEF engagement and identifies the initiatives undertaken between 2014 and 2020 to strengthen CRVS in Mali, as well as the bottlenecks that still constitute an obstacle to building a resilient CRVS system. The analysis highlights UNICEF's identifiable contributions that led to an increase in birth registration rates and shows that, to date, UNICEF's integrated approach to CRVS makes it a key player in birth registration at the decentralized level and a strong partner to governmental institutions in charge of CRVS. Finally, the report shares good practices, lessons learned and areas of improvement for future practice.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the situation

Mali suffers from high poverty rates, with 50 per cent of its population living below the poverty line, accompanied by stark socioeconomic and gender inequalities. The prevalence of child marriage and fertility rates are some of the highest in the world. Since 2012, the country has been experiencing terrorist-affiliated attacks on its territory, particularly in the Northern and Eastern regions. Due to insecurity in the conflict-affected regions, Mali faces recurrent humanitarian crises and significant development challenges. In this context, the provision of and access to basic services including birth registration has been challenging, thus hindering progress in achieving key results for children.

Birth registration (understood in this case study as birth registration for children under five years old) is estimated at 86.7 per cent based on the latest Demographic Health Survey (DHS) of 2018 – a slight increase from the 84.3 per cent of 2012. Differences in birth registration are important throughout the country, depending on the place of residence, wealth quintile, and the mother's level of education (mothers also often happen to be the head of household). However, no substantial difference in sex-based birth registration rates has been found, with less than a 2-point differential between men and women (respectively 87.8% and 85.6%). Similarly, the gap between children registered before the age of two (88.4%) and the age of five (85.6%) is inconsequential. However, of the 86.7 per cent of children who were registered, 9.2 per cent did not possess a birth certificate, preventing them from accessing basic rights and services.

Mali experiences major difficulties in providing birth registration to all children. In addition to the challenging country context, the lack of institutional capacity, unavailability of reliable data to monitor progress, and inadequate resource mobilization are some of the main barriers in reaching all children. To address these issues and ensure the protection of children's rights, the Government of Mali reformed its CRVS system by strengthening its institutional framework with the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the DNEC, la Direction Nationale de la Statistique, the Fédération Nationale des Associations de Santé Communautaire, and l'Association des Municipalités du Mali in 2017 and the implementation of its National Strategy for the Reform and Modernization of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (referred to in the case study as the 'National CRVS Strategy') a year later. Mali is pursuing its efforts to build capacity and mobilize resources for CRVS strengthening by partnering with development partners such as Global Affairs Canada, the European Union and the Belgian development agency Enabel, among others. Together, they are working towards achieving universal civil registration in Mali.

1.2 Methodology for a case study as part of the global evaluation

This report was produced using information obtained from an in-depth desk review and it was complemented with the information obtained from key informant interviews. The selection of Mali as a case study for the evaluation was



done according to several criteria explained in the evaluation report.⁴ The evaluation methodology used for this country case study is based on theory-based contribution analysis and is used to elaborate on the relative influence/contribution of the UNICEF Country Office to a known, discernible change or result. For this evaluation, those known, discernible changes are based primarily on the access, inclusion and coverage of birth registration as officially established over an observed period of time, from 2014 to 2020 (pre-COVID-19). While the analysis is based on these years, elements from before 2014 have been included whenever it has been appropriate to bring a historic context and perspective to the main developments during the observed time period. Progress in rates of registration of other vital events is also considered.

The analysis aims to provide detailed information on the actions of UNICEF, the government and other partners in order to adequately tell the 'contribution story'. To that end the analysis is centred on elaborating the CRVS-strengthening logic of intervention of the national stakeholders as well as that of UNICEF in Mali. The methodology focuses further on the analysis, which aims to verify the steps and assumptions in the logic of intervention, their realization in practice, and other major factors contributing to the results. This way, the analysis provides a granular view of what works specifically related to the strengthening of the CRVS systems. Based on observed results, this report focuses on why and how the result was achieved, whether UNICEF-supported efforts influenced or made an important contribution to the observed result, and what role that intervention played vis-à-vis those of other actors.

⁴ See the report here: <https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/reports#/detail/16474/evaluation-of-unicef-work-in-strengthening-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-systems>



2 COUNTRY CONTEXT ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

2.1 Country context

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Located in the heart of West Africa, Mali is a landlocked country bordered by Mauritania, Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Senegal. Mali is a country with 50.3 per cent of its population living in poverty, ranking 184th out of 189 countries on the 2018 Human Development Index.

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Capital city: Bamako

Official working language: French

Territorial size: 1 240 190 km² (World Bank, 2018)

Total population: 19,658,031 (World Bank, 2018)

Ministry responsible for civil registration:

Ministère de l'Administration du Territoire et de la Décentralisation (MATDRE)

Civil registration agency: Direction Nationale d'Etat Civil (DNEC)

National statistical office: Institut National de la Statistique (INSTAT)

Since 2012, Mali has been experiencing an armed conflict with jihadi groups in the country, predominantly in the Central and Northern regions. The repeated attacks and tensions in these regions have impacted the execution of initiatives and projects, with direct effects on birth registration rates.

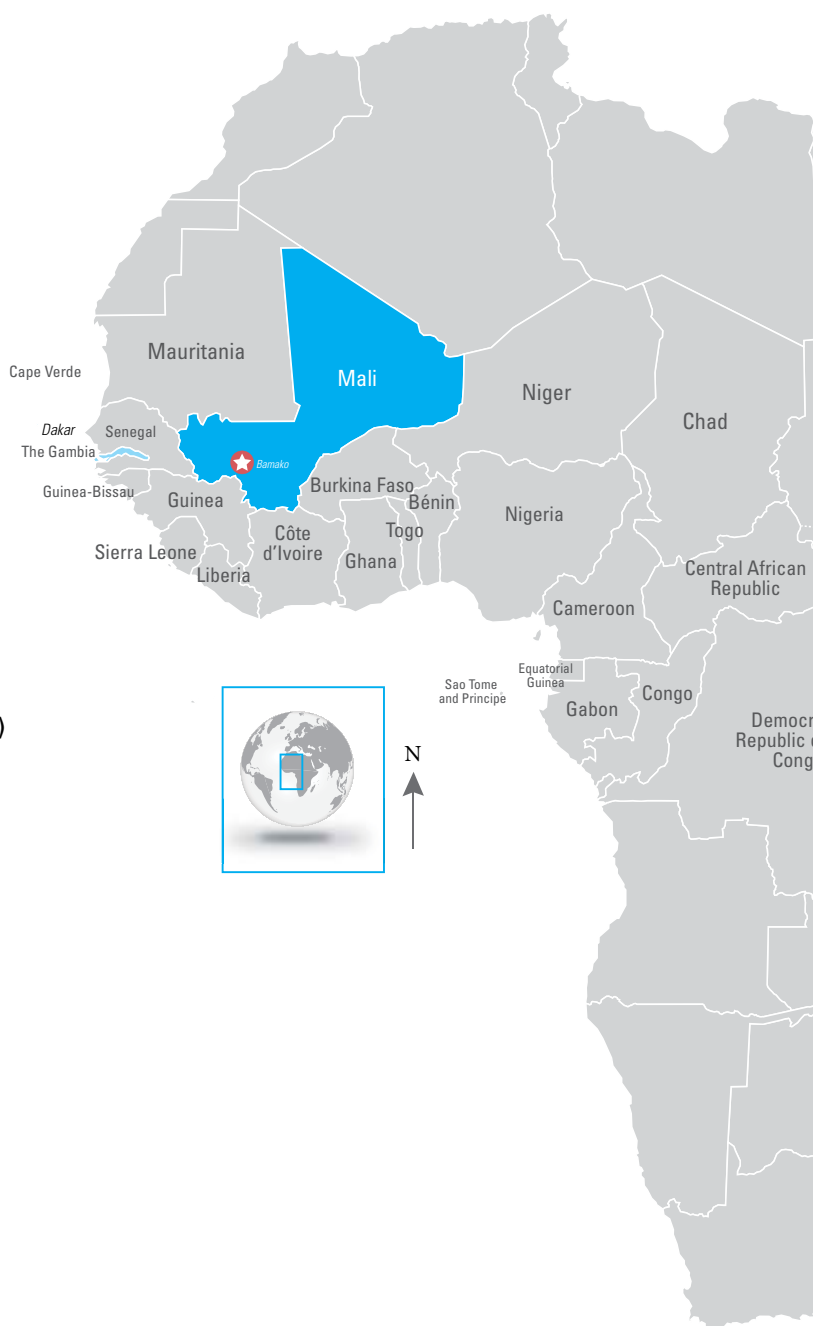



Figure 1: Key vital statistics indicators

Births	
Children under 5 years of age whose births were reported as registered <i>SDG Indicator 16.9.1</i>	86.7% (DHS 2018)
Births attended by skilled health personnel <i>SDG Indicator 3.1.2</i>	67% (2018) ⁵
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)	95 ⁶
Total fertility rate (live births per woman)	5.9 (2018) ⁷
Adolescent fertility rate (per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 years) <i>SDG Indicator 3.7.2</i>	174 (2018) ⁸
Deaths	
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	9.1 (2019) ⁹
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) <i>SDG Indicator 3.2.2</i>	60% (2019) ¹⁰
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) <i>SDG Indicator 3.2.1</i>	94% (2019) ¹¹
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) <i>SDG Indicator 3.1.1</i>	562 (2017) ¹²
Marriages	
Women aged 20–24 married or in union before age of 15 <i>SDG Indicator 5.3.1</i>	16%
Women aged 20–24 married or in union before age of 18 <i>SDG Indicator 5.3.1</i>	54%
Divorce registration rate	Not available

Mali follows a decentralized system with regard to civil registration. The communes (villages) are key players in registering vital events and keeping records. The Sous-Prefects coordinate actions with the communes with regard to processing civil registration, while the Prefects oversee the

transmission of civil registration data to the central government.

