



NEPAL CASE STUDY REPORT

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



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

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DoNIDCR	Department of National ID and Civil Registration
ECTP	Emergency Cash Transfer Programme
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MIS	Management Information System
MoFAGA	Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MoWCSW	The Supreme Court and the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens
PHD	Population Health and Development
UIN	Unique Identity Number
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VDC	Village Development Committee
VERSP MIS	Vital Events Registration System Program and Management Information System



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Only a decade ago, the civil registration and vital statistic (CRVS) system in Nepal was achieving moderate registration rates, with 58 per cent of children under five years old having their birth registered in 2014. By 2019, the birth registration rate was estimated at 77 per cent. UNICEF interventions in Nepal during this period were aimed at supporting the Government of Nepal to strengthen the CRVS system from several angles. A notable result saw UNICEF advocacy contribute to the right to birth registration being incorporated in the 2015 Constitution of Nepal. UNICEF collaboration with the Government also contributed to increasing birth registration rates; as well as focusing on the registration services supply side, UNICEF interventions aimed at contributing to increased demand for registration.

UNICEF was a key provider of humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of the major earthquakes in Nepal in 2015. UNICEF implemented a large-scale emergency cash transfer programme (ECTP) building on the organization's earlier experience with the distribution of child grants in remote areas.

The major novelty was that distribution was based on data extracted from the birth register. The result of this policy was a significant increase in birth registration rates. This increase was attributed to the ECTP, since beneficiaries were required to have birth registration certificates for their children in order to be able to collect the cash transfer.



By developing a registry of all children under five years old and increasing birth registration rates, UNICEF laid the foundation for the universalization of the child grant in Nepal, which also became an explicit priority of the Government.

Expanding the scope of the child grant programme country also strengthened the CRVS system at the national level, positioning it as the main data source for targeting of grant beneficiaries and thus making it a priority for the Government. An elaborate

digitized management information system was designed and implemented, integrating CRVS records and social services beneficiary records. Backed by financing from development finance institutions and with advisory support from UNICEF, the Government is expanding the CRVS based on the Management Information System of the Ministry of Home Affairs to become a state-wide population register.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

A decade ago, the CRVS system in Nepal was built around paper-based registration business processes, with notable weaknesses on both the demand and supply sides. There was also a lack of awareness among the population about the need for and/or benefits of birth registration. Registration was also perceived as costly, and registration offices could not be easily reached by populations residing in remote mountainous parts of country. Therefore, people were likely to register their vital events only when the registration certificate was required for some official purpose. For instance, a birth was registered only when a child reached school age and needed birth registration for school enrollment. In the absence of civil registration, many children may have been deprived of legal identity and access to services.

In terms of vital events registration, birth registration was historically the most common in Nepal, followed by death registration (although the completeness of the latter has never been fully assessed). Unlike in many other countries, birth registration rates across different population categories were largely similar, indicating that there were no major differences in registration rates between male and female, urban and rural populations, and across all wealth quintiles. Apart from overall registration rates, the CRVS system was experiencing challenges with registration timelines.

1.2 Methodology

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 Nepal as a case study for the evaluation was done according to several criteria explained in the evaluation report.¹ 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 Nepal. The methodology focuses further on the analysis, which aims to verify the steps and

¹ See the report here: <https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/reports#/detail/16474/evaluation-of-unicef-work-in-strengthening-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-systems>



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.



2 COUNTRY CONTEXT ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

2.1 Country context

The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal is a landlocked country bordering China to the north and India to the south, east and west. It is composed of seven provinces. There are six metropolitan cities, 11 sub-metropolitan cities, 276 municipalities, and 460 rural municipalities.

Capital city: Kathmandu

Official working language: Nepali

Territorial size: 147,516 km²

Total population: 28,608,710

Ministry responsible for civil registration:

Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA)

<https://moha.gov.np/en>

Civil registration agents: Department of National ID and Civil Registration (DoNIDCR)

<https://donidcr.gov.np>

National statistical office: The Central Bureau of Statistics <https://cbs.gov.np>

The percentage of children under five years of age who were registered at birth has been assessed four times over the past decade, through Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) in 2011² and 2016³ and multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) in 2014⁴ and 2019.⁵ For the analysis of the

trends in birth registration rates, this case study utilized the more recent MICS reports. The reports reveal a 16 per cent increase in registered births of children below five years of age between 2014 and 2019, from 58.1 per cent to 77.2 per cent.




Figure 1: Key vital statistics indicators

Births ⁶	
Children under 5 years of age whose births were reported as registered	77.2% (2019)
Births attended by skilled health personnel	77.2% (2019)
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)	18.5 (2019)
Total fertility rate (live births per woman)	2 (2019)
Adolescent fertility rate (per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years)	63 (2019)
Deaths	
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	6 (2018) ⁷
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	28 (2019) ⁸
Under five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	32 (2018) ⁹
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	186 (2017) ¹⁰

Changes can be also observed in terms of the timeliness of registration: for children under one year of age, registration increased from 32.8 per cent in 2014 to 59.5 per cent in 2019. Similar increases can be observed for other age categories. Overall, the gap between number of children registered in the first year of life and by the age of five narrowed from 41 per cent in 2014 to 27.7 per cent in 2019.

There is little difference between boys and girls when it comes to access to birth registration. In 2014, there were 2.2 percentage points more boys registered, while 2019 witnessed a reversal with 2 per cent more girls being registered. There is also minimal difference in terms of access to registration in rural and urban areas. Both in 2014 as well as in 2019, more children were registered in rural areas than in urban areas (1.7 percentage points more in 2014 and 3.2 in 2019). Statistically,

² Government of Nepal, 'Demographic and Health Survey, 2011', Ministry of Health and Population, Kathmandu, 2012.

³ Government of Nepal, 'Demographic and Health Survey, 2017', Ministry of Health and Population, Kathmandu, 2012., 2017.

