



BIRTH REGISTRATION: CHURCH RESPONSES



Without
a birth
certificate
I might
miss out on
life-saving
vaccines



I: THE CHALLENGE

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Churches are already responding to the fact that over 200 million children around the globe have not had their birth registered and around 80 countries do not have well-functioning civil registration systems to document births and deaths, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

EDITORIAL

The Churches can do a great deal to raise awareness of the importance of birth and marriage registration through preaching, working through organisations such as the Mothers' Union, and using their many links with their local communities to assist families to overcome the problems in the way of obtaining certificates and ID cards. Many government and voluntary organisations are also working to increase the number of children registered and so enable health and education services to be based on more reliable statistics. This newsletter shows how partnerships with state and other organisations can achieve significant results.

Belonging and identity are important concepts for the Anglican Communion. We belong to God and have our identity in Christ (Psalm 139: 1-4; Ephesians 2: 10, 19). We believe that we are known by God and that we matter to God. And we belong to one another (John 13: 35; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27). A theology of belonging and identity relates to how we live as individuals in relationship, in community, and to our rights and responsibilities towards one another.

Unregistered children are almost always in poor, marginalised or displaced families or from countries where systems of registration are not in place or functional. Anglicans are committed to human flourishing and to transforming structures in society which thwart human potential and well-being. Our understanding of children in particular is shaped by the example and teaching of Jesus who stood alongside those who have no voice and explicitly supported the welfare of children. "Children have to be counted to count" is rooted in Gospel values.

The first section of this newsletter looks at the challenges behind this lack of registration: the particular vulnerability of indigenous populations and of refugees and migrants; the possibilities of children being imprisoned with adults; legal complications in obtaining certificates and IDs; and difficulties such as those experienced by single mothers which prevent them from registering the birth of their baby. The second section gives some

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success stories: indigenous people being helped by the Church and church leaders to obtain registration and their rights as citizens in Northern Argentina; partnerships with UNICEF and the Mothers' Union achieving great success in the number of children being registered in their locality in Uganda, Mozambique, Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of Congo; the potential of church involvement set out in the ecumenical gathering of church leaders in Nigeria; and projects to help empower women, ensure they have the necessary registration and so are able to participate as full citizens in Egypt.

SECTION I: THE CHALLENGE



My birth certificate can protect me from sexual exploitation and trafficking



- Women and children perceived as the property of the husband/father with a consequential lack of agency for the mother – **Cameroon, Togo**
- Naming in instances where the father's name is omitted due to non-acknowledgement of paternity – **Cameroon, Ecuador, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Togo**
- Registrars not allowing women to register children alone – **Egypt, Mozambique**
- Perceived as shameful to register birth alone – **Egypt, Indonesia**
- Lack of time and opportunity due to women's greater domestic responsibilities – **Cambodia**
- Treatment by officials – **Cambodia, Ecuador, Egypt, Mozambique, Rwanda**

“Children have to be counted to count, as far as their rights are concerned, but millions of children are not registered at birth,” said the global head of child protection programmes for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Susan Bissell, speaking at a UN-backed summit held in Thailand in April. “This deprives each one of an identity and the crucial birth certificate which is literally a child's passport to benefits such as education and welfare programmes, and a shield to help protect him/her from trafficking, child labour, or other forms of abuse.”

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MOTHERS

Millions of children could be going unregistered as a result of discriminatory laws and practice which deter women from registering their children. Very little research has been done on this issue, and the scale of the problem remains unknown. But recent work by the Centre for Rural Childhood, Perth College, University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland, has shown that there are a number of social and cultural factors which could lessen the likelihood and ability of a single woman to register her child. These include:

- General stigma which affects a woman's decision to register a birth – **Benin, Bolivia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Pakistan, Uganda**
- A lack of capacity to act alone – **Mozambique**
- Confinement extending beyond the registration period – **Guatemala, Kenya**
- Generalised attitudes against single mothers resulting in women delaying registration while persuading the father to acknowledge paternity. This may be exacerbated by pressure from the woman's family – **Ecuador**
- Registration perceived as the father's responsibility – **Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau**

In total, of 43 respondents (representing 35 countries) at least 32 respondents, from 27 countries, identified discriminatory social/cultural factors as a barrier to birth registration by single women. For full report see <http://www.perth.uhi.ac.uk/specialistcentres/ruralchild/Docs/Mother%20to%20Child%20Full%20Report.pdf>