Between 2012 and 2018, birth registration rates for children under five increased from 84.3 per cent (DHS 2012/2013) to 86.7 per cent (DHS 2018.)¹³ Death, marriage and divorce registration rates are

⁵ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2019. Children. Food and Nutrition: Growing Well in a changing world*, UNICEF, New York, 2019.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Population Division World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision*, DVD Edition, 2019.

¹⁰ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2019. Children. Food and Nutrition: Growing Well in a changing world*, UNICEF, New York, 2019.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.



very low and figures are not available for these categories. About 77 per cent of children under five possess a birth certificate and this proportion remained constant throughout the observed time period. Additionally, Mali has one of the highest prevalence rates of child marriage worldwide, with 53 per cent of girls in Mali married before the age of 18 and 18 per cent before the age of 15 (INSTAT MALI, 2018).

The birth registration (BR) rate is relatively high in Mali considering it is a low-income country. Although there is not any fact-based evidence to support the following claim, the high BR rate is probably due to Mali's relatively long history with CRVS systems as well as traditional customary habits to register all births with the village chief. After independence from France, Mali enacted a number of legislative instruments to strengthen its legal framework on CRVS.

Birth registration rates are uneven throughout the country, with most of the observed variation dependent on the region, socioeconomic status and the distance to the closest civil registration centre. The gap in birth registration based on wealth status is fairly important, with almost all children from the wealthiest families (98.2%) registered. This rate drops to 77.7 per cent in the poorest households. However, progress was made over the observed time period as the gap was reduced from 25 per cent to 20 per cent. In urban areas, 96.3 per cent of children are registered compared to 84.3 per cent in rural

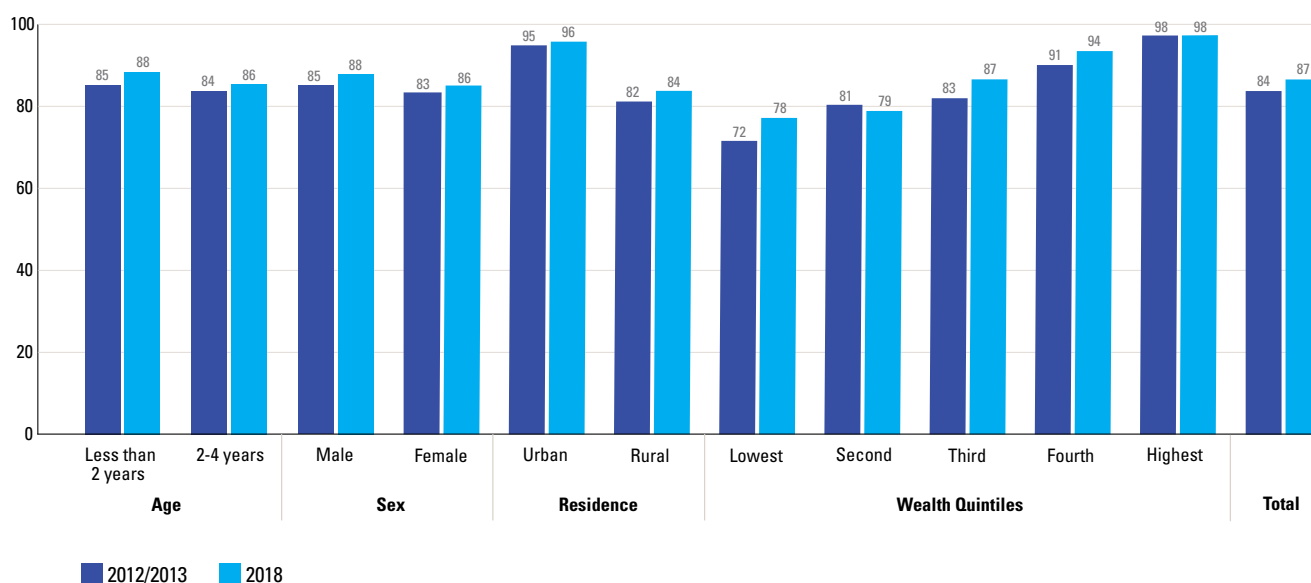
areas. In Bamako, almost all births are registered (98.2%) while in the region of Kidal, less than 2 out of 10 children are registered (17.5%). The low registration rate in the Kidal region can in part be explained by the terrorist attacks in the area, where registration centres have been destroyed. Additionally, the average distance to travel to the closest civil registration centre is estimated at 25 km, with variations dependent on whether the person lives in the capital city (1 km to the closest centre) or in a rural area (66 km for Kidal region). These variations based on socioeconomic status and location remain constant throughout the observed period, except for the region of Mopti which increased its birth registration by almost 15 per cent from 2012 to 2018. Furthermore, there is no substantial difference in birth registration rates based on sex (less than 2 points) or age group (less than 3 points).

Additionally, the mother's level of education or awareness on procedures related to birth registration impact the likelihood of their child being registered at birth. According to MICS 2015, a child whose mother holds a secondary-level education is registered at birth 98 per cent of the time, compared to 94 per cent with a primary-level education, and 85 per cent with no education at all. For the children who were not registered before the age of five, 29 per cent of the mothers were not aware of how to proceed with their child's birth registration.

¹³ MICS 2015 data are also available, showing a birth registration rate of 87.2%. To ensure coherence and consistency, data points from DHS 2012/2013 and DHS 2018 are compared throughout the case study.



Figure 2: Percentage of children under five years old who have their birth registered in Mali, 2012–2018



2.2 Intervention logic to strengthen the CRVS system

Conflict erupted in Mali in 2012 and since then there have been violent attacks on its territory, seriously disrupting the government's ability to provide basic services. Despite this challenging environment, Mali has made significant progress in the last decade to strengthen its CRVS system.

The Malian government recognizes the importance of a robust, resilient and sustainable national CRVS system to achieve the SDGs and in particular target 16.9. Mali aimed to put in place the recommendations on CRVS laid out during the Conferences of African Ministers responsible for civil registration held between 2009 and 2015. To this end, the Malian government completed a comprehensive assessment of its national CRVS system in 2016. The assessment concluded that there was a gap between the supply of CRVS services and the demand for CRVS services. On one hand, the CRVS system was weak and unreliable, and lacked institutional frameworks to ensure consistent delivery of services. On the

demand side, the assessment found that part of the population was unaware of the importance of registering vital events, and thus less inclined to register births and deaths. Additionally, the assessment highlighted the need for a national CRVS framework document and for a better system to produce reliable CRVS data. Subsequently, with the support of UNICEF the government elaborated its National CRVS Strategy for the years 2018–2022 to strengthen CRVS systems in the country.

The National CRVS Strategy aims to promote and increase CRVS service delivery for Malians in the country and overseas. To reach this objective, the Malian government works to

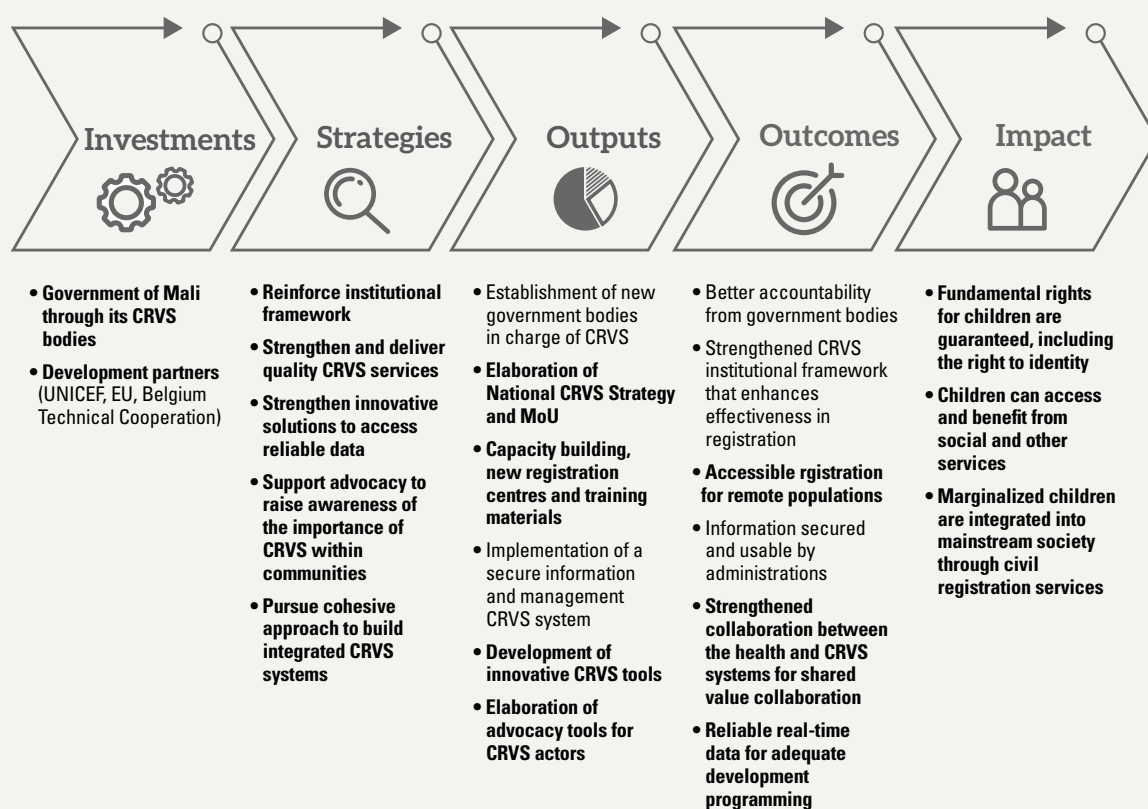
- i) deliver quality services,
- ii) modernize its system through innovative technological solutions to process registration of vital events, and
- iii) provide better collection of its data on vital events in order to implement and monitor development plans and policies.