⁴ Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Nepal, 'Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2014', Final Report. Kathmandu, Nepal: Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF, Kathmandu, 2015.

⁵ Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Nepal, 'Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019', Kathmandu, Nepal: Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF, Kathmandu, 2020.

⁶ Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2020. Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Findings Report. Kathmandu, Nepal: Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Nepal.

⁷ World Bank, 'Death rate, crude (per 1,000 people), Nepal', data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.CDRT.IN?locations=NP, accessed 31 January 2021.

⁸ Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019.

⁹ World Bank, 'Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births), Nepal', data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.MORT?locations=NP, accessed 31 January 2021.

¹⁰ World Bank, 'Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births), Nepal', data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.Changes.t?locations=NP, accessed 31 January 2021.

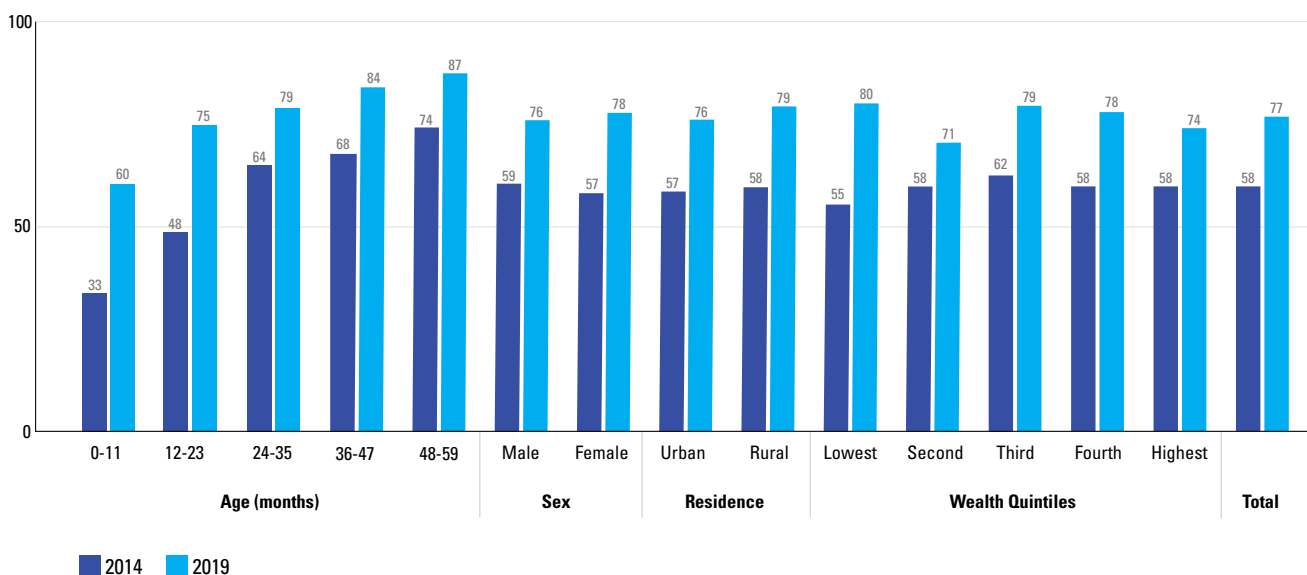


these differences are not significant, suggesting that the CRVS system is equally accessible regardless of gender or urban vs. rural areas.

In terms of differences across wealth quintiles, both MICS reports suggest only minor differences. The data from 2019 show that the poorest quintile was registered at a smaller higher rate (79.9 per

cent) than the richest quintile (74.1 per cent). The data provide a good indication of the impact of linking social security allowances with birth registration. For a great proportion of the poor population in Nepal, birth registration unlocks access to allowances that are central for children's wellbeing.

Figure 2: Percentage of children under five years old who have their birth registered in Nepal, 2014–2019



2.2 Intervention logic to strengthen the CRVS system

In Nepal, civil registration relates to the events of birth, death, marriage, and divorce. In addition, civil registration authorities are also responsible for registration of in-country migration. Since the introduction of vital event registration in 1976, people register their personal events at municipal committees and municipal ward offices, which are designated as local registrars. The Government of Nepal takes the lead in setting strategic priorities for the development of the national CRVS system.

To that end, it relies on the strategic plans developed to cover government priorities over four-year periods. The two most recent of these plans mention strategic goals and policies to improve the CRVS system.

The 12th Plan (2011-2013), without specifically providing policy guidance, established as a target an operational vital registration computer programme package for 65 district development committees. It also set a target of reaching a registration rate of 90 per cent for births and 65 per cent for other events by 2013.



The 13th Plan (2014-2017) more specifically laid out an operational policy and vital event registration-strengthening programme, including plans for a survey of the state of registration, an integrated management information system, training of civil registration personnel and, most importantly, expanding network data connectivity for its use (largely not available in rural areas).

In 2014, a national CRVS steering and coordination committee was established to oversee CRVS activities in the country. It was chaired by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) and attended by the different ministries and agencies involved, as well as representatives from decentralized administrative levels such as provinces and municipalities. In some cases, ad-hoc committees have been established to implement specific tasks, for example to conduct CRVS baseline surveys.

Institutional strengthening policies for the CRVS system were largely influenced by the results achieved through the UNICEF-administered child grant programme and ECTP, resulting in the decision to use the CRVS system as a data source to create lists of social transfers beneficiaries. The broader need for government sectors to identify data in order to provide services to citizens resulted in a decision to build a national population register. This also meant that integrating the civil register as a pillar of the population register became a priority.

Within the framework of a World Bank project titled, “The Strengthening of Systems for Social Protection and Civil Registration”, the national CRVS steering and coordination committee was designated as the project steering committee to guide and oversee its implementation. The project is designed to support the development of the

national population registry, strengthening of the civil registration system and modernization of the payment system. The steering committee is chaired by the MoHA secretary and includes joint secretaries from MOHA, the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA), the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health and Population, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens as well as representatives from the National Planning Commission, the Nepal Rastra Bank and the Department of National Identification and Civil Registration (DoNIDCR).