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ILLEGAL DETENTION

“We encountered several children who both claimed and appeared to be under 16 years old. When questioned about this, prison authorities said that the burden of proof was on the detainees to prove their age. But only a tiny minority of people in Mozambique have birth certificates – those from very poor families are unlikely to have any kind of documentation.” See Amnesty International's report on prison conditions in Mozambique <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/mozambique-thousands-unlawfully-held-substandard-prisons-2012-11-22>

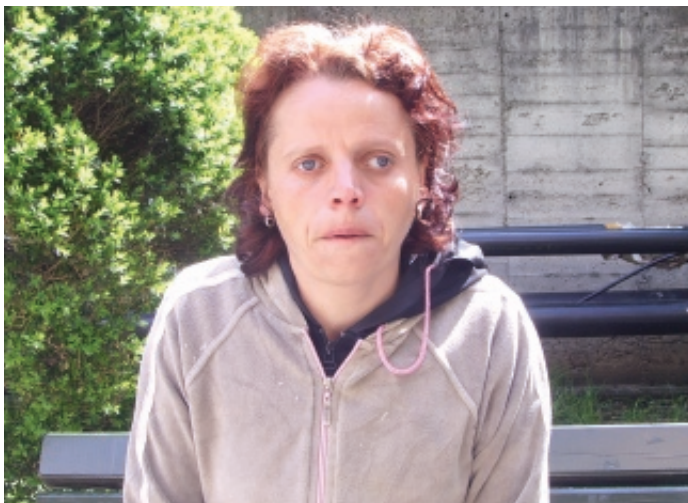


My birth certificate can protect me from illegal detention



LEGAL COMPLICATIONS AND COSTS

Ed. Note. *People Against Poverty* is a Christian charity dedicated to the relief of poverty, deprivation and distress of people through their projects around the world. Among those projects is the legal help given to families facing legal problems. One of the main areas which the project in **Romania** helps sort out is the legal difficulties and cost implications of obtaining identity documents for adults.



One of the Forgotten-no ID documents.

Photo: *People Against Poverty*.

M is a Romanian woman of about 34 years of age who had no birth certificate. Over a period of six years, three different organisations and a lawyer tried to assist M in obtaining legal identity. Each attempt failed to find a way through the complexities of her case. Hopes that hospital archives might provide evidence of her identity evaporated when it was discovered that the records had been destroyed in a fire. Even the police tried to do something for M within the limit of their responsibilities, but with no success.

When M called the legal aid manager supported by *People Against Poverty*, she was desperate. “Why can’t I have a normal life?” she asked. “Why do the police have problems with me every time? Why am I not respected? Why can’t my children be registered like other children?” M was so desperate she said, “Even if I die I cannot have a normal hole with a cross”. According to *People Against Poverty*, this was because M was one of ‘the Forgotten’.

Responding to her cry for help, the legal manager managed to enlist the help of another organisation and to find M’s two step-sisters who agreed to help and become witnesses in a court case to secure M’s identity. After a year of negotiation with this organisation, *People Against Poverty* was able to broker a way to support all M’s needs for the case and for her future. The legal manager obtained a certificate which proved that M had graduated in eight classes at school. With this evidence, M will be able to claim her birth certificate and identity card.

Obtaining the necessary official documents for unregistered adults in Romania requires court cases and can be very expensive because of the cost of obtaining documents and administrative costs. Sadly, the legal manager has just had to turn away a family who wanted help in obtaining four identity cards and seven birth certificates because he didn’t have the funds to meet the costs.

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DENIED FULL CITIZENSHIP

Ed Note: This article is shortened and updated from the original, first published in *ABC The Drum* (Nov 1 2012).

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples still struggle to enjoy full citizenship in **Australia**. This is because of problems they experience accessing a birth certificate – the document universally recognised as being the key to obtaining citizenship rights. Not having a birth certificate is the equivalent of being legally invisible.

Without a birth certificate, it is impossible to obtain a passport or driver’s licence, and it may be difficult to open a bank account, access social security, or obtain a tax file number. Without a birth certificate, some parents have even struggled to enrol their children in school.

