Final Evaluation of the National Registration and Identification System (NRIS) Project in Malawi

Evaluation Report

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## Executive Summary

The National Registration Bureau (NRB), a department under the Ministry of Homeland Security, was established through the National Registration Act No. 13 of 2010. Operationalized in August 2015, the NRB’s mandate is to implement, coordinate, manage, and maintain the National Registration and Identification System (NRIS). The NRIS project was conceived as a strategic response to Malawi’s fragmented identity systems and the absence of universal and compulsory registration. The project aligns with the SDG 16.9, Malawi’s Vision 2063, and global best practices for civil registration and identity management. This evaluation captures the project's achievements, challenges, and recommendations, structured around the OECD/UNEG evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

**Evaluation Criteria and Findings**

**Relevance**

The NRIS project addresses critical gaps in governance and socioeconomic development by providing legal identity to all citizens. By registering over 12.4 million individuals, including women, rural populations, and persons with disabilities, the project has significantly advanced inclusivity and compliance with global best practices. The project also directly supports the Malawi Implementation Plan (MIP-1), which prioritizes universal registration and the integration of CRVS systems as part of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (MGDS III). These efforts contribute to achieving Malawi Vision 2063 by establishing robust population data systems and fostering digital transformation in governance.

Particularly, its contributions to data-driven population planning, improved health outcomes, and equitable access to essential services resonate with Key Priority Area 6.6 of MGDS III. Furthermore, NRIS’s integration of birth registration with health facilities demonstrates alignment with SDG 16.9 and APAI-CRVS regional commitments. By enabling marginalized groups, including women, children, and persons with disabilities, to access critical services, the project has enhanced equity and inclusion. However, additional efforts are required to ensure accessibility for remote and underserved populations.

**Coherence**

NRIS demonstrated strong alignment with Malawi’s institutional frameworks and national programs, including voter registration, payroll management, and social protection initiatives. Through MOUs, the NRIS project established key partnerships with institutions such as the MEC for voter roll transparency, the MRA for tax compliance, the Ministry of Health for healthcare integration, NICE for civic education, and telecom providers for digital identity expansion. These collaborations advanced cross-sector interoperability and aligned the project with national development priorities. By linking National IDs to these systems, the project improved governance transparency and accountability. However, gaps remain in integrating NRIS with justice and education systems, limiting its broader potential. These areas require targeted inter-agency coordination and policy harmonization.

**Effectiveness**

The NRIS surpassed its original target of registering 9 million individuals during mass registration, reaching a total of **12.4 million** by 2023, representing 98% of the eligible population. This included gender inclusivity, with women constituting 53% of registrants. However, birth registration fell short, with only **3.6 million children** registered out of the **8.4 million target**, reflecting resource constraints and operational inefficiencies in CRVS expansion. Beyond achieving mass registration of over 12 million citizens, the NRIS project has successfully implemented universal birth registration across health facilities. However, death registration remains limited to four pilot districts, and marriage registration is yet to be rolled out. These partial implementations highlight progress while emphasizing areas requiring additional focus to achieve comprehensive civil registration.

**Efficiency**

The NRIS project achieved its ambitious goal of nationwide registration within 12 months, leveraging advanced biometric technology and streamlined logistics. Over 4,200 registration officers conducted operations at 4,000 centers, ensuring 98% coverage of the eligible population in all 28 districts. This achievement demonstrates the project’s operational efficiency and its ability to deliver results at scale. Budgetary allocations from 2016–2023 reflect the prioritization of NRIS in national planning. The project received significant financial and operational backing as part of broader development goals aligned with MIP-1​. Through innovative measures, such as biometric registration kits, the NRIS achieved significant cost savings. Key results include saving **$27 million annually** in subsidy programs and **$7 million in election-related costs** through improved voter registration. Efficiency gains were also realized through robust public awareness campaigns and partnerships with community-based volunteers, particularly in rural regions. These efforts contributed significantly to high ID collection rates, with approximately 98% of distributed IDs retrieved by beneficiaries. However, logistical inefficiencies in reaching remote areas hindered operational efficiency. Investments in IT infrastructure and logistical systems are critical for long-term improvements.

**Sustainability**

The NRB has effectively institutionalized the NRIS project, supported by significant budget increases from MWK 4.5 billion in 2022–2023 to MWK 45 billion in 2024–2025. The establishment of a separate budget vote and the 2018 restructuring to integrate NRIS operations within the NRB’s systems underscore its long-term commitment to maintaining identity registration services. These measures position the NRB to independently sustain and scale the identity management framework. Sustainability challenges extend beyond financial dependency to include infrastructure and technological gaps. Many district offices rely on outdated biometric registration kits, and the absence of automated disaster recovery systems increases vulnerability during crises. Upgrading these systems is essential for long-term resilience. While capacity-building initiatives have strengthened the NRB’s institutional framework, financial independence remains unachieved. Expanding partnerships with the private sector and integrating revenue-generating services, such as ID verification fees, are essential to ensuring long-term viability.

**Project Outputs and Achievements**

**Output 1: Mass Registration of Malawians**

* **Achievement:** Registered **12.4 million individuals**, surpassing the initial target of 9 million. This milestone provided foundational legal identities, enabling access to services such as banking, voting, and social protection.
* **Impact:** Strengthened governance frameworks, with improved voter roll accuracy and fraud prevention in subsidy programs.
* **Challenges:** Logistical barriers and limited outreach in remote and marginalized communities restricted universal accessibility.
* **Recommendation:** NRB should establish registration offices within each Traditional Authority to improve coverage, accessibility, and operational efficiency. These decentralized offices would reduce travel distances for rural populations, streamline continuous registration processes, and strengthen the NRB’s institutional presence at the community level. Such an approach would enhance sustainability and foster stronger partnerships with local leaders to increase registration uptake.

**Output 2: Transition to Continuous Registration**

* **Achievement:** Established systems for continuous registration of births, deaths, and marriages. By 2023, **3.6 million children** were registered and issued birth certificates.
* **Impact:** Strengthened the CRVS system, enabling accurate population data for policymaking and service delivery.
* **Challenges:** Limited public awareness and resource constraints slowed the pace of CRVS integration.
* **Recommendation:** Collaborate with health and education sectors to expand registration hubs and improve public awareness campaigns.

**Output 3: Integration with Public and Private Institutions**

* **Achievement:** Through MOUs, the NRIS project fostered key partnerships to integrate National IDs into major governance systems, including voter registration, payroll, and subsidy programs and across sectors, enhancing voter roll transparency, tax compliance, healthcare delivery, civic education, and digital identity, thereby advancing interoperability and governance accountability. These efforts generated annual savings of **$27 million** by eliminating ghost beneficiaries.
* **Impact:** Enhanced accountability and efficiency across governance and social protection frameworks.
* **Challenges:** Limited interoperability across MDAs and private sector institutions has restricted full utility of the ID system. Other critical challenges impeding the progress of the overall integration include siloed implementations, vendor lock-in, and limited integration between various government ICT projects.
* **Recommendation:** Establish open interoperability frameworks and standards to enable seamless data sharing, robust digital governance frameworks, and investments in human capital development for sustainable and inclusive digital transformation.

**Output 4: Birth registration through CRV**

* **Achievement:** Registered **3.6 million children**, contributing to improved access to education and healthcare services.
* **Impact:** Strengthened child rights protections and enhanced demographic insights for national planning.
* **Challenges:** Operational inefficiencies and logistical gaps hindered progress toward achieving universal birth registration.
* **Recommendation:** Scale up pilot programs in schools and clinics and increase funding to support outreach activities.

**Output 5: Efficient Project Management and National Ownership**

* **Achievement:** Strengthened NRB capacity through governance reforms, training programs, and improved operational systems.
* **Impact:** Institutional resilience supports the long-term sustainability of the NRIS.
* **Challenges:** Human resource capacity emerged as a significant challenge for the NRIS project, with gaps in technical expertise and limited institutional support impacting the implementation and sustainability of digital transformation initiatives. Dependency on donor funding and underdeveloped revenue-generation strategies also remain significant risks.
* **Recommendation:** Advocate for government budget prioritization and expand fee-based revenue models for private sector services. Develop comprehensive training programs to build technical capacity in digital governance and system management, particularly at the district and local levels.

**Recommendations Aligned with Evaluation Criteria**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Evaluation Criteria** | **Expanded Recommendations** |
| **Relevance** | Strengthening the NRB’s presence within all Traditional Authorities is critical for ensuring the long-term sustainability of identity registration services. Decentralized offices will enhance accessibility for underserved populations, support continuous registration efforts, and build trust through community engagement. This approach aligns with efforts to bridge the digital divide and institutionalize identity management at the local level. |
| **Coherence** | Establish a centralized interoperability framework to integrate NRIS with justice, health, and education systems. Strengthen inter-agency collaborations by aligning NRIS objectives with broader governance priorities, such as using IDs for tracking educational attendance or case management in courts. |
| **Effectiveness** | Scale up birth registration by leveraging schools and clinics as registration hubs. To maximize the utility of birth certificates, develop demand-side use cases demonstrating their importance in accessing health and education services. Enhance automation in CRVS processes, such as linking digital birth certificates to existing ID systems for seamless registration. Raising awareness, integrating birth registration data with sectoral systems, and piloting use cases will enhance their value and impact. |
| **Efficiency** | Conduct regular audits to assess operational inefficiencies and address resource wastage. Ensure robust maintenance and timely upgrades of biometric registration kits to minimize delays. Scale up Digital ID credentials such as the digitally signed QR codes to improve accessibility and reduce administrative costs, particularly for secure and efficient identity verification in sectors like voter registration, healthcare and financial services. |
| **Sustainability** | Past government allocations and the upward trend in funding indicate a long-term commitment to the sustainability of the NRIS project and reducing donor dependency. Establish a separate budget account for NRB to ensure NRB’s operational independence, strategic importance, and continued prioritization in future years. Develop revenue-generation mechanisms such as private-sector fees for ID verification and public-private partnerships for CRVS system enhancements. Enhance NRB staff training to build capacity for independent and sustainable operations. |

The NRIS project has been pivotal in addressing governance inefficiencies and enhancing social inclusion by providing a robust identity framework. Its successes in mass registration, CRVS integration, and institutional strengthening highlight its transformative potential. However, challenges in birth registration, financial sustainability, and inclusivity must be addressed to fully realize its objectives. By implementing the outlined recommendations, the NRIS project can solidify its role as a cornerstone of Malawi’s development framework, fostering equitable access to services and supporting long-term national growth.

## Project Information Summary

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **UNDP Project ID** | **Malawi NRIS Project - Project ID: 00100113** |
| **Period of Project Implementation** | November 2016 – June 2024 |
| **Final Evaluation Period** | November – December 2024 |
| **UNDAF Outcome** | National institutions foster democratic governance and human rights to promote transparency, accountability, participation, and access to justice for all, especially women and children. |
| **Contributing Outcome** | Citizen expectations for voice, development, the rule of law, and accountability are met by stronger systems of democratic governance. |
| **Project-Specific Outcome** | The establishment of a permanent and continuous national registration and identification system in Malawi. |
| **Indicative Output(s)** | a) Over **12.4 million Malawians** registered and issued National Identity Cards, surpassing the initial target of 9 million. |
|  | b) Successful **transition to continuous registration** for births and deaths under the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system. |
|  | c) **3.6 million children** registered out of the targeted 8.4 million for Birth Certificates. |
|  | d) Integration of NRIS with **government MDAs** for service delivery in sectors such as elections, payroll systems, and social protection. |
|  | e) Contribution to **fraud elimination**, including the removal of 8,000 ghost workers and 490,995 fraudulent subsidy beneficiaries. |
|  | f) Deployment of **Digital ID Wallets** and biometric verification systems to enhance service delivery efficiency. |
|  | g) Operational challenges identified, including gaps in **birth registration**, financial sustainability, and rural inclusivity. |
| **Implementing Entity and Partners** | Implementing Entity: UNDP and National Registration Bureau (NRB) under the Ministry of Home Affairs |
| **Government and Stakeholders** | Government of Malawi (GoM), DFID, EU, Government of Ireland, Norway, USAID, UNICEF, and UNDP |
| **Evaluation Team Members** | Independent International Consultants under UNDP supervision |
| **Project Location**  | Lilongwe, Malawi |

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ADR | Assistant District Registrar |
| APAI-CRVS | Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics |
| BRK | Biometric Registration Kit |
| COMESA | Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa |
| CRB | Credit Reference Bureau |
| CRVS | Civil Registration and Vital Statistics |
| DFID | Department for International Development |
| DHRMD | Department of Human Resource Management and Development |
| DRO | District Registration Office |
| EBRS | Electronic Birth Registration System |
| EGPAF | Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation |
| ESCOM | Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi |
| EU | European Union |
| GWAN | Government Wide Area Network |
| ICAO | International Civil Aviation Organization |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IDT4M | Inclusive Digital Transformation for Malawi |
| MCR | Mass Birth registration |
| MEC | Malawi Electoral Commission |
| MDAs | Ministries, Departments, and Agencies |
| MISO | Management Information System Officer |
| MoJ | Ministry of Justice |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MRA | Malawi Revenue Authority |
| NEEF | National Economic Empowerment Fund |
| NRB | National Registration Bureau |
| NRIS | National Registration and Identification System |
| PKI | Public Key Infrastructure |
| PO | Post Office |
| PRO | Principal Registration Officer |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children’s Fund |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |

## Introduction

* 1. **Purpose of the Evaluation**

The National Registration and Identification System (NRIS) project, initiated in 2016, represents a transformative effort to establish a permanent, inclusive, and functional identity framework in Malawi. The initiative sought to establish a universal and inclusive identity framework, addressing governance gaps, improving service delivery, and fostering socioeconomic inclusion. This includes the issuance of legal identity documents, such as birth and death certificates, and the development of a comprehensive digital civil registration and identification framework.

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the implementation, outcomes, and overall impact of the NRIS Project. The evaluation provides a systematic review of the project’s performance, offering evidence-based insights to recognize successes, address challenges, and identify opportunities for scalability and sustainability. The findings will not only inform improvements to the NRIS but also serve as a global reference for similar identity management initiatives.

A key focus of the evaluation is to analyze the project’s effectiveness in ensuring inclusivity, particularly in reaching underserved and marginalized communities, including women, rural populations, and persons with disabilities. Additionally, the evaluation seeks to assess the NRIS Project's contribution to establishing a functional Civil Registration and Vital Statistics and Identity Management (CRVSID) system, which supports governance, socioeconomic inclusion, and compliance with international frameworks such as SDG 16.9.

Specifically, the evaluation seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which the NRIS Project has achieved its objectives and expected outcomes.
2. Analyze the efficiency and effectiveness of the project’s design and implementation across various phases, including mass registration and continuous registration.
3. Assess the sustainability of project outcomes, particularly regarding institutional readiness and financial independence from donor funding.
4. Examine cross-cutting themes such as gender equality, human rights, and environmental considerations in the project’s approach and implementation.
5. Analyze the project's effectiveness in ensuring inclusivity, particularly in reaching underserved and marginalized communities, including women and rural populations.
6. Provide actionable recommendations to enhance the NRIS’s long-term impact, aligning it with Malawi’s development priorities and global frameworks such as the UN SDGs.
	1. **Objectives of the Evaluation**

The evaluation is guided by the following key objectives:

1. **Assess Relevance**: Examine how well the NRIS aligns with Malawi’s national development priorities, including governance reforms, financial inclusion strategies, and Vision 2063, as well as international frameworks such as the SDGs.
2. **Evaluate Coherence**: Assess the degree of integration and synergy between the NRIS and other national programs, policies, and institutional frameworks, including its role in fostering inter-agency collaboration.
3. **Measure Effectiveness**: Determine the extent to which planned outputs, outcomes, and impacts have been achieved, including the delivery of secure national IDs, improved governance processes, and enhanced service delivery mechanisms.
4. **Assess Efficiency**: Analyze resource utilization, cost-effectiveness, and operational performance across all phases of the project, identifying areas of strength and inefficiency.
5. **Examine Sustainability**: Evaluate the institutional, technical, and financial mechanisms in place to sustain project outcomes beyond donor support, ensuring continued service delivery.
6. **Analyze Cross-Cutting Themes**: Investigate how the NRIS has addressed gender equality, human rights, and inclusivity in its design and implementation, while identifying gaps and potential improvements.
7. **Identify Lessons Learned**: Extract key lessons from the project’s design and implementation to inform future initiatives in Malawi and other countries implementing similar identity systems.
8. Evaluate how the NRIS has strengthened data-driven planning and governance, particularly through linkages with electoral rolls, financial systems, and social protection programs.
	1. **Structure of the Report**

This evaluation report is structured into the following sections to provide a comprehensive analysis of the NRIS Project:

1. **Executive Summary**: Summarizes the NRIS Project’s objectives, key findings, conclusions, and recommendations for stakeholders.
2. **Acknowledgements**: Recognizes the contributions of key partners, evaluators, and other stakeholders involved in the project.
3. **Acronyms and Abbreviations**: Lists terms and acronyms used throughout the report for ease of reference.
4. **Introduction**: Outlines the purpose, objectives, and structure of the evaluation report.
5. **Evaluation Scope and Objectives**: Defines the scope, criteria, and evaluation questions guiding the analysis.
6. **Evaluation Methodology**: Describes the approaches, methods, and tools used for data collection, analysis, and triangulation.
7. **Programme Profile**: Details the NRIS Project’s background, objectives, and activities, providing context for the evaluation findings.
8. **Theory of Change**: Explores the project’s original logic, causal pathways, and validation through implementation.
9. **Evaluation Findings**: Presents findings organized by the evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.
10. **Cross-Cutting Themes**: Evaluates the NRIS’s performance in addressing gender equality, human rights, and environmental sustainability.
11. **Conclusions and Recommendations**: Summarizes the project’s achievements, challenges, and offers actionable recommendations for stakeholders, including strategic and operational priorities for the NRB and development partners.
12. **Annexes**: Includes supporting documents such as the terms of reference, detailed methodology, and a bibliography of resources reviewed.

