

An Assessment of Birth Registration Processes Among the Rural Population in Malawi: A Case Study of Traditional Authority Kasisi in Chikwawa District

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Abstract: UNICEF defines birth registration as “the process by which birth of a child is recorded in the civil register by the government agency. It provides the first legal recognition of the child required for the child to obtain a birth certificate and this provides the basis for obtaining any other legal documents and rights”. Birth registration provides an avenue for government to adequately address issues and concerns relating to children and helps to curb child abuse. To this end, Malawi Government introduced universal and compulsory birth registration of all births occurring in health facilities and communities so that children are registered at the earliest stages of their lives; so that they may receive the needed care and protection under the laws and be able to access available social services with ease. Birth registration also helps to provide up to date bio-data for citizens for planning and budgetary purposes. To guide the implementation of this programme, instruments such as the National Registration Act, 2010 and National Registration Regulations, 2015 were introduced. This research study therefore was done so as to assess progress made so far since the enactment of the National Registration (NR) Act, 2010 and other relevant enactments in Traditional Authority Kasisi in Chikwawa District, Malawi. The study revealed that most of the respondents were aware of the birth registration exercise, its benefits to both the government and citizens, but were yet to realize its importance since only a few children got their birth certificates after registering. The programme was met and continues to be met with a number of challenges at the implementation stage and the researcher has suggested solutions to help achieve compulsory yet effective birth registration for all children.

Keywords: Birth certificate, Birth Registration, Awareness, National Registration Act, National Registration Regulations

1. Introduction

Civil registration is defined as “a system where the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population like births, deaths, marriages and divorces are recorded in a compulsory, permanent, universal and continuous manner”. The reason for embarking on civil registration is primarily for creating the legal documents provided by the law. These records “serve also as a primary source of vital statistics”. One of the characteristics of civil registration is the recording of births occurring in a particular country. UNICEF defines the registration of birth as “a process by which a child’s birth is recorded in the civil register by the government agency. It provides the first legal recognition of the child and it is generally required for the child to obtain a birth certificate and this presents the basis for acquiring any other officially recognised documents and rights”. Birth registration as part of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) does not only provide children their birth right but also acts as an important instrument for planning about education, health and overall development issues. (Amos-Adjei & Annim, 2015).

However in 2012, UNICEF (2013) estimated that approximately 230 million children who were aged less than five years had not been registered globally and that almost 85 million were from Sub – Saharan Africa to which Malawi as a country belongs. UNICEF also approximated that “50 million newborn babies are not registered each year, accounting for over 40 percent of the children born annually”. This implies that a lot of children are not being

registered and as a result are being deprived of their birth right and at the same time being exposed to challenges in accessing the social services available in their countries.

Malawi is one of the Members States of the United Nations (UN) and also a signatory of various treaties which were and are signed in order to protect the children from various human rights violations and abuses. It is the responsibility of the Government of Malawi (GoM) to endeavour to provide services to her people including the children so as to lessen the social problems they face and uplift their living standards. These social services include initiatives to protect and promote the rights of children against early marriages, child abuse, child labour, abandonment, discrimination, child illiteracy among others.

To this end, social intervention programmes and welfare policies such as: (a) social protection policy which seeks to offer social cash transfers with the ultimate beneficiaries being Malawian children has been initiated. (b) There is the government's strategy to deal with poverty in relation to the attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure the alleviation of poverty among children. (c) Another welfare policy has to do with child rights and discrimination. It seeks to protect Malawian children from all forms of abuses and unfair treatment and secures them the rights to benefits that enhance their welfare and total development. (d) Child participation policy addresses issues such as relegation of the voices of children during the decision making process. These are but some of the policies undertaken by the government to address the welfare

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concerns of children in Malawi. The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been very instrumental in ensuring the smooth implementation of these policies. If registration of births is linked to these social services, it thus makes the exercise useful and beneficial to children (Mills et al. 2019).