The problem that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience in trying to obtain a birth certificate arises in one of two ways:

1. Their birth was never registered; or
2. Their birth was registered, but their parent(s) did not purchase a birth certificate at that time, and now the person is unable to satisfy the rigorous ID requirements that are a condition to obtaining a copy of their birth certificate. This is because the primary documents accepted by the Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages as proof of ID are a passport and a driver’s licence – two documents which a person without a birth certificate cannot obtain.

Research is needed into the precise number of unregistered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births in Australia, but preliminary investigations reveal it is in the thousands. Research is also needed into the reasons behind this under-registration. Anecdotal evidence suggests there may be a multitude of reasons including:

- **Fees** – while registering a birth is free, obtaining a birth certificate costs between AUS\$26 and AUS\$50, depending on which state or territory the birth occurred in. Compare this with the UK, where a birth certificate costs four pounds (AUS\$6).
- **Awareness** – is there sufficient understanding within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of the importance of registering a birth and obtaining a birth certificate?
- **Literacy/Language** – there may be language barriers or literacy issues in completing the birth registration process.
- **Confidence** – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may lack confidence in dealing with authorities and are often marginalised from mainstream services.
- **Distrust of authorities** – there may be a general suspicion of authorities amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples stemming, in part, from the policies that led to the Stolen Generations.

The problems experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in trying to obtain a birth certificate are starting to receive international attention. This is because several international human rights treaties, to which Australia is a party, expressly provide that every person has a right to have their birth registered. So the failure of Australian governments to ensure that the births of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are registered amounts to non-compliance with our treaty obligations. This is a damning indictment on Australia, because non-registration of births is something that has traditionally been understood as being a problem unique to the developing world. International children's rights organisations such as UNICEF and Plan International constantly run campaigns to increase birth registration in developing countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal and Malawi. It is shocking to discover that a wealthy country such as Australia has similar problems with under-registration of the births of a minority group.

Monash University and the University of Melbourne are collaborating in research aimed at collecting data and providing understanding into the underlying causes of the problem and what can be done to fix it. In addition, the Victorian Law Reform Commission is investigating the extent to which the problem of under-registration of births extends beyond Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to, for example, people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

In rural New South Wales, moves are underway to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school children all have birth certificates. A birth registration 'drive' was held in three Armidale primary schools in November 2012. A similar initiative, trialled previously, resulted in 300 births being registered in one day. Students at the University of New England have raised funds to pay for a further 300 birth certificates for Aboriginal people, and last year the programme was extended to siblings and other family members, so that adults also have the opportunity to have their births registered.



The extent of unregistered births of Aboriginal children in the Armidale region was discovered when an organisation teaching financial literacy skills to children realised that large numbers of the Aboriginal children were unable to open a bank account because they did not have a birth certificate.

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PROBLEMS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS, IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

In South Africa, the people who particularly struggle to get services are the people born from Mozambican immigrants who do not have South African IDs. The Government in 1995 invited Mozambican immigrants to register but most did not go, thinking that the Government wanted to deport them. Now they are being refused IDs. Getting documents for them can be very difficult. The children identified as needing help with ID documents are usually refugees and, given the limits of time and resources, there is often very little the care workers can do to help them. Migrant workers and their families can also have great problems in obtaining the protection of registration.

Ellen's story (name changed).

As we were doing home visits, I met Ellen. She has three daughters who are eight, six and three. She is also pregnant. She had just returned home from visiting the clinic, which is about an hour and a half walk each way. As we talked, she told us that she was 35 but this did not seem right, given the ages of her children. The only documentation she has is her clinic card, which legally means nothing as the mothers provide their own birth date.

Ellen has no other ID because she was born on a farm. Both her parents were farm workers in another South African province. Often, the farmers would keep all their workers' documentation so that they would not legally have an identity. Without any ID, it is virtually impossible to find work so farmers are able to seriously underpay them.

Because Ellen has no ID, her children have no ID either. In South Africa, many people are surviving only because of grants the Government gives for children. But with no IDs, Ellen's children aren't able to register for any of these grants. So she relies on her husband for money. He is an illegal immigrant from another African country and has no ID of his own.

We then learned that Ellen had just been cheated by someone in the community who offered to help her get an ID and told her it would cost a fair amount of money, which she didn't have. So she borrowed it from another person. When they heard this, her friends gasped – there are no fees for this process.