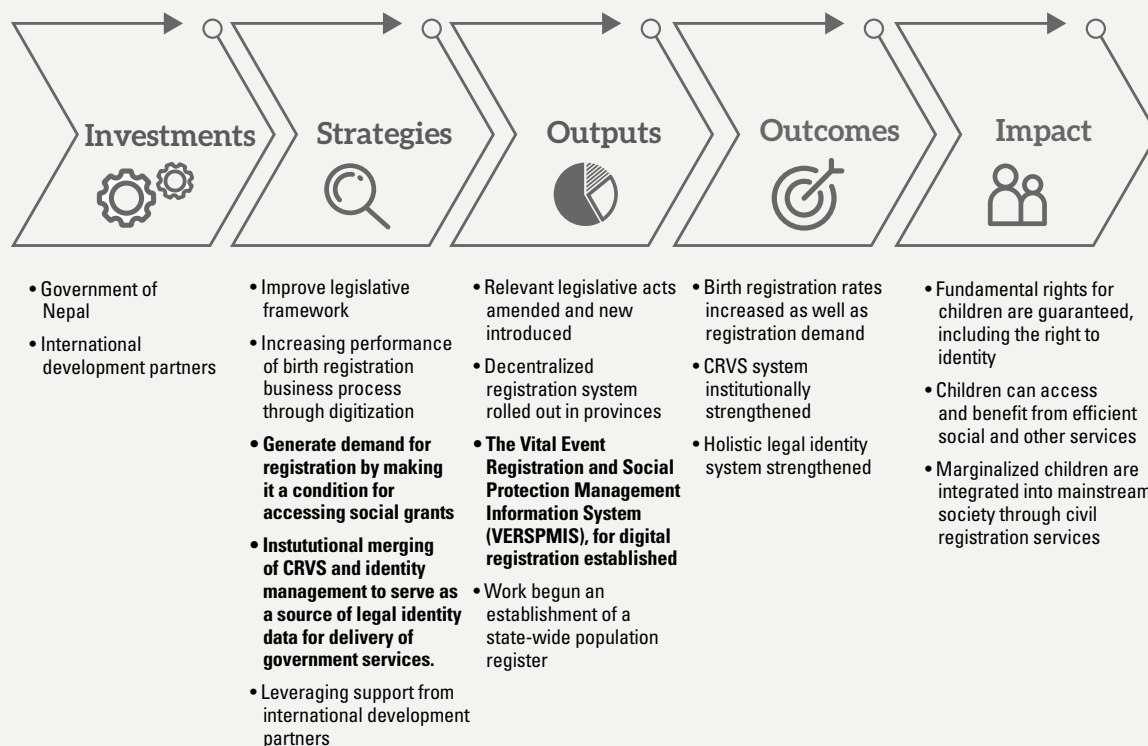
The project was launched in 2016 and covers the following priorities:

- Establishment of a national population register of individuals and household/families to support the expansion of coverage of civil registration and social security allowances;
- Establishment of a civil registration system that will grant all individuals and residents easy access to civil registration, enable regular monitoring of registrations, generate timely vital statistics from a central database and establish linkages with programmes such as social security allowances;
- Data collection to establish a population register;
- Communications and outreach campaigns; and
- Institutional strengthening.

The intervention logic behind UNICEF efforts to strengthen CRVS mirrors that of the Government in many ways. As such, UNICEF areas of intervention are highlighted in blue and reflect the investments, strategies, outputs, outcomes and impacts pursued through UNICEF interventions.



Figure 3: Elements of the intervention logic behind Nepal's efforts to strengthen CRVS systems



Source: National Strategic Plan for CRVS (2015 – 2019)

* 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

Legislative changes

Birth registration in Nepal is a right guaranteed by the constitution. This right is further monitored by appointment of a parliamentary committee on CRVS, which reviews on a regular basis all legislative issues relevant to the exercise of this right.

The Vital Events Registration Act came into force in 1976 (amended in 1991) and was supplemented by the Births, Deaths and Other Personal Events (Registration) Regulation of 1977. It defined five vital events and made the registration provisions more legally binding. The registration provisions of the Act came into force in a phased manner that took almost 15 years to roll out across the country.

Marriage registration is regulated in greater detail in the Marriage Act of 1971 (amended in 2018). Duties and responsibilities of registration stakeholders are further elaborated in directions to the local registrar and in the Local Government Act.

Over time, the CRVS system has become central to the efficient execution of a range of services such as the distribution of social allowances and identity management, which are the responsibilities of different branches of government. This resulted in a set of legislative changes in responsibilities for civil registration. The Department of National ID and Civil Registration has prepared a draft legislative proposal to amend some procedural measures contained in the vital events registration regulations. Some of the major procedural measures proposed are as follows:



- Appointment of registration agents in other agencies such as embassies and missions abroad and civil registration in refugee and internally displaced persons camps;
- Legalization of electronic records of registered vital events;
- Local registrars given expanded responsibilities over safekeeping of records of vital events;
- Formally linking civil registration with the management information system (MIS).
- Vital events registration system (birth, death, marriage, divorce and migration) and;
- The operation of social transfer schemes (pensions for the elderly as well as support for single women, persons living with disabilities, ethnic minorities, children living in Karnali zone, the Dalit community, etc.) delivered through the local bodies.

Generating demand by linking social allowances to civil registration

The Government of Nepal has prioritized strengthening social assistance, including providing assistance to children in remote areas. To that effect, birth registration records were recognized as a primary source of information to identify beneficiaries. Subsequently, birth registration became a precondition for accessing the child grant, which proved to be one of the most important factors in increasing demand for birth registration, including in remote regions such as Karnali. Subsequently, the distribution of emergency cash grants in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake was one of the decisive factors facilitating broader political commitment toward expanding the child grant programme nationally. This in turn led to a significant increase of registration rates, in particular in remote areas of the country.