Since 2011, the DNEC has been in charge of overseeing all actions and initiatives related to CRVS in the country, including the collection of CRVS data. More specifically, the DNEC is in charge of coordinating and supervising the implementation of the National CRVS Strategy. However, with only 25 employees and limited equipment, the DNEC has experienced substantial challenges in meeting its mandate.

Development partners working in the country have contributed to CRVS strengthening through advocacy and capacity-building in an effort to deliver quality and equitable CRVS services and promote birth registration as an essential service in fulfilling children's right to identity.

Figure 3: Elements of Mali's intervention logic on CRVS strengthening



Elements of the intervention logic are based on the National CRVS Strategy 2018–2022.

* The intervention logic for UNICEF CO mirrors that of the government in many ways. As such, UNICEF's areas of intervention are highlighted in **bold** above and reflect the investments, strategies, outputs, outcomes, and impacts pursued through UNICEF's interventions.



2.3 Mapping of strategies used

Reinforcing institutional framework for CRVS

Mali's CRVS system is covered by the Law No. 2011-087 of 30 December 2011 on the Personal and Family Code. The Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and State Reform (MATDRE) coordinates and implements national policies to increase the administration's efficiency across the country. To this end, the MATDRE is in charge of overseeing the implementation of the National CRVS Strategy and ensuring the mechanisms are effective and performing well.

The National CRVS Strategy came into force in 2018 and brought together the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Communication, Ministry of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and development partners for a successful implementation of the CRVS strategy. The strategy lays out nine specific objectives:

1. to strengthen the legal and institutional framework on CRVS;
2. to build capacity to better deliver CRVS services;
3. to promote the importance of registering vital events to hard-to-reach populations;
4. to ensure delivery of CRVS services equitably across the country;
5. to ensure in the long run financing of CRVS activities from centralized state and decentralized regions;
6. to increase the quality and record keeping of registration documents;
7. to increase the quality of CRVS data collected;
8. to set a up mechanism to collect and treat data on deaths;
9. to promote the use of ICT technology for CRVS.

The Strategy is split into two stages: the first stage (2018–2019) was dedicated to the launch of the

CRVS Strategy and implementing urgent measures such as increasing financial and technical support to put the action plan into effect; revise legal and regulatory instruments to improve the efficiency of CRVS; and start awareness campaigns. The second stage (2020–2022) is focusing on reinforcing human capacity and actors in communities; securing permanent records of CRVS data; and providing IT equipment for civil registrars. To strengthen CRVS systems, the government is being supported at financial and technical levels by development partners such as the European Union, UNICEF and other UN agencies, Global Affairs Canada, the cooperation for development from Italy, the Belgian development agency, and the French company CIVIPOL, and other UN agencies.

Furthermore, to reinforce the inter-operability of systems between the Health and CRVS sectors, the government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2017 between the DNEC, Direction Nationale de la Santé, and local organizations to formally allow community health workers (CHWs) to notify births in their communities. This cross-sectoral work has been particularly effective in registering newborn babies in the legal time frame of 30 days.¹⁴

Providing equitable access to CRVS services

Registering births, marriages and deaths in Mali is free and mandatory (Personal and Family Code, Articles 157, 281, 185) within a time frame of 30 days after the birth (Article 158), 15 days for religious marriages (Article 280), and 30 days for deaths (Article 185). To ensure the effective application of the law, the government and partners worked between 2014 and 2020 to increase service supply of CRVS services and capacity-building at the decentralized level, in particular in the conflict-affected regions. The government has leaned on financial and technical

¹⁴ UNICEF, Evaluation sommative du programme BR4MNCH sur l'enregistrement des naissances pour les nouveaux-nés et les enfants au Mali (2014–2018).



support from UNICEF to reopen damaged civil registration centres, train personnel and rely on qualified agents to share their knowledge on CRVS procedures in their communities. Focus has also been placed on equipping and providing office supplies to decentralized CRVS structures as well as centralized government bodies involved in CRVS as a means to ensure better management of equitable access to CRVS services across the country.

The MoU contributed to expanding the number of agents outside the CRVS sector who were mandated to notify births. By enabling CHWs to be birth registration notifiers, it simultaneously lifted the geographical (distance) barrier and travel-related costs otherwise incurred by families seeking to register the birth of their child. The implementation of this initiative was particularly beneficial to families living in remote or conflict-affected areas, far away from a functioning civil registration centre, who were struggling to travel to register their child's birth during the legal time frame.

In 2014, a partnership of four years was formed between the Government of Mali, UNICEF (Country Office and WCARO) and Global Affairs Canada through the Birth Registration for Maternal, Newborn, Child Health (BR4MNCH) project. The project's aim was to improve political engagement to strengthen CRVS reforms in the region and coordinate efforts to integrate birth registration as an essential part of cross-sectoral efforts. UNICEF and partners supported the government in standardizing its systems and services, by deploying the innovative platform RapidPro for CRVS data collection, training agents to be qualified to use the platform, and adequately equipping agents to notify births. In terms of political engagement, high-level advocacy led the government to carry out a complete assessment of its CVRS system and to adopt a National CRVS Strategy. Additionally, successful results directly linked to the BR4MNCH project led to the signing of the MoU between the Health and CRVS sectors for CHWs.

Strengthen innovative solutions to improve accessibility of data

In the observed time period, two initiatives were put in place by the government with support from UNICEF and development partners to overcome barriers related to the accessibility of reliable data. Deployed as part of the BR4MNCH project, the RapidPro platform is a tool that allows the transfer of CRVS data in real-time and has been operating in the country since 2017 for CRVS purposes. It is a platform that collects civil registration (births, marriages and deaths) data via mobile phones through a specific number, although collecting data related to deaths has been a challenge. It was tested in four pilot regions to collect and compile quality statistics in a timely manner. Data collected by RapidPro have been operational and accessible since 2019. RapidPro is supported by institutional contracts with Orange Mali and Malitel for SMS, and l'Agence Malienne de Régularisation des Télécommunications for the short codes. Difficulties encountered in implementing the tool have resulted in part from weak mobile reception in these four regions, as well as technical problems with the telecommunications operators which have led to an interruption of the service at various times (as mentioned by a UNICEF country staff interviewee). UNICEF is leading ongoing advocacy efforts to address this issue and increase RapidPro's performance.

In 2018, the European Union launched the €5 million 'PAECSIS project' for a period of four years to support the development of a secured information management system for CRVS with the objective of ensuring that all Malian citizens can enjoy their right to identity. The project is being operated in cooperation with the Belgian development agency Enabel, the Sant'Egidio Community and the French company CIVIPOL. The project has emphasized the need to increase demand and service delivery, and to deploy a CRVS system linked to a biometric database system operated directly by local governments. The project's specific aims are to improve the strategic management of civil registration and



the capacities of local authorities charged with managing CRVS; as well as to have a central register of consolidated CRVS linked to a biometric database and to the CR centres. Initiatives have included capacity-building for civil registration agents as well as awareness campaigns within communities on the demand side. To deploy the CRVS system linked to database, the strategy used has included an update of the current RAVEC database and IT support. PAECSIS hopes to fight against the root causes of illegal migration and forced displacement, as well as to manage the return of illegal migrants in the country.

Support advocacy to raise awareness in hard-to-reach areas

In the observed time period, the Malian government supported advocacy initiatives to raise awareness on the importance of civil registration through a series of events and awareness materials. The Ministry of Communication engaged in partnerships with community networks to inform the most hard-to-reach children, with the financial and technical support of UNICEF, most notably with the production in 2014 of 'Le Guide du citoyen'. This is a brochure that explains in simple terms the nature of birth and death certificates, their use and their relevance in accessing basic services and rights. The brochure was published by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, with the support of Enabel and the 'Projet d'Appui à l'Etat Civil' (PAEC) or civil status support project. The PAEC project was to strengthen CRVS in the Koulikoro region. It was first provided to city halls within the region, where citizens could get the brochure at no cost. It has now been disseminated beyond the initial region with the support of UNICEF.