However, to effectively deal with these problems, there is a need to have accurate bio-data about all the children in Malawi. The availability of accurate data and statistics can aid the government in planning and budgeting purposes. All these can be made possible through the registration of these children under the civil registration programme.

The Government of Malawi (GoM), therefore, enacted the National Registration Act, 2010, which gives mandate to the National Registration Bureau (NRB), a department under the Ministry of Home Affairs to register all births occurring in health facilities and in the community so as making the registration of births universal and mandatory; and furthermore beneficial to the children. According to this Act, the child is supposed to be registered within six weeks after the occurrence of the birth. This also applies to adopted and exposed children. This shows their existence as well as helps to give the children their legal identity. Registration of birth under this Act is free for all babies registered within the given period of time (six weeks after the occurrence of the event).

The universal and compulsory birth registration was introduced in all health facilities in Malawi in 2015 after the commencement of the NR Act on 1st August, 2015. Additionally, the NRB through its district offices conducts birth registration occurring in communities as well as births which occurred in health facilities but was not registered due to some reasons.

Furthermore, the NRB intends to roll out community birth registration in the communities to cater for births that occur in the communities but was not registered at any of the designated registration centres. The community birth registration exercise has also a mass birth registration component which will aim at clearing the backlog of unregistered children who were born prior to the commencement of universal and compulsory birth registration in 2015.

After registration of birth, the child is given a birth certificate, as a legal document to show their existence. The NRB has offices in all the districts in Malawi which among others coordinate civil registration functions including birth registration at the district level. Birth registration at the district level is aimed at meeting the following:

- Providing data at the local level for planning purposes.
- Providing proof of age for children to avoid cases of child abuse i.e. child labour, child marriages, and related cases.
- Recognizing the child – establishing the existence of the child under the law and linking the child to her / his parents.
- Assisting the children to easily access social services such as school enrollment, open bank accounts, health care, obtaining a passport, etc.

- Registering children for a national identity card when they attain the age of sixteen (16).

However, according to the National Statistics Office (NSO), 2018; about 25.9 percent of children below the age of 18 had birth certificates while the rest had no birth certificates. The NSO (2018) results also showed that 33 percent of the under-five children had registered for birth certificate while 67 percent had not. The figure suggests that a good number of people were not participating in the birth registration. Some of the questions we may ask ourselves however are, are we on the right track to ensure universal births registration for all? Are the people adequately sensitized on their responsibility to register their children? To what extent are the people appreciating the implications and benefits of registering their children?

To ensure that the communities are aware of birth registration, the responsibility was given to the District Registration Offices (DRO), health workers, the traditional leaders, and other stakeholders (National Registration Regulations, 2015: Part VII). The DRO is the coordinator of all awareness programmes regarding birth registration at the district level.

2. Literature Review

Recent estimates by UNICEF (2013). As of 2012, the world had not registered approximately 230 million children aged less than five. Furthermore, from the number which was registered 70 million children had not received a birth certificate. These children are deprived of a key building block for lawful identification, potentially excluding them from social and economic opportunities later in life such as accessing public services, participating in the modern economy, or registering to vote. Within a supportive governance framework, birth registration can also help to protect children from exploitation and abuse. Birth registration is more and more being regarded as central to capable and effective governance.

GSMA Mobile Identity Team (2013) reported that birth registration rates were generally low in Central and West Africa, with an average of just thirty – nine (39%) percent of newborn children being registered immediately at birth. This is a worrisome development in this era to note that children are being deprived of their legal right to a nationality as the children are supposed to be registered immediately they are borne so as to acknowledge their existence.

World Health Organisation (2014). It reported that for the past ten (10) years, the world had noticed an overall rise in birth registration rates of children below five years from fifty – eight percent to sixty -five percent globally. However, it should be noted that more than one hundred developing countries still do not have functioning systems that can sustain efficient registration of births and other life events like death and marriages. Furthermore, globally in 2012 as said earlier on, almost 230 million children under the age of five were not registered. Sub-Saharan Africa recorded 85 million of these children, while 135 million were children from Asia and the Pacific. This means that the developing countries are still lagging behind in the registration of children.