Institutional reforms by merging CRVS with other services

Government oversight of the registration process has over the last decade undergone numerous changes. The Department of Civil Registration was formally inaugurated in March 2015 under the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA). The Department was assigned to manage and regulate:

The most recent institutional reforms in 2018 resulted in the transfer of the Department of Civil Registration from MoFAGA to MoHA. Subsequently, the department merged with national identity card services to form DoNIDCR, currently in charge of both registration of vital events and identity management.

Digitization

Throughout numerous institutional transformations, the digitization of registration information has been a strategic goal of DoNIDCR. The department has introduced a software-based online civil registration and social protection information system called the “Vital Events Registration System Programme and Management Information System” (VERSP-MIS) to enhance service delivery, record management and reporting. The Government secured financing from the World Bank to support the expansion of civil registration and social security allowances by establishing a national population register that would combine the existing identification (ID) database and the VERSP-MIS in a seamless database architecture. The register is designed to be updated through regular civil registration and targeted outreach and communications campaigns. The national goal is to establish a CRVS system that will allow all individuals/residents easy access to civil registration services, enable regular monitoring of registrations, generate timely vital statistics from a central database and establish linkages with programmes such as social security allowances.



Pursuing partnerships with development partners

The vital events registration programme has been supported by the United Nations and other bilateral agencies. During the earlier development phase, UNICEF was a major player in supporting birth registration and its promotional activities. The World Health Organization (WHO) has supported database preparation for the MIS, focused on death and causes of death, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supported various activities aimed at improving vital statistics data. The World Bank and the Asian

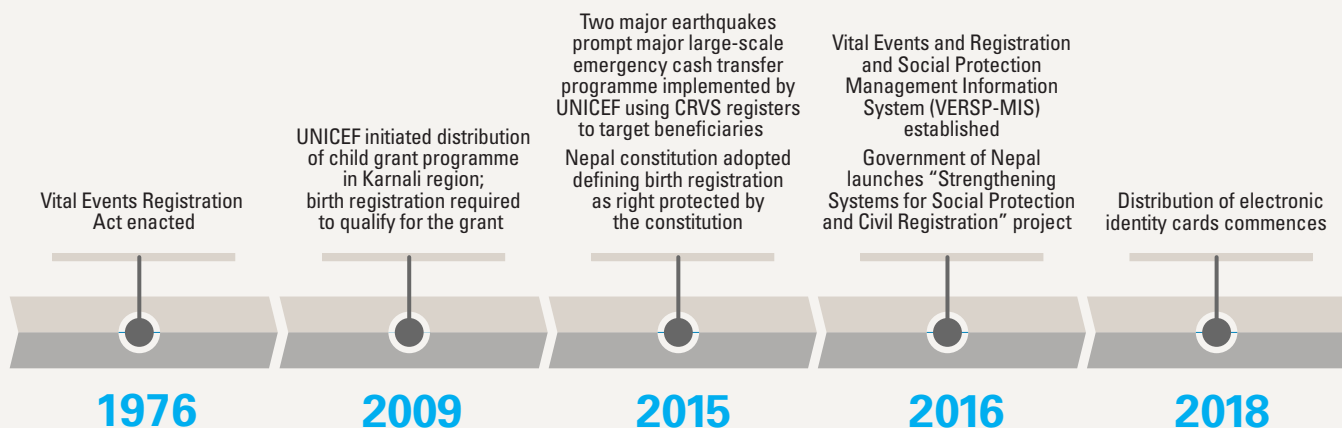
Development Bank (ADB) have supported the design and establishment of the VERSP-MIS. As noted above, in 2016, the World Bank launched the “Strengthening Systems for Social Protection and Civil Registration” project to improve the coverage of social security allowances and civil registration¹¹ and the delivery of social security allowances. In addition, the Government, UNICEF and other development partners, including the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, collaborated to roll out a national management information system.

Table 1: Overview of budgetary allocations for Nepal vital events registration system (in USD)

Fiscal Year	Allocation (USD)			Total
	Government	ADB	World Bank Grant	
2011/12	13,073	338,640	422,885	783,930
2012/13	2,888	830,000	9,520	852,558
2013/14	88,968	1,495,121	363,540	1,584,088
2014/15	102,057	805,507	285,404	907,564
2015/16	241,962	2,367,575		2,609,537
Total	448,947	5,836,842	1,081,349	6,737,677

Source: Ministry of Finance (www.mof.gov.np)

¹¹ World Bank, ‘Strengthening Systems for Social Protection and Civil Registration’, World Bank, Washington DC, <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P154548?lang=en>, accessed 31 January 2021.


Figure 4: Key milestones


2.4 Mapping of planned and attained outputs

Building on strong political commitment for CRVS reforms, the availability of external donor funding, support from international development partners and the commitment of key national stakeholders, significant progress has been achieved in delivering products as envisaged in the national plan. This is reflected in a dramatic increase in registration rates, especially in remote areas.

Legislative changes

The most recent national constitution, promulgated on 20 September 2015, preserved key child rights provisions, including the right to a name and identity and birth registration. With birth registration being embedded in the constitution, it is a responsibility of the state to operationalize an efficient CRVS system.

Vital Events and Registration and Social Protection Management Information System (VERSP-MIS)

In 2014, the MIS was implemented in 12 districts, linking social protection with civil registration and vital statistics to better administer social protection

schemes and take timely corrective action where necessary. By November 2015, it had been rolled out to 21 out of 75 districts. The Government also initiated a branchless banking system in ten districts to improve the social protection delivery system.

The Department of National Identification and Civil Registration manages VERSP-MIS. As the system is designed as a web application, registration officials in the field can access the platform with designated credentials from any internet-connected computer. Online event registration is in operation in more than a dozen municipalities and seven districts (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Ilam, Jhapa, Palpa, Kailali and Tanahu).