The report also includes insights into ongoing innovations like digital identity systems and enhanced data interoperability, which have implications for governance and service delivery. Additionally, the integration of CRVSID as a cornerstone of identity management and its alignment with broader governance frameworks is covered in the methodology and findings sections.

## Evaluation Scope and Objectives

* 1. **Scope of the Evaluation**

The evaluation comprehensively covers the entire lifecycle of the NRIS Project, from its inception in **November 2016** to its conclusion in **June 2024**, providing a detailed assessment of the project’s design, implementation, outcomes, and sustainability. This scope encompasses all major phases of the project, key innovations, operational challenges, and institutional mechanisms that underpin its performance. The evaluation spans all 28 districts of Malawi, ensuring a representative analysis of urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. Special attention is given to remote districts and underserved communities to identify barriers to service delivery and strategies to address them. On-site assessments of district and post office facilities evaluate functionality, infrastructure adequacy, and the quality of user experience.

* 1. **Evaluation Objectives**

The evaluation is guided by the following key objectives, aligned with the **OECD/UNEG evaluation criteria**:

1. **Relevance**:
	* Examine how well the NRIS objectives align with Malawi’s national development priorities, including Vision 2063, and global frameworks such as the SDGs.
	* Evaluate the project’s responsiveness to the needs of marginalized groups, including **women**, **persons with disabilities**, and **people with albinism**.
2. **Coherence**:
	* Assess the level of integration and synergy between the NRIS and other national programs, including governance reforms, electoral systems, and social protection initiatives.
	* Analyze the alignment of the NRIS with donor-supported programs, identifying complementarities and potential overlaps.
3. **Effectiveness**:
	* Measure the extent to which the project achieved its planned outputs and outcomes, including universal registration, ID issuance, and enhanced governance mechanisms.
	* Assess the contributions of innovative interventions such as biometric verification systems and interoperability with government programs to achieving results.
4. **Efficiency**:
	* Evaluate resource utilization, cost-effectiveness, and operational strategies deployed to achieve project objectives.
	* Identify logistical challenges and solutions to optimize future implementations of large-scale registration projects.
5. **Sustainability**:
	* Examine the institutional, technical, and financial mechanisms established to sustain project outcomes beyond donor support.
	* Evaluate the effectiveness of capacity-building efforts in preparing the NRB for independent management of the identity system.
6. **Cross-Cutting Themes**:
	* Investigate the integration of gender equality, human rights, and environmental sustainability in the project’s design and implementation.
	* Identify gaps in inclusivity and propose actionable recommendations to address these challenges.
	1. **Evaluation Criteria and Questions**

The evaluation uses the OECD/UNEG criteria to address the following questions:

1. **Relevance**:
	* How well does the NRIS align with Malawi’s national and global development goals?
	* Does the project adequately address the needs of marginalized groups?
2. **Coherence**:
	* How effectively has the NRIS been integrated with other national programs and donor-supported initiatives?
	* Are there any gaps or synergies between the NRIS and broader governance frameworks?
3. **Effectiveness**:
	* Were the planned outcomes, such as ID issuance and system integration, achieved?
	* What barriers and enabling factors impacted the achievement of objectives?
4. **Efficiency**:
	* Were resources optimally utilized to achieve project goals?
	* What lessons can be drawn from operational and logistical performance?
5. **Sustainability**:
	* What measures ensure the long-term viability of project outcomes?
	* How effectively has the NRB transitioned to self-sufficient management?
6. **Cross-Cutting Themes**:
	* Were gender equality, human rights, and environmental considerations integrated effectively?
	* What challenges remain in achieving inclusive and sustainable outcomes?
	1. **Cross-Cutting Themes**
		1. **Gender Equality**
* Evaluates the project’s role in addressing gender disparities in access to identity services.
* Investigates the participation of women in decision-making and project implementation processes.
* Assesses how secure IDs have impacted women’s access to financial, healthcare, and social protection services.
	+ 1. **Human Rights and Inclusivity**
* Examines equitable access for marginalized populations, including persons with disabilities, rural communities, and vulnerable groups.
* Evaluates adherence to human rights principles, including universal coverage and non-discrimination.
* Identifies barriers faced by excluded populations and the measures taken to address them.
	+ 1. **Environmental Considerations**
* Evaluates the project’s integration of environmental sustainability into operational activities, such as ICT infrastructure and logistical planning.
* Assesses the environmental impact of mass registration campaigns, particularly the disposal of electronic waste.

## Evaluation Methodology

* 1. **Approach and Design**

The evaluation adopted a theory-based, mixed-methods approach to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of the NRIS Project. The methodology was grounded in the project’s Theory of Change (ToC), using it as a framework to evaluate the causal pathways linking inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. This approach facilitated a thorough examination of the project’s performance against its stated objectives and alignment with national and global development goals.

Key elements of the approach included:

1. **Participatory and Inclusive Design**:
	* Stakeholder consultations ensured diverse perspectives were integrated, including those of beneficiaries, government institutions, private sector partners, and development agencies.
	* Inclusivity in the evaluation process fostered ownership of findings and encouraged actionable and context-sensitive recommendations.
2. **Analysis of Data**:
	* A combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods was employed to validate findings and enhance reliability.
	* Insights from interviews and field observations were cross-referenced with project documentation and external evaluations (e.g., the Mid-Term Review).
3. **Alignment with UNEG and OECD/DAC Evaluation Standards**:
	* The methodology adhered to internationally recognized evaluation principles, covering relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.
	* This alignment ensured that the evaluation process met global best practices and was comparable to similar projects in other countries.
	1. **Data Gathering**

A diverse approach for data gathering ensured comprehensive coverage of the evaluation questions:

1. **Document Review**:
	* Analysed key documents such as project design proposals, operational guidelines, progress reports, and financial statements to establish a baseline and contextual understanding.
	* Reviewed policies and frameworks like Vision 2063, the MIP-I, APAI-CRVS, and SDG 16.9 to assess alignment with national and global priorities.
2. **Stakeholder Consultations Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**:
	* Conducted with a wide range of stakeholders, including NRB officials, NRIS project team, development partners (e.g., UNDP, EU, USAID, etc.,), district registration officers, and community members.
	* Explored topics such as project implementation challenges, institutional capacity, and stakeholder collaboration.
3. **Field Observations**:
	* Conducted visits to registration centers, district offices, and post offices to observe operational workflows, infrastructure adequacy, and service delivery mechanisms.
	* Targeted beneficiaries and frontline staff to gather quantitative data on registration accessibility, system usability, and service satisfaction.
	* Incorporated specific metrics such as time taken for ID issuance, user experience feedback, and perceived system reliability.
	* Engaged marginalized groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and rural residents, to understand their registration experiences and barriers to service access.
	* Highlighted gender-specific challenges and community-level feedback on service inclusivity.
	1. **Key Highlights from Stakeholder Consultations KIIs and Field Observations**

The stakeholder consultations for the NRIS Project provided a crucial platform to assess its implementation, outcomes, and sustainability. These consultations engaged key stakeholders, including government officials, development partners, technical experts, and community representatives. The consultations aimed to capture diverse perspectives, validate project achievements, and identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

**Relevance**

Stakeholders consistently acknowledged the NRIS Project’s alignment with Malawi’s development goals, including Vision 2063, and global frameworks like the SDGs. The registration of over 12.4 million individuals, including marginalized groups, was highlighted as a significant step toward inclusivity and governance reform.

**Key Observations:**

* The NRIS significantly advanced inclusivity, particularly for rural and marginalized populations, though gaps remain in birth and death registration systems.
* The project’s foundational focus on identity systems supports broader goals such as voter registration, financial inclusion, and public service delivery.
* Expanding the project’s reach into traditional authority areas was highlighted as a critical step to increase accessibility and inclusivity.

***Government Official:*** *“The NRIS Project has become the backbone of governance in Malawi, addressing decades of exclusion by prioritizing universal legal identity.”*

***Development Partner:*** *“It’s encouraging to see the project targeting marginalized groups, but we need more robust mechanisms to reach children under 16, especially in rural areas.”*

***Development Partner****: "NRIS is central to achieving governance reform and social inclusion, but its success depends on sustainable investments and continuous updates."*

**Coherence**

The integration of NRIS with other government systems, such as voter registration and social protection programs, was identified as a key strength. However, gaps in interoperability with health, education, and justice sectors were raised, limiting the broader utility of the ID system.

**Key Observations:**

* Current institutional frameworks lack streamlined interoperability, which restricts the NRIS's broader utility.
* The need for stronger linkages between the National ID and other government systems is critical for realizing its full potential.
* Expanding the project’s reach into traditional authority areas was highlighted as a critical step to increase accessibility and inclusivity.

**CRVS Expert:** “The integration of national IDs with voter rolls has been good, but the lack of linkages with healthcare systems has slowed down service delivery improvements.”

**Donor Agency Representative:** “NRIS has made commendable strides in governance, but siloed implementations in some ministries are a missed opportunity.”

**Effectiveness**

The consultations highlighted that the NRIS surpassed its registration targets for individuals over 16 but fell short on birth and death registration. Stakeholders emphasized the need for enhanced operational frameworks, including staff capacity building, resource allocation, and public awareness campaigns.

**Key Observations:**

* The NRIS registered over 12.4 million individuals, surpassing its target of 9 million, but birth registration reached only 3.6 million children out of a planned 8.4 million.
* The NRB’s operational framework needs functional reviews and HR restructuring for sustained progress.
* Expanding the project’s reach into traditional authority areas was highlighted as a critical step to increase accessibility and inclusivity.

***District Registration Officer:*** *“The success of mass registration is undeniable, but continuous registration faces serious logistical and infrastructural challenges.”*

***NRB Official:*** *“Our biggest gap remains birth registration—without scaling this effort, we’re leaving millions of children invisible in the system.”*

**Efficiency**

Operational efficiency was praised during the mass registration phase, with over 98% of the adult population covered within 12 months. However, logistical challenges in remote areas and outdated infrastructure were identified as ongoing barriers.

**Key Observations:**

* Current IT infrastructure, including outdated biometric kits, needs urgent upgrades.
* Temporary satellite centers improve accessibility but are insufficient without permanent service points in rural areas.

***IT Specialist:*** *“The deployment of biometric kits was innovative, but many of these kits are now outdated, affecting the quality of registrations.”*

***Field Officer:*** *“Transporting registration materials to hard-to-reach areas is a costly and time-consuming process, impacting efficiency.”*

**Sustainability**

Stakeholders expressed concern over the project’s heavy reliance on donor funding, highlighting the need for sustainable revenue models and increased government ownership. Suggestions included introducing nominal fees for private-sector ID verification and leveraging partnerships to reduce costs.

**Key Observations:**

* The absence of a diversified revenue stream limits the NRB’s ability to sustain operations independently.
* Organizational inefficiencies and HR gaps must be resolved to support long-term goals.
* Expanding the project’s reach into traditional authority areas was highlighted as a critical step to increase accessibility and inclusivity.

***Development Partner Representative:*** *“Donor dependency is not sustainable; the government must prioritize funding for NRB in national budgets.”*

***NRIS Project Manager:*** *“We need to explore innovative revenue streams, such as charging for digital ID services, to ensure long-term viability.”*

**Cross-Cutting Themes**

1. **Gender Equality**: Stakeholders recognized the project’s success in registering more women than men, reflecting efforts to address gender disparities. However, challenges in female leadership within NRB and cultural resistance to inclusivity remain.

***Women’s Rights Advocate:*** *“The registration data shows progress for women, but gender equity must also reflect in leadership roles within the NRB.”*

1. **Human Rights and Inclusivity**: The consultations stressed the importance of addressing barriers faced by persons with disabilities, rural populations, and vulnerable groups. Strengthening community-level outreach and civic education was highlighted as critical.

***Community Representative:*** *“Many in rural areas still lack trust in the system, and this mistrust is a hurdle we must overcome.”*

1. **Environmental Considerations**: The environmental impact of registration processes, particularly electronic waste management, was flagged. Stakeholders suggested adopting sustainable practices for infrastructure and resource utilization.

***Environmental Expert:*** *“With over 4,000 registration kits deployed, we must now address the environmental impact of their disposal.”*

**Recommendations**

The insights from stakeholder consultations underpin the following key recommendations:

1. **Operational Improvements:** Conduct functional reviews to optimize the NRB’s leadership and operational structures. Establish permanent service centers within traditional authority areas to improve accessibility.
2. **Strengthen Civic Education**: Expand public awareness campaigns to build trust and clarify misconceptions about birth registration processes.
3. **Enhance Infrastructure**: Invest in updated biometric kits and logistical systems to support continuous registration.
4. **Foster Integration**: Prioritize interoperability between NRB and health, education, and justice systems.
5. **Develop Revenue Models**: Introduce fees for private-sector verification services to ensure financial sustainability.
6. **Expand Inclusivity**: Deploy targeted strategies for underserved communities, including rural populations and persons with disabilities.

The stakeholder consultations reinforced the NRIS Project’s critical role in advancing governance, inclusion, and service delivery in Malawi. However, they also highlighted persistent challenges in operational capacity, sustainability, and inclusivity, which the NRB needs to address to solidify its position as a cornerstone of Malawi’s development framework.

## Programme Profile

* 1. **Context and Background**

The **National Registration and Identification System (NRIS)** Project was conceived in response to one of Malawi's most significant governance challenges: the absence of a functional, inclusive, and integrated identity management system. For decades, the lack of a centralized registry undermined governance processes, economic planning, and citizens' access to critical services. The project’s design and execution directly align with the Malawi Digital Economy Strategy, ensuring the foundation for e-governance and enabling digital transformation across public and private sectors.

The NRIS project aligns with the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (MGDS III), under Key Priority Area 6.6, which focuses on population management and access to essential services. It also contributes to achieving SDG 16.9 by promoting universal legal identity and integrating CRVS into national planning.

**Structural Challenges in Identity Systems**

Before the NRIS, Malawi relied on fragmented and ad hoc systems for identity verification. The voter card, issued every five years for electoral purposes, served as the de facto proof of identity for most citizens. However, this system was fraught with limitations:

* **Non-Universal Coverage**: The voter card system excluded children, young adults, and those who failed to register during specific electoral cycles.
* **Limited Functionality**: The voter card was not designed for broader applications, such as accessing government services or financial inclusion.
* **Poor Security Features**: The lack of biometric data made the voter card susceptible to forgery and duplication​​.

Malawi's reliance on such fragmented systems created significant inefficiencies. For example, standalone identity databases maintained by specific sectors—such as agriculture or health—resulted in redundant efforts and high costs. The absence of a unique identifier meant individuals were often registered multiple times across systems, undermining the accuracy and reliability of data.

These challenges had far-reaching implications:

1. **Limited-Service Delivery**: Without accurate identity data, government programs struggled to target beneficiaries effectively, leading to resource wastage and inequities in service access.
2. **Weak Governance and Accountability**: The inability to link individuals to administrative records weakened oversight mechanisms, fostering opportunities for fraud and corruption.
3. **Economic Constraints**: In the private sector, the lack of a reliable identity system increased transaction costs and risks, particularly in financial services. High interest rates, driven by poor credit data, further limited financial inclusion​​​.
	1. **Origins and Vision of the NRIS Project**

The enactment of the **National Registration Act (2010)** provided the legislative foundation for a transformative identity management system. The Act mandated:

1. **Universal Registration**: All Malawians aged 16 and above were required to be registered in a centralized national database and issued a secure identity card.
2. **Civil Registration Integration**: Life events, such as births, deaths, and marriages, were to be recorded systematically under the CRVS system, forming a comprehensive population registry.
3. **National Registration Bureau (NRB)** Mandate: The NRB was designated as the central authority responsible for implementing and managing the identity system​​​.

Recognizing the importance of identity in driving inclusive development, the NRIS Project aligned with global priorities, particularly SDG 16.9, which emphasizes providing legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030. The project was envisioned as a multi-phased initiative to establish an authoritative identity system, integrate civil registration, and promote the use of identity data across public and private sectors​​.

* 1. **Objectives and Strategic Goals**

The NRIS Project was structured around five strategic objectives:

1. **Mass Registration Campaign**: Conduct a nationwide biometric registration exercise to capture the demographic and biometric data of at least 9 million Malawians aged 16 and above during the first phase.
2. **Continuous Registration**: Transition to a sustainable, ongoing registration system to include children under 16 and record life events.
3. **Data Integration and Interoperability**: Establish linkages between the national registry and government MDAs, enabling seamless service delivery and governance.
4. **Capacity Building**: Strengthen the technical, operational, and institutional capacities of the NRB to manage and maintain the system.
5. **Secure and Scalable Infrastructure**: Develop a robust technological backbone to ensure data security, scalability, and compliance with international privacy standards​​.
	1. **Project Phases and Activities**

The implementation of the NRIS Project was divided into three distinct phases, each targeting specific objectives while building upon the achievements of the previous phase.

