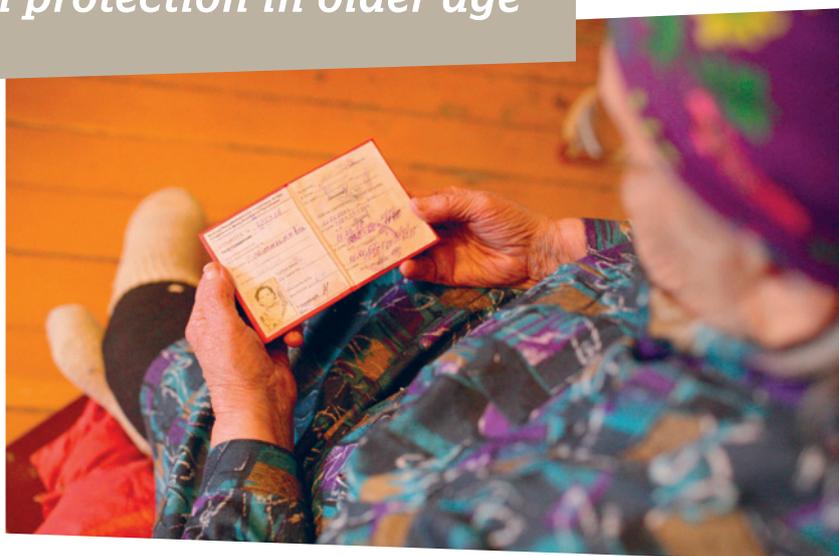


Pension watch

Briefings on social protection in older age



Briefing no. 6

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Challenges and opportunities for age verification in low- and middle-income countries

Key lessons

- Age verification for cash transfers is viable even in countries with low coverage of civil registration and legal identity records.
- All cash transfers need both an initial (set-up) registration process to identify and enrol recipients as well as ongoing systems of registration to sustain enrolment and de-registration over time. Too often cash transfers do not take into account how registration processes can be scaled up and sustained on an ongoing basis at national scale.
- Registration systems should aim to be available on demand and be flexible, to accommodate individuals making an application at any time. Cash transfers based on simple age criteria are more conducive to the establishment of these systems.
- Universal social pensions, due to their scale and the nature of age verification and de-registration, have the potential to strengthen civil registration systems and subsequently to support the wider development outcomes associated with the right to identity.
- Civil society can play an important role in improving the access of vulnerable people in the initial stages of registration and in supporting improvements to ongoing registration over the long term.

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1. Introduction

The success and impact of a cash transfer is dependent on the accuracy of the targeting process, which in turn essentially depends on the effectiveness of the registration and de-registration process. Age-based¹ cash transfers – such as child grants and social pensions – are among the simplest and most transparent targeting approaches to implement in countries where administrative capacity is weak. This is because criteria for eligibility can be easily verified and are less easy to manipulate.

Many countries are already implementing such age-based cash transfers at national scale and continue to improve registration systems to ensure access and minimise targeting errors. Nevertheless, verifying age in countries with weak civil registration systems can prove a significant barrier to implementation, with vulnerable people unable to obtain identity documents, or facing significant difficulties in doing so.

Civil registration,² the issuance of legal records of significant events (including birth, marriage and death certification), is a fundamental function of any state and provides the basis for an effective state-citizen relationship. The low coverage and inaccessibility of birth certification, in particular, causes problems for the accuracy of a whole range of population registers and statistical exercises – census data, electoral rolls or identity (ID) cards.

The focus of this paper is on practical considerations for the design and implementation of new registration systems. It illustrates why registration for age-based transfers is administratively simpler and thus easier to implement at national scale than registration systems based on income or poverty level. It also provides observations and lessons for strengthening existing weak and ineffective registration systems.

While civil registration and the creation of identity systems are key government functions, the paper also looks at the role that civil society can play in both the initial registration and the improvement of systems in the longer term.

2. Civil registration: implications for cash transfers

The weakness of civil registration systems in developing countries is a significant barrier to the implementation of social pensions and other age-based cash transfers. By addressing this weakness a foundation is laid to fulfil a broader range of development objectives.

2.1 Weakness of civil registration

Estimates suggest that only about a third of countries worldwide have civil registration systems that can provide comprehensive and timely information for policy and planning.³ In many countries, civil registration systems were inherited from colonial administrations which did not consider registration a basic human right of the indigenous population. Little attention has since been given to this issue and many countries have invested in systems to gather population statistics, rather than build vital statistics systems based on civil registration. Also, the preconditions that civil registration systems require in order to be developed and implemented effectively – long-term investment, sustained political will and stability – have not always been in place.