A unique identification number branded in Nepal as a "national ID number" is assigned to each newborn during birth registration, as long as registration is done using the VERSP-MIS web platform. Otherwise, the number is assigned when the person applies for a national ID card, at the age of 16 at the earliest. To date, VERSP-MIS has generated a unique identifier for 1.8 million persons.

Records of vital events registered manually are only kept in the paper archives in municipal wards. Precise information on the volume of paper-based registration records digitized so far is not publicly available. Some estimates suggest that there are



around 100 million archived vital event paper records that are yet to be digitized.

Until the population register is fully implemented, a key weakness remains the manual recordkeeping system, which entails risks of inaccuracy, duplication and difficulties in preserving vital records. Manual recordkeeping also makes it difficult for an individual to retrieve lost civil registration certificates. Another major weakness is the limited capacity of local bodies serving as registrars. Village development committees and municipal wards are the frontline agencies for delivering most government services. Unfortunately, they are overburdened with multiple duties without dedicated administrative and human resources assigned to specific functions. While the local bodies are required to report the aggregate number of civil registrations periodically, there is no concerted push to increase coverage of registrations. Finally, there is limited coordination between MoFAGA and the health sector in facilitating birth and death registrations.

Population register

Since 2018, the identification system in Nepal has undergone major transformations, starting with the issuance of electronic national identity cards storing biometric data. The introduction of a chip-enabled biometric national ID card is the most visible aspect

of broader changes in the institutional approach to management of legal identity data. All identity information collected in the enrollment process is stored digitally. The national ID number is used to link personal records in national ID database and VERSP-MIS database.

Following the decision to integrate civil registration and identity management under the authority of a single department, conditions were met for integrating identity card issuance and the VERSP-MIS. Integration is now underway, with the unique identification number connecting records in the two databases. Where personal data are available in digital format, DoNIDCR is able to use personal data required in the process of issuance of national ID card directly from VERSP-MIS. Equally, as persons apply for registration of birth or other vital events, their personal data can be verified directly online in the national ID database, as long as the person has already acquired an electronic national identity card.

Until the national ID is fully rolled out, the main document that is used as proof of identity is the citizenship certificate. This document serves as the foundation to access key social, economic, and political rights because without it, individuals may be barred from registering marriages, births, voting, buying or selling land, sitting for professional exams, opening bank accounts or accessing credit.



3 UNICEF'S WORK IN CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

3.1 Programming

UNICEF has initiated and implemented from 2014-2019 a range of programmes, strategically focused on 15 districts with the poorest social indicators. Some of these activities directly related to strengthening the CRVS system, while others served indirectly to strengthen CRVS. This approach was complemented with high-level advocacy aimed at embedding children rights, including birth registration, in Nepal's constitution.

3.2 Measurable contributions

As noted above, although the child grant programme is not directly aimed at strengthening CRVS systems, the implementation of this programme led to a dramatic increase of birth registration rates and to the digitization of the CRVS system nationwide, which is becoming one of the key components of the future population register. The funds directly allocated to improving the CRVS system during the period amounts to \$914,877.

Table 2: UNICEF financial contributions to CRVS, 2013-2019 (in USD)

2013 - 2017	2018	2019	TOTAL
817,890	75,501	21,486	914,877

In addition, UNICEF financial support to the Government for both phases of the ECTP amounted to \$26 million. Phase 1 provided a single top-up grant of NPR 3,000 (approximately \$30) to the beneficiaries of the existing Nepal social assistance programmes in 19 earthquake-affected districts, covering five vulnerable groups: Dalit children under five years of age, widows and

single women, persons with disabilities, senior citizens and members of minority ethnic groups. The second phase of the programme widened the coverage to provide a single cash transfer of NPR 4,000 (approximately \$40) to all children under five years of age in the 11 most earthquake-affected districts.



3.3 Outputs and strategies

1 Provide every child with a certificate upon birth

UNICEF advocated with parliament to include child rights in the constitution. It lists birth registration as a fundamental right and includes provisions for prohibiting child marriage and the illegal transfer and abduction of children. The constitution also provides for the prohibition of abuse, neglect and exploitation of children through any means, including in the name of religious or cultural practices.

From a UNICEF perspective, achieving this goal has been a result of prioritizing child protection within broader advocacy initiatives relating to human rights and justice, particularly in the process of reviewing criminal and civil laws where issues related to birth registration, adoption, minimum age of employment and minimum age of criminal responsibility are being regulated. In addition, UNICEF efforts and support to the constitutional drafting process were aimed at ensuring better legal protection of children, particularly with regard to citizenship, and children affected before, during and after elections.

Strategic engagement by UNICEF with the parliamentary committee on women, children, senior citizens and social welfare has been instrumental in advancing policy dialogue on child rights. Policy discussions were held on various topics such as parliamentary oversights, CRVS, and on recognizing and representing non-voting citizens in elections (child rights and elections). The chair of the parliamentary committee participated in the third Asia Pacific High-Level Meeting on Child Rights and reiterated the Government's commitment to strengthening social protection, such as through the child grant programme.

UNICEF further contributed to broader discussions on improving CRVS administrative and legislative frameworks. To that effect, UNICEF supported

drafting of a briefing note produced by the United Nations working group on citizenship to guide discussions within the United Nations Country Team on the Sustainable Development Goals and legal identity, civil registration and vital statistics, along with key advocacy messages on revision of the 2006 Citizenship Act. UNICEF also worked with United Nations partners on reviewing gaps and structural barriers in birth registration as participating agency in the United Nations working group on citizenship. Based on the review, the reforms required in birth registration have been identified and were being followed-up with the vital registration authorities.