The National CRVS Strategy also integrates advocacy as part of its strategic approaches. It has included civil society organizations as main actors to successfully carry out awareness and communication campaigns for the universal registration of vital events.

2.4 Mapping of planned and attained products

Mali reformed its CRVS systems at the institutional and community levels during the observed time period, particularly through the establishment of the National CRVS Strategy. As mentioned in section 2.1, the implementation of the National CRVS Strategy has just entered its 'second stage'; that is to say capacity-building and digitized initiatives have recently been initiated. Some of the products outlined in the National CRVS Strategy are planned to be achieved by the end of 2022. Considering the fairly recent implementation of the Strategy, some of the products listed below that pertain to the CRVS Strategy may not have yet been initiated, are currently in progress or have not been fully attained.

Reinforce institutional framework

In the last decade Mali has set up a number of instruments to strengthen its legal and institutional framework on CRVS. Today, the CRVS system is covered by the Law No. 2011-087 of 30 December 2011 on the Personal and Family Code. Book I, Title IV is entirely dedicated to framing the national civil registration system. Yet, the country lacked the institutional frameworks to implement these laws. To address this issue, Mali created several governmental mechanisms and strategies to coordinate CRVS matters:

- The National Directorate for Civil Registration (DNEC), established in 2011, is responsible for the elaboration and implementation of national policy orientations on civil registration.
- The Data Processing Centre for Civil Registration Data (CTDEC), created in 2013, is in charge of managing a secure database on vital events and uses data from the Recensement Administratif à caractère électoral (RAVEC). RAVEC is a biometric solution that was originally used to register the population on electoral registries between 2012 and 2016.



- The Personal Data Protection Authority (APDP), created in 2013, is an independent administrative authority whose mission is to protect personal data.
- The Memorandum of Understanding between the Health and CRVS sectors, signed in 2017, is a framework arrangement whose purpose is to establish a programme of cooperation enabling community health workers to act as birth registration notifiers.
- The National CRVS Strategy implemented in 2018 and through 2022 currently represents the key policy and operational document for all actions in support of CRVS sector reform in Mali.

Strengthen and deliver quality CRVS services

Delivering quality CRVS services which respond to the citizens' needs has been one of the government's core areas of focus in CRVS strengthening, and development partners have joined forces to support this effort.

Through the UNICEF 'BR4MNCH' project, support was provided to help reinforce capacity-building following an inter-operability of systems approach. Training and brochures were given to health and CRVS agents, informing more workers on how to correctly notify vital events and allowing more births to be entered into the database. Financial support was provided to reopen damaged civil registration centres in the conflict-affected areas and new equipment such as office supplies or new vehicles was provided to adequately operate these centres.

In 2014, Plan International provided birth certificates to 500 children in the conflict-affected area of Timbuktu. The following year, the project was implemented in five areas (cercles) in the Timbuktu region funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. It aimed not only at rehabilitating social infrastructures for local community members and internally displaced people (IDPs) and returning refugees but also

to ensure children have a legal identity. 3,500 children in Mali received free birth certificates through the project. Plan also targeted 600 local government representatives, informing them about the importance of birth registration and the time frame within which to register children (Plan International, 2015).

The National CRVS Strategy makes quality service delivery a priority and lays out specific outputs to this end. By the end of the Strategy's implementation, it aims to ensure that at least 90 per cent of CRVS-related structures are staffed by qualified and trained personnel. To reach this objective, the government aims to provide properly equipped civil registration centres with qualified agents and financial support. Concretely, the government is considering hiring 7,884 agents who are currently working as volunteers in the civil registration centres. It also plans to increase the qualifications needed to register vital events by providing training, courses, and educational programmes for new hires. Recognizing the added value of an efficient inter-operability of systems, the Malian government seeks to continue training the health workforce on issuing birth and death notifications by providing training and learning material. However, no evidence of available or planned funding for these activities could be found during the research process.

Today, issues of accountability with regard to registering vital events still exist at the communal level, making it a challenge for citizens to access their vital event documentation. For example, as it was described by a UNICEF Country staff interviewee, while municipalities – which are responsible for providing civil registration services – register a birth on their registries, that information is not always available to the applicant themselves, meaning a birth certificate is not always delivered to the person it concerns ().

Additionally, the CRVS Strategy aims to have 95 per cent of its CRVS-related structures provided with adequate equipment and office supplies. To do so, the government plans to build



additional civil registration centres and storage infrastructures, and provide civil agents with sufficient civil registry booklets. Finally, it plans to recruit statisticians and computer programmers to improve the quality of data produced and disseminated.

Strengthen innovative solutions to access reliable, real-time data

As a concrete follow-up to the validation of the CRVS Strategy, the European Union financed and led a €5 million civil registration project based on the objectives presented in the Strategy, in particular to increase the quality and record keeping of CRVS data and the ability to collect CRVS data, and to promote the use of ICT for CRVS. The project has invested in digitization by creating a secured information system for CRVS data. The objective of the project is to link, by 2022, the CRVS information system to an existing biometric database capable of securing the identity of the population and to be usable by other local authorities and administrations.

This project builds on earlier efforts to register citizens' identity in a central database. The national government had struggled to create a reliable census registry for electoral purposes by manually registering the population on 'census notebooks'. Mali used a biometric solution initiated in 2008 and conducted a national census and established the country's first-ever computerized civil registry (RAVEC). The census was done through door-to-door visits to collect data. The data collected included vital event information, fingerprints, ID picture, and residence information.

This civil registry was used and strengthened by PAPEM, a UNDP-financed project which ran from 2012 to 2016. PAPEM's primary objective was to register the population for voting purposes on RAVEC. During this period, more than 13.5 million Malians were registered and were assigned a unique National Identification Number (NINA). The NINA was used between 2012 and 2016 as a

system of voter identification during the electoral process and became Mali's first-ever biometrically secure identification document. As of late 2016, more than 15.1 million Malians in the country and abroad were issued with a NINA. The EU project seeks to build on to RAVEC's current biometric database to develop a digitized civil registry that can be used at the decentralized level.

To improve the quality of death-related data, the National CRVS Strategy calls for a study to be conducted on establishing a formal mechanism to collect death registration data from the health sector, as well as streamlining death registration within local communities.

Support advocacy to raise awareness

Advocacy interventions at the community level have been initiated by the government during the observed period. The government formed partnerships with local organizations and structures to disseminate key information through TV spots, radio messages and paper brochures. Key events, discussions and interactions were also organized to inform the population about the importance of civil registration and enable them to express their views and concerns.

In collaboration with the DNEC, Enabel carried out the PAEC project, which supported civil registration at the centralized and decentralized levels. The project took place in the Koulikoro region between 2011 and 2016. The project supported a communications strategy and the elaboration of awareness tools which was used to compile a brochure called 'Le Guide du citoyen' used by the DNEC. The project developed training material for civil registration officials and magistrates. It also piloted a strategy to improve the involvement of local administrations in CRVS at the municipal level.

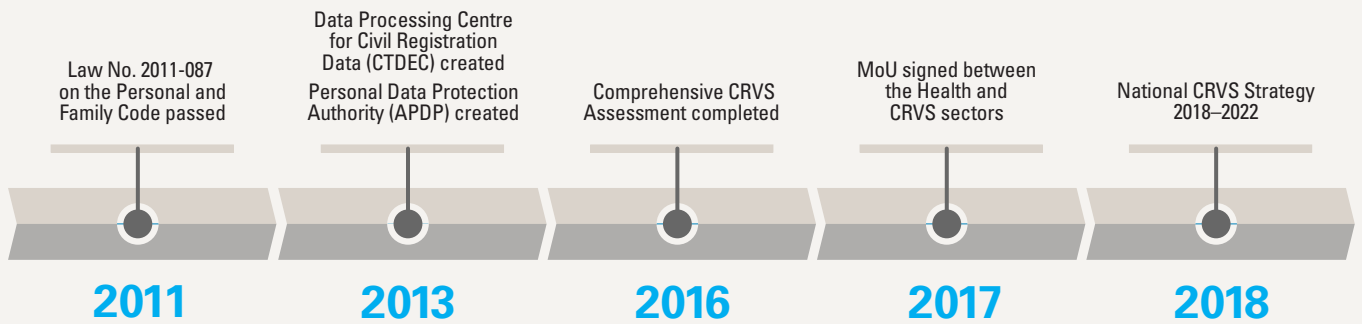
The National CRVS Strategy seeks to continue focusing on advocacy as a means to sensitize hard-to-reach populations on the importance of birth registration. Planned products include



a communication strategy to reach the most vulnerable populations through awareness and media campaigns on the importance of CRVS;

partnerships with civil society to disseminate key messaging; and radio spots and awareness days highlighting the importance of birth registration.

Figure 4: Key milestones





3 UNICEF'S WORK IN CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

3.1 Programming

Before the armed conflict that broke out in 2012, Mali had experienced exceptional political stability, the strengthening of its democratic process and the beginning of decentralization. Initiatives for the protection of children had included capacity-building, the establishment of a data management system, and improved community response. Particular emphasis was placed on birth registration.