In countries with weak registration systems, many people do not hold birth certificates. This is particularly true in rural settings where people have been largely excluded from accessing even basic social services throughout their lives. For example, in Tanzania, a recent study estimated that only 16 per cent of Tanzanians hold birth certificates, with a higher proportion in urban areas (and specifically Dar es Salaam). As a result of recent outreach initiatives, approximately 70 per cent of individuals on the birth register are under five years of age.⁴

1. In this briefing 'age-based' cash transfers refers to cash transfer schemes that include age as a criteria of eligibility and therefore involve a process of age verification.

2. The definition of 'civil registration' is: 'the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events (live births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages and divorces) and other civil status events pertaining to the population as provided by decree, law or regulation, in accordance with the legal requirements in each country. It establishes and provides legal documentation of such events. These records are also the best source of vital statistics.'
http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_19rev2E.pdf (June 2010)

3. Rao C, Bradshaw D, and Mathers CD, 'Improving death registration and statistics in developing countries: Lessons from sub-Saharan Africa', *Southern African Journal of Demography*, 9:2, 2004, pp.81-91

4. Personal communication, Consultation with Regulatory, Insolvency and Trusteeship Agency (RITA) as part of the Feasibility Study into a Universal Pension conducted by HelpAge International in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, Tanzania, 2010

Older people are even less likely than other age groups to possess any legal records of their age and identity. In many countries the current generation of older people was born before civil registration systems were introduced, thus they were never able to obtain records of their age or other state identity documentation at birth. Older people may also have experienced loss, theft or damage of their legal documents over their lifetimes. For example, in Mozambique a survey of nearly 4,000 older people in eight communities found that nearly 42 per cent had no identification cards.⁵ In Thailand, a number of studies have highlighted the regional and ethnic disadvantages that older people face in accessing the Old Age Allowance and other government services. In particular, ethnic Muslims and people from hill tribes lack ID documents and cannot prove citizenship. This undermines their access to services.⁶

Further barriers for older people include the physical and financial costs of navigating bureaucratic procedures. Unlike children, who need birth certificates to attend school or sit exams (as, for example, in Tanzania), there are fewer incentives and opportunities to seek identity cards or other legal civil registration records.

Without birth certificates and particularly in contexts where there is limited value in knowing one's date of birth – especially in later life – the details on legal records such as voter cards and national IDs can be inaccurate. Low literacy rates and the lack of birth certification can lead to misspelt names and ages that are approximated or randomly assigned.

For example, in Bolivia, the misspelling of names on birth certificates has been a major barrier to accessing ID cards needed for the universal pension. In Kenya, during registration for the Older Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT) members of the public regularly complained they had been excluded from the programme on the basis of inaccurate ages on their national IDs.⁷ In northern Kenya, the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) found that lack of birth certificates and unreliable methods of verifying people's ages resulted in large numbers of people having their ages approximated or randomly assigned in the distribution of national IDs or voting cards, where no supporting documentation is required to verify age.⁸

5. HelpAge International, *Baseline report: community tracking and monitoring in Mozambique*, HelpAge International and International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2006

6. *Evaluation report on the implementation of a monthly allowance for older people in Thailand* conducted by Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University and others, for the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, January 2004; *Situation of Older Persons in Northern Thailand: Evidence for Action* conducted by Faculty of Nursing, Chiang Mai University, funded by UNFPA Thailand, November 2009

7. Africa Development Research, *OPCT Impact Assessment Report, Kenya* (forthcoming)

8. Mwiti C, Kukrety N, *Delivery of Social Protection Programmes in Kenya*, Oxfam, 2010 <http://fex.ennonline.net/37/delivery.aspx> (June 2010)

Age verification: Tanzania's electoral register

In Tanzania, the Permanent Voters Register (PVR) provides comprehensive coverage of the population over 18 years old. However, unlike a civil registration system, the PVR does not support vital statistics and therefore there is arguably less emphasis on ensuring that a person's age is recorded accurately as long as they are clearly over 18. In the event that an applicant does not know their date of birth, enumerators can simply identify the cardholder as "adult" on the reverse of the card.

Analysis of the PVR during the updating process in February 2010 revealed that 56 per cent of people over 60 had been registered with a date or year of birth on their voter's card. While this is a high percentage, other older people are also likely to hold cards, but without their date or year of birth recorded on them – in these cases their eligibility to vote is shown by their identification as "adult".