The careworker and Ellen's friends devised a plan to help her get an ID. They wanted her to be able to provide for her children on her own, as her husband is a drinker. A friend suggested the careworker sit down with Ellen and her husband and talk to them both, as Ellen would not stand up to him on her own. The two of them together would ask the husband for money so that Ellen could travel to the farm where she believes her father is working. Her parents had split up some time ago. Her mother wanted nothing to do with her, and her father moved away. The hope was that her father would be able to explain the story of the farm to Home Affairs, who would grant Ellen a birth certificate. This would enable her to get grants to support her three children and the new baby.

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Photograph modelled for The Children's Society.

Photo: Laurence Dutton.

Children living in the shadows

Over the past few months there has been a great deal of debate about immigration in the **UK**, with political party leaders setting out their policies. The current Government's main thrust has been to reduce net migration from 'hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands'. This has been done by addressing key migration routes – workers, students and families.

Missing within the migration debate

One group of migrants that has remained largely absent from the debate are children and young people, who are nevertheless affected by government's policies.

Although the experiences of migrant children living in the UK vary a great deal and many are well integrated into our society, there are a significant number of children who find themselves in extremely precarious circumstances because of their immigration status and uncertainty as to whether they or their parents have the right documents.

"I would end up just walking the streets. Words can't explain how I felt."

There are an estimated 120,000 undocumented migrant children living in the UK. Children find themselves in this situation for a number of reasons: some may have come to the UK alone seeking protection but been refused asylum despite not being able to return to their country of origin. Others came here on visas but have overstayed. Another group are children who may have been trafficked into the country for the purposes of exploitation. The majority of undocumented migrant children were born in this country to parents whose own immigration status is irregular.

A key problem for undocumented children is the tighter immigration controls creeping into the work of public agencies such as social services and the National Health Service. For example, the Government is now considering whether schools should be asked to check children's status as part of their admissions process. In addition, legal aid is no longer available for children in non-asylum immigration cases and is set to be restricted even further.

Vulnerable to exploitation, under abusers' control

Many children and families supported by The Children's Society are frequently refused the support or services they desperately need because of their immigration status or because frontline professionals are not aware of their rights and entitlements. This often leads to children going hungry or homeless and leaves them very vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Some of the destitute mothers and children our services support, have been forced to stay in abusive relationships because the authorities have consistently refused them help on the basis of questioning their right to be in Britain. Abusers may use the family's lack of immigration status to control them, stopping them from seeking protection from the police.

One young mother we supported was sexually exploited by older men when she was an undocumented teenager. She is a Jamaican national who was sent to the UK as a child when she was 12 years old to stay with her older sister following the death of her father. She came to the UK on a visa. But she was kicked out of home at 14 and began prostituting herself in order to survive. She was abused by older men but stayed with them because she had no place to go. She then became pregnant. Her visa had expired and she had no one to help her. She said:

"I would end up just walking the streets. Words can't explain how I felt. I had a male friend who was much older than me who I phoned to see if he could help. He called his friend who let me stay with him. I didn't like him, but I had to sleep with him... It made me feel nasty, but I had nowhere else to go. I used to take a lot of tablets because I didn't want to be in the world anymore."

Britain is the only 'home' they know

The majority of undocumented children were raised up in the UK, educated in British schools and many speak English as their first language. They know no other home.

The Government has a responsibility to protect all children within its borders, regardless of their immigration status or background, and to ensure that all children have the best possible start in life. The best interests of the child must be at the heart of all decisions concerning children, and the Government must not allow immigration policies to override its obligations to protect children.

For more information see The Children Society's report '*I Don't Feel Human: Experiences of destitution among young refugees and migrants*' see http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/research_docs/thechildrensociety_idontfeelhuman_final.pdf

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SECTION 2: SOME CHURCH RESPONSES



CHURCHES HELP INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OBTAIN CITIZENSHIP

In 1963 I went as a mission partner to work amongst the Wichi Amerindians, who lived at subsistence level as hunters and gatherers in the forest lands of the Chaco in **Northern Argentina**. At that time, a tiny minority of the people were registered and had documents to prove that they were Argentine citizens. In practice, this meant that as far as the authorities were concerned, they did not exist, had no rights and in some areas were outside the law and justice. Exploitation was common and they had no redress. Their children were in many places refused admission to the Government Schools, which became exclusively for the children of Spanish-speaking settlers.