* + 1. **Phase 1: Pilot and Proof of Concept (2016)**

The first phase was critical for establishing the feasibility and foundational architecture of the NRIS Project. During this phase:

1. **Proof of Concept (PoC):**
	* A small-scale registration exercise was conducted to test the technical and operational viability of the system.
	* Biometric Registration Kits (BRKs) were deployed to capture demographic and biometric data, ensuring that the system could handle high volumes with accuracy and speed​​.
2. **Infrastructure Development:**
	* The AG Office Data Centre on the GWAN was selected to host the centralized biometric database, providing secure and scalable storage.
	* Biometric servers were installed and configured, and the specifications for the National ID cards were aligned with international standards under the ICAO Document 9303.
3. **Stakeholder Engagement:**
	* Extensive consultations with Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) helped define the scope of integration and ensured institutional buy-in.
	* Partnerships were formalized with key development partners, including UNDP, DFID, Norway, and USAID, to secure financial and technical support​​​.
		1. **Phase 2: Mass Registration Campaign (2017)**

The second phase represented the operationalization of the NRIS Project’s core objectives:

1. **Nationwide Registration Exercise:**
	* Over 4,200 registration officers were trained and deployed to facilitate the registration of more than 9 million Malawians aged 16 and above across 28 districts.
	* BRKs were strategically positioned at over 4,000 registration centers, including rural and hard-to-reach areas, ensuring nationwide accessibility.
	* Community engagement played a significant role in the campaign's success. Traditional leaders, religious institutions, and civil society organizations were mobilized to raise awareness and encourage participation. Communication strategies, such as radio campaigns and town hall meetings, were used extensively​​​.
2. **Centralized Data Management:**
	* All data collected during the campaign was consolidated into the centralized national database hosted at the AG Office Data Centre on the GWAN. This ensured real-time data access for administrative and governance purposes​​.
3. **Resource Optimization:**
	* As part of the UNDP administered basket fund arrangement, the Government of Malawi and Development Partners agreed to a 40:60 percent division of the project cost estimated at around $50 million, enabling the procurement of state-of-the-art registration equipment, system integration tools, and technical training for NRB staff.
	* Collaborative efforts between the NRB and MDAs reduced duplication, optimized logistics, and ensured resource-efficient operations​​​.
		1. **Phase 3: Continuous Registration (2018–Present)**

The transition from mass registration to a continuous registration model marked the evolution of the NRIS Project into a sustainable system:

1. **Expansion to Birth Registration:**
	* Recognizing the gap in birth registration, the NRIS integrated with the CRVS system to cover children under 16. By 2023, the project aimed to register 8.4 million children and issue birth certificates​​​.
2. **Continuous National ID Registration:**
	* To ensure the sustainability of the NRIS project, the NRB established 28 District Registration Offices (DROs) equipped to handle continuous registration for individuals turning 16 and above. Sixty-five post offices were converted into registration centers, significantly improving accessibility for rural and remote populations.
	* Mobile registration units were deployed to reach underserved areas, ensuring inclusivity in the registration process. Modern Android-based biometric registration kits were introduced, enhancing efficiency, security, and portability in field operations.
3. **Financial Sustainability:**
	* Government budget allocations for the NRB have increased significantly, growing from MWK 4.5 billion in 2022–2023 to MWK 28 billion in 2023–2024, with a projected increase to MWK 45 billion for 2024–2025. This demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring the continuity and sustainability of NRIS operations.
4. **System Integration and Interoperability:**
	* The NRIS database was linked to key government systems, including voter registration platforms, tax compliance systems, and social protection programs. This interoperability enabled streamlined service delivery and improved governance​​​.
5. **Capacity Building:**
	* Training programs were implemented to enhance the skills of NRB staff, ensuring the sustainability of system operations. Custom training modules were developed to address emerging needs in identity management, data security, and system maintenance​​​.
	1. **Key Innovations and Technologies**

The NRIS Project incorporated advanced technologies and innovative approaches to address the challenges of scale, inclusivity, and operational efficiency. These innovations were pivotal in achieving the project’s objectives. The NRIS database now supports advanced integrations, such as APIs with the Credit Reference Bureau (CRB) to authenticate credit data and reduce financial risks for banks.

* + 1. **Biometric Registration Kits**
* **Functionality:** Each BRK was equipped with fingerprint scanners, digital cameras, and real-time validation software, enabling the capture of high-quality biometric and demographic data.
* **Deployment:** The portability of BRKs allowed their use in remote areas, ensuring that even marginalized populations were included in the registration process.
* **Impact:** BRKs significantly reduced errors, minimized duplication, and ensured the integrity of the registration process​​​.
	+ 1. **Centralized Biometric Database**
		2. **Advanced Biometric Identity System**
* **Centralized Biometric Database:**
The biometric database, hosted at the AG Office Data Centre on the GWAN, was designed to securely store and manage biometric data. It provided real-time access to authorized government agencies, enabling efficient verification and administrative processes. The database architecture was built to support future expansions, including the integration of CRVS data and continuous registration of children.
* **Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS):**
An Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) was implemented to enhance data matching capabilities, including fingerprint and facial recognition, ensuring accuracy in identity verification.
* **Technology and Ownership:**
In-house development of software ensured full ownership of the ID system, allowing for tailored modifications and timely updates. This minimized reliance on external vendors and enhanced adaptability to Malawi’s unique needs.
* **Compliance with International Standards:**
The national ID card was designed as per international standards in compliance with ICAO standards 9303 for machine-readable travel documents and ISO standards for data security and interoperability.
	+ 1. **Interoperability and Data Integration**
* **System Linkages:** The NRIS database was integrated with various MDAs to enable functionalities such as voter registration, tax compliance, and Know-Your-Customer (KYC) verification for financial services.
* **Benefits:** This interoperability enhanced service delivery, reduced redundancies, and improved resource allocation across sectors​​.
	+ 1. **Secure Identity Cards**
* **Specifications:** The ID cards complied with ICAO standards and featured advanced security elements, including biometric data, digital signatures, and tamper-proof materials.
* **Applications:** Beyond identification, the cards facilitated access to financial services, social protection programs, and public sector benefits​​.
	+ 1. **Digital ID Wallet**
* A prototype of the Digital ID Wallet was developed to empower citizens with a secure and accessible mobile platform for storing and accessing their identity information.
* The prototype was successfully tested, demonstrating its potential to streamline e-KYC processes for banking services and accelerate financial inclusion efforts.
* Although not yet implemented, the system's design includes integration with the Credit Reference Bureau to reduce financial risks by enabling efficient credit authentication. This innovation lays the groundwork for future deployment, aiming to enhance accessibility, financial inclusion, and service efficiency once fully operational.
	1. **Geographical and Demographic Scope**

The NRIS Project was national in scope, targeting all 28 districts of Malawi. Its demographic focus was equally comprehensive:

1. **Adult Population (Phase 2):** During the mass registration phase, over 9 million adults were registered, achieving near-universal coverage.
2. **Children and CRVS (Phase 3):** Subsequent efforts focused on integrating birth registration with CRVS. By 2023, the project aimed to register 8.4 million children and issue birth certificates, addressing a significant gap in vital statistics coverage​​.

The NRIS Project prioritized inclusivity by employing mobile registration units to reach remote and underserved communities. This effort significantly improved access for rural populations and persons with disabilities, resulting in registration rates of over 85% across rural districts. Special measures ensured that over 1.3 million children under 16 were registered during the continuous registration phase, addressing a critical gap in the CRVS system.

District-level data indicates that Zomba, Lilongwe, and Blantyre achieved the highest registration coverage, reflecting strong urban participation. However, challenges remain in certain remote districts, where logistical constraints have limited outreach efforts.

* 1. **Challenges Addressed by the NRIS**

The implementation of the NRIS Project was designed to address several systemic challenges that had historically hindered Malawi’s governance, service delivery, and socioeconomic development. Below are the key challenges and how the project tackled them:

* + 1. **Fragmented and Redundant Identity Systems**

Before the NRIS, Malawi’s identity landscape was characterized by fragmentation, with multiple sector-specific databases operating in isolation. These systems were:

* Costly to maintain, as they duplicated efforts across sectors such as health, education, and agriculture.
* Inefficient, with significant overlaps and inconsistencies in data collection, leading to inaccurate or incomplete records.
* Vulnerable to misuse, with no central mechanism to verify or authenticate individuals’ identities.

**How the NRIS Tackled This Challenge**:

* The project consolidated identity management into a centralized database housed in the AG Office Data Centre on the GWAN, eliminating redundancies.
* By introducing unique identification numbers (UIDs) for all registered individuals, the NRIS enabled seamless integration of data across sectors​​.
	+ 1. **Lack of Inclusivity**

A significant portion of Malawi’s population, especially women, children, and rural residents, lacked formal identification. This exclusion perpetuated inequalities in access to services such as healthcare, education, and financial support.

**How the NRIS Tackled This Challenge**:

* The mass registration campaign and subsequent continuous registration efforts prioritized accessibility, deploying mobile registration units to reach underserved areas.
* The integration of CRVS ensured that even children under 16, who were previously excluded from identity systems, could obtain legal documentation through birth certificates​​​.
	+ 1. **Weak Governance and Accountability**

The absence of a centralized identity system limited the government’s ability to:

* Monitor and evaluate service delivery programs effectively.
* Prevent fraud, such as ghost workers on payrolls or ineligible beneficiaries in social protection schemes.
* Strengthen accountability in financial and administrative systems.

**How the NRIS Tackled This Challenge**:

* By providing a single source of truth for identity verification, the NRIS improved governance mechanisms. For example, it eliminated ghost workers from government payrolls, reducing resource wastage​​.
	+ 1. **Economic Inefficiencies**

Malawi’s private sector faced high transaction costs due to the lack of reliable identity systems. Financial institutions incurred significant risks, reflected in high interest rates that stifled financial inclusion and economic growth.

**How the NRIS Tackled This Challenge**:

* The NRIS introduced secure identity cards that enabled compliance with KYC requirements, facilitating access to financial services.
* The system supported the creation of a functional credit bureau, enabling financial institutions to assess credit histories and reduce risk premiums​​.
	1. **Institutional and Legal Framework**

The success of the NRIS Project was underpinned by strong institutional arrangements and a robust legal framework. These elements ensured that the project was implemented in a manner that was sustainable, inclusive, and compliant with international standards.

* + 1. **Institutional Arrangements**

The NRB was designated as the lead implementing agency, operating under the Ministry of Homeland Security. Key institutional arrangements included:

1. **Project Steering Committee**:
	* Comprising representatives from the government, development partners, and civil society organizations, the Steering Committee provided strategic oversight and policy guidance.
2. **Technical Committees**:
	* Specialized committees focused on operational aspects such as technology deployment, data security, and capacity building.
3. **Development Partner Engagement**:
	* The project was supported by multilateral and bilateral partners, including UNDP, DFID, UNICEF, Norway, and the EU, who provided financial resources, technical expertise, and capacity-building support​​.
		1. **Legal Framework**

The **National Registration Act (2010)** provided the foundation for the NRIS Project, establishing the legal framework to ensure universal registration and the secure management of identity data. The framework includes the following provisions and challenges:

1. **Mandates for Registration:**
	* Universal registration for all Malawians aged 16 and above, ensuring the issuance of a National ID as a fundamental right.
	* Compulsory birth registration for children under 16 through the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system, bridging identity gaps for minors.
2. **Data Privacy and Security:**
	* While the Act outlined general principles for secure handling, storage, and sharing of personal data, it lacked robust enforcement mechanisms.
	* The **Data Protection Act (2024)** was enacted to strengthen privacy protections, but its associated regulations are still under development, limiting the NRB’s ability to act as a Data Processor under the new legal framework.
3. **Institutional Accountability:**
	* The NRB was legally mandated to oversee the implementation and maintenance of the National Registration System, with provisions for periodic audits and reviews to ensure accountability and transparency.

**Current Limitations and Opportunities:**

* The absence of fully operational data protection regulations restricts the NRB’s ability to integrate with other systems as a secure Data Processor.
* Amendments to the National Registration Act are under review to address gaps in governance, interoperability, and institutional autonomy.
	1. **Achievements and Outcomes**

The NRIS Project has achieved significant milestones since its inception, transforming Malawi’s identity ecosystem and delivering tangible benefits across governance, service delivery, and socioeconomic inclusion.

* + 1. **Registration Milestones**
* Over 9 million adults were registered within five months during the mass registration phase in 2017, surpassing the original project target and achieving 99% coverage of the eligible population.
* Continuous registration operations began in 2018, expanding the system to include children under 16. By September 2024, the system had registered approximately 8.9 million children, incorporating updates to integrate CRVS data​.
* As of September 2024, the NRIS project successfully registered 12,459,226 individuals, surpassing the initial target of 9 million. This includes 5,854,594 males (47%) and 6,604,632 females (53%), demonstrating gender inclusivity.
* Gender-disaggregated data shows women constitute a higher proportion of registrants, highlighting the program’s success in addressing gender disparities in access to legal identity.​
* A comprehensive analysis of September 2024 registration data provides detailed insights into demographic, regional, and district-level performance, offering a roadmap for addressing gaps in implementation and inclusivity.
	+ 1. **Overall Registration Achievements (as of Sep 2024)**

The NRIS project successfully registered **12,459,226 individuals**, exceeding its original target of 9 million adults. This figure includes:

* **5,854,594 males (47%)** and **6,604,632 females (53%)**, indicating a commendable effort toward gender inclusivity.
* The program’s achievement aligns with Malawi’s national development goals and international commitments, including SDG 16.9, which emphasizes providing legal identity for all.

However, challenges persist in achieving comprehensive registration coverage, particularly in death registration. As of June 2024:

* Only 7,500 deaths have been flagged in the NRIS system, a significant discrepancy compared to the estimated 700,000 deaths during the same period.
* The disparity between flagged and actual deaths undermines the reliability of population data, affecting planning and resource allocation at the national level.
1. **Gender Trends**

The project demonstrated significant success in reducing gender disparities:

* + Female Representation: Women constitute 53% of the registered population, reflecting successful engagement strategies targeting women.
	+ Male Representation: Although males account for 47% of total registrations, their lower participation in some age groups (e.g., 16–26) suggests potential barriers that need to be addressed.



1. **Gender Trends by Age Group:**
	* The 16–17 age group saw a notable disparity, with 251,977 females registered compared to 183,292 males (0.73:1 male-to-female ratio).
	* The 18–26 age group had a male-to-female ratio of 0.89:1, showing greater female participation.
	* For older age groups (67+), females continue to dominate registrations, consistent with broader demographic trends of higher female longevity.
2. **Gender Trends by Region and District:**
	* The Northern Region leads with 56% female registrations, while the Central and Southern regions each recorded 53% female participation.
	* Urban districts like Zomba City and Blantyre City showed higher female-to-male ratios (e.g., 1.25:1 in Zomba City), likely due to targeted campaigns and accessibility.



**Key Implications:**

* + The higher representation of females highlights the program’s success in reaching underserved groups.
	+ Male participation needs attention in younger (16–26) and older (67+) age brackets to achieve balanced inclusivity.
1. **Age-Based Analysis**

The program successfully targeted individuals across all age groups, with notable findings:

* + The 18–26 age group represents the largest segment, comprising 30% of total registrations. This reflects the program’s relevance for young adults entering employment, education, and financial systems.
	+ The 16–17 age group recorded 435,269 registrations (3.5%), ensuring early integration into governance systems for youth.
	+ Older populations (67+) accounted for only 7.1% of total registrations, suggesting barriers such as mobility challenges or limited outreach.
1. **Region-wise Trends**

Registration performance varied across regions. The analysis below integrates data from NSO estimates, NRIS registration figures, and UN population data for a more accurate perspective:

* + Central Region: Registration reached 108% of the estimated NSO population and 102% of the UN population estimate. This high performance reflects strong rural outreach and operational efficiency. However, the slight over-registration suggests potential duplication or underreported population estimates.
	+ Southern Region: Registration achieved 103% of the NSO population estimate and 97% of the UN estimate. While operational performance was strong, the lower percentage against the UN estimate may indicate a need for better alignment between estimates or improved outreach to remote communities
	+ Northern Region: Registration lagged at 96% of the NSO population estimate and 90% of the UN estimate. This shortfall highlights logistical and accessibility challenges in remote and sparsely populated areas. Enhanced interventions, such as mobile registration units and targeted campaigns, are essential to address these gaps.



**Key Implications:**

* + The differences in population estimates between NSO and UN data (e.g., 11,351,931 vs. 12,027,371) lead to varying registration percentages, which warrant harmonization for future analyses and planning.
	+ Over-registration in the Central and Southern regions with registration rates of 109.74% (NSO estimate) and 103.58% (UN estimate), suggests potential duplication or data inflation, warranting further validation to ensure data integrity and accurate demographic representation.
	+ The Northern Region requires focused interventions to enhance accessibility and operational efficiency.
	+ Across all regions, the estimated deaths from 2017–2024, totalling around 700,000 need to be factored into active population calculations to better align registration percentages with reality
1. **District-Level Performance**

Significant disparities exist at the district level, with notable high and low performers:

**Top Performing Districts:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **District** | **Total Registrations** | **% of Total Registrations** |
| Lilongwe | 1,937,864 | 15.5% |
| Blantyre | 908,857 | 7.3% |
| Mangochi | 752,799 | 6.0% |

**Lowest Performing Districts:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **District** | **Total Registrations** | **% of Total Registrations** |
| Zomba City | 5,429 | <0.1% |
| Blantyre City | 8,913 | <0.1% |
| Likoma | 11,814 | <0.1% |

**Key Insights:**

* Lilongwe leads with **15.5% of total registrations**, highlighting successful implementation in populous areas.
* Low registration in urban districts like Zomba City and Blantyre City raises concerns about urban outreach and logistical barriers.

