

Factors for Low Birth Registration in Mbeya District: A Case of Utengule Usongwe Ward in Mbeya District

Issa Hamisi Issa, Nelly Raymond Mgaya
Institute of Rural Development Planning P. O. Box 138 Dodoma

Abstract:- Birth registration is crucial instrument to generate accurate demographic data, which are essential for government to plan and meet the needs of its citizens. This study was conducted to find out the factors for Low Birth Registration in Rural Areas, Mbeya District. The study examined the community's level of awareness on birth registration, determined current practices of community and identified constraints affecting birth registration in the study area. Sampling procedures used to get respondents were simple random and purposive sampling whereby interviews, focus group discussion and documentary reviews were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics was used in data analysis. The study revealed that majority of respondents had knowledge on birth registration. However, current registration practice is low because few respondents with knowledge have registered their members and use birth certificates to obtain services. Findings further revealed different constraints that hinder birth registration in Mbeya District, including; long distance from home to service centres, bureaucracy and high costs. Furthermore, findings revealed that, the government has not yet established infrastructures in rural areas to ensure systematic registration of vital events. It was recommended that, to ensure the improvement of birth registration in rural areas there is a need for RITA to improve infrastructure in rural areas.

Keywords:- Birth registration, Birth certificate, unregistered births.

I. INTRODUCTION

Birth registration is the official recording of a person that establishes the existence of the person under law and provides the foundation for ensuring many of the person's rights. A birth certificate is one of the most important documents a person will ever own. People will only exist in the eyes of their national government, and enjoy their fundamental rights, when they are officially registered with a birth certificate. Birth certificate provides proof of a person's name, age, nationality and parentage, and is required to obtain many other documents the person will need later in life, such as an identity card, marriage license, driver's license, passport and ballot card. Birth certificate may also be required for many economic activities, such as opening a bank account, working legally and registering a business. Birth registration also provides an important source of vital statistical data to governments, enabling them to better development plan for different services for their populations. Unfortunately, this

right is denied to many children, especially in less developed countries for instance, an estimated 230 million children worldwide have never had their births registered, thereby exposing them to various rights abuses (Olusesan, 2016).

It is internationally recognized that birth registration is among of basic and fundamental means of a country to have an up to date and reliable database for development planning as well as protecting human rights of the individuals. In rural areas of Tanzania, birth registration is not well utilized compared to urban areas. Only 3% of rural population and 22% of urban population have birth certificate (UNICEF, 2010). Despite the importance of birth registration, it is approximately that 50 million newborn babies are not registered each year, accounting for over 40% of the children born annually. Each year more than 50 million births go unregistered worldwide, with rates of unregistered children under five as high as 55% in sub-Saharan Africa and 63% in South Asia. The situation varies by region. In South Asia 63% of children (over 23 million) are not registered. Unregistered births are particularly a serious problem in development countries, in sub Saharan Africa and Asia. The rate of unregistered births is a global problem, in which most of them are found in developing countries. The problem of unregistered children is most prevalent in Sub Saharan Africa and South Asia, where over 70% and 63% of births go unregistered in each region, respectively (UNICEF, 2010). In the Middle East/North Africa region, 31% of children are not registered, and in Asia and the Pacific the rate is 22%. In addition, 14% of children born in Latin America and the Caribbean region are not registered. By comparison, only 2% of births in industrialized countries are not registered. Nearly half the countries for which data is available fail to register at least one in ten children born within their jurisdiction. In 39 countries, over 30% of all children under age five were not registered at birth, and in 19 of these countries, over 60% of such children were not registered at birth. For example, registration rates in Bangladesh and Tanzania are reported less than 15%, while Nigeria registers only 30% of newborns. Meanwhile, in India and Nepal, more than one third of the children under-five have been registered (UNICEF, 2013).