Emma Judge/HelpAge International

Source: Ministry of Labour, Employment and Youth Development and HelpAge International, 'Income security for all Tanzanians; the feasibility of a universal pension', Government of United Republic of Tanzania/ HelpAge International, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, May 2010

Gaps and inaccuracies in the age or date of birth details in existing documents pose a greater challenge for older women than for older men. This is due to women's lower levels of literacy compared with men, and lack of access to formal employment, land holding and other opportunities. In Mozambique, older women required greater assistance in accessing ID cards in order to enrol in the food subsidy programme.⁹ In Tanzania older men were more likely than women to be registered for a voter card with their date or year of birth recorded. Much higher numbers of women had been registered without a date or year of birth but were identified as "adult". This suggests that women, particularly older women, may be less likely to know their year of birth.¹⁰

2.2 Strengthening registration systems – beyond social protection

The benefits of strengthening civil registration go far beyond the effective implementation of social pensions or other social protection mechanisms, and have broader development outcomes.

Strong civil registration can be seen as a key component in gathering vital statistics at national, regional and local levels. This, in turn, helps to inform the development of appropriate policy responses. In the last few decades efforts to collect statistics for development purposes have focused on compiling statistics rather than recording significant events (ie, births, deaths and marriages). This leaves individuals without legal records for their own reference. Some developments suggest that there is a trend towards using civil registration as a foundation of national data collection and statistical analysis. A UNSTATS workshop in the SADC region in 2008 concluded:

“[there is]... need of numerous remedial actions... Substituting civil registration with other sources, such as population and housing censuses and household surveys, which is current practice in the region out of necessity, does not provide sustainable, regular and timely production of vital statistics.”¹¹

Perhaps more importantly, civil registration is a right in itself, which is protected under the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. People who can prove their citizenship status have a direct claim to the related rights and benefits endorsed by the state: for example, the right to vote, to access social services, and to own land and property. The right to identity underpins the functions and capabilities that are necessary for human development, a point which has been well articulated in the work of Amartya Sen and others.¹²

Recent developments suggest that there is now increased attention being paid to the importance of civil registration in Africa. For example the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa recently recognised that:

“The purpose and services of civil registration go beyond issues of statistics and extend to various individual and public services, justice and public administrations, including education and health sectors, decentralisation and democratisation processes, [which] depend on the availability of these official records.”¹³



Kate Holt/HelpAge International

9. HelpAge International, Mozambique, 'Food Subsidy Programme: impacts and implementation report' (forthcoming)

10. Ministry of Labour, Employment and Youth Development/HelpAge International, *Achieving income security in old age for all Tanzanians: a study into the feasibility of a universal social pension*, Dar es Salaam, May 2010

11. UNSTATS, Workshop on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in the SADC Region, Blantyre, Malawi, 1-5 December 2008: Conclusions and Recommendations http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/wshops/Malawi_1Dec08/docs/Conclusions&Recommendations.pdf (June 2010)

12. Szreter S, 'The Right of Registration: Development, Identity Registration, and Social Security – A Historical Perspective', *World Development*, 35:1, 2007, pp.67-86

13. UNECA, *Reforming and Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa*, March 2010 www.uneca.org/cr-ministerial-conference/documents/Medium-term-plan-2010-12.pdf (February 2011)

Moreover, civil registration has recently been acknowledged in the context of monitoring development impact and measuring progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. For example, the first Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration was convened by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union in August 2010.¹⁴ The conference confirmed the importance of civil registration as a basis for reliable vital statistics and public policy, as well as good governance, human rights, and the rights of children.¹⁵

There is also a growing recognition of the role of identity registration in economic development. Describing the UK's economic growth in comparison to that of other leading global economies, Szreter explains that identity registration and the provision of social security laid important foundations for development. In relation to identity registration he notes that: "[identity] registration can also be a multi-faceted institutional mechanism for simultaneously promoting economic growth, population health, and welfare".¹⁶

2.3 Cash transfers as a catalyst to improve civil registration

The wider role and impact of civil registration demonstrates that increasing the number of older people registered for a social pension relates to a much larger question than the social pension itself. Nevertheless, there is also growing evidence that social pensions – and other age-based cash transfers – can act as a catalyst to increasing the reach of civil registration systems.

First, cash transfers can provide the impetus to mobilise people to register. As outlined above, one of the reasons that people live all their lives without ID documentation is that they see little benefit in going through the often expensive administrative procedures to obtain their documents as these do not lead to improved access to any direct services, such as access to health. However, where for example, eligibility for a social pension is dependent on being registered, this provides a direct incentive for people to register.

Second, for governments, improving civil registration is important in order to avoid the fiduciary risk associated with including younger (non-eligible) individuals in the scheme. As with other age-based transfers and services, verification should ultimately be based upon legal records and primarily on birth registration records. Without this, there is scope for individuals to manipulate documentation so that they can benefit illegitimately from the transfer.