**Key Implications**

* **Inclusivity and Gender Empowerment:**
	+ The NRIS effectively engaged women, reducing gender gaps and supporting gender-focused SDG goals.
	+ Male participation, especially in younger and older age groups, requires targeted interventions.
* **Under-reported Deaths:**
	+ Death registration remains significantly underreported, with only 7,500 deaths recorded in the NRIS system compared to an estimated 700,703 deaths over the past nine years. This underreporting impacts demographic accuracy and the reliability of population statistics.
* **Age-Based Insights:**
	+ High registration rates among young adults (18–26) demonstrate the program’s relevance for financial inclusion and governance participation.
	+ Barriers for older populations (67+) need to be addressed to ensure lifelong inclusion.
	+ Underage registration and its possible political motivations, particularly in the lead-up to the 2025 elections, remain areas of concern and necessitates stricter age verification mechanisms to prevent misuse of the system.
* **Regional Disparities:**
	+ Strong performance in the Central and Southern regions underscores successful outreach strategies, but over-registration may require data validation.
	+ Northern region challenges highlight the need for tailored solutions to improve access in remote areas.
* **District-Level Gaps:**
	+ Urban centers like Zomba City and Blantyre City require focused outreach to address low registration rates.
* **Dataset Discrepancies:**
	+ The discrepancies between NRIS registration data and population estimates from NSO and UN Population Data further highlight the need for harmonization and cross-validation to ensure the system’s accuracy and credibility.
		1. **Integration with Governance Systems**

The NRIS project has significantly enhanced service delivery and governance by integrating identity systems across critical sectors and developing innovative pilots:

* **Pilot in Karonga District for Health Integration:** A pilot project in Karonga District aims to link the National ID and birth certificates with the health system. This initiative enables efficient patient identification and record management, enhancing healthcare delivery and reducing duplication. Lessons from this pilot will inform the national rollout of health sector integration​.
* **Linkage with the Universal Beneficiary Register (UBR):** The NRIS successfully linked 4.8 million records with the UBR. This integration supports social protection programs, including the Social Cash Transfer and Public Works Programs, ensuring accurate beneficiary targeting, and reducing fraud​.
* **Improved Service Delivery Across Sectors:** Integration with systems such as the Affordable Inputs Program and voter registration has enhanced accountability, reduced resource leakage, and saved millions annually. For instance, the removal of ghost beneficiaries saved $27 million under subsidy programs​.
* **Enhanced Electoral Integrity:** The integration of the NRIS into voter registration established the "one ID, one vote" principle, significantly reducing duplication and fraud.

The NRIS Project has been linked with 10 critical MDAs to demonstrate the transformative potential of identity system integration, paving the way for expanded use in sectors such as health, education, and financial services, driving improvements in governance, financial inclusion, and service delivery,

* + 1. **Economic Benefits of NRIS Integration**
* **Cost Savings**:
	+ The integration of National IDs into various public programs has generated significant cost savings. For example, the NRIS Project eliminated 490,995 ghost farmers from the Affordable Inputs Program (AIP), saving the government approximately $27 million annually.
	+ Similarly, the project improved voter registration processes by streamlining the voter roll, saving $7 million during the 2019/2020 elections compared to previous cycles.
* **Addressing Inefficiencies:**
	+ Moreover, the introduction of National IDs as a requirement for pension management has addressed inefficiencies, eliminated ghost pensioners and saved an estimated $6 million annually. These savings underscore the project’s role in enhancing governance and accountability while reducing fiscal waste.
		1. **Financial Inclusion and Economic Impact**
* **Access to Financial Services**:
	+ The introduction of secure identity cards enabled compliance with KYC requirements, increasing access to banking and financial products.
* **Cost Savings**:
	+ The NRIS reduced administrative costs for service delivery, generating estimated savings of $43 million by eliminating inefficiencies such as ghost workers and fraudulent claims​​.

This extensive coverage has enabled broader socioeconomic benefits, such as improving access to essential services, including financial products and government social protection programs. Notably, over 8 million telecom subscribers—3.2 million TNM and 5.3 million Airtel users—have registered their SIM cards using National IDs, fulfilling regulatory compliance, and expanding digital inclusion.

* + 1. **Institutional Strengthening**

The NRB has emerged as a more capable and resilient institution, with enhanced technical and operational capacities to manage and maintain the system. Training programs for NRB staff have built expertise in areas such as data security, system maintenance, and interoperability​​​.

* 1. **Strategic Importance**

The NRIS serves as a cornerstone for Malawi’s governance and development strategy, enabling:

1. Enhanced governance accountability and service delivery efficiency.
2. Broader access to financial and social services for marginalized populations.
3. Foundation for Malawi’s transition to a digital economy, fostering regional and global integration.
4. As a key enabler of Malawi’s digital transformation agenda, the NRIS lays the groundwork for innovations in e-governance, digital payments, and cross-border identity integration.
	1. **Future Directions for Sustainability and Scalability**.

While the NRIS Project has achieved significant milestones, ensuring its long-term sustainability and scalability requires alignment with broader national and regional strategies, such as the **Inclusive Digital Transformation for Malawi (IDT4M)** project. The following focus areas provide a roadmap for future enhancements:

1. **Institutional Sustainability:**
	* Increasing government budget allocations and exploring alternative financing mechanisms are essential to sustaining the NRIS.
	* Strengthening the institutional capacity of the NRB is critical to managing the system independently, ensuring operational efficiency and adaptability to emerging needs.
2. **Integration with the IDT4M Project:**
	* The NRIS aligns with the IDT4M project’s vision to establish a safe, trusted, and inclusive digital public infrastructure that promotes participation in the digital economy.
	* Expanding interoperability with key MDAs, such as the Ministry of Health and the Department of Agriculture, will enable the integration of digital identity with service delivery systems, accelerating access to essential services like healthcare, education, and agricultural subsidies.
	* Leveraging digital public infrastructure and introducing new digital workflows will improve administration, transparency, and governance.
3. **Enhanced Interoperability and Governance:**
	* Future directions include establishing robust governance structures to manage and control national digital transformation.
	* Adopting open standards and creating policies to support cross-sectoral data sharing will enable seamless interoperability between identity systems and various MDAs.
	* Strengthening regulatory frameworks, particularly in data protection and privacy, is crucial to safeguarding personal information and fostering public trust.
4. **Addressing the Digital Divide:**
	* Bridging the digital divide remains a priority to ensure inclusive access to NRIS-enabled services. Focused interventions are needed to address disparities based on socioeconomic status, geography, education, and gender.
	* Scaling up digital literacy programs and ensuring affordability of digital services will foster broader participation in Malawi’s digital transformation.
5. **Positioning NRIS in the Broader Digital Ecosystem:**
	* As a cornerstone of the Malawi Digital Economy Strategy, the NRIS must evolve to support the country’s broader digital transformation goals.
	* Investments in foundational technologies, such as DPI-enabled systems and improved interoperability, will strengthen service delivery and promote private sector innovation.

## Theory of Change

The Theory of Change for the NRIS Project provides a detailed framework for understanding how the project’s inputs, activities, and outputs lead to intermediate and long-term outcomes. This section outlines the pathways through which the NRIS aimed to achieve its overarching goal of improving governance, enhancing service delivery, and fostering socioeconomic inclusion through an integrated national identity system. The ToC served as both a guiding framework during implementation and a basis for evaluating the project’s outcomes.

* 1. **Original Project Logic, Key Assumptions, and Core Components of the ToC**

The NRIS Project’s original logic addressed systemic challenges in governance, service delivery, and financial inclusion caused by the absence of a comprehensive identity system. The fragmented, inefficient systems previously in place hindered effective planning, equitable service delivery, and public accountability. The project hypothesized that the creation of a robust, centralized identity system would:

1. **Strengthen Governance**:
	* Provide accurate and reliable data for decision-making and planning.
	* Reduce fraud and corruption in public service delivery systems, such as payroll and social protection programs.
2. **Enhance Service Delivery**:
	* Enable better targeting and equitable access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and subsidies.
	* Improve the efficiency of administrative functions, including voter registration and taxation systems.
3. **Promote Financial Inclusion**:
	* Facilitate access to banking and financial services by ensuring compliance with KYC requirements, particularly for marginalized groups such as women and rural populations.

**Key Assumptions**

The success of the NRIS Project’s ToC relied on several critical assumptions:

* **Political Will and Stability**: Sustained government commitment to support the NRIS through policies, funding, and institutional oversight.
* **Adequate Funding**: Consistent financial contributions from development partners and the government to sustain operations and infrastructure development.
* **Community Engagement**: High levels of public trust and participation to achieve universal registration.
* **Institutional Capacity**: Sufficient technical and operational capacity within the NRB to implement and manage the system sustainably.
* **Interoperability**: The centralized identity system could be effectively integrated with other public and private sector systems to enhance service delivery and governance.

**Core Components of the ToC**

The ToC emphasizes the following key components:

* **Inputs:** Financial resources, technical expertise, and community engagement.
* **Activities:** Mass registration campaigns, continuous registration processes, and integration of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems.
* **Outputs:** Issuance of biometric IDs, universal birth registration, and operational district registration offices.
* **Outcomes:** Enhanced governance, fraud reduction, and improved access to social and financial services.
	1. **Reconstructed Theory of Change**

As the project evolved, the ToC was refined to address real-world challenges and better align with implementation realities. During implementation, the NRIS’s ToC was refined to address emerging challenges and incorporate new priorities, such as digital transformation and CRVS integration. The reconstructed ToC incorporated new dimensions to ensure scalability, inclusivity, and sustainability while maintaining the project’s original goals.

**Causal Pathways**

* **Inputs to Outputs**:
	+ Financial resources, technical expertise, and institutional support were directed toward building a secure biometric database, deploying BRKs, and issuing tamper-proof identity cards.
	+ Awareness campaigns and stakeholder engagement ensured public participation and system adoption.
* **Outputs to Outcomes**:
	+ Outputs, such as the registration of over 12 million individuals surpassing the target of 9 million individuals and the issuance of secure identity cards, translated into outcomes including improved governance, enhanced service delivery, and greater financial inclusion.
	+ The integration of National IDs with the Malawi Electoral Commission improved voter roll accuracy, eliminating cases of multiple voting in the 2019/2020 elections and achieving cost savings of $7 million compared to the 2014 elections.

**Adjustments Made**

* **Expanded Scope**:
	+ The ToC was broadened to include continuous registration and the integration of CRVS to address the needs of children under 16.
* **Inclusivity Measures**:
	+ Strategies such as deploying mobile registration units and collaborating with traditional leaders targeted marginalized populations, including women, rural communities, and persons with disabilities.
* **Sustainability Enhancements**:
	+ Greater emphasis was placed on strengthening institutional capacity within the NRB and reducing reliance on donor funding to ensure long-term operational viability.
* **Technology-Driven Innovations and Adaptations**:
	+ The ToC evolved to address emerging needs, such as the introduction of Digital ID Wallets to enhance accessibility and the integration of NRIS with governance frameworks like voter registration and financial systems. These adaptations highlight the ToC’s responsiveness to operational realities and shifting priorities.
	1. **Validation of the ToC: Causal Pathways and Gaps**

The NRIS Project’s ToC was validated by its achievements, which highlighted the effectiveness of the designed pathways. However, certain gaps and challenges emerged, underscoring the need for adaptive measures.

**Validation Through Achievements**

1. **Inputs to Outputs**:
	* Over 12 million individuals registered during the mass registration phase, achieving near-universal coverage.
	* Secure biometric identity cards issued to the population, enhancing reliability and reducing identity-related fraud.
	* Data integration with payroll and voter registration systems reduced inefficiencies and improved governance accountability.
2. **Outputs to Outcomes**:
	* **Fraud Elimination**: Removal of over 8,000 ghost workers from government payrolls saved millions in public funds.
	* **Enhanced Electoral Processes**: Biometric verification improved transparency and credibility in national elections.
	* **Financial Inclusion**: Over 1 million individuals, particularly women, gained access to banking services for the first time.
	* **Linkages with MDAs**: Demonstrated significant benefits, such as the removal of 490,995 ghost farmers from the Affordable Inputs Program database and the adoption of the national ID as a primary patient identifier by the Ministry of Health.

**Identified Gaps and Challenges**

1. **Sustainability Risks**:
	* The project needs to reduce dependance on external donor funding which might pose significant risks to its long-term sustainability. While government budget allocations for the NRB have increased significantly—from MWK 4.5 billion in 2022–2023 to a projected MWK 45 billion by 2024–2025—further increases and alignment with operational needs are required to ensure the NRIS can operate independently and sustainably.
	* The absence of diversified funding mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships or self-sustaining revenue models, exacerbates the reliance on external support.
2. **Operational Barriers**:
	* Continuous registration efforts were hindered by inadequate staffing, outdated infrastructure, and logistical challenges.
3. **Inclusivity Challenges**:
	* Despite targeted efforts, certain vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities and those in remote areas, faced barriers to accessing registration services.
4. **Interoperability Challenges:**
	* Despite significant progress, challenges remain in fully leveraging interoperability with MDAs due to varying levels of ICT infrastructure readiness.
5. **Institutional Capacity:**
	* Limited institutional capacity within the NRB to manage the financial and operational demands of the system independently further compounds challenges for maintaining the system's infrastructure, scaling operations, and achieving interoperability with key MDAs.
	* The validation process highlighted the need for adaptive strategies to address gaps in institutional capacity, particularly in managing the transition to full government ownership.
	1. **ToC as a Framework for Evaluation**

The Theory of Change (ToC) served as a robust framework for evaluating the NRIS Project, providing a structured approach to assess progress, achievements, and challenges while identifying actionable pathways for improvement.

**Benchmarking Success:**

* **Outputs:**
	+ Registration of over 12.4 million individuals, surpassing the initial target of 9 million during the mass registration phase.
	+ Issuance of secure, biometric identity cards.
	+ Integration with key governance systems, including voter registration, Universal Beneficiary Register (UBR), and health system pilots in Karonga District.
* **Outcomes:**
	+ Enhanced governance accountability through the "one ID, one vote" principle and improved beneficiary targeting for social protection programs.
	+ Increased efficiency in service delivery, exemplified by the linkage of 4.8 million records with the UBR and cost savings in subsidy programs.
	+ Expanded financial inclusion, with digital ID integration streamlining e-KYC processes and fostering access to financial services.
* **Impacts:**
	+ Socioeconomic transformation by improving access to services such as healthcare, education, and social protection.
	+ Alignment with SDG 16.9, emphasizing legal identity for all, and the Malawi Digital Economy Strategy, which positions the NRIS as a foundation for inclusive digital transformation.

**Gap Analysis and Lessons Learned:**

* **Gaps in Birth Registration:**
	+ Birth registration processes were insufficiently addressed in the project’s implementation, with a predominant focus on mass child registration initiatives. While these efforts achieved notable milestones, they overlooked the critical need for continuous registration systems, particularly in hospitals and at the community level.
	+ The revision of project documentation lacked a holistic perspective, particularly in how child registration was prioritized over a comprehensive approach to birth registration. Despite 90% of births occurring in hospitals—providing a natural capturing point—the project failed to fully leverage this opportunity.
	+ Strengthening linkages with the CDC could have improved birth registration rates significantly. Additionally, continuous registration efforts in community settings, which were critical for coverage, were underprioritized.
	+ While NRIS supported the CDC by providing printers to facilitate birth certificate issuance before maternity leave, greater emphasis on integrating birth registration as a fundamental component of civil registration would have created a more robust system.
	+ These gaps highlight the need for a stronger focus on aligning civil registration efforts with the broader goals of identity management.
* **Technical Gaps:**
	+ Challenges in achieving full interoperability with MDAs due to limited ICT infrastructure and data-sharing protocols.
	+ Underdeveloped death registration processes, with only 7,500 deaths registered compared to an estimated 700,000 over nine years, impacting demographic accuracy.
* **Policy Limitations:**
	+ Delays in enacting and implementing legislative amendments, such as the Data Protection Act (2024) and CRVS-ID integration frameworks, restricted the NRIS’s ability to function as a secure Data Processor.
* **Sustainability Risks:**
	+ Despite significant increases in government budget allocations (e.g., MWK 4.5 billion in 2022–2023 to MWK 45 billion by 2024–2025), gaps remain in achieving financial self-sufficiency.
	+ Staff retention issues and reliance on donor funding hinder long-term planning and operational independence.
* **Key Lessons Learned:**
	+ Early stakeholder engagement and adaptive management practices were instrumental in addressing operational and policy-related challenges.
	+ Achieving long-term sustainability requires greater government ownership, diversified funding mechanisms, and alignment with initiatives like Inclusive Digital Transformation for Malawi (IDT4M).
	+ Capacity-building programs focusing on technical expertise and institutional strengthening are critical to bridging gaps and sustaining progress.

**Moving Forward:**

The ToC framework underscores the importance of continuous capacity-building efforts, robust governance structures, and interoperability to ensure the NRIS system’s sustainability. Aligning the NRIS with broader digital transformation strategies and integrating with foundational public infrastructure will position the system as a catalyst for inclusive development beyond donor support.

## Evaluation Findings

* 1. **Introduction**

The NRIS Project represents one of the most transformative governance initiatives in Malawi’s history. Since its inception in 2016, the project has aimed to address critical gaps in identity management and registration systems, which previously undermined effective governance, equitable service delivery, and socioeconomic inclusion. By establishing a centralized, biometric identity system and integrating it with CRVS, the NRIS sought to provide legal identities to all Malawians, laying the foundation for improved governance, enhanced service delivery, and financial inclusion.

The final evaluation of the NRIS project focuses on systematically analysing its performance across five core criteria—Relevance, Coherence, Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Sustainability—as prescribed by the OECD/UNEG evaluation framework. Additionally, the evaluation incorporates cross-cutting themes such as gender equality, human rights, and environmental sustainability, assessing the project’s broader contributions to Malawi’s development agenda and its alignment with global frameworks like the SDGs, particularly Target 16.9.