Most of the men travelled away to work in the sugar-cane fields at harvest-time to earn some money; this would enable them to buy clothes, blankets and needed utensils. The only document that most of them had was a Confirmation Certificate signed by the Bishop in Buenos Aires. For them, this was their passport and was hugely prized, as it carried weight in a Catholic country.

Clearly, the Church had to assist Amerindians of the area to obtain their documents and be recognised as Argentine citizens. They were the original inhabitants of the country before the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadores in the 15th Century. We visited the Civil Register authorities to urge them to rectify the situation, and were informed that nothing could be done unless they had photographs to identify them on their documents. For the next year or two, one of the main responsibilities of visiting mission partners to the many scattered villages was not just on the medical, educational, agricultural or spiritual level, but the taking of photographs, getting the films developed and then trying to ensure that the right photograph reached the right owner!

Eventually, most received their documents, but we then had to encourage the appointment of registrars in accessible sites so that the registration of births could take place on a regular and continuing basis. Interest in rectifying the situation suddenly became intense as political party members realised that there were votes to be had. Today the situation is completely resolved: all Amerindians are now recognised as Argentine citizens with all the rights and responsibilities that this carries. Children have the right to education, adults have the right to vote and older people have the right to a pension.

Rt Rev Patrick Harris, former Bishop of N Argentina: Chair of IAFN (2007-2012). C/o Network office

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MOTHERS' UNION: BIRTH REGISTRATION SUCCESS

In the Church of **Uganda**, the priests and lay readers, together with the Mothers' Union (MU) leaders, have been involved in the registration of births since 2011. This is done in partnership with the Health Department and support from UNICEF, under the project of *Accelerating Access to and Uptake of Services to Keep Children Safe*, in northern, north eastern and western Uganda. There are six Dioceses of focus and these include Kitgum, Northern Uganda, Karamoja, North Karamoja, Mityana and Rwenzori. Local government is part of the partnership for the registration of the births and is done at the sub-county level of the districts.

A number of activities were carried out and these included the following:

- Ensure that the children under five who are baptised in the Church of Uganda are notified to the Birth Registrars at their nearest sub counties.
- The Church team, which includes the MU leaders, follow it up to ensure that this registration is actually done at the sub county.
- Training of MU and other religious leaders in order to equip them with skills to carry out birth registration sensitisation and mobilisation.
- Review meetings.

The achieved results were as below:

- In the first quarter of the project, 21,106 children were referred to the sub counties for registration and over 795 children were able to receive their short birth registration confirmation certificates; in the second quarter, 59,646 (67%) were registered and in the third quarter, 13,053 (21%) children were also able to receive their short birth registration confirmation certificates.
- 100% of all the church leaders within the Dioceses targeted were able to dialogue with the politicians, parents and cultural leaders on issues concerning birth registration, children's rights and child protection.
- The Diocesan MU Community Development Co-ordinator, during her routine visits, and all the supported Parish leaders worked to raise awareness and understanding about the importance of birth registration during church services.
- All supported parishes have included birth registration as part of the instructions during baptism and confirmation.
- The trained team followed up, on a weekly basis, the children referred for birth certificates to ensure that they are processed and received by the owners.

Challenges

- Acquiring the birth certificates in the above regions, in that the sub-county officials delay in issuing the birth registration certificates to the referred children for registration.
- Some sub-county chiefs still demand payment for birth registration certificates which cannot be afforded by the majority of households.



Ugandan children proudly show off their birth certificates.

Photo: PLAN.

Lessons learnt

1. Building the capacity of the Mothers' Union and church leaders, as well as providing them with technical and financial support, are key for the successful mobilisation and sensitisation of the community to the importance of the issue as well as the follow-up process to birth registration.
2. The MU and church leaders have opportunities to meet families quite often which makes the process cost-effective, and the message is delivered in a very user-friendly manner.
3. Linking birth registration referral to church baptism ensures a very effective partnership between church and local government in birth registration and the benefits that come with it.
4. Motivation for key players in the process need to be taken into consideration.

Contact Person: Sarah Kasule, Provincial Mothers' Union Co-ordinator, Church of Uganda, PO Box 14123, Kampala, UGANDA

The importance of the registration of children was one of the shared talks at our Diocesan Mothers' Union Conference in 2010.