Unregistered children are also vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation by human traffickers as well as suffering from significant legal consequences by receiving heavier than warranted punishments because they are unable to prove their real age (Cappa, 2014; Dow, 1998 in Olusesan, 2016). In legal terms, these children do not exist and their right to an official name, services and nationality is denied. Their access to basic services may be severely jeopardized and they may find

themselves more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. At national level, birth registration statistics as part of vital statistics are fundamental to inform immediate, medium and long term planning for children’s access to basic services. They generate information about the size, gender and age of the child population, which help governments to plan effectively for different social services such as education and health. Data provided through birth registration is also important for monitoring progress towards key development indicators, such as the Millennium Development Goals (UNICEF, 2008). Thus, birth registration is important not only from the legal perspective (protection of the rights and interests of an individual child), but also from the point of view of planning national programmes in the areas of healthcare, education, employment, financial and economic development, industry and trade, social security and other fields (UNHCR, 2013). Tanzania has the second lowest rate of birth registration in the East and Southern African region. As in many developing countries, rates of birth registration in

Tanzania vary considerably by geographic location and household income. Rates of registration in Tanzania range from high of 79% in densely populated Zanzibar and 59% in urban areas to a low of 4% in the rural areas (URT, 2011).

In promoting birth registration, the Tanzania government has introduced and implement various initiatives including; establishment of Registration Insolvency and Trusteeship Agency (RITA) that was officially launched on the 23rd June 2006, with mandate of registration of Births, Deaths, Marriages, Divorces, and Adoptions. With UNICEF support and in partnership with Tigo, RITA has also developed innovative technology which quickly uploads records of all birth registrations to a centralized system through messages sent on mobile phones (RITA, 2011). In Tanzania Mainland, the region with the highest percentage of birth registration was Dar es Salaam 40 percent and the lowest was Simiyu with five percent, whereby Mbeya region has 11 percent with birth registration and 85% with no birth certificate or notification as table 1 below illustrates;-

Region	Has a Birth Certificate			Has no Birth Certificate/Notification		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Dar es Salaam	40.4	41.2	39.6	48.7	47.4	49.9
Mbeya	11.3	11.8	10.8	84.5	83.9	85.1
Simiyu	4.5	4.7	4.2	87	86.5	87.4

Table 1. Status of birth registration in three regions in Tanzania by the year 2014
Source: URT, 2014. Basic Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile Report Tanzania Mainland,

Despite of all initiatives taken by Tanzania government to improve birth registration still the rate of birth registration still low especially in rural areas. This study was therefore, conducted to find out factors leading to low birth registration in rural areas. Specifically the study intended to examine the community’s level of awareness on birth registration, to determine the current practices of community and to find out constraints that affect birth registration in rural areas.

II. STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at Utengule-Usongwe ward in three villages of Mbalizi, Utengule-Usongwe and Ihambo Village in Mbeya district. The district is one of the seven districts in Mbeya region with the population of 305,319 people, where males were 143,779 and females 161,540. Average household size was 4.1 and sex ratio was 89. Administratively Mbeya district is divided into 5 division, 21 wards and 158 villages/mitaas (Mbeya district economic profile 2010). According to 2012 Tanzania National Population Census, the ward had the population of 41,952, whereby males were 19,706 and females were 22,246 and the number of households was 10,238. Selection of the study area was based on the fact that Mbeya district is among the rural areas of Tanzania where birth registration is still very low. The 2013 statistics released by RITA in Mbeya district shows that only 3% of rural population have their birth certificates (RITA, 2013). This study adopted a non-experimental research

design but rather a cross sectional research design using mixed methods of data collection, done at a single point in time, using both quantitative and qualitative data. Sampling frame involved all household heads and government officials as key informants. Simple random sampling was used to obtain sample size where as purposive sampling technique was employed to obtain key informants. Both primary and secondary data of qualitative and quantitative nature were collected. Primary data were collected from household heads and key informants; where by secondary data were collected from the literature. In this study, the sample size (n) was estimated using a formula; $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$ by Yamane (1967), where n – estimated sample size, N= number of household heads and e= significant level (10%). The estimated sample was 100 household heads, which were obtained through simple random sampling. To distribute the sample size for the three villages the following formula was used to get the representative number of each village; $S_n = N * S / T$, where S_n = Sample size of village, N =Total households in the respective village, T = Total households in the ward and S = Sample size. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics to calculate mean, percentages, maximum and minimum.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Characteristics of the Respondents

Household heads involved in this study were categorized in terms of sex, age, marital status, occupation, income level and education level. In terms of sex, majority were females (60%) implying that, women have a big role compared to men and that's why women take the major roles in the households which include social and economic issues in the societies. 60% of respondents being female also suggests that, majority of the household heads are women, hence this circumstance may also influence birth registration in one way or another. Age distribution of the respondents was categorized into four in which majority aged between 31 to 50 years. On marital status, majority were married where as on occupation most of

them engaged in private employment (business). High numbers of the respondent were engaged in small business. In term of education characteristic, majority were primary and secondary school leavers. On income characteristic it was grouped into three groups, ranging from below Tshs 300,000/= who were 21%, earning between Tshs 300,000 to 1,000,000/= 79%, and above Tshs 1,000,000/=. Table 1 has more illustrations on the characteristics of the respondents.