**Context**

Before NRIS, Malawi lacked a comprehensive identity management system. Fragmented databases and ad hoc identity solutions, such as voter cards and sector-specific IDs, left significant portions of the population, particularly children, rural residents, and marginalized groups, without reliable documentation. These gaps perpetuated inefficiencies in public service delivery and limited the reach of social protection programs. Recognizing these challenges, the Government of Malawi, in collaboration with key development partners, initiated the NRIS project to create a robust, inclusive identity framework.

Over its lifecycle, the NRIS has undergone several phases of implementation:

1. **Mass Registration Phase (2016–2018):** Registered over 9 million Malawians aged 16 and above, achieving near-universal adult coverage.
2. **Transition to Continuous Registration:** Focused on embedding sustainable systems, including birth registration and CRVS integration.
3. **Innovations and Pilots:** Introduced technologies such as Digital ID Wallets and piloted birth registration models in select districts.
4. **Final Implementation Phase:** Strengthened institutional capacity and aimed to address gaps in inclusivity, operational sustainability, and service delivery.

**Structure of this section**

This section systematically organizes findings under the following headings:

1. **Relevance:** How well the NRIS aligned with national priorities, international frameworks, and the needs of marginalized populations.
2. **Coherence:** The degree of integration with other national programs and alignment with donor-supported initiatives.
3. **Efficiency:** Evaluation of resource utilization, logistical performance, and cost-effectiveness.
4. **Effectiveness:** Assessment of output and outcome achievements, barriers, and enabling factors.
5. **Sustainability:** Analysis of the project’s institutional, technical, and financial viability.

Each subsection draws on evidence from the consultations and project documents, providing a nuanced understanding of the NRIS’s contributions and areas for improvement. This comprehensive analysis ensures that findings are not only rooted in data but also contextualized within Malawi’s broader governance and development goals.

* 1. **Relevance**
		1. **Relevance to Global, Regional, and National Development Goals**

**EQ: How relevant is the NRIS project to the global, regional, and national development goals?**

The NRIS project represents a foundational initiative for addressing systemic governance challenges in Malawi. It aligns closely with global, regional, and national development goals.

**Alignment with Global Goals:**

* The NRIS directly supports SDG 16.9 which emphasizes the provision of legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030. Through the registration of over 12 million individuals, including women, children, and rural residents, the project contributed to improved inclusivity and reduced inequalities, consistent with SDG principles. Additionally, the NRIS indirectly contributes to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by empowering women through access to financial services and social protection facilitated by legal identities.
* The project also strengthens government accountability and transparency, foundational elements of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). By eliminating ghost workers from government payrolls and fraudulent beneficiaries from subsidy programs, NRIS demonstrates tangible progress in governance reforms and resource efficiency.

**Regional Priorities:**

* Aligned with the Africa Programme for APAI-CRVS, the NRIS integrates vital event registration into a centralized identity system. This improves population data accuracy, ensuring the availability of reliable statistics for governance, development planning, and social program delivery.
* Malawi’s integration of identity management systems with CRVS systems exemplifies regional best practices and positions the country as a leader in governance-focused identity reforms. The emphasis on building resilient and inclusive systems aligns with broader regional priorities for economic planning and social equity.

**National Alignment:**

* The NRIS project directly aligns with Malawi’s strategic development goals, particularly the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (MGDS III), under Key Priority Area 6.6, which emphasizes population management and health.
* The Malawi Implementation Plan (MIP-1), under the MGDS III, identifies universal registration and the integration of civil registration systems as pivotal for achieving Vision 2063. The project directly supports Malawi Vision 2063, particularly its emphasis on digital transformation and inclusive governance. By establishing a centralized database and biometric identity system, the NRIS creates the digital infrastructure necessary for delivering efficient public services.
* NRIS also enhances the targeting of beneficiaries for national programs such as the AIP and healthcare subsidies. These integrations ensure equitable access to essential services while reducing resource wastage through fraud elimination.

**Sectoral Contributions:**

* In the health sector, the integration of National IDs with patient records has improved service delivery efficiency and reduced data duplication. In the financial sector, NRIS compliance with KYC requirements has enabled financial institutions to extend services to over 1 million marginalized individuals.
* The NRIS’s governance contributions include the removal of over 8,000 ghost workers from payrolls and 490,995 fraudulent subsidy beneficiaries, saving millions annually. Furthermore, its integration with voter registration systems introduced the "one ID, one vote" principle, enhancing electoral integrity.

**Additional Insights:**

* Consultations revealed operational challenges in maintaining connectivity between CRVS systems and NRIS in remote areas, impacting the timeliness of data updates. Despite these issues, the project is recognized as a flagship initiative supporting Malawi’s alignment with international and regional governance priorities.
	+ 1. **Inclusivity and Responsiveness to Marginalized Groups**

**EQ: How well does the NRIS project address the needs of marginalized groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and rural communities?**

The NRIS project employed a variety of strategies to ensure inclusivity and responsiveness to marginalized populations, achieving notable progress while highlighting persistent barriers.

**Women:**

* Women account for **53% of registered individuals**, underscoring the success of gender-focused outreach and awareness campaigns. These efforts included partnerships with local women’s groups, gender-sensitive communication strategies, and the deployment of mobile registration units.
* Legal identities issued through NRIS enabled over **1 million women** to access formal financial services, including savings accounts and credit. This improved women’s financial independence and participation in the formal economy.

**Persons with Disabilities:**

* The NRIS implemented measures such as deploying mobile registration units and collaborating with disability advocacy organizations to facilitate participation by persons with disabilities. Despite these efforts, physical accessibility barriers and low community awareness in certain regions limited their registration rates.

**Rural Communities:**

* Mobile registration units, combined with partnerships with traditional leaders, achieved high registration rates in rural districts, with coverage exceeding **85%** in some areas. However, logistical issues, including the lack of sufficient equipment and long distances to registration centers, posed significant challenges.

**Cultural and Social Barriers:**

* Patriarchal norms in some communities restricted women’s ability to independently register or obtain IDs for their children. Cultural misconceptions about the purpose of IDs also created resistance, particularly in areas with limited government engagement.

**Urban Gaps and Gender Disparities:**

* Urban centers such as Zomba City and Blantyre City recorded lower registration rates, with Zomba City accounting for only 5,429 registrations (<0.1%) and Blantyre City 8,913 registrations (<0.1%) of total registrations. These figures are significantly below expectations based on population benchmarks derived from NSO data, indicating gaps in urban outreach strategies. Young men aged 16–26 are underrepresented in the registration data, likely due to migration patterns and a lack of targeted engagement strategies. These gender disparities reflect broader gaps in reaching specific urban subpopulations.
	+ 1. **Clarity and Realism of Project Objectives and Indicators**

**EQ: Are the project’s objectives and indicators clearly defined, realistic, and adaptable to Malawi’s sociopolitical and economic context?**

The NRIS project established clear and measurable objectives, with strong alignment to Malawi’s governance needs. However, gaps in public awareness and birth registration reflect areas for strategic improvement.

**Strengths in Objectives and Indicators:**

* The project’s primary objective of registering 9 million individuals was achieved and exceeded, with over 12.4 million registered. Indicators such as gender-disaggregated data and rural-urban coverage metrics allowed for effective tracking of inclusivity and operational performance.

**Adaptability:**

* The transition from mass registration to continuous registration demonstrated the project’s adaptability to evolving national needs. For instance, integrating birth registration into the CRVS system addressed previously unmet gaps in demographic inclusivity.

**Challenges and Gaps:**

* Despite progress, birth registration remained a significant gap, with only **3.6 million children** registered out of a target of 8.4 million. Additionally, limited public awareness campaigns contributed to low participation among specific demographics, including young adults and urban populations.

**Operational Feedback:**

* Field-level staff emphasized the need for continuous training and better maintenance of registration equipment to address logistical challenges in remote regions.
	+ 1. **Addressing Systemic Governance Challenges and Sectoral Needs**

**EQ: Does the NRIS address systemic governance challenges and align with sectoral needs?**

The NRIS addressed systemic governance inefficiencies while demonstrating alignment with the needs of key sectors, such as health, finance, and social protection.

**Governance Contributions:**

* The project significantly improved electoral processes by integrating voter rolls with the National ID system, saving $7 million in election-related costs. Additionally, the elimination of ghost workers and fraudulent beneficiaries enhanced government accountability and resource allocation.

**Sectoral Integration:**

* In the health sector, linking IDs to patient records reduced data duplication and improved service delivery. In the financial sector, the NRIS database supported compliance with KYC requirements, enabling financial institutions to expand their services to underserved populations.

**Challenges:**

* Connectivity issues and outdated infrastructure hindered the implementation of the National ID system, particularly in remote districts.
* Fragmented systems across institutions created silos that limited seamless integration with the National ID, reducing efficiency and interoperability.
* Dependence on proprietary technologies resulted in vendor lock-in (most notably in the IT systems of pensions and road traffic), increasing costs and delaying the adoption of open, interoperable solutions.
* Limited public trust in government systems in some areas affected the willingness of individuals to adopt IDs for financial and social services.

**Summary for Relevance**

The NRIS project demonstrated high relevance to global, regional, and national priorities by addressing systemic governance challenges and advancing inclusivity for marginalized populations. Its contributions to governance reforms, fraud reduction, and improved service delivery reflect significant progress. However, barriers such as low birth registration rates, logistical challenges in remote areas, and cultural resistance to ID usage require continued focus to enhance the project’s long-term impact and inclusivity.

* 1. **Coherence**
		1. **Integration with Other National Programs and Policies**

**EQ: How effectively has the NRIS project been integrated with other national programs and governance frameworks?**

The NRIS project has established critical linkages with governance systems and national programs, advancing accountability and enhancing service delivery.

**Linkages with Governance Systems:**

* The integration of National IDs with voter registration rolls ensured electoral integrity through the “one ID, one vote” principle, reducing fraud and saving $7 million in election-related costs during the 2019 cycle. This significantly improved Malawi’s democratic processes by eliminating duplicate voter registrations.
* NRIS eliminated over 8,000 ghost workers from payrolls and 490,995 fraudulent beneficiaries from the AIP, saving $27 million annually in subsidy programs. These linkages directly strengthened governance and resource allocation systems.

**Social Protection Programs:**

* Integration with the Unified Beneficiary Registry enabled more accurate targeting for social protection schemes, ensuring that benefits reached legitimate recipients. NRIS data also supports subsidy and health-related schemes, minimizing overlaps and inefficiencies.

**Healthcare Integration:**

* The project facilitated patient record management by linking IDs to health records, particularly in central and district hospitals. However, rural areas with limited connectivity face delays in integrating health data into the centralized system, hindering service efficiency.

**Operational and Institutional Challenges:**

* Connectivity and infrastructure gaps, especially in remote districts, delay updates to centralized databases, impacting social protection and service delivery.
* Legal barriers restrict NRIS integration with refugee registration systems and judicial case management, highlighting the need for legal reforms to unlock its full potential.
	+ 1. **Synergies with Donor-Supported and Sectoral Programs**

**EQ: How effectively does the NRIS project align with and complement other donor-supported and sectoral initiatives in Malawi?**

The NRIS leveraged donor partnerships to scale operations and foster innovation, but broader cross-sectoral synergies remain underutilized.

**Donor Contributions and Collaborative Efforts:**

* Donor funding from UNDP, FCDO, USAID, and UNICEF facilitated the prototyping of technical innovations, including biometric verification systems and Digital ID wallets, laying the groundwork for their rollout and implementation under the new IDT4M project. These prototypes demonstrated the potential to enhance the reach and usability of National IDs across various sectors.
* UNICEF supported birth registration pilots under the CRVS framework, which registered nearly all children in three districts. However, broader nationwide rollouts remain unfunded, limiting scalability.

**Sectoral Use Cases:**

* In the financial sector, NRIS data compliance with KYC requirements allowed over 1 million individuals to access banking services.
* Despite demonstrated benefits in social protection and financial inclusion, justice sector linkages remain underdeveloped. Stakeholders emphasized that connecting NRIS data with case management systems could improve judicial accountability and reduce administrative delays.
* Malawi’s progress in voter roll integration and fraud reduction aligns with best practices under APAI-CRVS. However, countries like Rwanda have achieved greater success in leveraging CRVS data for universal health coverage and education, highlighting areas where Malawi could improve.

**Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:**

Critical institutional partnerships through MOUs have been integral to the NRIS project, driving cross-sectoral collaboration and service delivery improvements. Key partnerships include:

* An MoU with the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) facilitated the integration of National IDs into voter rolls, ensuring a transparent and reliable electoral process.
* Collaboration with the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) enabled the use of National IDs to strengthen civic education and public awareness initiatives.
* Partnership with the Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA) integrated National IDs into the Msonkho Online system, improving tax compliance and efficiency.
* National IDs were linked to patient records through collaboration with the Ministry of Health, enhancing healthcare delivery and data management.
* Agreements with telecommunications companies, including Airtel and TNM, supported SIM card registration compliance, extending the digital utility of National IDs.

These partnerships underscore NRIS’s strategic approach to fostering interoperability and aligning institutional efforts with national development objectives.

* + 1. **Addressing Fragmentation and Avoiding Duplication**

**EQ: Does the NRIS effectively address fragmentation in identity systems and avoid duplication of efforts across sectors?**

The NRIS centralized identity management systems, reducing redundancies and promoting efficiency, but challenges in full integration persist.

**Consolidation Efforts:**

* The centralized biometric database replaced fragmented sector-specific identity systems, creating a single source of truth for identity verification.
* Integration with voter rolls, UBR, and financial databases minimized redundancies and improved governance mechanisms.

**Operational Challenges:**

* Manual processes in rural areas, caused by poor infrastructure, result in delays and occasional duplication of data. Registration officers reported limited resources and inconsistent IT support, affecting the synchronization of records.
* Standalone databases in sectors like healthcare and agriculture still operate independently due to limited connectivity and capacity constraints, undermining full consolidation efforts.

**Comparative Practices:**

* Comparative practices in regional programs under APAI-CRVS, such as those in Uganda and Rwanda, have successfully implemented automated linkages between identity systems and sectoral databases to prevent duplication and enhance service delivery. In contrast, Malawi’s reliance on manual processes persists across several critical institutions, including government payroll systems, pensions, and rule-of-law institutions. These challenges, compounded by fragmented digital infrastructure, underscore the urgent need for interoperable and digitalized processes and systems to improve governance and operational efficiency​.
	+ 1. **Alignment with Broader Development Frameworks**

**EQ: How well does the NRIS align with broader national and international development frameworks?**

The NRIS aligns strongly with Malawi’s national goals and international frameworks, contributing to governance and socioeconomic development.

**National Development Goals:**

* Malawi Vision 2063 emphasizes digital transformation, inclusive governance, and equitable service delivery. The NRIS supports these objectives by providing the foundational infrastructure for e-governance and improving transparency in resource allocation.

**Global Commitments (SDGs):**

* NRIS advances SDG 16.9 by ensuring legal identity for over 12 million individuals, including marginalized populations. Its contributions to fraud reduction and accountability also align with broader SDG 16 objectives related to strong institutions and justice.
* The project’s focus on financial inclusion and gender empowerment supports SDG 5, enabling women to access banking services and other economic opportunities.

**Regional Frameworks (APAI-CRVS):**

* The NRIS integrates birth and death registration with identity systems, aligning with APAI-CRVS priorities to strengthen population data for governance and service delivery. However, the limited scale of these integrations indicates untapped potential for improving civil registration coverage.

**Institutional and Financial Constraints:**

* Heavy reliance on donor funding poses risks to the long-term sustainability of NRIS operations. Limited budget allocations from the government have constrained efforts to scale integration with other sectors, such as education and justice.

**Summary for Coherence**

The NRIS project demonstrates significant coherence by integrating with national programs, reducing identity system fragmentation, and aligning with Malawi’s development goals and international frameworks. Its impact on governance, fraud reduction, and social protection highlights its transformative potential. However, challenges in operational infrastructure, sectoral integration, and funding sustainability indicate the need for enhanced capacity-building, legal reforms, and resource investments to ensure long-term coherence and scalability. Malawi’s performance aligns with regional best practices in some areas but lags in leveraging identity systems for broader sectoral linkages, such as education and justice. Addressing these gaps will further strengthen NRIS’s role in driving Malawi’s development agenda.

* 1. **Efficiency**
		1. **Cost-Effectiveness of Resource Utilization**

**EQ: Were resources—financial, human, and technical—allocated and utilized efficiently to achieve the project’s objectives?**

The NRIS project achieved substantial results with its resources, reflecting commendable efficiency in its planning and implementation. However, a detailed analysis of the total project cost relative to its outcomes provides further insights into resource utilization.

**Achievements in Cost-Effectiveness:**

* The total cost of the project amounted to **$66 million** over its implementation period. This investment facilitated the registration of **over 12.4 million individuals**, including the issuance of biometric National IDs and the integration of ID systems with governance frameworks.
* The mass registration campaign, which registered over 9 million adults within five months, demonstrated high efficiency by leveraging 4,200 registration officers and mobile registration units, achieving 98% coverage of the adult population within the initial target.
* Integrations such as the removal of ghost workers and fraudulent beneficiaries yielded significant cost savings. For instance:
	+ **$27 million saved annually** in the Affordable Inputs Programme (AIP) through verified beneficiary lists.
	+ **$6 million saved annually** by removing 4,024 ghost pensioners from the system.
	+ **$7 million saved** during voter registration by eliminating duplicate entries​.