In Uganda, for example, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has been engaging with other government institutions and development partners as part of the Expanding Social Protection Programme to explore ways of strengthening birth and death registration to ensure the potential for sustainable cash transfers. In particular, it is strengthening birth and death registration in selected districts for a universal pension and a household vulnerability grant pilot programme. Building on the previous work of UNICEF, which implemented community Birth and Death Registers (BDRs), the cash transfer initiative has provided an incentive to institutionalise this registration system to ensure the long-term sustainability of the scheme.¹⁷

A less explored question is how social pensions could contribute to death registration and the update of national population registers. In Namibia and Kenya, bonus payments provide an incentive for surviving household members to report the death of an older recipient. For example, when an older recipient of the OPCT programme in Kenya dies, the household is entitled to collect payments for up to six months after the de-registration of the older person. In order to do so, they must surrender copies of the deceased recipient's ID card and the burial permit issued by the area chief.

The OPCT in Kenya provides an insight into the potential benefits of linking updates of the scheme's list of beneficiaries with that of other national population registers. Since the programme requires proof of death to enable recipient households to receive a bonus payment when an older person dies, deaths are reported and the payroll is updated. While the OPCT is implemented at the current

14. www.uneca.org/cr-ministerial-conference/index.htm (February 2011)

15. First Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, UN Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13-14 August 2010. The resulting commitments from ministers were to: "Take appropriate policy measures to facilitate the implementation of plans, programmes and initiatives for the reform and improvement of CRVS [civil registration and vital statistics] systems to achieve universal coverage and completeness, taking into consideration the specific circumstances of our countries."
Final Ministerial Declaration
www.uneca.org/cr-ministerial-conference/documents/FinalMinisterialDeclaration.pdf (February 2011)

16. Szreter S, "The right of registration: development, identity registration and social security" *History and Policy*
<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:p688JCdqCV8J:www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-53.html+Registration+can+also+be+a+mechanism+for+simultaneously+promoting+economic+growth,+population+health,+and+welfare&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk&source=www.google.co.uk> (11 March 2011)

17. Personal communication

small scale, reaching only 3 per cent of all older people in Kenya, the OPCT would not be of much value in updating nationwide population databases. However, if it was delivered at national level as a universal entitlement, the OPCT could provide regular updates of deaths to the National Registration Authority (NRA) database (and other population databases).

The full potential for population databases and registers to benefit from universal social pensions de-registration systems needs to be further explored. Currently, removing deceased voters from the PVR presents a significant challenge for the National Electoral Commission in Tanzania. Coordination between a universal pension management information system and the PVR could be of mutual benefit. This is especially true if an adequate funeral benefit were to be incorporated within the design of a universal pension in Tanzania as it would result in increased uptake of death registration. This could, in turn, provide regular updates for the electoral register and any other future national ID initiatives.¹⁸



Tom Weller/HelpAge International

3. Design and implementation of registration systems

When considering how to implement a cash transfer scheme, policy makers and practitioners need to consider registration from two angles. First, how to enrol the entire population who meet the criteria at a given time, possibly through an initial registration activity. Second, how the registration system will enable ongoing enrolment of newly-eligible individuals and de-registration of those who have died or are ineligible, so that the programme can be sustainably implemented in the longer term. For example, in the case of social pensions this would mean:

- a. An initial registration system that captures all those at or above the age of eligibility
- b. An ongoing system which enrolls individuals as they reach the age of eligibility and de-registers them on death.

3.1 Achieving sustainable registration systems: initial registration and on-demand systems

Initial registration processes typically require outreach initiatives, taking registration processes beyond the boundaries of current administrative coverage. These “push mechanisms” are appropriate when trying to register people who do not have the resources needed to access registration points. Alternatively, “pull mechanisms” allow individuals to register on demand by travelling to registration points. Ultimately “the ideal registration system is universal and open-ended – any potential beneficiary can apply at any time, and programme officials will assess eligibility for immediate access to social [cash] transfers”.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that national-level cash transfers in Africa which are government-financed are based on simple registration (and de-registration) on the basis of age. Age-based transfers allow for on-demand registration processes that are feasible at national scale. Nepal uses on-demand registration for its universal pension, which has been acknowledged as a success despite Nepal’s status as a low-income country with high levels of illiteracy.²⁰ The success of the scheme is largely explained by the simplicity of age verification, especially when compared with verifying other criteria for eligibility.

3.2 Challenges of registration based on poverty levels

Creating open-ended or on-demand registration systems for cash transfers that verify eligibility on the basis of income or poverty, is far more challenging. Beyond issues of inadequate civil registration or inaccuracies in national ID systems, low-income countries are also characterised by economies with high levels of informality. There is no clear way to verify incomes or poverty levels and complex processes are needed to identify and verify people or households on low incomes.