With UNICEF advocacy, 18 potential village development committees and three municipalities from the eastern, central and western regions made a political commitment to work towards meeting the criteria for being declared child-friendly by 2015. This provided for more focused approaches by local authorities in ensuring registration of all children. In 2018, UNICEF provided technical support to amend legislation to allow birth registration by guardians (including institutions) and for making birth registration mandatory for receiving social security.

2 Link birth registration to social services

UNICEF has prioritized strengthening social assistance, including to provide assistance to children in remote areas. As discussed above, birth registration became a precondition for accessing the child grant, which proved to be one of the most important factors for increasing demand for birth registration in these parts of the country. Prior to 2015, UNICEF focused primarily on technical and financial assistance to the child grant programme, and during that period, birth registration rates in the Karnali region increased dramatically, to 90 per cent in child grant beneficiary households compared to the national average of 58 per cent. Based on the lessons identified in a 2014 cross-sectional survey of the child grant, UNICEF refocused toward increasing birth registration and



coverage of the child grant among children under the age of one, linking with the infant and young child feeding programme. Subsequently, as a response to the devastating earthquakes in Nepal in April and May 2015, UNICEF developed and implemented a large-scale ECTP, in collaboration with the Government, the details of which are discussed above.

Following Phase 1 of the programme, UNICEF supported a household census to develop a registry of all children under five years of age to support the expansion of the programme. The Population Health and Development (PHD) group, a non-governmental, not-for-profit voluntary organization, was contracted to work with local governments to carry out the census. The census exercise successfully identified and registered roughly 85 per cent of eligible beneficiaries. In the course of the implementation, UNICEF and the Government realized that a more sustainable system of maintaining a register of beneficiaries was necessary. An assessment was conducted on the efficiency and effectiveness of the child grant and lessons were fed into the implementation guidelines.

The implementation of emergency grant revealed how the CRVS system, as a source of data on targeted beneficiaries, was of utmost importance in mobilizing a targeted response by the Government and its partners in emergency settings. The two phases of the ECTP were seen by UNICEF as the first steps toward the longer-term objectives of helping the Government to establish a model of rapid social transfers to vulnerable groups during emergencies, and ultimately to strengthen the social protection system for children in Nepal.

In 2017, the Government of Nepal, with technical support from UNICEF, expanded the child grant programme to the entire country, targeting all children under five years of age in a phased manner. Since birth registration is a prerequisite for enrolling under the scheme, this expansion was also expected to increase the coverage of birth registration nationally, which in turn was expected to help further promote child rights.

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

Following institutional restructuring, the link between social protection and CRVS system was made more pronounced by co-locating both services under the authority of the same department. This institutional transformation was also mirrored in the design of the VERSP-MIS. UNICEF was not directly involved in the implementation of these systems; rather, its intervention focused primarily on advocacy for the building of the MIS and its merger with social protection, including the main elements of the design of the integrated system. The implementation of VERSP-MIS prompted the authorities to work on integration with the national ID cards system, which in turn led to the development of the World Bank project to address integration of these systems in a holistic manner.

4 Engage communities to demand birth registration for every child

As noted under 4.3.2, based on the lessons from a 2014 cross-sectional survey of the child grant, UNICEF refocused its efforts toward increasing birth registration and coverage of the child grant among children younger than one year old, linking these efforts with the infant and young child feeding programme.

As per the ECTP evaluation report, UNICEF supported a household census to develop a registry of all children under five years of age to support the expansion of the child grant in programme districts. Enumerators had to verify the age of children using birth registration documents, where available. In instances where no formal birth records were available, enumerators were permitted to record self-reported ages, but were instructed to encourage households to get formal birth registration documents. In addition,



enumerators were also instructed to collect information regarding pregnant women expecting

to give birth soon, so that children born during the implementation of Phase 2 would not be excluded.



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4 KEY OBSERVATIONS

4.1 Relevance

A UNICEF focus on high-level advocacy helped to ensure that the rights of children were reflected in Nepal's constitution. The adoption of the 2015 Constitution and the rights of children enshrined therein demonstrates the relevance and value of UNICEF advocacy in this area. Reaffirming birth registration as a right protected by the constitution also directly contributes to the UNICEF goal of strengthening the national CRVS system.

Technical and financial assistance with the distribution of the child grant was instrumental in testing how birth registration records can be used for the efficient distribution of social grants, and to what extent this approach can result in increased registration rates.

The UNICEF ECTP underlined how UNICEF is able to quickly provide financial support to a significant share of the vulnerable children in several districts covered using emergency grant programmes. It contributed to increasing the profile of CRVS as important instrument for ensuring efficient distribution of social allowances, which led to the institutional linking of the CRVS and social allowances systems. As a result, more children across the country and in particular in remote areas benefit from registration services and social protection. In response to this development, UNICEF readjusted its support to CRVS strengthening to help build a digitized system of civil registration that includes digital registration, as well as centralized processing and storing of vital events records.

4.2 Effectiveness

UNICEF activities were designed with the goal of achieving high effectiveness within the available resources. This was demonstrated in the case of advocacy to ensure that birth registration was enshrined as a right in the constitution. UNICEF Nepal has been also highly effective in raising the profile of the CRVS system within the broader public governance system, which subsequently prompted major investments in digitizing and further strengthening of the national CRVS system.

Birth registration of children under five was significantly increased in remote areas, thanks in large part to the design of the ECTP, the success of which laid the foundation for the national child grant scheme.

The decision of the Government to scale up the child grant scheme in turn had a decisive effect on the reforms of the CRVS system. By the time the distribution of the ECTP was nearing its end, there was a growing recognition that to implement horizontal expansion quickly and efficiently, one would need a database comprising a comprehensive registry of the whole population. This strategic decision comes as result of UNICEF being able to demonstrate that the CRVS system can be an efficient instrument for obtaining targeting data. UNICEF further successfully demonstrated that where the CRVS system is used as an instrument for the distribution and scaling up of child grants, the two systems will reinforce each other and as a result increase the efficiency of both systems.