It is in this context that the Country Programme 2008–2014 aimed at ensuring that children and women, particularly the most vulnerable, exercise their rights fully. However, the beginning of the Country Programme suffered from the emergence of armed conflict in the Northern regions and an Ebola virus outbreak. The health and security landscape made UNICEF's operations extremely challenging towards the end of the programme. The programme ended up being reoriented to a largely emergency-based one and UNICEF increase its efforts on resource mobilization and partnerships.

In anticipation of a return to peace, the Country Programme 2015–2019 paid particular attention to strengthening the resilience of communities and systems. Its overall objective was to support the Government of Mali in increasing equitable access to basic social services; strengthening the resilience of communities, supporting service delivery systems and promoting policies that were sensitive to the situation of the most disadvantaged groups and children. This programme contributed to the objectives

of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2015–2019 and special efforts were made to integrate equity, gender, resilience and peacebuilding issues.

3.2 Measurable contributions

Project-related contributions

Through the BR4MNCH project, UNICEF WCARO invested heavily in strategic partnerships to improve political engagement as it remained one of the key bottlenecks in CRVS reforms in the region. A solid partnership was maintained with the APAI-CRVS Programme and CRVS Core Group (AUC, AfDB, EC, UN agencies, IDRC and other key partners). New partnerships were built with the regional economic commissions (ECOWAS and ECCAS), la Francophonie (OIF), and the World Bank Group seeking to coordinate efforts and integrate birth registration as an essential part of cross-sectoral and identity efforts.

UNICEF expanded partnerships with NGOs for humanitarian and development activities which contributed to better results for children. Alongside government services, UNICEF collaborated closely with COOPI, Terre des Hommes, Solidarité pour le Sahel (SOLISA), ENDA, and KANUYA as implementing partners, and Child protection subcluster members (IRC, Save the Children, UNHCR and IOM) so that children affected by the conflict received adequate prevention and response services. For birth registration specifically, UNICEF strengthened partnerships at strategic level with CRVS strategic partners such as the European



Union, PAECISIS, NRC, and the French, Canadian and Belgian embassies. UNICEF also partnered with community organizations such as AMM and FENASCOM, and community health actors, to strengthen inter-operability between health and civil registration actors at field level. The aim of those partnerships is to increase birth declaration and certification for newborns and children under 18.

CRVS contributions from actors in humanitarian settings

Work on cross-cutting issues – including birth registration – has been particularly prevalent given Mali’s humanitarian settings and the multiple deprivations faced by Malian children.

Mali’s humanitarian situation has worsened since the beginning of conflict, exposing many children and women to violence and abuse. Children are particularly at risk of being recruited and exploited by non-state armed groups. In the first three quarters of 2019, 571 grave violations against children were recorded in Mali, compared to 544 in 2018 and 386 in 2017. As of the end of September 2019, 277 children were reported killed and maimed – more than twice the total number in 2018.¹⁵ It is estimated that more than 377,000 vulnerable girls and boys currently require protection assistance.¹⁶ UNHCR states that, as of early 2020, over 57,000 Malian refugees, including children, were in neighbouring camps in Mauritania. Lack of birth certificates had hindered their access to basic services or return to country of origin.¹⁷

Since the start of the conflict, a humanitarian response has been provided by international partners including UNICEF.¹⁸ Development partners have provided support to the government to

ensure that children, especially girls, are better protected against violence, abuse and exploitation. Many of the initiatives undertaken during the observed period integrate a holistic approach to child protection. While birth registration may not have a central place in these interventions, legal identity is certainly a component that has been included in the humanitarian response.

The Inter-Cluster Coordination Team for Mali, of which UNICEF is a member, helped provide coordinated humanitarian assistance to the populations in the conflict-affected regions. In 2017, the group planned to target 18,000 girls in the Goa, Menaka, Mopti, and Timbuktu regions and issue them with birth certificates.¹⁹ No information could be found on whether this target was met.

Additionally, the Working Group on Access to Justice, which is also part of the Inter-Cluster Coordination Team, provided advocacy efforts through awareness discussions and community dialogue. In 2017, 119 people had participated in discussions around civil registration documentation; 3,339 adults and 1,266 children benefited from the Working Group support to register their birth and/or obtain an identity card.²⁰

In 2019, greater attention was placed on children in armed conflict through the visit of the Special Representative of Secretary General (SRSG) for Children in Armed Conflict (CAAC), and the Security Council Working Group for CAAC. The SRSG advocated for the extension of free birth registration beyond the existing 30-day time frame and for the adoption of a moratorium to register more than 100,000 children in the North of Mali who have not yet been registered. No evidence could be found that this initiative has been achieved.

¹⁵ UNICEF, Central Sahel Advocacy Brief, January 2020.

¹⁶ UNICEF, Children under Attack, 2020.

¹⁷ UNHCR, Middle East and North Africa Bureau, address by Ayman Gharaibeh, Director, 77th Meeting of the Standing Committee, March 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/5e6a50337.pdf>

¹⁸ Mali was designated as an L2 emergency for the period January 2013 to September 2013. In August 2019, Mali was once again designated an L2 emergency as part of the Central Sahel region and is still an L2 emergency.

¹⁹ Inter-Cluster Coordination Team, Cadre de Monitoring De La Réponse Humanitaire, ‘Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2017 – MALI’.

²⁰ OCHA, ‘Rapport Inter-Cluster’, Mali, octobre à décembre 2017, p. 11.



This helped to raise the CAAC agenda with the government and the armed groups, and to support the Country Task Force on monitoring and reporting. These initiatives emphasized that each child should be given the right to an identity through birth registration.

Additionally, in June 2020 the African Union and UNICEF launched the 'No Name Campaign: For every child legal identity, for every child access to justice'. With the increasing realization that timely birth registration is one of the key elements to accelerate access to a child-friendly justice system for all African children, the campaign seeks to rally for the speedy implementation of universal registration of children at birth and the urgency to reposition civil registration and vital statistics in Africa to address the indignity of invisibility. The launch of the campaign is equally timely as there is concern about birth registration rates falling behind because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most recently, UNICEF, through the 'Children are Under Attack' global advocacy campaign initiated in 2020, is on the ground with local authorities, other UN agencies, NGOs and civil society, helping

the children in armed conflict recover and rebuild every day. The campaign calls for reinforcing birth registration as a tool not only to protect children, but also to facilitate their release and reintegration if recruited or detained.

The analysis aims to provide detailed information on the actions of UNICEF, the government and other partners in order to adequately tell the 'contribution story'. To that end the analysis is centred on elaborating the CRVS-strengthening logic of intervention of the national stakeholders as well as that of UNICEF in Mali. The methodology focuses further on the analysis, which aims to verify the steps and assumptions in the logic of intervention, their realization in practice, and other major factors contributing to the results. This way, the analysis provides a granular view of what works specifically related to the strengthening of the CRVS systems. Based on observed results, this report focuses on why and how the result was achieved, whether UNICEF-supported efforts influenced or made an important contribution to the observed result, and what role that intervention played vis-à-vis those of other actors.

Figure 5: UNICEF Mali funding overview, 2014–2020 (in USD)

UNICEF Mali							
2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
161,898	71,604	318,688	1,518,160	1,097,619	422,665	42,597	3,633,231

Source: UNICEF, Vision funds utilization reports, own elaboration



3.3 Outputs and strategies

1 Provide every child with a certificate upon birth

At the onset of the observed period, Mali was already facing terrorist attacks on its territory and consequently UNICEF's work was primarily focused on providing a humanitarian response to restore peace and basic social services. In that context, UNICEF still worked to provide every child with a birth certificate by focusing on first strengthening the nationwide system and then providing a rapid catch-up opportunity for three northern regions (Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal) where birth registration has been disrupted by the crisis.

Strengthening the national CRVS system

In 2016, UNICEF supported the government in conducting the comprehensive assessment of the CRVS system which led to the elaboration of the National CRVS Strategy. The document addressed the deficiencies in the CRVS systems and provided recommendations to improve the legislation in place and its application. The drafting of the National CRVS Strategy was based on the assessment's findings and it was implemented in 2018. Additionally, UNICEF pursued its efforts to strengthen the inter-operability between the Health and CRVS systems. After a pilot project which produced successful results in birth registration, UNICEF advocated for a cooperation agreement between both systems. In 2017, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the DNEC, Direction Nationale de la Santé, and local associations to nominate community health workers (CHWs) as village birth registrars.

Strengthening and delivering equitable access to CRVS services

While new CRVS legislation was established, it also needed to support the strengthening of

capacity at the decentralized level for it to produce concrete results. During the conflict, critical infrastructure was destroyed or looted in Northern Mali and the service delivery was interrupted in many areas, preventing access to civil registration services. In 2014, UNICEF and the DNEC trained 82 new civil registration officers in the Gao and Timbuktu regions to collect data on birth and other civil registration events. Additionally, UNICEF supported the operationalization of 160 civil registration services through the provision of registration booklets and computer kits. In 2015, UNICEF helped restore and reopen 37 CRVS centres and provided training to 1,478 civil registration officers and birth informants. This training was aimed at ensuring that CRVS data were collected in accordance with existing laws and procedures.

In 2016, UNICEF provided technical and financial support to train 834 actors and equipped 150 civil registration centres with declaration kits, including typewriters. The 150 centres were operational and provided birth certificates to parents in a timelier manner. This all contributed to the birth registration rates improving in the Mopti region.