Despite considerable investigation there is no evidence to suggest that processes for verifying poverty levels can be simplified. In order to sustain registration of newly-eligible recipients and de-register those who should exit from poverty-related transfer schemes, inflexible and costly “push” mechanisms will remain

18. Ministry of Labour, Employment and Youth Development and HelpAge International, 2010

19. Samson M, van Neikriek I, MacQuene K, *Designing and Implementing Social Transfer Programmes*, Cape Town, EPRI Press, 2006, p.120

20. Rajan SI, *Old Age Allowance Programme in Nepal*, Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, Kerala, India, 2002, p.18

a significant component of targeting processes. This is why a geographical approach is used to phase or expand the programme over time.

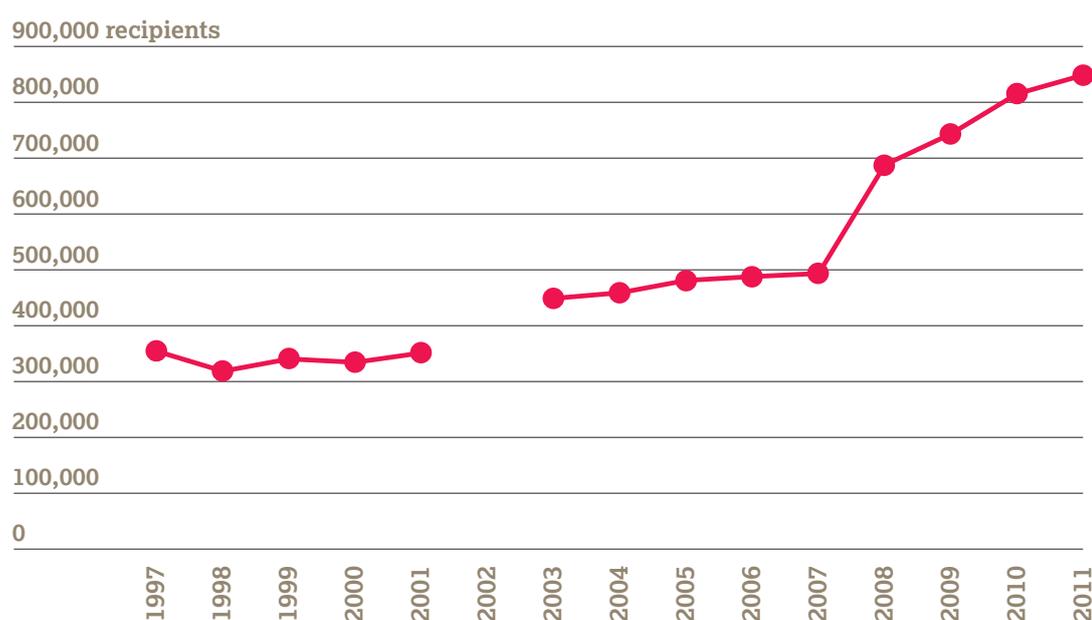
This incremental approach demonstrates the huge implementation challenge for poverty-targeted schemes to be implemented nationwide. Furthermore, this demands ongoing external resources to support capacities at all levels, or alternatively, going back to the drawing board. In addition, given high poverty rates, re-registration processes (or re-targeting) are often an after-thought to programme design and implementation. These will require significant data collection exercises as part of the de- and re-registration processes that also undermine the scalability of the transfer.

3.3 Improving registration systems

At least in the short and medium term, it is likely that a mixed approach using on-demand and “push” registration mechanisms will be needed. At the outset, the focus should be on determining the best way to establish the initial payroll to maximise access for the eligible group. Registration mechanisms in government-administered transfer schemes, unlike small-scale, externally-financed cash transfer programmes, need to be continually improved over the longer term. For universal and near-universal pensions and cash transfers that are part of a permanent system of social protection, it is useful to see registration mechanisms as something that will be continually improved over time.

For example in Bolivia, registration for the universal pension has been improved over time, as shown in Figure 1. The pension – originally called the *Bonosol* – initially gave an annual pension to everyone over 65. In the early years, the numbers receiving the pension remained relatively stable, nevertheless, by 2007 the numbers of recipients had increased by about 35 per cent since the first payment. In 2008, the pension was rebranded as the *Renta Dignidad* and eligibility changed to include older people over 60 (hence the sharp rise in beneficiaries in 2007) and benefits were made on a monthly basis. In the last three years the numbers of recipients have increased significantly each year, which suggests that it has taken some time for all of the new beneficiaries to be enrolled. Improved registration and changes in eligibility mean that uptake of the universal pension has more than doubled over the last 15 years.