**Donor Contributions and Financial Oversight:**

* Donor partners (UNDP, FCDO, USAID, EU) contributed approximately **60%** of the project’s budget, with a basket funding arrangement ensuring streamlined disbursements and accountability during implementation.



**Challenges in Resource Allocation:**

* Operational inefficiencies in remote districts were observed due to outdated equipment and inadequate staff training, limiting the reach of ID issuance and data collection.
* Limited government financial contributions beyond the initial project phases resulted in a dependency on external funding, creating sustainability risks for ongoing operations and maintenance of the ID system.

**Analysis of Cost vs. Results:**

* At a cost of approximately **$5.32 per registration**, the project delivered robust returns by enabling significant cost savings across governance and social protection programs. These efficiencies highlight the project’s ability to maximize financial inputs to deliver high-impact results.
* Despite the efficiency demonstrated, addressing sustainability risks requires increased government funding and investments in IT infrastructure and human capital development.
	+ 1. **Efficiency in Operational and Logistical Performance**

**EQ: How efficiently did the project manage logistics and operations to achieve its objectives?**

The NRIS effectively managed complex logistics during its mass registration phase, but logistical challenges during the continuous registration phase highlighted the need for systemic improvements.

**Mass Registration Successes:**

* Registration teams were strategically deployed to over **4,000 centers**, including remote and underserved areas. Community mobilization through traditional leaders and radio campaigns ensured high participation.
* Mobile registration units reduced logistical costs by enabling on-site registration in remote districts, avoiding the need for individuals to travel long distances.
* Collaboration with local leaders and civil society organizations, along with awareness campaigns via radio and town halls, drove high participation rates, particularly in rural communities.
* The deployment of biometric registration kits ensured accurate and reliable data capture. This technology minimized duplication and errors, creating a secure foundation for generating unique identification numbers.

**Continuous Registration Gaps:**

* Transitioning from mass registration to continuous registration revealed infrastructure gaps in district registration offices. Delayed rollout of decentralized services, including CRVS integration, affected efficiency in updating birth and death registrations.
* Manual data entry processes in rural facilities caused delays and occasional inaccuracies, as noted by field officers during consultations.

**IT Infrastructure and Connectivity:**

* Insufficient connectivity in rural areas impeded real-time data synchronization with the central database. This issue compounded operational inefficiencies, particularly in integrating health and social protection data with NRIS.

**Comparative Insights:**

* Compared to regional programs under APAI-CRVS, Malawi’s operational efficiency during the mass registration phase stands out, but its reliance on manual processes in continuous registration lags behind countries like Uganda and Kenya, which have implemented fully digitized systems for ongoing registrations.

**Logistical Challenges:**

* Despite operational successes, logistical challenges persist in reaching remote districts, where outdated equipment and limited connectivity impeded continuous registration efforts., necessitating the need for addressing these inefficiencies through decentralized IT support and upgraded infrastructure.
	+ 1. **Cost-Efficiency in Achieving Outputs**

**EQ: Were planned outputs, such as the issuance of National IDs and birth registrations, achieved cost-efficiently?**

The NRIS project achieved most of its planned outputs within budget, reflecting strong cost-efficiency during its mass registration phase with significant advancements in local ID card printing capacity. However, gaps in birth registration and CRVS implementation and most importantly challenges related to high costs and delays in offshore ID printing significantly impacted overall efficiency.

**Achievement of Outputs:**

* By 2023, the project registered **12.4 million individuals**, surpassing its original target of 9 million adults. This included significant achievements in gender inclusivity, with women representing 53% of registered individuals.
* The issuance of over **12 million secure biometric IDs** allowed Malawi to integrate these records into voter registration, healthcare, and financial systems, demonstrating a high-impact use of resources.

**CRVS and Birth Registration Challenges:**

* Birth registration fell short, with only **3.6 million children registered** out of a target of 8.4 million. Limited funding for CRVS integration and operational barriers in rural districts were key factors.
* Stakeholders noted that the piecemeal approach to CRVS integration reduced efficiency, particularly in linking birth registration with educational and healthcare services.

**Efficiency Savings through Innovation:**

* The adoption of biometric registration kits significantly reduced duplication and fraud during mass registration. Similarly, linking NRIS with subsidy programs such as the Affordable Inputs Program generated cost savings of $27 million annually by removing fraudulent beneficiaries.

**Printing Challenges:**

* In 2024, approximately 1,000,000 cards were printed offshore at a significantly higher cost compared to locally produced cards, driving up project expenditures.
* Centralized offshore printing caused substantial delays, especially for remote areas. For example, while 447,820 cards were produced locally in 2024, additional demand necessitated offshore printing, further straining timelines and budgets.
* Limited local capacity and reliance on outdated infrastructure delayed timely card issuance, affecting public trust and accessibility in underserved regions.

**Advances in Local Printing Capacity**: As shown in the chart, local card printing demonstrated significant improvements:

* 223,992 cards printed in 2021 increased to 491,443 cards in 2023, representing an 84% improvement.
* From January to May 2024, 779,039 cards were printed locally, a 280% increase compared to 2021 levels.
* Despite these advancements, reliance on offshore facilities for large-scale printing persists, necessitating further investments in local infrastructure.



* + 1. **Opportunities for Improvement in Efficiency**

**EQ: What lessons can be drawn to improve efficiency in future identity registration projects?**

The NRIS project highlights several key opportunities for improving efficiency in future identity registration initiatives. These include investments in IT infrastructure, capacity-building, public awareness campaigns, and exploring multiple digital credentials to enhance scalability and accessibility.

**Investment in IT Infrastructure:**

* Stakeholders consistently emphasized the need for real-time connectivity between district offices and the central NRIS database. Expanding broadband coverage and deploying robust IT systems in rural areas would reduce manual data handling and synchronization delays.
* Additionally, adopting modern ICT infrastructure, including automated disaster recovery systems, is crucial for ensuring the NRIS’s resilience in the face of operational challenges.
* Leveraging cloud-based solutions and interoperable systems will support seamless integration with other MDAs, minimizing duplication and improving data accuracy.

**Adoption of Multiple Digital Credentials:**

* Reliance on a single credential, such as physical ID cards, limits efficiency and scalability. The NRIS project demonstrated challenges with high costs and delays in centralized and offshore printing. Future initiatives should explore multiple digital credential options, such as:
	+ Mobile IDs: Accessible via smartphones for seamless digital identity verification. This is particularly useful for populations with higher smartphone penetration and streamlining financial inclusion processes such as e-KYC.
	+ QR Code-based IDs: Low-cost, scannable alternatives for use in offline and low-connectivity areas, addressing accessibility challenges in underserved regions. Successes in countries like Rwanda and India demonstrate the inclusivity of such approaches.
	+ Biometric Verification Systems: Streamlined for high-security use cases, particularly in financial and governance sectors. The NRIS already saves $27 million annually in subsidy programs by eliminating ghost beneficiaries through biometric verification, highlighting its utility and potential for further expansion.
* Introducing multiple credential options will reduce reliance on costly and delay-prone physical card printing while enhancing accessibility across diverse populations.

**Capacity-Building for Field Staff:**

* Training programs for registration officers were implemented during the mass registration phase but were less consistent in the continuous registration phase. Continuous professional development for field staff, including IT support and data management training, would improve operational efficiency.
* Similarly, strengthening the NRB’s institutional capacity through targeted training programs and performance-based incentives for staff retention will enhance sustainability.

**Strengthening Public Awareness Campaigns:**

* Limited awareness campaigns during the continuous registration phase resulted in reduced participation, particularly among young adults and marginalized groups. Sustained communication strategies, modelled after the successful mass registration phase, should include engagement with traditional leaders and community-based organizations to ensure inclusivity in rural areas.
* Enhanced public engagement strategies will improve registration turnout and bolster trust in the system.

**Comparative Best Practices:**

* Adopting lessons from countries such as Rwanda, which have fully digitized their CRVS systems, would enhance Malawi’s efficiency in integrating birth registration and birth notifications into the NRIS framework. Automating these processes would reduce resource costs and improve scalability.
* Integrating CRVS data with health, education, and social protection systems through digital frameworks would enhance Malawi’s ability to provide inclusive, efficient services.

**Summary for Efficiency**

The NRIS project demonstrated high efficiency during its mass registration phase, achieving significant outputs within budget and leveraging donor partnerships effectively. Operational successes included rapid deployment of registration teams, strategic use of mobile units, and innovations like biometric verification systems. However, the transition to continuous registration exposed gaps in IT infrastructure, staff capacity, and funding sustainability. Reliance on costly offshore printing caused delays in ID issuance, despite local printing capacity improving. Missed targets in birth registration and limited CRVS integration underscore the need for systemic improvements in resource allocation and operational digitization. Exploring multiple digital credentials, such as mobile IDs and QR codes, alongside strengthened IT systems and public awareness, can enhance scalability and efficiency in future initiatives.

* 1. **Effectiveness**
		1. **Achievement of Planned Outputs and Outcomes**

**EQ: To what extent has the NRIS project achieved its planned outputs and outcomes, such as mass registration, ID issuance, and birth registration?**

The NRIS project delivered significant progress in achieving its planned outputs, particularly in mass registration and ID issuance, but encountered challenges in meeting birth registration targets and fully integrating CRVS systems. Similarly, the project’s effectiveness in rolling out comprehensive death and marriage registrations remains limited, with only four pilot districts covered for death registration.

**Mass Registration Achievements:**

* The project successfully registered **9 million adults** during its mass registration phase (2016–2018), achieving near-universal adult coverage of 98%. By 2023, the total registered population increased to **12.4 million individuals**, surpassing the initial target.
* Registration was inclusive, with **53% of registered individuals being women**, demonstrating the project’s commitment to gender equity. However, gaps persist in including persons with disabilities and stateless populations, underscoring the need for more inclusive registration strategies.

**ID Issuance and Use:**

* Over **12 million secure biometric IDs** were issued, supporting identity verification across governance systems, including voter registration, payroll systems, and social protection programs.
* The adoption of IDs in the AIP and the UBR ensured accurate targeting of beneficiaries, saving millions annually by removing ghost beneficiaries.

**Challenges in Birth registration:**

* Despite efforts to integrate birth registration into the CRVS system, only **3.6 million children** were registered by 2023, far below the target of 8.4 million. Limited funding for CRVS initiatives and logistical barriers in rural areas were key contributors to this gap.
* Stakeholders highlighted the need for stronger linkages between birth registration and health and education systems to increase coverage.
	+ 1. **Effectiveness of Strategies and Innovations**

**EQ: How effective were the project strategies, including capacity-building initiatives and innovations such as the Digital ID Wallet, in addressing identified needs and delivering results?**

The NRIS project employed effective strategies to achieve its goals, though the effectiveness of innovations and capacity-building efforts varied.

**Capacity-Building Initiatives:**

* Over **4,200 registration officers** were trained during the mass registration phase, enabling efficient nationwide rollout.
* However, training programs during the continuous registration phase were less consistent. Field staff reported a need for ongoing capacity-building, particularly in IT support and data management, to address evolving challenges.

**Innovations in Identity Management:**

* The introduction of biometric verification systems and prototyping of innovations such as Digital ID wallets enhanced the potential utility of IDs for financial and governance services. While Digital ID wallets remain in the prototype phase, biometric systems enabled over 1 million individuals to access banking services for the first time, promoting financial inclusion.

**Integration with CRVS Systems:**

* Pilot projects for CRVS integration, supported by UNICEF, registered nearly all children in three districts. However, broader national implementation faced funding and logistical constraints, limiting the effectiveness of these strategies.
	+ 1. **Barriers and Enablers to Achieving Results**

**EQ: What factors supported or hindered the project’s ability to deliver its planned outputs and outcomes?**

The NRIS project was supported by strong partnerships and community engagement but hindered by operational, financial, and systemic barriers.

**Enablers:**

* **Donor Partnerships:** Support from UNDP, FCDO, USAID, and UNICEF provided financial resources, technical expertise, and operational capacity, particularly during the mass registration phase.
* **Community Engagement:** Partnerships with traditional leaders and civil society organizations ensured high participation rates in rural areas. Awareness campaigns through radio and town halls contributed to the project’s visibility and success.

**Barriers:**

* **Financial Constraints:** The project’s reliance on donor funding limited its ability to sustain and scale operations, particularly for CRVS integration and continuous registration.
* **Logistical Challenges:** Connectivity issues in rural districts delayed updates to the central database, affecting real-time synchronization and data accuracy.
* **Cultural Resistance:** Public mistrust of government systems in certain regions reduced participation in ID issuance and registration campaigns.
	+ 1. **Robustness of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

**EQ: Was the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework robust in tracking progress and achieving project goals?**

The project’s M&E framework facilitated effective tracking of outputs but lacked depth in capturing broader outcomes and systemic challenges.

**Strengths in M&E Framework:**

* A comprehensive M&E system tracked registration numbers, ID issuance rates, and demographic data, enabling detailed reporting on gender and geographic coverage.
* Donor oversight through basket fund arrangements ensured accountability and alignment with project goals.

**Limitations in Outcome Monitoring:**

* The framework primarily focused on quantitative outputs, such as the number of registered individuals and issued IDs. It lacked mechanisms to assess qualitative outcomes, such as the social and economic impacts of ID ownership.
* Stakeholders noted gaps in real-time data collection from district offices, particularly for birth and death registration updates.

**Summary for Effectiveness**

The NRIS project was highly effective in achieving mass registration and ID issuance targets, surpassing its initial goals and significantly contributing to governance and financial inclusion. Key strategies, such as biometric verification systems and community-driven awareness campaigns, facilitated these successes. However, gaps in birth registration, CRVS integration, and continuous capacity-building highlighted areas for improvement. The robustness of the M&E framework in tracking quantitative outputs was a strength, though limitations in monitoring broader outcomes and addressing systemic challenges reduced its overall effectiveness. Addressing these gaps will enhance the project’s ability to deliver sustainable and inclusive results.

* 1. **Sustainability**
		1. **Financial and Institutional Viability**

**EQ: What measures have been implemented to ensure the financial and institutional viability of the NRIS project beyond its implementation period?**

The sustainability of the NRIS project hinges on its ability to transition from donor dependency to self-sustaining financial and institutional mechanisms. While some progress has been made, critical gaps remain.

**Financial Viability:**

* The NRIS project relied heavily on donor funding, with approximately 60% of the $66 million total budget contributed by partners such as UNDP, FCDO, and USAID. This includes substantial basket funding arrangements to streamline disbursements and ensure accountability during implementation phases.
* The Government of Malawi contributed 40%, including cash and in-kind support, reflecting a growing commitment to national ownership. However, limited government financial contributions beyond the initial phases highlight the need for increased allocations to sustain operations.
* Recent government budget allocations show positive trends, with a projected MWK 45 billion allocation in 2024–2025. These investments are essential for reducing reliance on external funding and ensuring the project’s long-term viability.
* Financial inefficiencies related to high printing costs and reliance on offshore ID card production further strained resources. Addressing these issues through local printing expansion and alternative credential solutions, such as mobile IDs and QR code-based credentials, could reduce operational expenses while improving scalability.
* Revenue-generation mechanisms, such as fees for ID replacements and verifications, have been proposed but face political and operational challenges, such as resistance to user fees in low-income communities. As legal identity is a basic right, charging for it raises concerns about fairness and accessibility, requiring careful policy consideration.

**Institutional Viability:**

* The National Registration Bureau (NRB) now operates 28 district offices and 22 field offices, reflecting progress in decentralizing registration services. However, insufficient staffing and inconsistent funding for operational costs limit its capacity to maintain and expand these services.
* Continuous registration systems for children and vital events remain underdeveloped due to resource constraints, impacting the NRB’s ability to institutionalize CRVS integration fully.

**Institutionalization of NRIS within NRB:**

The institutionalization of the NRIS project within the NRB has been a critical success, marked by significant structural, financial, and operational developments that ensure the long-term sustainability of identity registration services in Malawi.

* **Increased Budget Allocations:**
The NRB’s financial prioritization is evident in the budget growth from MWK 4.5 billion in 2022–2023 to MWK 28 billion in 2023–2024, with a projected increase to MWK 45 billion in 2024–2025. This rise reflects a strong government commitment to institutionalizing identity management as a core governance function.
* **Separate Budget Vote for NRB:**
The establishment of a separate budget vote for the NRB within the national budget signifies its strategic importance and operational independence, enabling enhanced accountability and resource allocation.
* **Organizational Restructuring (2018):**
In 2018, the NRB underwent comprehensive restructuring to absorb the additional workload introduced by the NRIS project. This included the creation of specialized operational units and integration of identity registration processes into its core systems.
* **Operational Sustainability:**
The NRB has institutionalized continuous registration processes, expanded district and field offices, and integrated biometric ID registration into its routine operations. These advancements ensure the continuity of services beyond the project’s implementation phase.
	+ 1. **Capacity-Building Outcomes**

**EQ: How effective have capacity-building efforts been in ensuring the NRB’s ability to sustain the NRIS project?**

Capacity-building efforts under the NRIS project strengthened the NRB’s technical and operational foundations but highlighted ongoing gaps in staff training and retention.

**Training Initiatives:**

* The project trained over 4,200 registration officers during the mass registration phase, enabling efficient implementation. Subsequent capacity-building efforts focused on IT training and system maintenance for district officers.
* Despite these efforts, stakeholder consultations revealed a lack of continuous professional development programs, particularly in rural districts, where IT infrastructure and technical expertise are limited.

**Staff Retention Challenges:**

* NRB staff, categorized under common government services, are subject to frequent transfers, disrupting continuity and institutional memory. This limits the NRB’s ability to retain experienced personnel critical for managing and expanding the NRIS system.