By partnering with the Government and working to build upon and bolster the existing social protection system, UNICEF not only successfully demonstrated strong commitment toward its long-term objectives in Nepal, but also added further credibility to the programme.

UNICEF also provided technical expertise and know-how in designing a contemporary, digitized CRVS system. UNICEF maintained an advisory role over time as the value of the CRVS system for the public governance was further raised by linking the system with the national identity management system. In that way, the CRVS system also became the key source of identity data in the issuance of national identity cards. With the establishment of a statewide population register, CRVS system will become a key component of the future national identity ecosystem.

4.3 Coherence

UNICEF worked with the Nepal parliament to rise profile of child protection at the highest level and established effective cooperation with the parliamentary committee on CRVS.

With the overarching aim of expanding the child grant nationwide, UNICEF worked closely with development partners (the Asian Development Bank, the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the International Labour Organization, the World Bank, UNCDF, the World Food Programme, the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation and the Government of Nepal to improve the national social protection system, providing assistance on a series of institutional capacity development activities (international training, national-level training, workshops, review meetings, assessments and studies on data management). In addition, in 2019, UNICEF and other United Nations partners engaged in capacity-building of different United Nations agencies for integrating birth registration into their programmes. The office also highlighted the importance of timely birth registration to 1,400 local government officials.

In addition, the Government, UNICEF and other development partners, including UNCDF, the

World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, were collaborating to roll out a comprehensive management information system nationally.

4.4 Innovation

Birth registration has traditionally been seen as a first recognition of one's identity by the state, first by recognizing a birth and later by providing proof of identity. The CRVS system therefore provides a permanent source of up-to-date information on legal identity. With the rapid expansion of digital information processing, registration records have gained value as digital data can be more efficiently shared with other government sectors.

In many countries, the linking of digital vital events records with other government systems began with the integration with identity management systems to support the issuance of national identity cards. In Nepal, authorities pursued a different route, by integrating first the CRVS system and social services distribution system as two integrated components of a single information management system, only later to expand the links to include the identity management system.

This innovative approach of linking social grants and CRVS into a single information management system proved to be very effective in Nepal. In essence, the social service management component represents a subset of data from the CRVS records management system. This data subset is created as result of searching for the identity data of people who meet a specific set of criteria in order to qualify for a specific type of social service (e.g. child grant). The number of subsets maintained corresponds to the number of grants that the government provides. The value of integration of the two systems comes in that the register of grant beneficiaries is permanently up-to-date if the CRVS system succeeds in timely recording of all vital events.

The Nepal experiences shows that linking CRVS with social grants distribution schemes early on and providing tangible benefits from registering vital events can drive registration of vital events close to universal registration rates.



5 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Interventions by the UNICEF Nepal country office from 2014-2019 aimed to strengthen the CRVS system through an indirect approach – namely, CRVS system strengthening through support to a cash transfer programme. This case study provides evidence on the extent to which UNICEF has been strategic in supporting and strengthening functional CRVS systems at national level. The Nepal case shows how the most marginalized populations can be reached by developing strong incentive schemes. The case study also provides evidence on how offering child grant schemes linked with birth registration can generate demand for registration.

5.1 Limitations of this case study

This case study is a result of a desk review of UNICEF CRVS programme documents supplemented by a review of other available documents from the Government and non-government stakeholders in Nepal. It was developed during the period when the world was engulfed in the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely curtailed global travel and limited in-person social contacts. As result, this study lacked on-site consultations with key interlocutors in Nepal, limiting the inclusion of additional perspectives. Taking into account the period covered by this study, obtaining direct feedback from many UNICEF and non-UNICEF interlocutors was no longer possible due to staff rotation within UNICEF as well as within Nepal government structures. The ability to consult officials involved with CRVS reforms at the beginning of the observed period would have been useful to better understand specific strategic decisions made early

in the reform process and which have decisively affected CRVS reforms over past eight years.

5.2 Lessons learned and good practices

Nepal's experience of building its CRVS system provides evidence of an entirely different means of achieving high registration rates, which focuses primarily on generating demand for registration and subsequently addressing the supply side. Other evidence also suggests that lack of supply of registration services may not be an obstacle to registration. If the right incentives are offered, these can alleviate concerns linked with distances and associated costs.

The experience of Nepal shows that linking the CRVS system with a social protection delivery system may result in mutually reinforcing systems. Given the origin of the social protection delivery system, in a context of emergency, the case of Nepal is a good example of the humanitarian-development nexus; a system devised to respond to an emergency could be leveraged and built into a broader, sustainable post-crisis to strengthen the national CRVS system. This expansion was useful to generate commitment and making the decision to engage in a large-scale investment with support from development partners. The ECTP was thus successful in meeting its broad aims and objectives, albeit with some operational challenges along the way. The evaluation of UNICEF delivery of the ECTP acknowledged successful design and implementation of the delivery model, and more importantly,



acknowledged the importance of this experience in improving disaster response programmes in the future.

The introduction of financial incentives resulted in almost universal registration coverage. At the same time, it also makes the system a greater target for fraud, which calls for strengthening the integrity of the entire system. As a result, the Government, UNICEF and other development partners are working toward digitized information systems.

Overhauling of the CRVS system and the integration of management of vital events records with other services such as social grants, has the potential under certain conditions to unlock other benefits. It might assist all citizens in acquiring legal identity and facilitate access to a range of services such as school enrollment and bank account opening. This would reduce the risk of marginalization, contribute reducing barriers to social inclusion. Robust data on births and deaths will allow effective monitoring of health indicators, including fertility, mortality and disease patterns, to inform public health programming as well as other demographic-based policymaking.

An updated population register built on the CRVS system will also greatly facilitate disaster management and recovery. Key figures such as the number of households and individuals by age group and location could have enhanced emergency planning and speedy provision of relief. Disasters such as the earthquake have also led to many affected individuals losing their identity documents, and paper-based records of vital events can be permanently lost. Replacing the documents will be much easier with an integrated electronic CRVS system.