Figure 1: Increase in registration for the universal pension in Bolivia



Source: Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas Públicas, Viceministerio de Pensiones y Servicios Financieros Dirección General de Pensiones www.economiayfinanzas.gob.bo/index.php?id_portal=VPSF (March 2011)

After 2007 the steepest increase in registration of approximately 20 per cent per annum occurred between 2008 and 2011. In August 2009 the Bolivian government authorised a biometric registration exercise which took place over two years to improve access and minimise fiduciary risk. Until now, *Autoridad en Pensiones* has enrolled 66.7 per cent of recipients into biometric registration using a “push registration” process and aims to achieve 80 per cent coverage by July 2011.²¹ The increase in coverage is beginning to level off in 2011 as the scheme is reaching nearly all older people. This example of a government investing in improvements to its implementation more than after 15 years after the pension was introduced is partly in response to the demand and technical support provided by civil society (see also section 4).

4. Overcoming age verification and registration challenges: key lessons from practice

To implement a cash transfer scheme that requires age registration, two key questions need to be addressed:

- how to verify the person’s age and identity
- how to make registration points accessible to recipients.

The techniques and approaches in this section may be particularly useful during the design and implementation of initial registration exercises but are also relevant when thinking about strengthening registration systems generally.

4.1 Techniques to verify age

In the initial process of registering older people for a cash transfer, questions are likely to arise about how to verify age where a person has no legal documentation. National bureaus of statistics that are tasked with gathering population data have developed a number of strategies that may be useful. These approaches could also be shared with national ID and registration institutions to ensure that they establish a person’s age accurately.

It is important to ensure that when data is collected from individuals, enumerators are trained and follow a set of guidelines to ensure that a person’s age is not approximated or misreported. Discussions with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics revealed that age verification methodologies are developed and tested before a census exercise. Techniques include:

- **Cross checking age and year of birth:** Enumerators request the date or year of birth as well as the age, so that they can check for accuracy. People are likely to approximate their age but when probed on their date of birth, they tend to give more accurate information.
- **Alternative age records:** Other identity records can be requested (either state or non-state), for example: baptism cards, vaccination cards, public works cards.
- **Age association:** Enumerators ask older people to situate how old they are in relation to a known birth date, for example: “how old were you when your younger sister was born?”
- **Calendars of events:** The Uganda Bureau of Statistics developed a calendar of significant political and national events for older people to state how old they were at those times.

Calendars of events can be constructed innovatively to ensure that they are sensitive to varying socio-cultural and even local contexts. In Nepal, the government allowed citizenship cards to be issued based on a calculation of age associated with horoscopes, which most older people had in their possession.²² For age verification within the HSNP programme in northern Kenya, the calendar of events was based upon an anthropological history that documented major seasonal events in the northern districts of Kenya. These were found to be more memorable than the political dates that referred to historic leaders and independence. Committees of elders also had an important role in settling disputes regarding the age of individuals included and excluded from the programme.

21. Audit Authority pension and social control AP, 2011 Bolivia

22. Rajan, 2002, p.18

4.2 Using a variety of age records

Even where civil registration systems are weak, there are many credible state and non-state records that can be used to verify a person's age. These alternative forms of identification can offer fairly wide coverage. An assessment carried out by HelpAge International in 2010 for the Social Protection Secretariat of the Government of Uganda found that birth and death records had patchy coverage and varied considerably between sub-regional administrative locations. However, the assessment noted that many people know their age as a result of other registration exercises. For example, a variety of formal identification documents containing age and date of birth had widespread coverage, including tax tickets, commonly held by older men. Although this system has now been abolished, many men still had their tax tickets and considered the details an important record of their identity.

Baptism cards, often widespread even in very remote locations, are also considered valid and credible sources of identity and proof of age.²³ The assessment team was able to confirm the accuracy of data on baptism cards by examining and cross-checking them with existing records from at least two church establishments. These exist because of the long history of Christian missions and establishment of local church registration records in Africa. Baptism cards and records were also found to form an important part of identity verification in Uganda for child protection officers, who may need to trace the parenthood of children without birth certificates in order to settle custody cases.²⁴ As a means of verifying age, voters' cards also have very wide coverage. In the villages visited, more than 80 per cent of the inhabitants, including older people, had voter registration cards.²⁵

The example from Uganda shows that programmes that accept a variety of age records, at least in the short term, can significantly reduce delays in the issuance of identity records. Otherwise, such delays undermine the impact of the transfer.