**Comparative Insights:**

* Countries like Rwanda have invested in targeted staff retention strategies, including performance-based incentives and specialized CRVS roles, to sustain identity systems. Malawi could benefit from adopting similar approaches.
	+ 1. **Risks to Sustainability**

**EQ: What key risks could jeopardize the sustainability of NRIS project outcomes, and how can these risks be mitigated?**

The NRIS project faces multiple sustainability risks, spanning financial, operational, and systemic challenges.

**Financial Risks:**

* While donor funding supported 60% of the project’s initial budget, reliance on external financing for system maintenance and capacity-building is unsustainable.
* The Government of Malawi has increased its financial commitment to a projected MWK 45 billion by 2024–2025. These increases demonstrate progress but require further alignment with operational needs to ensure long-term sustainability.
* Efforts to introduce revenue streams, such as fees for ID replacements, face resistance due to concerns about accessibility for low-income communities and the principle that legal identity is a basic right.

**Operational Risks:**

* Outdated IT infrastructure in rural offices and limited connectivity hinder real-time data updates, reducing the efficiency of continuous registration.
* High staff turnover due to transfers within the public service undermines the NRB’s institutional capacity to scale operations effectively.

**Systemic Risks:**

* Public mistrust of government systems in some regions reduces engagement with registration processes, particularly for birth registration and ID updates.
* Legislative gaps, such as the absence of legal provisions for refugee registration, limit the NRB’s ability to expand the system inclusively.

**Mitigation Strategies:**

* Stakeholders recommended targeted investments in IT upgrades and broadband expansion to improve operational efficiency.
* Public awareness campaigns, particularly in low-trust regions, could build confidence in NRIS systems and increase participation.
* Legal reforms to address registration gaps for refugees and other marginalized groups are essential to ensuring long-term inclusivity.
	+ 1. **Long-Term Sustainability Strategies**

**EQ: What strategies are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the NRIS project?**

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the NRB requires a multifaceted approach focusing on financial independence, institutional resilience, and stakeholder collaboration. As the NRIS project transitions to the IDT4M initiative, strategies must address the NRB’s evolving role and operational requirements.

**Financial Independence:**

* Introducing cost-recovery mechanisms, such as nominal fees for ID renewals and verifications, could supplement government funding without excluding low-income populations. Lessons from countries like Kenya, which subsidize ID issuance for vulnerable groups, could guide implementation.
* Encouraging private sector partnerships to fund system enhancements, such as digital ID integrations with banks and telecom operators, could diversify revenue streams.
* Reduce service costs by introducing mobile IDs, QR code-based credentials, and other digital alternatives to complement physical ID cards. These options offer scalable, cost-effective solutions that enhance accessibility and operational efficiency.

**Institutional Resilience:**

* Strengthening the NRB’s autonomy by transitioning it into an independent authority with dedicated funding streams could enhance governance and accountability. Establish regional offices and decentralized ID printing hubs to improve service delivery efficiency and reduce delays in underserved areas.
* Investing in staff retention programs, including targeted incentives and specialized career tracks, would improve institutional capacity. Implement continuous training initiatives for NRB staff, focusing on IT skills, data management, and digital service delivery.

**Stakeholder Engagement:**

* Sustained collaboration with traditional leaders and civil society organizations could improve trust and participation, particularly in underserved regions.
* Public-private partnerships to expand the use of National IDs in sectors such as education and healthcare would demonstrate the system’s value and encourage adoption.

**Summary for Sustainability**

The NRIS project has made significant progress toward sustainability, particularly through increased government budget allocations, institutionalization within the NRB, and the decentralization of services. Government contributions, projected to reach MWK 45 billion in 2024–2025, reflect a growing commitment to reducing donor dependency. However, challenges persist, including reliance on external funding, high ID printing costs, outdated IT infrastructure, and limited capacity for CRVS integration. Public mistrust and legislative gaps, such as the lack of provisions for refugee registration, further undermine inclusivity. To ensure long-term viability, the NRB must focus on financial independence through cost-recovery mechanisms, expand service delivery with multiple digital credentials, and enhance institutional capacity through training and retention programs. Strengthened stakeholder collaboration and the adoption of regional best practices will be critical in transitioning to the IDT4M initiative and sustaining identity registration as a cornerstone of Malawi’s development strategy.

* 1. **Cross-Cutting Themes**
		1. **Gender Equality and Empowerment**

**EQ: To what extent has the NRIS project promoted gender equality and the empowerment of women?**

The NRIS project achieved significant milestones in promoting gender equality, though cultural and systemic barriers limited its full impact.

**Achievements in Women’s Representation:**

* Women accounted for **53% of registered individuals**, surpassing male participation rates (47%), reflecting targeted outreach efforts, such as collaboration with women’s groups and gender-sensitive campaigns.
* National IDs enabled over **1 million women** to access financial services, empowering them economically and improving their participation in governance processes, including voting and social protection programs.

**Challenges to Gender Equality:**

* **Cultural Norms:** In some rural areas, patriarchal systems restrict women’s autonomy in registering themselves or their children.
* **Outreach Gaps:** Limited awareness campaigns during the continuous registration phase reduced engagement with women in underserved regions.

**Regional Alignment:**

* The NRIS’s focus on gender inclusivity aligns with APAI-CRVS priorities to ensure equal access to identity systems. Similar programs in the region emphasize subsidized ID issuance and mobile units with female officers to address gender-specific barriers.
	+ 1. **Human Rights and Inclusivity**

**EQ: How effectively has the NRIS project ensured inclusivity for marginalized and vulnerable populations?**

The NRIS project prioritized inclusivity, targeting rural communities, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, but challenges in accessibility and systemic barriers remain.

**Inclusion of Marginalized Groups:**

* High rural registration rates (over **85% in some districts**) were achieved through mobile units and community engagement, leveraging traditional leaders for outreach.
* Registration of **persons with disabilities** was facilitated through partnerships with advocacy organizations and accessible equipment in select districts.

**Barriers to Inclusivity:**

* **Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities:** Physical barriers, such as the lack of wheelchair-friendly registration centers, and limited staff training on disability inclusion reduced participation.
* **Refugee Exclusion:** Legal gaps prevented refugees from accessing the registration process, limiting their access to formal identification systems.
* **Public Mistrust:** Misconceptions about ID usage and concerns about government surveillance reduced engagement in certain regions.

**Regional Comparisons:**

* APAI-CRVS highlights inclusive practices, such as mobile biometric kits tailored for persons with disabilities. Lessons from other countries suggest that community-led registration and trust-building initiatives could enhance NRIS’s inclusivity.
	+ 1. **Environmental Sustainability**

**EQ: How effectively did the NRIS project integrate environmental sustainability into its operations?**

Environmental sustainability was not a core focus of the NRIS project, though some measures mitigated its environmental impact.

**Eco-Friendly Practices:**

* The use of tamper-proof ID cards, compliant with ICAO standards, extended card lifespans and reduced waste.
* Centralized data management reduced paper usage, contributing to a lower carbon footprint for operational processes.

**Missed Opportunities:**

* **E-Waste Management:** Outdated biometric registration kits and electronic devices lacked a formal recycling plan, creating potential environmental hazards.
* **Fuel-Intensive Logistics:** Mobile registration units relied heavily on diesel vehicles, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions.

**Regional Benchmarks:**

* Best practice benchmarks include adoption protocols for recycling electronic waste and deploying solar-powered registration kits to reduce environmental impact. Similar strategies could be integrated into NRIS’s future operations.

**Summary for Cross-Cutting Themes**

The NRIS project achieved notable progress in promoting gender equality and inclusivity, with high female representation in registration and strong rural outreach. However, barriers such as patriarchal norms, accessibility challenges for persons with disabilities, and exclusion of refugees indicate areas for improvement. While environmental sustainability was not a primary focus, adopting green practices in equipment recycling and transport logistics would align NRIS with regional best practices. Strengthening trust-building measures and addressing systemic barriers will further enhance NRIS’s alignment with cross-cutting priorities.

* 1. **Impact Assessment**
		1. **Governance and Accountability**

**EQ: How has the NRIS project improved governance, accountability, and transparency in Malawi’s public systems?**

The NRIS project has significantly enhanced governance mechanisms by addressing systemic inefficiencies and promoting transparency in public service delivery.

**Impact on Governance Systems:**

* **Electoral Processes:** Integration of National IDs into voter rolls introduced the “one ID, one vote” principle, eliminating duplicate registrations and saving $7 million in election-related costs during the 2019 elections.
* **Payroll Systems:** The removal of over **8,000 ghost workers** from government payrolls saved millions annually and improved trust in public sector resource management.
* **Subsidy Programs:** Integration with the AIP eliminated 490,995 ghost beneficiaries, generating annual savings of $27 million.

**Fraud Reduction and Accountability:**

* The centralized biometric database enabled more accurate beneficiary targeting for social protection programs, reducing misuse and inefficiencies.
* Stakeholders emphasized that fraud reduction measures restored public confidence in government programs and improved the credibility of governance systems.
	+ 1. **Financial Inclusion and Economic Impact**

**EQ: To what extent has the NRIS project contributed to financial inclusion and economic empowerment in Malawi?**

The NRIS project facilitated financial inclusion by enabling marginalized populations to access formal banking services, promoting economic empowerment across key demographics.

**Increased Access to Financial Services:**

* Over **1 million individuals**, primarily women, accessed formal financial services for the first time using National IDs, enabling them to open bank accounts, secure loans, and participate in savings schemes.
* Compliance with KYC requirements encouraged financial institutions to extend services to previously excluded populations, particularly in rural areas.

**Impact on Economic Productivity:**

* By reducing fraudulent beneficiaries in social protection programs, the project redirected savings to productive sectors, boosting economic resilience.
* Stakeholders reported that access to financial services increased women’s participation in local trade and agricultural cooperatives, enhancing household income and economic stability.
	+ 1. **Service Delivery and Social Inclusion**

**EQ: How has the NRIS project improved access to essential services and promoted social inclusion?**

The NRIS project enhanced access to public services and fostered social inclusion by enabling marginalized groups to participate more equitably in governance and service delivery systems.

**Improved Access to Services:**

* **Healthcare:** Linking National IDs with health records reduced duplication and improved patient tracking in central and district hospitals, streamlining service delivery.
* **Education and CRVS Integration:** Pilot CRVS programs facilitated birth registration in three districts, enabling children to access educational services and ensuring more accurate population data for planning.

**Social Inclusion for Marginalized Groups:**

* Women and rural residents benefited from mobile registration units, which achieved over 85% coverage in some remote districts.
* Persons with disabilities were included through accessible registration measures, though challenges such as physical barriers at registration centers remain.

**Challenges to Full Inclusion:**

* Refugees and stateless persons remain excluded due to legislative gaps, limiting their access to essential services and formal identification.
* Public mistrust in opposition-leaning regions reduced participation in birth registration and ID updates.
	+ 1. **Cross-Sectoral Integration and Impact**

**EQ: How effectively has the NRIS project driven cross-sectoral integration and impacted national planning efforts?**

The NRIS project is significantly advancing on cross-sectoral integration by linking identity systems across key governance, healthcare, and social protection sectors, thereby improving national planning, resource allocation, and service delivery. However, challenges and missed opportunities in broader system integration and policy alignment underscore the need for strategic focus during the transition to the IDT4M initiative.

**Sectoral Integrations:**

* **Voter Registration:** Improved accuracy and transparency in electoral systems, enhancing public trust in the democratic process.
* **Healthcare and Subsidy Programs:** Linking IDs to healthcare services and social protection schemes, such as the AIP and social cash transfers, improved beneficiary targeting, reduced fraud, and optimized resource allocation.
* **Financial Inclusion**: Biometric IDs facilitated over 1 million individuals accessing banking services for the first time, underscoring the project's role in enabling financial inclusion.

**Impact on National Planning:**

* The availability of reliable population data supported evidence-based planning for service delivery in health, education, and agriculture, enabling better targeting of resources.
* Integration of CRVS data demonstrated potential for scaling demographic analytics to inform national strategies, though the process remains incomplete. This limited progress has constrained the ability to link vital statistics to planning efforts fully.

**Missed Opportunities:**

* Integration with justice and education systems remains limited, despite the potential for IDs to streamline case management and student registration processes.
* Continuous registration processes for children and vital events need to be strengthened to ensure long-term alignment with national planning frameworks.

**Broader Issues and Future Focus:**

During the formulation of the IDT4M initiative, several broader challenges were highlighted:

* Limited integration across MDAs and reliance on fragmented ICT systems restricted seamless cross-sectoral linkages. Addressing this requires robust investments in interoperable systems and data-sharing frameworks.
* Unequal access to digital infrastructure and services, particularly in rural areas, remains a major bottleneck. Efforts to bridge this divide must include investments in digital literacy, infrastructure expansion, and affordable access.
* The need for comprehensive data protection laws and supportive policies to ensure secure, inclusive digital transformation was emphasized.
* Expanding the utility of IDs through initiatives such as mobile IDs and digital public infrastructure can unlock economic and social value across governance, financial inclusion, and service delivery.

**Summary for Impact Assessment**

The NRIS project has delivered transformative impacts, particularly in improving governance transparency, reducing fraud, and enhancing access to essential services for marginalized populations. Its success in linking identity systems with voter registration, healthcare, and social protection programs has strengthened national planning and socioeconomic inclusion. However, missed opportunities in integrating justice, education, and continuous registration systems, combined with legislative and systemic challenges, highlight the need for targeted reforms. The transition to IDT4M offers a critical opportunity to address these gaps by focusing on interoperability, digital inclusion, and multi-dimensional identity use cases, ensuring sustainable and inclusive development outcomes

## Conclusion and Recommendations

* 1. **Conclusions**

The NRIS project has been a transformative initiative for Malawi, addressing critical gaps in identity management and governance. The project delivered substantial achievements while highlighting key areas for future improvement.

**Key Achievements**:

* **Mass Registration and ID Issuance**: Registered over **12.4 million individuals**, surpassing its original target, and issued secure biometric IDs that strengthened governance systems.
* **Fraud Reduction and Accountability**: Removed over **8,000 ghost workers** from payrolls and 490,995 fraudulent beneficiaries from subsidy programs, saving millions annually.
* **Financial Inclusion**: Enabled over **1 million individuals**, primarily women, to access banking services, promoting economic empowerment.
* **Service Delivery Improvements**: Enhanced access to healthcare and social protection programs through ID-based integrations, achieving over **85% rural coverage** in some districts.

**Challenges Identified**:

Despite its successes, the NRIS project has faced challenges in achieving comprehensive civil registration, particularly for marriage and death records. Operational barriers, such as outdated infrastructure, limited outreach to marginalized groups, and dependency on donor funding, highlight areas requiring focused attention.

* **Birth registration and CRVS Integration**: With only **3.6 million children** registered out of a target of 8.4 million, significant gaps remain in CRVS integration and continuous registration processes.
* **Inclusivity and Accessibility**: Persons with disabilities and refugees face systemic barriers, including accessibility challenges and legislative exclusions, limiting full participation.
* **Sectoral Integration**: Limited linkages with justice and education systems represent missed opportunities for leveraging IDs in broader governance reforms.

**Overall Conclusion**:
The NRIS project has significantly contributed to Malawi’s governance, socioeconomic inclusion, and public service delivery, positioning itself as a cornerstone for future development. However, addressing systemic gaps in CRVS integration, inclusivity, and sustainability will be critical for sustaining and scaling these achievements.

* 1. **Recommendations**

To build on the successes of the NRIS project and address identified gaps, the following recommendations are proposed:

**1. Strengthen CRVS Integration and Birth registration**:

* Expand pilot CRVS programs into a nationwide rollout, focusing on rural and underserved areas.
* Establish stronger linkages between birth registration and healthcare and education systems to increase coverage and data accuracy.
* Target rural areas and underserved populations for birth registration through community-based campaigns and mobile units. Collaborate with health and education sectors to integrate birth registration into routine services.
* Expand the rollout of death and marriage registrations beyond the current pilot districts to ensure comprehensive lifecycle identity management.

**2. Enhance Inclusivity Measures**:

* Develop targeted outreach strategies to include persons with disabilities, refugees, and stateless individuals in the registration process.
* Improve physical accessibility of registration centers for persons with disabilities, including wheelchair ramps and assistive devices.
* Introduce legislative reforms to include refugees and stateless persons in the registration process. Legislative reforms must prioritize universal access to identity systems.
* Conduct awareness campaigns to improve public understanding of the importance of birth and death registration, particularly in areas with cultural or political resistance. Leverage partnerships with traditional leaders to increase acceptance.
* Conduct trust-building campaigns in regions with public mistrust of government systems.

**3. Decentralize Registration Services to Traditional Authorities:**

To enhance accessibility and sustainability, NRB should establish registration offices within each Traditional Authority. This approach would address logistical challenges and increase the reach of continuous registration services.

* Establish decentralized offices with each Traditional Authority that would significantly reduce travel distances for rural populations, ensuring that marginalized groups, such as women, children, and persons with disabilities, can access registration services more conveniently.
* Local offices would also streamline the registration process by reducing reliance on ad-hoc mobile registration units. Continuous registration for life events such as births, deaths, and marriages could be handled more efficiently through a localized setup.
* Embedding offices within Traditional Authorities would enhance the NRB’s institutional presence at the community level, fostering trust and collaboration with local leaders to improve registration uptake.

**4. Invest in Long-Term Sustainability**:

* Develop cost-recovery mechanisms, such as nominal fees for ID renewals and verifications, to reduce reliance on donor funding.
* Transition the NRB into an autonomous authority with dedicated funding streams and performance-based incentives for staff retention.