A national population register would contribute to reducing the fragmentation in the ID ecosystem and serve as a basis for the eventual establishment of a national ID system and a possible poverty targeting system. Each individual will be assigned a unique ID number (UIN) in the system. For the existing population, the UIN will be assigned at the time of the house-

to-house data collection. Each newborn will be assigned a UIN at the time of birth registration. The UIN will therefore be designed to be interoperable with the national ID system under MoHA. The point of entry into the interlinked systems would be birth registration. An individual would 'exit' from the system when his/her death is registered. Smooth transfer of data between these systems would ensure accurate matching of the records.

Building of a national population register is a large undertaking requiring significant financial resources as well as administrative technical and human resources. UNICEF correctly readjusted its role to correspond with its available resources while still maintaining advisory role in the process of setting up of the population register.

The United Nations Legal Identity Agenda could serve as a platform for joint United Nations support to a legal identity ecosystem. UNICEF could be well positioned to provide technical assistance in building the foundations of a holistic system.

5.3 Issues for future investigation

Linking access to social allowances with birth registration records is a powerful way of increasing demand and registration rates. It also requires a continued source of funding for the distribution of pledged social allowances. This potentially brings up the issue of sustainability. Important learning from the process so far suggests that if financial incentives are not in place, other forms of incentives must be provided in order to sustain high levels of birth registration.

There is also room for other means of strengthening the CRVS system that could potentially be further explored. Many births and deaths take place at health facilities. Delegating some registration responsibilities to health facilities allows for information to be captured at registration points as and where they occur. This option becomes more realistic in situations where registration business processes are digitized, and registered vital events stored digitally in



a central civil register database. Community health programmes also provide birth services in communities, capturing information on mothers as they contact health facilities during pregnancy and after birth for immunization and other health services. This broad range of contacts of health workers in the context of childbirth highlights the role of health facilities.

Cooperation with health facilities is equally important in the case of delayed birth registration. This allows registration authorities to take advantage of programmes such as immunization: delayed registration can be completed when

children receive their vaccinations, during either facility-based or outreach activities. This enables registration authorities to clear the backlog of unregistered births at a significantly lower cost, as it eliminates the need for dedicated registration campaigns and mobile team visits. Registration at health facilities also provides opportunities to collect information on expectant mothers, supporting accurate collection of statistical data on fetal deaths and speeding up the process of completing birth notifications by capturing key data prior to birth.



Annex 1 Data for Evidence Story

Birth registration among children 0–4 years old

	2014		2019	
	% of children with births registered	No. of children	% of children with births registered	No. of children
Age				
0-11	32.8	978	59.5	1,301
12-23	47.8	1,008	74.6	1,265
24-35	63.9	1,079	79.0	1,232
36-47	67.9	1,137	84.2	1,449
48-59	73.8	1,147	87.2	1,410
Sex				
Male	59.2	2,766	76.3	3,502
Female	57.0	2,583	78.3	3,156
Residence				
Urban	56.6	699	76.1	4,318
Rural	58.3	4,650	79.3	2,340
Province				
Province 1			78.4	1,053
Province 2			76.1	1,579
Bagmati			70.8	1,250
Gandaki			73.8	479
Lumbini			76.7	1,208
Karnali			84.4	446
Sudoorpashchim			89.1	644
Wealth Quintiles				
Lowest	54.6	1,183	79.9	1,550
Second	58.1	1,085	74.1	1,366
Third	62.0	1,176	78.9	1,345
Fourth	58.3	1,086	78.3	1,299
Highest	57.5	819	74.1	1,098
Total	58.1	5,349	77.2	6,658

NOTE: Data extracted from: Nepal MICS 2014, Nepal MICS 2019.



Annex 2 List of documents reviewed

Development Pathways Limited	Social Accountability in the Delivery of Social Protection: Nepal case study (2017)
Forum for Women, Law and Development	Legal Analysis of Civil Registration Laws of Nepal (2018)
Forum for Women, Law and Development	Birth and Marriage Registration in Nepal: Understanding Trends, Causes, Barriers and Impacts (2018)
Gautam, B. Department of National ID and Civil Registration, Nepal	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics: Policy and practices in Nepal (2016)
Government of Nepal	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2014
National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics	Legal Identity in Nepal: An assessment of existing database and recommendations for future directions (2015)
Gurung, Y. and Khatiwada, P	Strengthening Systems for Social Protection and Civil Registration Project (2016)
The World Bank	Project Appraisal Document Strengthening Systems For Social Protection And Civil Registration Project (2016)
The World Bank	Incentives for Improving Birth Registration Coverage: A review of the literature (2018)
The World Bank	Evaluation of the Nepal Emergency Cash Transfer Programme through Social Assistance Final Report (2017)
UNICEF Nepal	How Does Nepal's Child Grant Work for Dalit Children and their Families? A mixed-methods assessment of programme delivery and impact in Bajura and Saptari (2015)
UNICEF	STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS FOR SCALING UP AND ENHANCING THE CHILD GRANT NATIONALLY IN NEPAL (2015)
UNICEF Nepal	Annual Report, 2014
UNICEF Nepal	Annual Report, 2015
UNICEF Nepal	<i>Annual Report, 2016</i>
UNICEF Nepal	Annual Report, 2017
UNICEF Nepal	Annual Report, 2018
UNICEF Nepal	Annual Report, 2019
UNICEF, Nepal	Civil Registration in South Asia: Coordination, connections and collaboration (2019)
UNICEF ROSA	Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in South Asia Countries: Registration of births, deaths and marriages (2019)
UNICEF ROSA	Lessons from the UNICEF Nepal Emergency Cash Transfer Programme through Social Assistance (2016)
UNICEF/Oxford Policy Management	Country Programme Document, 2016-2022



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