Countries with weak Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (CRVS) where there are no accurate and proper records to show the existence of the birth of the child become fertile grounds to systematically exclude rural and poor children from accessing the benefits tied to birth registration as the weak system prevents these children from being counted in the national database and makes planning so difficult. (Bhatia et al. 2017).

UNICEF (2017). In this paper it was reported that the Sub Saharan region had reported the lowest levels of birth registration at 43%. In Eastern and Southern Africa, only 41 percent of children were registered by their fifth birthday, while the rate in West and Central Africa was slightly higher, at 45 percent. This shows that Africa is still lagging behind on birth registration and the number can be higher than this because in some cases children are born in communities and not registered in hospitals or government offices. In short, these births are not noticed hence not registered.

Mohanty and Gebremedhin (2018) noted that the education level of the mother and the household wealth have an impact on the level of registration of the child. This therefore may entail that government's efforts and initiatives which sound so well on paper to improve birth registration, might go into the drain if the government does not take into consideration some other factors affecting the citizens it is serving, for instance the social, environment and economic factors.

Wodon and Yedan (2019). The results of their survey showed that in urban areas almost slightly more than half (52.77%) of the children were registered unlike in rural areas where the percentage registered was less than half. This suggests that a good number of children in developing countries where most of the households live in rural areas are not registered. This needs the attention of the government and its partners to work towards improving coverage of birth registration in all areas.

3. Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of this research:

- 1) To study and analyse the various provisions in the National Registration Act, 2010
- 2) To identify the challenges faced by the people in the rural areas in accessing birth registration facilities.
- 3) To suggest the solutions to various problems people in the rural areas face in accessing birth registration services.

4. Research Methodology

A descriptive research was adopted for the purposes of this study. An assessment of the level of awareness regarding birth registration at the grassroots level as well as the accessibility of the programme and its associated issues among the rural population in Traditional Authority Kasisi in Chikwawa, a district in the Southern Region of Malawi was conducted. Both Primary and Secondary sources of data were used. Primary data was the major source of data for the study. A questionnaire was administered to obtain

information from the community respondents and the researcher also interviewed staff at the District Registration Office (DRO) and from the District Health Office (DHO) during the data collection exercise. After that, data was analyzed using computer computations.

This study sampled the respondents from the communities at two stages. Firstly, the study used cluster sampling to choose the 'needed' category of respondents. After that, the respondents were randomly sampled. A total of One hundred and twenty – five (125) individuals from the three villages from Traditional Authority Kasisi were randomly selected for the study. These included those with children less than 5 years old so as to get more details from them about birth registration since the enactment of the NR Act, 2010 in 2015. The sampled people were divided according to gender: 80 % representing the females and 20% represented males. Thirty officers from the DRO and DHO were also interviewed so as to get their views on the birth registration processes and challenges being faced in order to get an idea of what is to be done so as to improve the situation.

5. Findings

The main aim of the study was to assess the birth registration processes in the rural area of Malawi in particular in Traditional Authority Kasisi in Chikwawa district. Below are the findings of the study:

5.1 The Respondents

a) Demographic data

In this study, a questionnaire was administered to 125 respondents. Of this total, 100 were females and 25 were males representing 80% and 20% of the sampled population respectively. In terms of their marital status, 94% were married, 3% were divorced, 2 % widows and the remaining 1% were single. The proportions of respondents based on age categories were that 46% of them were less or equal to 25 years of age, 36 % were 26 – 35 years, 14 % were 36 – 45 years old, 2% were 46 -55 years old and 2% were above 55 years of age. This is a good representation of the people who had given birth or witnessed the birth of the child in between the enactment of the NR ACT, 2010 and the period the study was being conducted.

b) Education level

Educational attainment, as "one of the socioeconomic variables, adds value for analysis and forecasting of the occurrence of vital events. For instance, birth and death statistics by the mother's educational attainment allow for the study of differentials in fertility rates and infant mortality rates by education of mother". (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014). Therefore, in terms of education, 75 respondents representing 60% of the respondents ended their education at primary level, 34 respondents representing 27% of the respondents had little or no education at all. Again 15 respondents representing 12% had up to Junior Certificate of Education (JCE). The remaining 1% represented those respondents who had up to secondary education. This implies that the government needs to do more to improve the level of education among the

people in the district because this has a bearing on birth registration.