This meeting gathered Mothers' Union members from different parts of our vast country, **Mozambique**, knowing that the Church is a means of dissemination of information to the communities through the membership – ladies who are mothers, grandmothers, aunts, godmothers, and neighbours. We saw that learning about child registration would stimulate many mothers in our communities. So we asked two MU members in the Diocese of Lebombo, who are also employees at the registration services, to give this talk. As the Conference took place in the District of Inhambane, in another Province (about two-three hours from Maputo the capital city), Dr Cecilio Bila was also asked. She accepted the request and honoured us by leading the discussion.

The talk roused participants in such a way that information was spreading in all ecclesiastical districts and Reverend Father Francisco Manave, priest of the Anglican Church in the Pastoral Zone of Zove (the area where Vovo Esperança Berta Sengulane lost her life in service of the Mothers' Union), went to the



Mothers' Union worker.

district registry office Direction of Chibabava. Here he contacted the Director of those services requesting a brigade to encourage the communities of Zove and Nhamicombe to register their children. The Director considered the petition and sent a brigade and nearly 3,000 children aged 0 to 14 years received the benefit of registration. It is a great honour for Mothers' Union that, through our work, these children were registered and we hope to continue in the same way in other communities.

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Three years ago, the Mothers' Union in the five dioceses in **Madagascar** became involved in the campaign for birth registration for the protection of children, in partnership with UNICEF, the public sector and the Ministry of Education. The resources came from UNICEF. After training, the MU members were shared out around their towns, six MU members in each town, and they have worked in 119 towns till today and have delivered 2,767 birth certificates. (Reported by Marie Pierrette, Provincial President of MU)

As a Mothers' Union organisation which cares for the family, we start with marriage registration. This is a big challenge in the **Congo**, because many of the marriages are traditional marriages. They do not care about registration and when the husband dies, it is the beginning of suffering for the widow. So we work with the couples, showing them the importance of being registered and when women become pregnant, we educate and help them to register their babies the day they leave the hospital with their child. (Reported by Mugisa Isongoma, Mothers' Union Trustee)

POSITIVE IDEAS FROM MEETING OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Ed Note: In Nigeria, the November 2011 World Day of Prayer and Action was marked with a religious leaders' workshop in Abuja on Birth Registration. Facilitated by UNICEF, it was attended by dignitaries from the Ministry of Information, and messages of support were sent from the President of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the President of the Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN). This article is taken from a report of the workshop. See <http://dayofprayerandaction.org/events/2011/Nigeria/wor>



New citizen.

In **Nigeria**, the registration of children under five years old is as low as 30%. In law, all births must be registered within 60 days and this is free. After this, births must be registered within 12 months and this is subject to fees prescribed by law. Although for the moment these fees are waived, it appears that payment can be demanded.

The workshop recognised the potential of churches to make the connections between families with unregistered children and the Registrar for the area. It was suggested to religious leaders that they could ask for a birth certificate when children were brought for baptism. If no certificate were available, then they could both advise parents to register the birth of their child and let the local Registrar know.

The discussions made clear some of the challenges to achieving higher levels of birth registration:

- Low level awareness of the importance of registration, the rights it conferred as the pathway to citizenship and access to services such as education, health care and employment, as well as protection from child-trafficking, early marriage and child labour.
- Poor funding.
- Inadequate registration centres and too few National Population Commission (NPC) workers.
- Ignorance of the role of religious leaders and lack of co-operation and networking between them and NPC staff.
- Ignorance and non-enforcement of the enabling laws.

- Poor attitude to free services at the federal level, resulting in demands for payment.
- The nonchalant attitude of Christians to national issues and it was thought that the Church hierarchical structure could also pose challenges.

At the same time the opportunities and potential of church and government agencies working together were made clear:

- Birth registration certificates should be presented before weddings (during pre-marital counselling), baptism and child-naming ceremonies.
- The pulpit could provide wonderful opportunities to create awareness of the importance of birth registration.
- Church programmes and conventions could provide further opportunities to reach out to groups in the local community.
- The Churches could organise special seminars and workshops to pass on the message.
- At burials, the importance of birth and death registration should be preached.
- The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) could help to disseminate this information.

Recommendations

1. National Population Commission (NPC) officials should collaborate with various church officials and agencies for greater success.
2. NPC should provide materials for churches to use during awareness-raising sessions, baptism and child dedication.