Sex of the Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Male	40	40
Female	60	60
Age of the respondent	Frequency	Percent
20 to 30	6	6
31 to 40	32	34
41 to 50	25	35
50+	25	25
Marital Status of the Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Married	72	72
Single	3	3
Separate	3	3
Widower	22	22
Occupation of the Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Government	21	21
Private	64	64
Others	15	15
Education Level of the Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Informal	10	10
Primary	56	56
Secondary	29	29
Tertiary5	5	5
Per capital Income of the Respondents (in Tshs)	Frequency	Percentage
Below 300,000	79	79
Between 300,000 – 1,000,000	21	21
Above 1,000,000	0	0

Table 2. Characteristics of respondents
Source: Field data

B. Community Awareness and knowledge on Birth Registration in the Study Area

This study, also intended to find out community awareness on birth registration as the level of awareness on birth registration appears to differ from one society to another. This study revealed that, 66% of respondents were aware about birth registration while 34% of respondents in the study did not have any knowledge on birth registration issues. The government and non-government organisation played a big role to ensure community got information concerning birth registration through different means like hospital, media and campaign. Even though majority of respondents knew the issues related to birth registration but most of them were unable to register births due to different reasons. This implies that there are large numbers of rural people who do not have any idea on birth registration. Also the analysis revealed that 42% of the respondents know the procedures that need to be undertaken to register birth and collect birth certificates and 58% of respondents do not know the procedures. Knowledge about where birth registration is conducted depends on one person to another person. From the study area, 52% of all respondents said that birth registration is conducted at District

commissioner’s office, followed by 8% which says that birth registration is conducted in hospital and 6% in ward office.

C. Current practices of community on birth registration

The study was also interested to identify the practice of birth registration in the study area from various different perspectives. This included: number of registered births in a family, number of unregistered births as well as number of people use birth certificates. From this study, it was learnt that majority of respondents have not been registered. For instance; Out of 515(100%) of family members; only 104 (20.2%) of the member of the family had birth certificate. Also the study revealed that 74 (71%) of family members out of those who had birth certificate, have used their birth certificate in different issues like education and job access. This implies that current practice on birth registration in a study area is not good because majority of respondents have not registered their births. This related to the study of UNICEF (2009) which argued that in developing countries there is low practice of birth registration especially in rural areas since most of people in rural have no knowledge on birth registration.

Items	Frequency	Percentage	Sex			
			Male	%	Female	%
No. of family member	515	100	306	59	209	40.6
No. of Registered Births	104	20.2	67	64	37	35.6
No. of Unregistered Births	411	67	239	58	172	41.8
No. of family members use Birth Certificate	74	52	52	70	22	29.7

Table 3. Current practice of the community on birth registration

D. Constraints Affecting Birth Registration among Rural Community

This study was also interested to find out constraints that hinder people to register their births especially in rural areas. Irrespective of importance of births registration there are still many bottlenecks of birth registration especially in rural areas. The most common barriers responsible for the low rate of birth registration across the world include: lack of attention on the part of governments, administrative obstacles, and inadequacy of registration offices, resource and geographical constraints. Findings from this study revealed a number of limitations which respondents mentioned as the source of low birth registration in rural areas. These include; High costs of birth registration 52%, lack of public awareness about the critical importance of registering births among rural people 63%, lack of integration of registration services in health centres 43% as well as distance to birth registry office 89%, poverty situations that make birth registration appear to be of less priority issue 47%, Ignorance and illiteracy on the importance of birth registration 24%, Lack of effective registration infrastructures 51% and bureaucracy 53%. This result implies that, there are many constraints of having low birth registration especially in rural areas. The findings are related to UNICEF (2009) which analyses different limitation

facing more developing countries to have low birth registration in rural areas.