5.2 Birth Registration

a) Awareness regarding Birth Registration

The study revealed that ninety – six (96%) percent of the respondents were aware of the birth registration exercise and four (4%) were not aware and did not even take part in the registration process. Awareness activities help the communities to actively take part in such activities and bring forth good results as Jain et al (2016) concluded in their research that awareness contributes to higher levels of birth registration among the communities. It is a good development to note that most of the information about birth registration was obtained from the District Registration staff as well as the health personnel manning maternity units and the antenatal care centers as it is in line with the National Registration Regulations, 2015 where these officials are given that responsibility of civic educating the communities / public. Antenatal clinics have proven to be effective in delivering messages in relation to birth registration.

In addition, the study found out that people also got information from the local/ community leaders, Civil Society / Non-Governmental Organisations and the mass media. However, it was noted that not much was being done by this group although they do play a major role in disseminating information to the general public. Gupta et al (2009) agreed that the media had a bigger role to play in sensitizing the communities about birth registration and as such, they needed to be strengthened so that they could produce articles, magazines, newspapers which contain information necessary for use by the general public.

b) Awareness in relation to the benefits of registering children

On awareness regarding the benefits of birth registration, the results showed that ninety – two (92%) percent of the respondents had knowledge about the benefits of registration of births, while the remaining eight (8%) percent were either not aware of birth registration or had no idea about any benefit. These 92% of the respondents were aware of one or two more benefits but revealed that they have not started experiencing any of them. One can therefore conclude that this is one of the reasons we are still having some children who have not yet been registered. Makinde et al. (2016) concluded that “designing and implementing a strategic communication program to educate the population about the processes and benefits of early birth registration may further improve birth registration”.

c) Participation in Birth Registration Programme

The purpose of birth registration programme is to “attain full coverage of the population so that all types of vital events occurring to its members are accurately and completely registered on a timely basis in accordance with the registration law”. (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014). For registration of birth to achieve full coverage in a timely manner, the civil registration duty bearers must ensure that the target population appreciates the need to participate in birth registration.

Regarding this therefore, the research found out that most of the respondents, (eighty – eight percent) registered their children. In trying to find out as to what motivated them to go for registration, most of the respondents said that they were trying to oblige for what the health personnel manning the maternity units had told them. In addition to this information, they said that they did not hesitate to comply because they ‘heard’ that the registered children will be included in the village register and this would make it possible for their children to easily access social services such as social support services, health care, education and also to easily register for a National Identity Card when they reach 16 years old. Nsemwa (2014) recommended the intensification of the strategies that help the communities link birth registration and its benefits as this helps enrich the awareness messages; and the result would be greater participation in birth registration activities.

The fact that some people just ‘heard’ about the benefits of registering their children and were motivated to register their children means that the people are interested in birth registration but do lack adequate information in order for them to make informed decisions. The inadequate information regarding the benefits of birth registration can be said to have hindered other people (12%) from registering their children. This also shows that there is a significant proportion of the people that have not yet started appreciating the benefits of birth registration resulting in them not participating in birth registration. Pais (2009) noted that the “lack of birth registration is an infringement of the child’s inalienable human right to be given an identity at birth and to be regarded as part of society”. This is a violation of Article 7 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC) which gives ‘every child the right to be registered at birth by the State within whose jurisdiction the child is born’. This is also not in line with the NR Act, 2010 which stipulates that all births have to be registered within six weeks from date of its occurrence.