Biblical Texts and Messages from the Nigerian Church Leaders

- The importance of the Caesar Augustus enrolment before the birth of Jesus. (Luke 2: 1-7)
- The Bible is a record of births and deaths of people of God – *have you been registered?* (Matthew 7: 1-7)
- Jesus was registered at birth; *register your child today.* (Luke 2: 1-7)
- Nigeria is our country; is your family recognised in the records of the nation? *Register your child today.*
- To be a good Christian you have to be a good citizen; *Register your child today!*
- Christians obey the law; *register your child today.* (Romans 13: 1-7)
- Give your child an authentic national identity: *register your child today.* (Acts 22: 22-30)
- Guarantee your child's rights and privileges for a better tomorrow: *register your child today.* (Acts 22: 22-30)



Successful business woman.

Photo: David Degner.

EMPOWERING WOMEN TO ATTAIN IDs AND BECOME FULL CITIZENS

EGYPT

"I am happy now because I'm no longer a passive citizen, but an effective and active woman standing up for my rights."

When Fatheya attended a public meeting at EpiscoCare's Ain Shams Community Development Centre in Cairo, her eyes were opened to the important role women like her can play in rebuilding **Egypt**. Previously, she had thought that a woman's role was limited to the home, and she knew little about political participation. After the meeting she obtained an official ID card with the assistance of the manager of the centre. This gave Fatheya legal existence and the opportunity to be involved in the democratic process in Egypt. In 2011, a year when many Egyptians voted for the first time in their lives, EpiscoCare helped 262 people to obtain their ID card or voter registration.

EpiscoCare is the development arm of the Episcopal/ Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa. The Diocese, led by Bishop Mouneer Hanna Anis, seeks to share the love of God in both word and deed, through its churches and ministries which include hospitals, clinics, schools, a theological seminary, vocational training programmes, as well as ministries for refugees, the deaf and disabled. It is through this practical engagement – or "life dialogue" – that the Diocese seeks the welfare of the people. It is not a theoretical or theological engagement but it involves serving and loving our neighbours, both Muslim and Christian. This is a powerful way of engaging with our communities.

EpiscoCare runs holistic programmes in six community centres located in impoverished areas of Egypt. Its vision is to reach and empower the poorest of the poor without any discrimination. Muslims and Christians take part in participatory programmes which include adult-literacy, parenting and health-awareness classes, nurseries and micro-loans. When a new arrival comes to the centre, the staff confirm that they have an ID card. This is important for other programmes: for example they cannot get the Government Certificate for Literacy unless they have an ID card.

In the aftermath of the Revolution and the following months of political instability, the economy was badly affected and many Egyptians lost their jobs. The poorest people in Egypt suffered most, and many people came to EpiscoCare's community development centres in desperation.

EpiscoCare initially provided emergency food packages to meet people's immediate needs. However, it soon became clear that the long-term need was to assist people who had lost their jobs to earn their own livelihoods. EpiscoCare

increased its established micro-loan programme and since the January 2011 Revolution, over 4,000 micro-loans have enabled Egyptians to start businesses and provide for their families.

EpiscoCare has an effective system of micro-loans, which has been running since 2008. Firstly, public meetings are held at the centres to raise awareness about entrepreneurship. If people want to start a business, vocational training courses are offered and assistance is given to write a feasibility study. A local committee at the centre then assesses the business idea, and if it is approved a small loan is given. Interest is paid weekly to the centre, and once the loan is paid off, they can apply for another loan. EpiscoCare has achieved a high rate of loan repayment; 90% of the people receiving loans paid back on time, 6% of the people receiving loans paid back with delay, and only 4% needed external help to be able to repay their loans.

"I am happy now because I'm no longer a passive citizen, but an effective and active woman standing up for my rights."

Sahar is a middle-aged Muslim woman, a widow and mother of five who was helped by our economic empowerment programme. She put her loan towards starting a small business: sewing and selling bed sheets. It was so successful that she became well-known in the area. Sahar says, "I was living with my mother-in-law and my entire family in one room. Now I managed to buy two flats from the profits. Now my family lives in one flat and my mother-in-law lives in the other flat. I am so happy! Thank you for helping me!"

Sahar is one of many women EpiscoCare has empowered to rebuild their lives and their country.

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Literacy class.

Photo: Embrace The Middle East.

The ripple effect of small choices

Imagine being a non-person. Nothing to prove who you are or when you were born; no place for you at school; no entitlement to treatment when you are ill.