In Namibia, despite being one of the most sparsely populated African countries, there is a 93 per cent coverage of the universal pension among the eligible population. Social pension recipients can be registered using any one of a selection of legal records with proof of age, including birth and marriage certificates and national ID cards. If the person has no legal records, interim documents for verification are accepted temporarily. Interim non-state records that verify age include baptism cards or signed letters from a local village or church leader testifying to the applicant's age. However, the recipient can only use these unofficial documents to identify themselves for a limited number of payments until he or she can arrange to register for a national ID card. Similarly, the food subsidy programme in Mozambique requires the applicant to be in possession of a national ID card in order to register for the transfer. If the applicant does not have an ID card, alternative proof of age can be accepted for no more than three payments.²⁶

4.3 Coordination with civil registration and identity institutions

Since wider civil registration and identity systems are often administered by separate government institutions, it is critical to ensure coordination between these institutions and the line ministries implementing cash transfers. Ministries responsible for civil registration, national identity authorities and electoral commissions need to be aware that the implementation of any age-based transfer programme is likely to create incentives for the public to manipulate their stated age in order to appear eligible.

National electoral commissions establishing electoral registers need to ensure that only those of voting age are registered. Where few people have birth certificates, a key concern is how to verify that young people are over 18 years of age. This is to protect against electoral fraud, where young people might be encouraged by local political representatives to inflate their ages to become eligible to vote. The same is true for pensions. If the age of eligibility is announced before or around the time of ID campaigns, people have an incentive to inflate their ages.



Judith Escríbano/Age UK

23. In one instance, at Bamusuuta Kinakulya Church of Uganda Parish in Kiboga, the research team saw records of births and deaths as well as marriages dating back to 1904.

24. Personal communication, Age Registration Assessment for SAGE programme in Uganda, 2010

25. HelpAge International, internal working paper, Age Registration Assessment for SAGE programme in Uganda, 2010

26. Biwa H, Presentation at National Social Policy Dialogue Forum, ILO, Dar es Salaam, 6 October 2009

If the outreach of government registration initiatives is to be valuable for social pension registration, the authorities need to be sensitised to the importance of making ID registration accessible to older men and women and use accurate age verification.

Thus it is critical that public awareness campaigns announcing the schemes avoid making reference to the age of eligibility until after initial registration phases have been completed. Initial registration can also help to register people below the age of eligibility to reduce the need for further “push” mechanisms and allow an auto enrolment of people as they become eligible in the immediate years following the start-up of a pension.

The potential role of electoral register campaigns for universal pensions

For universal social pensions, it has been possible for several countries to implement initial registration on the back of other registration campaigns – in particular voter registration.

In Lesotho older people were registered in their local constituencies at voters’ registration centres. Currently the on-demand system allows newly-eligible people to register on demand.

In South Africa, registration for all government services can take place at government service centres. They provide “one-stop shops” that enable people to register for identity documentation, civil registration and government grants.



Source: HelpAge International, *Ageing and Development* 21, 2007, p.8

One strategy being tried in Uganda to ensure successful registration is to seek ways to improve civil registration systems before implementing initial registration for an age-based cash transfer.

The National Registration Authority in Kenya did not systematically implement a national ID campaign before the age-based transfers of the OPCT and HSNP were implemented. However, during the expansion of the OPCT programme, district-level implementing officers worked with district-level registrars to provide registration outreach services after identifying gaps in the coverage of the national ID card.

In Nepal, a previous election campaign enabled ages to be verified and recorded on voter cards that were issued before the implementation of the universal pension. These could then be used to access citizenship cards that are required to claim the pension. This approach has improved accessibility to the Nepalese universal pension. Nearly a quarter (24.4 per cent) of respondents in Nepal recommended that the government should make more effort to improve access to documents (citizenship and identity cards) for senior citizens.²⁷

The improvement of civil registration systems and national ID systems, in advance of the implementation of government cash transfer schemes, is a potential area for external funding and development partner support. UNICEF and Plan International, among others, have taken the lead in advocating for improved civil registration schemes, in particular to advance the right to an identity enshrined within the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In just two years, for example, a birth registration campaign by UNICEF and the Mozambican government succeeded in registering 40 per cent of children.

27. NEPAN and HelpAge International, *The Effectiveness of Non-contributory Pension in Nepal: participatory research report*, 2010

4.4 Institutional arrangements

The institutional arrangements for the delivery of transfers will have an impact on the accessibility of registration. Although local government at district and regional level may play a crucial role in registration processes, it may be worth exploring options for contracting services from third parties, including NGOs, which can offer wider coverage.

It may be more cost-effective for government to outsource registration in certain locations where public infrastructure is thin, not only because the government has limited capacity but also because of the additional services that can be offered. For example, the near-universal social pension in Lesotho uses post offices as points for on-going registration.

Increasing research is being carried out on involving the private sector in the delivery of cash transfer payments. Some of these payment service providers may also have the capacity to provide either initial or ongoing registration services.

The Government of Namibia, for instance, has faced a challenge in making the pension available in all regions in the most sparsely-populated country in Africa. A private firm has been contracted to provide mobile paypoints. These mobile units can get within around five to six kilometres of each recipient once every month. However, there are still problems for older people who cannot make the journey to obtain their national ID cards. An option would be to consider how payment service providers could provide on-demand registration.

