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Item 4 (d) of the provisional agenda for the expert segment\*

**Statutory issues: report of the African Union Commission on the No Name  
Campaign**

## **“No name campaign”: advocating universal birth registration in Africa**

### **I. Background**

1. Birth registration is the critical foundation of any country’s identity management system, as it provides people with documents that enable them to exercise their rights, including access to basic services, and to be protected from certain forms of violence, exploitation and harmful practices.<sup>1</sup> Information about live births occurring over time, disaggregated by age, geographical location and various characteristics of the person giving birth, helps to determine the dynamics of human reproduction and to enable more focused development-related activities. Legal identity is first recognized by a State at birth, through birth registration. All subsequent important life events are recorded in reference to this first recognition.

2. According to data from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF),<sup>2</sup> nearly half of all African children are deprived of a legal existence, and there are troubling projections that the number of such children will exceed 110 million by 2030 if no immediate measures are taken. In fact, although some progress has been made over the past decade, UNICEF estimates

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<sup>1</sup> Setel, Philip W., and others, “A scandal of invisibility: making everyone count by counting everyone”, *The Lancet*, vol. 370, No. 9598 (November 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys and administrative data, for the year 2021. Available at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/dataset/percentage-children-age-5-whose-births-registered-sex-place-residence-household-wealth-quintile/>.



that efforts to increase birth registration will need to be increased significantly in order to meet Sustainable Development Goal target 16.9, which refers to children's right to a legal identity.

3. In order to mobilize more effective action by States members of the African Union towards the universal registration of children at birth in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and beyond, the African Union Commission and UNICEF are implementing the "No name campaign". The advocacy campaign fits within the broader framework of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems. The campaign, launched on 17 June 2020, recognizes that children whose births are not registered and who lack proof of their age are more likely to be excluded from access to such basic services as education and, subsequently, to be more vulnerable to marginalization, discrimination, abuse and associated protection risks, such as child marriage, child labour, forced recruitment to armed forces or groups and trafficking in persons. The campaign also calls for the transformation of birth registration systems on the basis of three key game changers: interoperability, digitalization and decentralization.

## II. Progress

4. The first year of implementation of the "No name campaign" included the production of a series of communication materials<sup>3</sup> and the involvement of the famous Beninese singer, songwriter and activist, Angélique Kidjo, who voiced her support for the initiative.<sup>4</sup> The campaign also mobilized technical and political support from ministers responsible for birth registration through a technical meeting and a ministerial meeting, held in August and November 2020, respectively, to discuss birth registration during the pandemic. As part of the campaign, the African Union Commission and UNICEF co-organized two subregional exchange meetings for the African Union regions of Western Africa and Central Africa in April 2021 and for the African Union regions of Eastern Africa and Southern Africa in June 2021. The events triggered in-depth discussions on the challenges and opportunities for the continent and allowed countries to learn from each other about the implementation of innovative approaches.

5. On the basis of recent progress and demonstrated political commitment, 10 countries were identified as champions of the "No name campaign", with the expectation that they would mobilize other countries to follow in their footsteps, pursuing the three evidence-based, game-changing strategies for universal birth registration, namely, interoperability, digitalization and decentralization.

6. In November 2021, the African Union Commission, with technical support from UNICEF, began to develop a continental strategy to achieve universal birth registration in Africa by 2030. By June 2022, the consultant responsible for developing the strategy had submitted a second draft, which is currently under review. It is expected that the final draft will be available for review by the relevant specialized technical committees of the African Union in the first quarter of 2023.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vpQ88xXtvM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vpQ88xXtvM).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7klUgJZuaNs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7klUgJZuaNs).

### **III. “No name campaign: next level”**

7. The “No name campaign” was launched at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as a means of triggering a sense of urgency for universal birth registration as the world was grappling with the pandemic. The campaign has become an important platform for bringing visibility to this critical area of development that is often ignored, mobilizing political support and commitment and, ultimately, changing the lives of children by ensuring their right to a legal identity.

8. Despite important gains, some activities from the original road map, including the sixth session of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, were postponed owing to the pandemic. As of September 2022, the campaign will move into a second phase, called the “No name campaign: next level”. The second phase, which is expected to last three years, builds on the initial mobilization efforts of the first phase and entails more focused action and tailored support for countries. Champion countries from the inception phase will play a more prominent role in order to drive other countries towards universal birth registration in Africa.

9. The overall goal of the initiative remains to guarantee a legal identity for every child in Africa by 2030. To achieve this ambitious goal, there is a recognition that birth registration needs to be universal and free of charge and that systems need to be interoperable and digitalized in order to achieve decentralized service delivery.

10. The second phase will be implemented on the basis of the following five programmatic entry points: (a) the provision of technical support to countries as a means of advancing game-changing solutions; (b) capacity-building; (c) data and evidence collection; (d) partner engagement; and (e) communication, visibility and social mobilization.

11. One of the first deliverables of the second phase will be the finalization of the continental strategy and its submission to the Executive Council of the African Union for adoption.

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