Constraints/Limitations	Frequency	Percentage
High cost of birth registration	57	57
Lack of public awareness on importance of registering births	76	76
Lack of integration of registration services in health centres	23	23
Distance to birth registry office	90	90
Continuing home births in remote areas	19	19
Poverty situations hence birth registration become less priority	42	42
Ignorance and illiteracy of rural residents on the importance of birth registration	25	25
Lack of effective registration infrastructures	64	64
Bureaucracy	53	53
Total	426*	426

Table 4. Constraints to birth registration in rural areas

Note: * Multiple responses

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

The findings from this study revealed that majority of people are aware and have knowledge on birth registration though few have registered their births in the rural community. Apart from those who have knowledge which is 51% of respondents, there is high percent of respondents (49%) have no any idea of the concept. This indicates that majority of respondents they lack the information about birth registration. In addition, the findings show that there are low practices on birth registration. Majority of respondents do not take consideration of registering their births. Furthermore, the results show that there are various constraints that contribute to low birth registration. Thus, it can be concluded that majority of respondent's do fail to register their births due to long distance to the service centres, high cost of registering births, bureaucracy, lack of community awareness and ineffective registration infrastructures in rural area.

B. Recommendations

In order to improve birth registration especially in rural areas, District councils, RITA and private sectors should conduct seminars and campaigns to local leaders, parents, guardians and community members in general on the importance of birth registration to rural people. This might increase birth registration rates and reinforce parental responsibility for protecting their children. Also District office and government through RITA should introduce subsidies on health service centres especially those dealing with reproductive health and task them to strengthen birth registration and discover unregistered births so as to ensure that births and civil registration should be free of charge, in order to register many young and adult within a short time of period and to reduce expenses to the parents. From the observation, long distance was the major problem on birth registration; RITA and District council should extend the registration offices especially in rural areas. For instance, birth registration should be provided through VEO and WEO offices to reduce long distance from home to the District office. By practicing the birth registration process through local leaders the participation of parents and guardians will improve and this will help to reduce transport cost and time, also will improve the registration of vital events in rural areas.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Eric C. Shedlosky (2007) Protecting Children from the Harmful Behavior of Adults, Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology Volume 98 Issue 1Fall Article 7 Fall 2007 USA. Cited from <http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7285>.
- [2]. Olusesan, A M. et al (2016), Trends in the completeness of birth registration in Nigeria: 2002–2010, VOLUME 35, ARTICLE 12, PAGES 315–338 PUBLISHED 17

AUGUST 2016, cited from <https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol35/12/35-12.pdf>.

- [3]. Plan International (no year) Birth Registration and Children's Rights; A Complex Story; cited from http://www.planbelgie.be/sites/default/files/birth_registration_and_childrens_rights_full_report_1.pdf.
- [4]. RITA, (2011). Innovations in Mobile Birth Registration: Insights from Tigo Tanzania and Telenor Pakistan. Cited from <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Innovations-in-Mobile-Birth-Registration-Insights-from-Tigo-Tanzania-and-Telenor-Pakistan.pdf>.
- [5]. UNHCR (2013), Study of birth registration procedures in the republic of Armenia: Problems and Prospects for overcoming them. Cited from http://www.un.am/up/library/Birth%20Registration_Armenia_eng.pdf.
- [6]. UNICEF (2010) Good Practices in Integrating Birth Registration into Health Systems (2000–2009); Case Studies: Bangladesh, Brazil, the Gambia and Delhi, India, New York, Cited from [https://www.unicef.org/protection/Birth_Registration_Working_Paper\(2\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/Birth_Registration_Working_Paper(2).pdf).
- [7]. UNICEF (2013). A passport to protection: a guide to birth registration programming, UNICEF, New York, p. 11.
- [8]. UNICEF, (2009). The State of the World's Children Special Edition, New York, UNICEF, www.unicef.org site visited September 10th 2010.
- [9]. UNICEF, (2013). United Nations Children's Fund, Every Child's Birth Right: Inequities and trends in birth registration, New York.
- [10]. URT, 2014. Basic Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile Report Tanzania Mainland, National Bureau of Statistics and Office of Chief Government Statistician Ministry of State, President Office, State House and Good Governance, Dar es salaam – Tanzania.
- [11]. Yamane, T. (1967). Statistics: An Introductory Analysis, 2nd Edition, New York: Harper and Row.