

Improved Community-Based Birth Registration Using Local Governance Structures in Sokoto State

CHILDREN UNDER ONE YEAR ISSUED BIRTH REGISTRATION CERTIFICATES

In developing countries, more than 50 million births a year are not registered, despite government, donor, civil society, and international organizations' efforts to universalize birth registration. One of every three developing countries has a birth registration rate of less than 50%, and two of every three unregistered children under five-years-of-age live in sub-Saharan Africa.

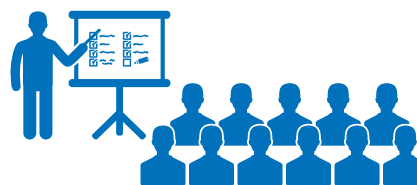
BIRTH REGISTRATION IS CRUCIAL FOR NATIONAL PLANNING

and can also be a valuable source of data for forecasting the health needs of children, as when planning immunization programs. Children whose births are not registered cannot use or benefit from the services to which they have an equal right. Furthermore, the achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals will remain elusive if credible health information such as birth registration is compromised. In Nigeria, the National Population Commission (NPopC) is responsible for ensuring that births

are registered in all states and local government areas. In Sokoto State, which records some of the poorest health outcomes for children under five in the country, village head scribes are responsible for registering newborns and unregistered children under five-years-of-age in their communities. Village-level birth registration is linked to the district-level collation process, in which the district head scribes collate and submit all registered births to the local NPopC offices. All completed birth registration forms are then transferred to the state NPopC headquarters for entry into computers and tracking by the national office.

In 2013, USAID|TSHIP helped NPopC conduct a study to identify barriers to and best practices for integrating birth registration into community-based governance structures. Barriers included inadequate knowledge of the benefits of birth registration, too few registration centers, poor stakeholder involvement, unmotivated public officials, unavailability of registration tools, and the nomadic nature of many inhabitants of the state.

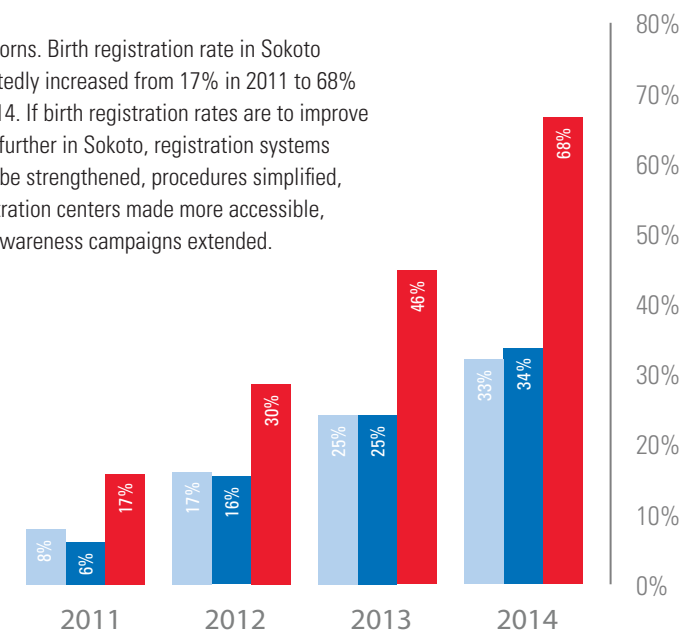
Within the same year, USAID|TSHIP helped NPopC train more than 500 village head scribes and gave them the tools to conduct birth registration in their communities. The project's initiative is expected to inform those of other states in Nigeria and other developing countries.



500 VILLAGE HEAD SCRIBES TRAINED

USAID|TSHIP also collaborated with NPopC to engage community health volunteers and traditional and religious leaders to promote birth registration as a platform to increase uptake of child health services such as routine immunization, vitamin A supplementation, promotion of exclusive breastfeeding, household diarrhea management, and use of chlorhexidine antiseptic gel to prevent cord infections in

newborns. Birth registration rate in Sokoto reportedly increased from 17% in 2011 to 68% in 2014. If birth registration rates are to improve even further in Sokoto, registration systems must be strengthened, procedures simplified, registration centers made more accessible, and awareness campaigns extended.



BIRTH REGISTRATION INCREASED FROM 17% TO 68% BETWEEN 2011 AND 2014