In an effort to provide local agents with the adequate tools and knowledge to register births and deaths, in 2017 UNICEF supported the development of a harmonized training module on CRVS and trained 6,876 civil registration officials. These officials were given the tools to provide high-quality services in accordance with standard procedures. This initiative contributed to the free issuing of birth certificates for approximately 410,000 children. Furthermore, 71 trainers were made available at the decentralized level to train 6,000 civil registry officials on procedures for registering vital events. UNICEF supported this initiative by advising on the design and facilitating the training modules.

From 2014 to 2018, UNICEF along with development partners implemented a birth registration project in four African countries including Mali, known as the BR4MNCH project (Birth Registration for Maternal, Newborn and



Child Health in Africa). Funded by Global Affairs Canada, the project covered four regions in Mali at a total cost of CAN\$20 million. During the course of the project and despite the challenging environment, particular efforts were made in the North to improve services at the community level. UNICEF's efforts focused on providing access to critical services during the conflict:

- UNICEF provided technical assistance and supported capacity-building to harmonize and standardize systems and services. Concretely, UNICEF supported the deployment in four regions of RapidPro, a data collection tool that operates with simple mobile phones to record the number of births and deaths, allowing the follow-up of system performance in real time. It also mobilized community health workers to notify births. The objective was to reduce the number of village community agents, which are costly to train, equip and supervise as they are often volunteers. This initiative proved to be successful and over the project cycle a total of 7,650 civil agents were trained on CRVS procedures in the country and civil registrars were adequately equipped to process birth declarations.
- Regional Office support was provided through regular country missions jointly with regional Health and HQ colleagues. This helped in following internationally recognized standards on health service delivery and inter-operable data flow with CRVS.
- UNICEF HQ provided technical assistance through a series of training courses, offered in conjunction with the World Bank Group Open Learning Campus. These courses on CRVS were intended to build the capacity of policymakers, public and civil servants, university students, researchers, development practitioners, and civil society organizations by providing practical tools and approaches in maintaining CRVS systems in humanitarian settings. UNICEF HQ also programmed research training, meetings and workshops to share country experiences and provide good practices to CRVS system-strengthening in fragile contexts.

The BR4MNCH project contributed to an increase in birth registration in three regions: Sikasso (92.5% in 2010 to 98% in 2015), Mopti (66.2% in 2010 to 82% in 2015) and Timbuktu (41.2% in 2010 to 52.9% in 2015). However, the birth registration rate in Gao region declined as a consequence of civil registration centres closing due to the ongoing conflict. As the BR4MNCH project showed positive results, this initiative was replicated in other neighbouring countries.

Through the MoU, Health and birth registration services worked together to increase reporting rates of births in health centres and in communities through community health workers (CHWs). UNICEF provided inputs and supported capacity-building for CHWs by providing a vehicle for central-level supervision and 135 computers with solar kits to health facilities to facilitate birth registration.

2 Empower all parents, regardless of gender, to register their children at birth

UNICEF has been involved in supporting the government to increase birth registration, especially for girls, through high-level advocacy. UNICEF contributed to improving the situation of women and children by ensuring their issues were a priority in the national agenda of key stakeholders in the country. To do so, UNICEF provided training and information, education and communication materials to better explain the rights of children, including birth registration, in particular for the most vulnerable children.

In 2017, UNICEF helped the government strengthen the capacity of more than 1,200 out-of-school adolescent and migrant girls to sensitize their peers on birth declaration and certification. In 2018, the Country Annual Office Report stated that significant efforts were made to include strong gender considerations in the next Country Programme 2020–2024. Four key areas were highlighted, including child marriage, but no information could be found linking gender-sensitive approaches to birth registration.



However, continued advocacy from development partners to extend the 30-day birth registration time frame for the registration of newborns may remove the gender-related barrier that prevents a mother, because of a lack of mobility due to the absence of transportation or local traditions keeping her at home, from registering her child on time.

3 Link birth registration to social services

To address the issue of multidimensional deprivations faced by children in Mali, UNICEF focused its programme on strengthening the linkages between CRVS and the health sector. The approach was to improve the governance of the health system to include CRVS data. To do so, UNICEF supported the capacity assessment of health centres for birth registration and the training of the various actors, and provided technical assistance to the Government of Mali through an international expert to support the process. Ultimately, an annual statistical report was finalized and disseminated in 2014 to all parties involved.

As seen, the interconnection between the CRVS system and the health system was strengthened through the CHWs. Particular focus was put on CHWs as they are an important source of information for CRVS and can reach remote populations. UNICEF promoted a health–protection joint initiative to develop a pilot project to assess the recognition of CHWs as village birth registrars. Concretely, the birth notification component was added to CHWs' registry booklets. Through this initiative, 26,858 births in health facilities and 35,312 home births were registered in the Sikasso, Mopti, Timbuktu and Gao regions in 2017. This represented 40 per cent of birth registration rates reported by CHWs in the project sites. The CHWs were particularly crucial in registering births for families who would have otherwise missed the 30-day registration time frame. This initiative directly contributed to the improved availability of health data and birth registration coverage for children born outside health facilities in the conflict-affected

areas. The success of the pilot project ultimately led to CHWs being formally appointed as birth registration agents, and an MoU between the health and CRVS sectors was developed with the support of UNICEF.

However, registering a child within the 30-day time frame remained challenging for many. This was especially the case for populations living in conflict-affected areas where civil registration centres may have been destroyed or for children associated with armed groups who were released and needed assistance. To address this issue, UNICEF supported initiatives targeting birth registration for children who missed the time frame. In total, 25,877 children received birth certificates through a UNICEF-supported legal process of supplementary judgement in 2018.

Three sections of UNICEF (Child Survival, Child Protection and C4D) worked closely to continue developing and implementing the BR4MNCH project. The approach integrated birth registration in the provision of medical services, joint training of medical and civil registry staff and the integration of birth registration in the training module for CHWs. Since the end of the project, there seems to be a need to do more work to bring UNICEF colleagues from different sections together around the priority of birth registration, as a way to move away from the siloed division of work between sections of Health, Child Protection, C4D, etc. (UNICEF Country Office interviewee).

4 Invest in safe and innovative technological solutions to facilitate birth registration

The registration of vital events in Mali is still largely paper-based and, as a consequence, records are at higher risk of being lost or destroyed. When this is the case, the population cannot have access to their civil registration documentation upon demand, stripping them of a legal identity and preventing them from accessing basic services. Also, the government cannot use real-time data to better implement and monitor



national policies and development plans. To address these constraints, UNICEF supported the use of the RapidPro registration technology in four regions both through technical knowledge sharing and financial support through the BR4MNCH project. UNICEF covered the costs related to the use of SMS for RapidPro (about USD\$15,000/year).

In 2017, the platform was pilot tested in four regions where 81 civil registry officials were trained to use the tool. Officials were taught how to develop and share monthly statistics on births and deaths. RapidPro helped produce real-time data on vital statistics. Through 2019, UNICEF continued to support the DNEC in collecting data through RapidPro, by aligning indicators with the Key Result for Children #7 and adopting a dashboard to monitor progress, which contributed to an increase in the registration of newborn babies. Data first became available in 2019 and that same year RapidPro reported 15,615 birth registrations in the areas of Mopti and Sikasso, and a few communes of Kati and Bamako. It included both newborn babies, in and out of health facilities, who were registered within the legal deadline of 30 days, and older children who were registered post-deadline through supplementary judgements. In 2018, only 43 per cent of the target was reached (25,877 birth registrations of the 60,300 target) and in 2019, only 25 per cent of the target number had their birth registered (15,615 out of 62,350 children) through UNICEF-supported programmes. This was largely due to security constraints, inaccessibility of certain areas, lack of funding, and high costs of court judgements for late birth registration.

The Malian government recognizes the need for good governance of administrative functions to provide targeted services and serve as a critical source of information for the effective delivery of public services. A health system which includes civil registration data can fulfill this function. Mali has thus shown commitment to improving the availability of statistical data including birth registration. Since 2015, CRVS data have been added to the DHIS2 software in nine districts.

More specifically, two statistics relating to births are entered into the system: a) the number of births notified to the agent, and b) the number of newborns who possess a birth certificate. This allowed decentralized levels to directly enter data in the system and the central level to access the consolidated data in real time. This initiative was possible with the support of UNICEF, Canada and other development partners in order to ensure as much coverage as possible in the country. UNICEF supported the deployment of DHIS2 in 355 rural community health centres, of which 265 were located in regions affected by insecurity. DHIS2 is not interconnected with the RapidPro platform so there are two distinct data sets, which involves additional efforts to consolidate them.

5 Engage communities to demand birth registration for every child

In humanitarian settings, local networks are essential to the success of any behaviour change strategy. The Ministry of Communication, with the technical and financial support of UNICEF, established partnerships with community and traditional networks to reach the most deprived children through interpersonal communication and community dialogue, including on the importance of birth registration. In 2014, 800 traditional and religious leaders and 514 radio presenters were mobilized to ensure wider promotion of birth registration in 60 districts. This initiative was done through group discussions, preaching in mosques, churches and public places. As for the media, radio and television messages were disseminated to promote birth registration. Furthermore, UNICEF ensured that community leaders, NGOs and civil society were fully engaged in the formulation of the C4D initiatives. A total of 160 community leaders were trained in community dialogue facilitation on issues including birth registration.