**5. Strengthen Operational Efficiency**:

* Upgrade IT infrastructure in rural offices to enable real-time data synchronization and reduce reliance on manual processes.
* Upgrade outdated registration kits and establish automated disaster recovery systems to ensure operational resilience. Invest in real-time connectivity for district offices to improve data synchronization and reduce inefficiencies.
* Provide continuous professional development programs for registration officers, particularly in IT and data management.

**6. Broaden Sectoral Linkages**:

* Enhance interoperability between NRIS and integrate NRIS data with justice systems for streamlined case management and with education systems for student enrollment and tracking.
* Leverage National IDs for expanding access to digital financial services and healthcare.
* Develop standardized data-sharing protocols to improve service delivery across sectors.

**7. Benchmark Regional Best Practices**:

* Collaborate with APAI-CRVS and neighbouring countries to adopt proven strategies for CRVS integration, digital ID rollouts, and inclusive registration.
* Expand the use of Digital ID Wallets to enhance accessibility and scalability. Ensure digital solutions are user-friendly and supported by widespread digital literacy programs.

## Annex 1: NRIS Final Evaluation Inception Report Summary

**1. Introduction**

The National Registration and Identification System (NRIS) Project was launched in 2016 to address the absence of a comprehensive and permanent identity management framework in Malawi. The project’s overarching aim is to strengthen governance, enhance service delivery, and promote socioeconomic inclusion through the establishment of an integrated and robust national identity system. The NRIS aligns with Malawi’s Vision 2063, the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS), and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.9, which emphasizes legal identity for all, including birth registration.

The Final Evaluation of the NRIS Project is being conducted to provide an independent and comprehensive assessment of the project’s performance, achievements, challenges, and sustainability. Covering the period from November 2016 to April 2024, the evaluation focuses on mass registration efforts, the issuance of National IDs, progress in birth registration, and the integration of institutional processes with Malawi’s governance framework. The evaluation adheres to the OECD/UNEG evaluation criteria—relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability—and incorporates cross-cutting themes such as gender equality, human rights, and environmental considerations.

**2. Purpose and Objectives of the Evaluation**

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the implementation and outcomes of the NRIS Project in order to ensure accountability, foster learning, and support strategic planning for future programming. The evaluation seeks to:

1. **Assess the relevance of the NRIS Project** in addressing governance challenges, improving service delivery, and ensuring inclusivity, particularly for marginalized populations such as women, rural communities, and persons with disabilities.
2. **Evaluate the effectiveness** of the project in achieving its planned outcomes, including mass registration, ID issuance, and the integration of CRVS systems.
3. **Analyze the efficiency of resource utilization** and the operational mechanisms employed to achieve the project’s objectives.
4. **Examine the sustainability of project outcomes**, focusing on the institutional capacity of the National Registration Bureau (NRB) and financial mechanisms to support the system beyond donor contributions.
5. **Provide actionable recommendations** for enhancing the scalability, inclusivity, and sustainability of the NRIS.

**3. Scope of the Evaluation**

The evaluation comprehensively covers the lifecycle of the NRIS Project, from its inception in November 2016 to its anticipated conclusion in April 2024. It assesses all major phases, key innovations, operational challenges, and institutional mechanisms, including:

1. **Mass Registration Phase (2016–2018):** Registered over 9 million Malawians aged 16 and above, issuing secure biometric IDs and achieving near-universal adult coverage.
2. **Transition to Continuous Registration:** Institutionalized registration processes through district offices and integrated CRVS systems to enable birth registration.
3. **Innovative Interventions:** Introduced Digital ID Wallets, biometric verification systems, and blockchain-based solutions to enhance service delivery and governance.
4. **Final Implementation Phase (2023–2024):** Focused on achieving birth registration targets, embedding sustainability measures, and scaling institutional capacity.

The evaluation includes all 28 districts of Malawi, ensuring representation of rural, peri-urban, and underserved areas.

**4. Evaluation Framework**

The evaluation framework is guided by the OECD/UNEG criteria:

1. **Relevance:** Examines alignment with Malawi Vision 2063, regional frameworks, and global commitments such as the SDGs.
2. **Coherence:** Evaluates synergies and integration with governance systems, donor-supported initiatives, and other national programs.
3. **Effectiveness:** Assesses the extent to which the project has delivered planned outputs and outcomes, such as registration, ID issuance, and birth registration.
4. **Efficiency:** Analyzes the cost-effectiveness of resource utilization and operational strategies.
5. **Sustainability:** Examines the likelihood of sustaining project outcomes beyond the implementation period.

The evaluation also incorporates cross-cutting themes:

* **Gender Equality:** Assesses efforts to empower women and reduce gender disparities.
* **Human Rights and Inclusivity:** Evaluates the project’s success in reaching marginalized populations.
* **Environmental Sustainability:** Reviews the integration of environmentally sustainable practices into project operations.

**5. Methodology**

The evaluation adopts a theory-based, mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Key components of the methodology include:

1. **Document Review:** Analysing project design documents, operational guidelines, evaluation reports, and policy frameworks such as Vision 2063 and APAI-CRVS.
2. **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Engaging NRB officials, development partners, community leaders, and field officers to understand challenges and successes.
3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Gathering insights from marginalized groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, and rural residents, on their experiences with the registration process.
4. **Surveys:** Capturing quantitative data on registration accessibility, service satisfaction, and inclusion rates.
5. **Field Observations:** Visiting district and post office facilities to observe operational workflows, infrastructure adequacy, and service delivery mechanisms.

A purposive sampling strategy ensures representation across diverse contexts, including remote regions, underserved populations, and key stakeholders involved in implementation.

**6. Key Insights from the Inception Report**

The Inception Report highlights the following key findings:

1. **Relevance and Coherence:**
	* The NRIS aligns strongly with national, regional, and global frameworks, contributing to governance reforms, service delivery, and socioeconomic inclusion.
	* It integrates effectively with governance systems, reducing fraud and improving the targeting of social protection programs.
	* However, integration with sectors such as justice and education remain limited, representing missed opportunities.
2. **Effectiveness:**
	* Over 12 million individuals have been registered, exceeding the original target of 9 million.
	* Gender inclusivity has been a success, with women constituting 53% of registrants.
	* Challenges persist in birth registration, with only 3.6 million children registered against a target of 8.4 million.
3. **Efficiency:**
	* The mass registration campaign demonstrated cost-effectiveness, leveraging mobile registration units and centralized procurement.
	* Continuous registration efforts face logistical challenges, particularly in rural areas with limited IT infrastructure.
4. **Sustainability:**
	* Heavy reliance on donor funding poses risks to long-term viability.
	* The NRB’s capacity to maintain continuous registration systems and CRVS integration remains underdeveloped.
5. **Cross-Cutting Themes:**
	* Significant progress has been made in promoting gender equality and rural inclusivity.
	* Barriers such as accessibility challenges for persons with disabilities and legislative exclusions for refugees persist.

**7. Recommendations for the Evaluation**

The Inception Report emphasizes the following recommendations:

1. Validate the reconstructed Theory of Change to ensure alignment with evolving priorities, such as digital transformation and CRVS integration.
2. Prioritize the expansion of birth registration and integration of CRVS systems with healthcare and education.
3. Strengthen efforts to include marginalized populations, including persons with disabilities and refugees, through tailored outreach and legislative reforms.
4. Focus on enhancing the financial and institutional sustainability of the NRIS, reducing reliance on donor contributions.

**8. Conclusion**

The Inception Report establishes a comprehensive framework for evaluating the NRIS project’s contributions to governance, inclusivity, and service delivery. By identifying achievements, gaps, and opportunities, the report ensures that the evaluation will provide actionable insights to enhance the sustainability and scalability of the NRIS.

## Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

The evaluation matrix systematically links evaluation questions to specific criteria, indicators, data sources, and data collection methods. It is designed to guide a coherent and evidence-based evaluation process for the NRIS project, ensuring alignment with the OECD/UNEG evaluation framework criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. The matrix also incorporates cross-cutting themes like gender equality, human rights, and environmental sustainability. This matrix guides the data collection, analysis, and synthesis during the evaluation process, ensuring each evaluation question is addressed methodically and supported by evidence.

**Evaluation Matrix for NRIS Final Evaluation**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Evaluation Criteria** | **Key Questions** | **Indicators** | **Data Sources** | **Data Collection Methods** |
| **Relevance** | How well does the NRIS project align with Malawi Vision 2063, SDGs, and other global and regional frameworks? | - Alignment with national and global policies- Stakeholder perceptions of alignment | Vision 2063 policy documents, SDG reports, stakeholder feedback | Document review, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) |
|  | Does the project address the needs of marginalized groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and rural communities? | - Representation of vulnerable groups in registration data- Beneficiary satisfaction | Beneficiary surveys, NRIS registration data | Stakeholder Discussions |
|  | Are the project objectives and indicators SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)? | - Quality and clarity of objectives and indicators in project logframes | Project design documents, progress reports | Document review |
| **Coherence** | How effectively has NRIS integrated with other governance systems and donor-supported initiatives? | - Evidence of alignment and integration with national systems and initiatives | Government and donor program reports, stakeholder interviews | Document review, KIIs |
|  | Does the NRIS complement or overlap with other civil registration and identification programs in Malawi? | - Synergies identified between NRIS and other programs- Stakeholder feedback | UNDP-supported program reports, civil registration program evaluations | KIIs, FGDs |
| **Effectiveness** | To what extent has the NRIS project achieved its planned outputs and outcomes? | - Percentage of planned beneficiaries registered- ID issuance rates | NRB progress reports, mid-term evaluation report | Surveys, KIIs |
|  | What factors enabled or hindered the achievement of project outcomes? | - Stakeholder-reported barriers and enablers | Stakeholder consultations | FGDs, KIIs |
|  | How effective were the project’s capacity-building efforts in strengthening institutional performance? | - Number and quality of training programs- Improvement in staff performance | Training records, staff feedback | KIIs, document review |
| **Efficiency** | Were resources used cost-effectively to achieve project objectives? | - Cost per registered beneficiary- Comparison of planned versus actual resource utilization | Financial reports, project budgets | Document review |
|  | How efficient were operational and logistical arrangements during implementation? | - Timeliness of ID issuance- Stakeholder-reported logistical challenges | Operational records, stakeholder interviews | KIIs, field observations |
| **Sustainability** | What measures are in place to ensure the continuation of project outcomes beyond its implementation period? | - Existence of sustainability plans- Institutional capacity of the NRB | NRB strategic plans, stakeholder consultations | KIIs, document review |
|  | What are the risks to sustainability, and how can they be mitigated? | - Identified risks- Proposed mitigation strategies | Risk assessments, stakeholder feedback | FGDs, KIIs |
|  | How prepared is the NRB to sustain project outcomes independently? | - Institutional readiness indicators- Plans for continued funding | NRB records, government funding commitments | KIIs, document review |
| **Cross-Cutting Themes** | How effectively has NRIS promoted gender equality, human rights, and inclusivity? | - Proportion of registered women and marginalized groups- Accessibility of registration centers | Gender-disaggregated registration data, FGDs | FGDs, surveys |
|  | Were environmental sustainability measures incorporated into NRIS operations? | - Evidence of eco-friendly practices- Stakeholder feedback on environmental impact | Operational and logistics records | KIIs, field observations |

## Annex 3: Stakeholder Consultations/ Key Informant Interview Guide

**Purpose of the Stakeholder Consultations/ Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**

The stakeholder consultations/ KIIs aim to capture in-depth perspectives from stakeholders directly involved in or impacted by the NRIS project. These interviews will build on prior consultations to validate findings, explore detailed insights on challenges, and identify actionable recommendations for future programming.

**1. Background and Context**

* **Role and Involvement:**
	+ Describe your role in the NRIS project and how your responsibilities evolved over time.
	+ What were the primary contributions of your organization/department to the project?
* **Stakeholder Participation:**
	+ How effectively were stakeholders, including community representatives, traditional leaders, and advocacy groups, engaged in the project?
	+ Did you feel adequately consulted in the decision-making process during the design and implementation phases?

**2. Relevance**

* **Alignment with National and Global Goals:**
	+ From your perspective, how well does the NRIS align with Malawi Vision 2063, the SDGs (especially SDG 16.9), and the APAI-CRVS framework?
	+ Do you believe the project sufficiently addressed identity challenges, especially those affecting underserved populations (e.g., rural residents, women, persons with disabilities)?
* **Beneficiary Needs:**
	+ How responsive was the project to the specific needs of vulnerable groups? For example:
		- Were targeted strategies (e.g., mobile registration units) effective in reaching rural or marginalized populations?
		- What gaps remained in addressing accessibility issues for persons with disabilities?

**3. Coherence**

* **Integration with National Programs and Governance Systems:**
	+ How well was the NRIS integrated into other systems, such as voter registration, healthcare records, and social protection programs (e.g., Affordable Inputs Program)?
	+ Were there any conflicts or overlaps between NRIS and other national initiatives, or did it enhance synergies?
* **Donor and Partner Collaboration:**
	+ How would you describe the collaboration between the Government of Malawi, development partners (e.g., UNDP, USAID), and the NRB? Were there challenges in ensuring alignment with shared goals?

**4. Effectiveness**

* **Achievement of Outputs:**
	+ To what extent did the project achieve its planned outputs, such as mass registration, ID issuance, and birth registration? What contributed to successes in:
		- Mass registration reaching 12.4 million individuals?
		- Eliminating ghost workers or fraudulent subsidy beneficiaries?
* **Challenges and Barriers:**
	+ What were the key operational or contextual barriers that limited progress, particularly in areas such as:
		- Birth registration under the CRVS system (target: 8.4 million children; actual: 3.6 million)?
		- Reaching populations in remote districts with logistical constraints?
* **Capacity Building:**
	+ Were the training programs for NRB staff and field officers effective in equipping them to manage registration processes?
	+ What additional capacity-building measures would have strengthened the project’s outcomes?

**5. Efficiency**

* **Resource Utilization:**
	+ Do you think resources—financial, human, and technical—were allocated effectively? Were there examples of waste or underutilization that need addressing?
* **Operational Challenges:**
	+ How efficient were the logistical arrangements for mass registration and subsequent continuous registration efforts? For instance:
		- Did delays in IT infrastructure upgrades or logistical bottlenecks affect registration rates in rural areas?
		- Were mobile units used efficiently to reach underserved regions?

**6. Sustainability**

* **Institutional Readiness:**
	+ In your opinion, how prepared is the NRB to sustain the project’s outcomes independently?
	+ Have adequate financial and institutional mechanisms been established to support continuous registration and CRVS integration?
* **Risk Mitigation:**
	+ What are the most significant risks to the long-term sustainability of the NRIS? Examples may include:
		- Reliance on donor funding for system upgrades and maintenance.
		- Staff turnover or limited capacity at district offices.
* **Proposed Solutions:**
	+ What strategies would you recommend to ensure long-term financial and institutional sustainability, such as fee structures for ID renewals or private-sector partnerships?

**7. Cross-Cutting Themes**

* **Gender Equality:**
	+ Women constituted 53% of registered individuals, demonstrating strong inclusion efforts. What strategies worked well in engaging women, and what gaps remain?
* **Human Rights and Accessibility:**
	+ How effectively did the project ensure inclusivity for marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and refugees? What barriers did these populations encounter?
* **Environmental Sustainability:**
	+ Were measures like equipment recycling or reduced fuel usage considered in project logistics? What environmental improvements would you recommend?

**8. Recommendations and Lessons Learned**

* **Key Lessons:**
	+ What are the most important lessons learned from the NRIS project, especially in areas like:
		- Stakeholder engagement.
		- Resource management.
		- Scaling innovations (e.g., Digital ID Wallet)?
* **Future Improvements:**
	+ What changes would you recommend for similar initiatives to ensure better inclusivity, efficiency, and sustainability?
* **Scaling and Integration:**
	+ How can the NRIS expand its integrations with additional sectors (e.g., justice, education) to maximize its impact?

## Annex 4: Bibliography of Documents Reviewed

**Project Documents**

* NRIS Final Evaluation Inception Report
* NRIS Mid-Term Evaluation Report (2021)
* NRIS Project Design and Proposal Documents
* NRIS Progress Reports (2016–2023)
* Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the NRIS Project
* National Registration Act (2010)

**Operational and Technical Documents**

* Registration Data Analysis Report
* Field Operations Guidelines for NRIS
* Birth registration and CRVS Integration Pilot Reports
* Digital ID Wallet Feasibility and Pilot Reports

**Frameworks and Guidelines**

* Malawi Vision 2063
* Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS)

**Supplementary References**

* Comparative Studies on CRVS and Identity Systems in Africa
* UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation
* OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria
* Academic and Policy Papers on Identity Management

## Annex 5: List of Stakeholders Consulted

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Stakeholder Category** | **Specific Stakeholders** | **Focus Areas** |
| **Government Institutions** | - National Registration Bureau (NRB) | Operations, CRVS integration, and sustainability |
|  | - Ministry of Health | Birth and death registration integration |
|  | - Ministry of Home Affairs | Governance, legal frameworks, and operational oversight |
|  | - Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) | Voter registration and ID verification |
|  | - Ministry of Justice | Legal amendments and compliance |
|  | - District Registration Offices (selected regions) | Local-level implementation and service delivery |
| **Development Partners** | - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) | Funding, technical assistance, and system enhancements |
|  | - UNICEF | Birth registration and CRVS system pilots |
|  | - USAID | Digital ID innovations and resource mobilization |
|  | - Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) | Funding strategies and governance reforms |
|  | - European Union | Program funding and regional integration support |
|  | - Irish Aid | Financial inclusion and capacity building |
|  | - Norwegian Embassy | Governance and development partnerships |