The study also found out whether the child was registered within the stipulated period of time after its birth or not. It was revealed that most of the children (75%) were registered for birth immediately after its occurrence at the health facility. The study also noted that eighty-eight percent (88%) of the children were registered within six weeks after birth as per the dictates of the NR Act, 2010. This is very encouraging as it shows that most people are complying with the requirement of registering birth within six weeks from its occurrence.

The study also revealed that it took less time to register children either at the health facility or district registration office, which serves as an encouragement though a few had some reservations more especially with regards to the time taken to conduct birth registration as evidenced during ‘question / answer’ session. Prolonged ‘question and answer’ usually occurred in situations where the informant had inadequate knowledge about the details being required and usually the result was incomplete accurate data. But generally, most people were quite satisfied with the conduct of the registration exercise because certificates of registration were being issued to them later after the successful completion of the registration.

d) Availability and issuance of the birth certificate

Pertaining to the issuance of birth certificate, the results of the study revealed that only twenty – four (24%) percent of the children that had registered received their birth certificates after registration. The DRO said that this was so because most of the certificates had not yet been printed by the time the research was being conducted and also because some certificates had not yet been collected by the parents / guardians. This means that children may be deprived of their human rights because of the lack of birth certificates as it would be difficult for a ‘layman’ to know who registered and who did not register. The other issue here was the collection of birth certificates in health facilities by clients. There were a number of certificates in health facilities which were left uncollected by the clients. This defeats the purpose of birth registration and the practice was very much evident in district registration centers as well as community hospitals which usually act as referral hospitals.

e) Challenges faced

Sixty (60%) percent of the respondents accessed the available health centers and other registration points by foot as this was the most popular and affordable means while few others used bicycles to cover the long distances. This on its own can hinder people from registering their children when they miss the six weeks period. The result would be that some children would not be registered hence depriving them of their right to nationality as Malawians for the fact that they are borne in Malawi according to the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, 1994. Duff et al. (2016) agreed in their research that “distance impact negatively on birth registration especially for the rural populace where only a few children are registered because the parents are faced with “increased financial and opportunity costs (e.g., transportation costs, lack of infrastructure)”.

The results of the study also showed that due to high levels of illiteracy among the people, the workload on the part of the health facility ‘Registration Officers’ led to delays in the registration process as the recording of information was time consuming. However, the health personnel contended that there was nothing they could do under the prevailing circumstances and were doing their best to serve the people the best way possible. Kumar et al. (2014) said that level of literacy of the mother affects birth registration where they found in their research that "about 80 percent of births from illiterate mothers were not registered as they ‘did not know the procedure’ of birth registration”.

The use of the electronic Birth Registration System (eBRS) at the district hospital which is online with the District Registration Office (DRO) facilitated the speedy and smooth discharge of the birth registration services. However, there was a serious connectivity problem such that most of the times the eBRS at the district hospital was not functioning which delayed birth registration. Sometimes clients were redirected to the DRO from the health facility due to the same challenge. World Health Organization (2013) contended in its report that weak and dysfunctional CRVS systems tend to affect the reliability and continuous flow of accurate vital statistics.

The delay in processing the birth certificates served as a disincentive to potential clients. At the time the study was being conducted, processing of birth certificates was taking between three to four months before being printed as there were a number of bottlenecks ranging from delayed data entry at the district hospital and DRO to connectivity and system issues. The National Registration Bureau (NRB) decentralized printing of birth certificates to DROs but approval of births records was still being done centrally online at NRB Headquarters.

There was inadequate coordination among the various players in birth registration especially District Registration Office (DRO) and the health facilities within the district. Coordination among these players is important to offer an opportunity to the service providers to share lessons and experiences with regards to quality birth registration service delivery. According to Abebe et al. (2019) inadequate coordination affects the implementation of birth registration negatively.