Moreover, UNICEF supported the Government of Mali to celebrate the African Child Day (16 June 2015), led by the President of Republic of Mali. The Presidency committed to actively support efforts to



end child marriage and improve birth registration in the country. UNICEF supported the production of two related TV programmes and several press releases to inform and raise awareness on child marriage and birth registration. In particular, a citizen's guide to birth registration ('Le Guide du

citoyen') was issued in five languages. To ensure that those who were illiterate could benefit from the guide, more than 1,000 audio copies and 600 videos were also distributed.





4 KEY OBSERVATIONS

The latest Country Programme Document (2020–2024) draws on lessons learned from the country programme of 2015–2019. It has been developed through a life-cycle approach which recognizes the intersectoral and mutually reinforcing nature of key results for children. It aims at empowering adolescents and positioning them as key actors of change. It also aims at linking humanitarian and development programming while building community resilience to bring about results that are transformative, innovative and at scale. Finally, it recognizes major risks that could hinder the success of the Country Programme, such as the escalation of violence and spread of conflict, consequently reducing humanitarian access.

4.1 Relevance

In recent years, Mali has been experiencing a humanitarian crisis and armed conflict on its territory. This situation had a substantial impact on the implementation of CRVS strategies, even though there has been a genuine political will to improve the situation of children including by increasing birth registration. Within this context, UNICEF understood the challenging situation and responded by making early recovery of basic CRVS services in the North a top priority for its activities. To this end, UNICEF supported efforts to restore infrastructure and capacity in the most remote regions. It also reached out to vulnerable populations through communication for development initiatives and engaged with civil society actors to share knowledge and increase awareness.

UNICEF demonstrated a responsiveness to the needs of children who were most vulnerable. However, the implementation of such a priority remained a challenge for UNICEF and partners throughout the observed evaluation period. Insecurity, and lack of accessibility of services due to weak government presence in conflict-affected areas made it challenging to carry out interventions.

UNICEF recognized the importance of reinforcing inter-operability of systems to effectively bring access to rights and social services to a broader range of children. UNICEF worked towards that end through advocacy which bore fruit at the national level. A CRVS strategy prioritizing inter-operability of systems was established. At the decentralized level, roles and responsibilities were redefined for better accountability and performance. Prefets and Sous-Prefets (local authorities) hold greater responsibility for recording vital events and CRVS-related data. UNICEF's advocacy strategies brought better awareness of CRVS to community players and helped strengthen the resilience of communities and systems. Yet, efforts still need to be pursued to reinforce accountability and the delivery of civil registration services within local actors at municipality level to ensure related documentation is available to the population.

4.2 Effectiveness

Considering the context, UNICEF made unique, identifiable contributions to stronger CRVS systems during the years 2014–2019. Change was



most significant in prioritizing the inter-operability of systems between Health and CRVS and progress was most visible at the legal and institutional levels. In promoting the interconnection between these two sectors, UNICEF was able to demonstrate the added value of cost-effective models that lead to clear improvement rates in birth registration. It was also able to set an example for other countries in the region through the success of the BR4MNCH project, as these initiatives were replicated in other francophone neighbouring countries. Such contributions led to substantial improvements in birth registration rates in the regions where the project was implemented.

UNICEF recognized the need for a legal framework and national policies that align with international standards. It successfully supported policy analysis and continued advocacy for children's rights, including birth registration. UNICEF used its leadership position and expertise to support the development of a CRVS assessment, followed by a National CRVS Strategy and an MoU between Health and CRVS. Coordination mechanisms were essential in managing the effective implementation of the CRVS reform that is ultimately needed for universal registration of births. Such mechanisms also allowed for improved coordination and synergy of actions by partners to avoid duplication and inefficiency. UNICEF's contributions were important in keeping CRVS a priority at the top level of government. These efforts turned priorities into actionable policies.

UNICEF also made a few sustainable contributions to stronger CRVS systems at the community level. It concentrated on community dialogue to promote the importance of vital event registration within the legal time frame. It also focused on training local actors and working with community leaders to promote good practices that led to better rates of registration. This is particularly true for the most hard-to-reach populations of the Northern regions. Particular efforts were deployed to improve services in areas where state services were lacking. UNICEF was particularly effective in helping

improve birth registration of children born outside health facilities thanks to the inter-operability of systems and the introduction of new technologies. UNICEF's expertise was instrumental in successfully managing the BR4MNCH project, which achieved considerable results in birth registration. Thanks to this project, Mali became the first francophone country to complete the APAI-CRVS Comprehensive Assessment with the support of UNICEF.

4.3 Coherence

UNICEF engaged in strategic partnerships at the central level with top government. It continued building interest in birth registration through meetings, group discussions and through technical expertise which led to new CRVS policies. At the local level, UNICEF engaged with local actors such as civil registrars, CHWs and community leaders. At the international level, it supported projects and initiatives to increase birth registration. However, key informant interviews with country staff and CRVS partners highlighted the need for continued and strengthened interactions between development actors and the Government of Mali. UNICEF being a key player for CRVS system strengthening in the country, interviewees would have hoped for closer collaboration and coordination of activities between UNICEF, the government and CRVS partners.

In the context of the BR4MNCH project, strong partnerships were built with governmental institutions, international organizations, development partners and civil society. These partnerships brought considerable progress in strengthening the national CRVS system. UNICEF was successful in setting and coordinating priorities at the highest level of government, as shown through technical support provided during the 4th and 5th CRVS Conferences of African Ministers in 2017 and 2019. UNICEF successfully coordinated and implemented the various initiatives between the health and CRVS sectors with government ministries and other funding partners.



After implementation of the National CRVS Strategy, the EU funded the PAECISIS project which covers the improvement of the civil registration system. Available documentation does not specify the extent to which UNICEF was involved in this initiative, although synergies could be found between the main development of the projects and UNICEF's expertise in CRVS on the ground.

4.4 Innovation

While it still has a paper-based system, Mali has worked towards the use of new technologies to improve its CRVS system. UNICEF has been instrumental in supporting this approach, especially with the deployment of the DHIS2 and RapidPro platforms. These new technologies enabled real-time health and CRVS-related data collection. They also helped the central government plan services better and identify bottlenecks, ultimately enhancing the overall CRVS system. With regard to the DHIS2 innovative tool, as of late 2019 it was deployed in almost all parts of the country and UNICEF successfully advocated to report not only the number of birth declarations but also the number of children who possessed a birth certificate. As such, in terms of CRVS data, the DHIS2 tool provides two data points. The RapidPro

platform, deployed through the BR4MNCH project, makes it possible to complement the CRVS data with birth and death declarations data for births that may happen inside health facilities or at home. However, it should be noted that the RapidPro and DHIS2 data sets are not linked, thus there are two distinct sets of data. Linking the platforms would reduce duplication and errors, and ultimately allow for more accurate, reliable data that could better serve the government in setting national plans and programmes. Additionally, weaknesses in the RapidPro tool have been identified such as weak mobile phone coverage or temporary breakdown of the platform, and the efficiency of the platform is hampered by a lack of ICT skills in the agents using it. These issues prevent the tool from working at its full capacity, thus hindering the ability to accurately report vital events. Working towards strengthening the ICT infrastructure as well as training agents on how to properly use the tool would reinforce the efficiency of RapidPro.

Mali also uses NINA, an identification number system, and the citizens use it as a means of identification and for voting purposes. However, there could be an opportunity to set linkages between NINA and civil registration systems.



5 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Reforms in Mali from 2014–2020 (pre-COVID-19) reinforced collaborative work between different sectors and provide an example of how UNICEF has exercised a strategic choice to focus on supporting the inter-operability and cross-sectoral action in support of CRVS system strengthening. This is particularly relevant and efficient during a humanitarian crisis. The MoU between the Health and CRVS sectors in Mali provides a cooperation framework which guides CRVS actors on roles and responsibilities delegated to them by the partnership agreement. Through this MoU, community health workers (CHWs) have been instrumental in notifying vital events in communities, particularly for births occurring outside of health facilities. Not only does the partnership build capacity and increase quality service supply, it also makes it possible to target the most hard-to-reach populations, which are often the ones who are the least likely to be registered at birth. The effectiveness of the inter-operability of systems was reinforced thanks to the use of innovative solutions which further enhanced outcomes by standardizing procedures and providing reliable CRVS data.

UNICEF's support was fundamental to the successful development and implementation of these initiatives, and UNICEF's efforts ultimately helped the government increase birth registration rates. UNICEF provided technical support at community level, through knowledge sharing to health and CRVS agents such as training or technical assistance, and the reopening of civil registration centres damaged during the conflict. UNICEF's efforts also contributed to have CRVS and Health agents fulfil their mandate and provide quality service to rights holders through financial

and technological support. UNICEF's contributions accelerated results for children in a sustainable way and promoted government ownership.

Furthermore, with the ongoing conflict in the country, the Malian case study provides a good example of CRVS activities undertaken in humanitarian and fragile settings. This case study showcases UNICEF's contributions on CRVS system strengthening as well as drawing on contextual factors that influenced the implementation of programmes and achievement of results.