4.5 The role of civil society

Civil society will play a critical role in transfers that use age criteria, ensuring access to registration points and even assisting in verifying age. HelpAge's experience shows that making registration possible for the most marginalised section of the population is an intensive process that may be beyond the capacity of government in the short term.

In Mozambique for example, the government-coordinated food subsidy programme has engaged with NGOs (including HelpAge International) to extend the reach of the programme into rural areas.²⁸ These NGOs adhered to the overall programme design determined by the government, but they have developed models to address access barriers and ensure eligible recipients are enrolled. With this in mind, governments might consider how civil society can play a role in ensuring access to registration in areas beyond the reach of government structures.

In Kenya, community-based committees were essential in implementing the OPCT and Orphans and Vulnerable Children Cash Transfer (OVC-CT) programmes for which they provided the initial identification of potential recipient households. *Barazas* – community meetings – were used to inform communities about the programmes and registration (and targeting) procedures. For each sub-administrative unit, the *barazas* elected programme committees, which played a more structured role in implementing the registration process.

This community-based methodology is commonly used in small-scale cash transfer programmes and pilots in Africa (such as the Kalomo cash transfer in Zambia and Mchinji cash transfer in Malawi) and has a number of benefits that make it an acceptable approach to initial registration. Among those benefits is working with local community members who have some knowledge of households and are able to speak the local language.

There are, however, significant obstacles to scaling up this approach nationally. In Kenya, for example, this would mean creating thousands of committees across the country. Sustaining these structures, even for a relatively short period of time would be a challenge. It would also require incentive structures, both in terms of reimbursing costs associated with the programme and also maintaining their interest and motivation to sustain the programme. Reimbursing volunteers could pose a significant administrative problem, and could also set a precedent for many other volunteer structures created under other government schemes.

28. HelpAge International has been working in partnership with the implementing government department of the PSA to develop models that could be used to inform the extension and expansion of the programme. HelpAge works with national partners – “Partners for Protection” – to facilitate the targeting, registration and payment of 1,600 recipients in 22 villages in two districts in Mozambique.

29. Asociación Nacional de Adultos Mayores de Bolivia

30. HelpAge International, Latin America Programme Partnership Arrangement: End of grant report, 2008

HelpAge International helps older people claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty, so that they can lead dignified, secure, active and healthy lives.

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It is therefore advisable that community volunteer structures do not become an institutionalised registration mechanism. As schemes mature and national coverage is achieved, newly-eligible recipients ought to apply (or be automatically enrolled) directly with an official institution of the scheme. Nonetheless, civil society can play a key role in ensuring registration processes are accessible and improved over time.

In Bolivia, the advocacy and technical support of the National Association of Older People (ANAMBO)²⁹ has resulted in baptism certificates now being accepted as age verification for older people in the rural areas where few people have birth certificates. Support services in the form of socio-legal centres have played an important role in ensuring access to the universal pension and other entitlements for older people by supporting their access to ID documentation. Over three years from 2005 to 2008, socio-legal centres in five of Bolivia's nine large cities dealt with 26,541 cases across the country. The primary demand for socio-legal services in Bolivia is associated with problems associated with identity documents needed for both the pension and health entitlements. Problems are frequently caused by errors in older people's existing documentation rather than a lack of documents (10,000 cases related to personal documentation).³⁰

A large number of access problems relate to the inaccuracies and inefficiencies of other identity registration systems, rather than to the design of the age-based transfer scheme. Civil society will continue to play a role in meeting the shortfalls in these government services and will enhance the performance of the scheme as a whole.

5. Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of lessons and experience from existing age registration processes for social pensions and other cash transfer schemes. Registration processes were looked at both in terms of registration processes to identify and verify the target group at the outset of implementation, as well as ongoing institutionalised systems to cater for enrolment and de-registration that sustain the programme overtime.

Initial registration exercises have to overcome significant challenges due to lack of civil registration and national identity registration. Poor and vulnerable people remain largely anonymous and with no proof of identity and citizenship in many low- and middle-income countries. Despite this, accurate and sustainable registration systems are achievable even in resource-poor countries. Systems based on age verification are indeed easier to achieve at national scale when implemented as part of universal cash transfer programmes rather than poverty targeted cash transfer programmes.

There are a number of strategies that can be utilised to verify age which should be considered when designing the implementation of initial registration exercises. In the long term, ongoing systems of registration will be strengthened alongside civil registration systems.

This link between age-based transfers and wider systems of civil registration and national identity is critical if age-based transfers are to support wider development processes that are associated with civil registration and the right to identity.

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