Inadequate resources such as finances, equipment and human resource at the district level also posed a serious challenge to service delivery. Without finances some activities for instance, monitoring, review meetings could not be effectively conducted. On the other hand, inadequate equipment brought about inefficiencies. As it was, most of the established posts at the district level were not filled resulting in DROs operating with less than required staff members. This contributed to delays in processing of birth registration.

There was also a problem of failure to embrace birth registration as one of their core duties among health facility personnel. Most of the health facility staff considered birth registration as an external role which was given unto them and did not prioritize it.

6. Suggestions

Birth registration is important as far as the development of a country is concerned. Initiatives such as the following have to be put in place in order to improve birth registration in the district:

According to the National Registration Regulations, 2015; there are different stakeholders who are to be involved in ensuring that the general public is aware of birth registration initiatives being carried out by the government of Malawi. There are different sources of information and the government should actively involve all the stakeholders in the dissemination of information. For instance, local leaders such as the village heads live with the people and they organize regular meetings with their subjects; issues to do with beliefs that delay birth registration can be tackled and addressed during such meetings and in so doing help to encourage all children to be registered in time. The government through the District Council should ensure that these gatekeepers are continuously involved in the exercise as far as raising awareness is concerned.

The government should take advantage of the availability of different media stations especially the community radio

stations to ensure that messages as regarding birth registration are carried out for the general public to benefit. Some programmes may allow for discussions with the communities like the phone-in programmes. These can help in ironing out some of the misconceptions. Therefore, the NRB should take advantage of this and ensure that these people are well equipped with the required / relevant information so that they effectively disseminate the same.

Some areas or villages are not near the registration centres therefore the government should ensure that it brings the registration exercise closer to the people. This can be done by either conducting mobile outreach registration exercise where teams will go to the Villages for example at Group Village Heads level in order to register all children including those who were born before the commencement of the National Registration Act in August, 2015 and those who have not yet registered for various reasons. The government should also hasten rolling out the mass community birth registration exercise which has just been piloted in two districts of Ntcheu and Balaka, to clear the backlog of unregistered children who are out there in the communities.

Awareness in relation to birth registration should not only cover the places where people can get the services but should also cover the benefits of birth registration. Knowing the benefits of birth registration will help to motivate the people to register their children immediately after birth and then making follow-ups to ensure the children are given birth certificates. Appreciation of the importance of birth certificate by all people is paramount to ensuring complete coverage of birth registration in all societies as the demand will be created for the same.

There should be good collaboration amongst the stakeholders at the district level to ensure that each of them has updated information on the issues to do with birth registration. All stakeholders need to be conversant with the processes that help in ensuring that birth registration takes place as efficiently and effectively as possible as is stipulated in National Registration Regulations, 2015. For instance, the regulations which stipulate the role of different stakeholders should be shared with all the stakeholders so that each one of them knows which part they are supposed to play so as to ensure good collaboration and avoiding duplication of efforts. District Registration Office (DRO) should make such initiatives such as holding joint periodic review meetings; refresher trainings for the staff working on birth registration and joint monitoring should be given priority. Due to limited resources, the DRO can also make an initiative to be sharing the reports with stakeholders on the progress of birth registration so that if there are issues then all the stakeholders should be involved in giving suggestions / solutions to the problems being faced. This suggests that a holistic review of the birth registration processes and system performance is necessary so that all bottlenecks can be ironed out.

Staff manning the registration centers at the health facilities may be overwhelmed with work; the government should therefore speed up the assigning of permanent staff who will be responsible for birth registration at the health facilities. This calls for enhancing staffing capacity in the health

facilities so that there is always a person available to conduct birth registration in time. Therefore, to enhance the embracement of birth registration as a core duty of health workers, there is thus a need for deliberate strategies and mechanisms to be put in place for ensuring the embracement of birth registration by all health facility staff. One such strategy would be to include civil registration modules in the training courses for all cadres of health workers.

There is the need to open files for the expectant mothers during ante-natal clinics with the view to have comprehensive data to help during the registration of the babies so that the process of registering the baby does not take long as the information is already available. This also ensures that more children are registered within a short period of time as well as ensuring that quality data is collected to avoid sending back the registration forms for corrections.