5.1 Limitations of this case study

This case study is a result of desk review of UNICEF's CRVS programme documents supplemented by review of other available documents of government and non-government stakeholders in Mali. The main limitations of this case study are the i) inability to contact key interlocutors and ii) the information gaps in certain areas of the evaluation.

i. Inability to meet key interlocutors

The case study was mainly elaborated based on a desk review and analysis of secondary documentation available, supplemented by key informant interviews through phone discussions to validate or nuance findings. As a result, this study is lacking the component of an on-site consultation with key interlocutors and therefore some aspects described in this case study lack additional perspectives that would otherwise come as result of in-person interviews with the relevant stakeholders.



Mali has undergone CRVS reforms since the early 2010s, but the National CRVS Strategy was implemented in 2018 and is only beginning to produce measurable results. The opportunity to meet in person with key interlocutors would have made it possible to examine in greater detail the progress achieved since the implementation of the Strategy. Concretely, it would have been useful to better highlight obstacles to the realization of certain outputs and strategies laid out in the Strategy. This would have helped provide context as to why certain listed outputs have not yet been implemented. Closer contact with development partners would also have given a deeper insight on ongoing and planned partnerships, especially with humanitarian actors. Finally, in-person discussions with the Country Office would have provided more in-depth context related to the ongoing conflict and its measurable consequences on the birth registration component of UNICEF's programmes.

ii. information gaps in certain areas of the evaluation

The data points used in this analysis stem from three sources: DHS 2012/2013 to provide context of the situation at the start of the observed period; DHS 2018 to track and compare changes in rates and draw conclusions on the trend observed during 2014–2020; and MICS 2015 to complement the two DHS points. The data points on marriage, divorce and death registration are not available – thus an assessment of the trend in these areas was not possible. Further, scarce information was available for human and financial resources on CRVS, making it impossible to provide valuable information in that area.

5.2 Lessons learned and good practices

The experience of Mali in building its CRVS systems shows that developing innovative and cost-effective service models can lead to a clear improvement of registration rates, especially among the rural and poorest populations. It

is perhaps even more true in times where the nascent CRVS system is being fragilized by external factors such as a conflict, a humanitarian crisis or a virus outbreak. Innovative solutions such as the inter-operability of systems between sectors are an opportunity to circumvent or adapt to that type of environment. That being said, the innovative work produces positive results when combined with high-level advocacy, strong partnerships and a focus on integrated system building rather than horizontal service delivery mechanisms.

The use of technology and innovative means in humanitarian settings can improve civil registration. Mali's civil registration system has been impacted since the conflict erupted in the Northern regions. Civil registrars and vital events records have been destroyed, infrastructure has been unusable, and government services lacking in certain regions. Yet, innovative strategies such the use of the RapidPro platform or the deployment of the DHIS2 technology were used and reached the targeted population. These initiatives leveraged several systems and increased birth registration amidst the humanitarian settings, although the sustainability of these innovations has been put in question with regard to technical issues that prevent reliable use of the tools.

Advocacy is crucial at the highest level of government but equally crucial among local communities. Mali underwent a comprehensive CRVS assessment thanks to UNICEF's advocacy efforts. The efforts were combined with technical expertise and support in line with internationally recognized standards. UNICEF's advocacy role was equally important for the development of the CRVS strategy. At the local level, advocacy initiatives helped increase the recognition of the importance of accessing individual rights including birth registration. In taking that approach and given the contextual constraints, UNICEF was able to reach out to the most vulnerable children. Nonetheless, improvements are still needed in the conflict-affected areas.



Strengthening partnerships and coordination across sectors is crucial to foster successful multisectoral collaboration and establish mechanisms for sustained efforts. UNICEF was

able to successfully integrate birth registration into health services and mobilize community health workers on birth registration processes. This made it possible to reduce the number of village community agents, who are costly to train and equip. Technical assistance for harmonization and cross-sectoral knowledge proves to be an innovative and cost-effective approach. This approach helps bridge the gap in birth registration.

The inter-operability of systems between health and CRVS is a good practice that effectively contributes to strengthening CRVS in humanitarian settings. It has the potential to rapidly scale up the notification and registration of births and deaths. It is also capable of improving the availability and quality of vital statistics that are essential for programme planning and monitoring. While inter-operability of systems can prove to be effective in collecting CRVS data, attention should be given to the data privacy laws in place – or the lack of such laws – to protect individuals' personal data.

5.3 Issues for future investigation

Mali has taken steps to strengthen its CRVS systems: it established government institutions responsible for CRVS coordination and data collection, put in a place a national strategy and built partnerships with other sectors to capitalize on joint efforts. Mali has introduced innovative tools to help capture data, better plan policies, and improve the registration of vital events.

Mali has experienced conflict with rebel groups, which is bringing instability in the country at the national and local levels. The political development agenda is fragilized, infrastructure is damaged, and local government sometimes cannot provide the social services they are responsible for.

The use of technology and inter-operability of systems has been an interesting way to achieve positive results given the contextual issues in the country. Technology accelerates the sustainability and efficiency of efforts made in terms of CRVS. However, technology is impacted by the environment in which it is being used and the implementation of technology cannot be dissociated from other concerns or urgent needs. Additionally, technology is only effective if there is the local infrastructure to support it. Thus, reinforcing the infrastructure, enabling an environment to protect the data, providing monetary investment, and training personnel on these tools are issues for future investigation.



Annex 1 Data for Evidence Story

Birth registration among children 0–4 years old

	2012/2013		2018	
	% of children with births registered	No. of children	% of children with births registered	No. of children
Age				
Less than 2 years	85.2	4,076	88.4	4,147
2-4 years	83.8	6,672	85.5	6,037
Sex				
Male	85.1	5,512	87.8	5,162
Female	83.4	5,236	85.6	5,022
Residence				
Urban	95.4	2,020	96.3	2,058
Rural	81.7	8,728	84.3	8,127
Province				
Kayes	83.7	1,423	86.9	1,606
Koulikoro	83.7	2,364	89.0	1,875
Sikasso	90.4	2,462	89.4	1,829
Ségou	81.0	2,079	86.8	1,610
Mopti	71.0	1,369	85.8	1,164
Tombouctou	n/a	n/a	51.5	423
Gao	n/a	n/a	58.9	318
Kidal	n/a	n/a	17.5	7
Bamako	96.0	1,052	98.2	1,352
Wealth Quintiles				
Lowest	72.1	2,226	77.7	2,129
Second	80.9	2,268	79.4	2,174
Third	82.5	2,213	87.1	2,199
Fourth	90.6	2,210	94.0	1,948
Highest	97.8	1,831	98.2	1,734
Total	84.3	10,748	86.7	10,184

NOTE: Data extracted from: Mali DHS 2012/2013, Table 16.1 page 266, Mali DHS 2018, Table 2.1, page 33.



Annex 2 List of documents reviewed

CIVIPOL	Support Programme for the Running of the Civil Registration System in Mali: Support for the Implementation of a Secure Information System, 2018
European Union	Document d'action du Fonds fiduciaire de l'UE Identification
Government of Mali	La Stratégie Nationale de l'Etat Civil de la République du 2018–2022
Government of Mali	Demographic Health Survey 2018
Government of Mali	Demographic Health Survey 2012/2013
Government of Mali	Le système d'état civil du Mali, les textes législatifs et réglementaires, 2019
Government of Mali	Programme d'Appui au fonctionnement de l'état civil et à la mise en place d'un système d'information sécurisé (PAECSIS)
Government of Mali	Rapport d'évaluation du système d'enregistrement des faits d'état civil et de la production des statistiques de vie au Mali, 2016
OCHA Mali	Rapport Inter-Cluster Juillet-Septembre 2017
Plan International	'Thousands to receive birth certificates in Mali', 2015
Security Identity Alliance	Civil Registry Consolidation Through Digital Identity Management, Dec 2015
UNICEF	Strategic Plan 2018–2021 Executive Plan
UNICEF	A Passport to Protection: Guide to Birth Registration Programming, 2013
UNICEF	SiTan Mali 2018
UNICEF	Evaluation Sommativ du Programme BR4MNCH sur l'enregistrement des naissances pour les nouveau-nés et les enfants du Mali (2014–2018)
UNICEF	Country Programme Document 2020–2024
UNICEF	Mali 2015–2019 RAM Combined Outcomes Outputs and End Year Summary Narratives Report
UNICEF	Mali 2008–2015 RAM Combined Outcomes Outputs and End Year Summary Narratives Report
UNICEF	Country Office Annual Report 2014
UNICEF	Country Office Annual Report 2015
UNICEF	Country Office Annual Report 2016
UNICEF	Country Office Annual Report 2017
UNICEF	Country Office Annual Report 2018



UNICEF	Country Office Annual Report 2019
UNICEF	Country Programme Document 2008–2015
UNICEF	Country Programme Document 2015–2019
UNICEF	Mali RAM 2017–2020
UNICEF/Global Affairs Canada	Birth registration for maternal newborn and child health, end of project, 2014–2018, 2019
United Nations Office of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict	ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict Campaign Launch – Remarks by Virginia Gamba, 3 April 2019
United Nations Security Council	Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Mali, 19 June 2018
World Bank	The State of Identification Systems in Africa, Country Briefs, 2017
World Bank	ID4D Country Diagnostic: Mali, 2016



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