Production and distribution of birth certificates should be improved and the National Registration Bureau Office needs to ensure that all clients in need of birth certificates are provided with these documents on time. This acts as a motivation to the others as well. A proper mechanism therefore needs to be developed to ensure that certificates reach the registrants within a reasonable time frame.

Capacitating the DRO and other birth registration points with additional equipment such as computers will help to ensure that all officers trained on data entry are able to carry out their duties efficiently. This will also help to ensure that more records are entered and processed within a short period of time and before the district can go for the next trip of collection of the filled forms from health facilities for data entry. At the same time, regular system and connectivity maintenance are therefore needed to keep the eBRS up and running at all times for effective birth registration service delivery at the district hospital and DRO.

The use of the birth certificate has to be fully institutionalized by most social service providers / departments. This will create demand for the birth certificates and as a consequence it will encourage people to go for the birth registration of their children. On the other hand, the government should realign its programmes of service delivery to birth registration whereby for instance; enrollment to schools, provision of vaccination in hospitals should demand birth certificates. In this case, there will be an increased demand for birth certificates and all parents or guardians will be encouraged to register their children/wards.

The District Registration Office should be supported with resources. It should adequately be funded so as to allow them to carry out different / various tasks they have been assigned to. It should also be provided with additional computers and other ICT related systems to enhance efficiency.

Monitoring and supervision are essential for ensuring that issues affecting registration centres are well known in advance and settled without even waiting for review meetings. The interaction helps also to motivate the ones

doing the work on the ground. All stakeholders at the district level can be involved in carrying out this task because each has got their own expertise and experience according to their work.

District Registration Office needs to discuss with the health personnel to agree on the mode of certificate delivery especially at the District Hospital to ensure that the birth certificates are delivered to the owners promptly. It would be very effective if birth certificates distribution is mainstreamed in other health services especially those that reach out to the communities.

Punitive measures for those parents and guardians who fail to register their children within specified periods should be enforced so that everyone should be held accountable for his/her actions or failure to act. These punishments should be localized whereby a DRO is able to administer the punishments. However, these measures should not be done in the way that they can deter people from registering their children.

7. Conclusion

Registration of birth is one of the 'fundamental rights' of children in Malawi and for that matter government should spare no effort in ensuring that the provision of Part III of National Registration Act, 2010 is implemented to the fullest. It is also refreshing to learn that the people of Chikwawa District as per the survey conducted have taken advantage of registering their children / wards in accordance with the government directive.

In as much as I applaud government's effort of ensuring the implementation of this programme, I would like to as well call on stakeholders; opinion leaders, women groups, NGOs, the media, traditional leaders, and government to ensure consistent awareness creation which should take into consideration the benefits of birth registration to everyone including the child, parents and the State in order that the programme does not become an event but rather a process handed over to generations to come. It should become a tradition / a culture of the people to supervise the registration of their children right after birth. This will not only guarantee the child a true identity but also ensure that it receives vaccinations at appropriate times.

Once again, the State should device innovative means to generate birth certificates within the shortest possible time to motivate parents and guardians to register children at the earliest stage.

To achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the year 2030 especially indicator 16.9 in this case, which calls upon the Member States to provide legal identity for all including birth registration, means enough commitment is required / needed from the government so that the needed resources to enhance birth registration are provided. The Malawi Government needs to liaise with development partners and stakeholders to come up with strategies and mechanisms for addressing gaps and challenges in birth registration so that the country is geared towards achieving SDGs indicator 16.9 by 2030. Resources must be channeled

into the smooth implementation of birth registration for all citizens with particular emphasis on registration immediately after births to ensure that there is high birth registration coverage in the country.

Lastly, this research study will help contribute to the availability of literature about birth registration in Malawi as not much has been written about this topic; and on the same note, Researchers are being called upon to conduct further research on CRVS in Malawi.

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