For many people in Egypt's disadvantaged communities – particularly women and girls – this is the reality. Partners of *Embrace the Middle East* estimate that over a million Egyptians do not have a birth certificate, or possess only a paper certificate that is no longer recognised by the Government's computerised system.

The underlying issues are those of poverty, illiteracy and gender discrimination. The father of Noura, 18, from a village near Maghagha in the Minya Governorate, did not see the point of registering her birth. She was 'only a girl', who would not need to go to school as she would be more useful doing household chores.

A small number of children are unregistered because their parents' marriage is unofficial. Egypt accepts polygamy for Muslim men, but often only the first marriage is registered, leaving subsequent wives reluctant to discuss their status publicly.

It is only in the last five years that women in Egypt have had the right to register their child's birth in the father's absence. While the legislation now supports them, attitudes have lagged behind and mothers – especially those who are not married – still face discrimination from registrars.

The underlying issues are those of poverty, illiteracy and gender discrimination.

Without a birth certificate, children cannot go to school. They grow up unable to read or write, becoming adults ill-equipped to work their way out of poverty. On reaching 18, they do not receive a national identity card and cannot vote or access government healthcare. It is difficult to gain employment, and failure to possess an ID card poses the risk of arrest.

Embrace the Middle East supports a range of Egyptian Christian projects committed to empowering marginalised women.

By improving literacy and making women aware of their rights, we can help them acquire the skills to apply for birth certificates and ID cards, enabling them to play a full role in their society.

Noura, for example, has now graduated from the Embrace-funded Life School, an educational project in two Minya villages for women aged 15-35 who missed out on school when they were younger. Over the past two years, 90 women have attended the project, improving their literacy and numeracy, discussing health and community issues, and training in income generation skills. Those without birth certificates can apply for them, and report feeling a sense of pride that they are now recognised as Egyptian citizens. Noura plans to start a micro-enterprise selling dairy products.

The Salaam Centre, working among Cairo's Zabaleen (rubbish-picker) community, also offers literacy and awareness-raising seminars. During the 2012 presidential elections, they ran a community participation campaign, supporting women to obtain or update their ID cards so that they could exercise their right to vote.

In Ras el Soda on the outskirts of Alexandria, EpiscoCare, the social care organisation of the Anglican Diocese of Egypt, runs a project called '*I am not alone*', which helps girls aged 8-13 to get back into education and away from the risks of exploitation and sexual abuse that they encounter on the streets. EpiscoCare encourages young women to mentor the girls, acting as 'big sisters' who help them develop self-esteem and grow up aware of their rights.

By educating and empowering individuals, *Embrace* is helping communities to develop and become self-sufficient. As one of the charity's partners said: "*It works one household, one young girl graduating from secondary school at a time. At first glance it might not seem much, but the ripple effect of these small choices made by mothers, wives and daughters is the only way to go in a society constrained by poverty and illiteracy.*"

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MORE WAYS FORWARD

I. LINKING BIRTH REGISTRATION AND BAPTISM



“Those of us who are priests should ensure that before we baptise a child that the child is registered. If not, we should facilitate their registration. Fortunately, for us in Kenya, the process takes a day.” (Fr Enoch Opuka)

Bishop Oliver Simon is raising awareness of the importance of birth registration among the clergy of his diocese of Antsiranana in **Northern Madagascar** and making the link with baptism. Official figures stating 25% of the population are not registered at birth may underestimate the problem. While one of his predecessors, Bishop Keith Benzies, had made a note ‘no baptism without a birth certificate’, and this had apparently been agreed at a synod, it is not clear how effectively it is being implemented.



Birth certificate.

Photo: UNICEF Mozambique.

2. PARTNERSHIP WITH MOTHERS' UNION

In April, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Angola and reported that 68% of children under 5 were unregistered, with huge implications for their future participation in society. The Church has a key role to play in promoting and encouraging birth registration. See p7 for the example of how in Zove and Nhamicombe last year the MU led a registration drive and were able to help nearly 3,000 children.

“Building the capacity of the Mothers' Union and church leaders, as well as providing them with technical and financial support are the key for the successful mobilisation and sensitisation of the community to the importance of the issue as well as the follow-up process to birth registration.” Sarah Kasule, Uganda

3. LOCAL CHURCH INITIATIVES

Ed note. For many years, Fr Juliao Mutemba, who died last month, ministered to people living on Hulene rubbish dump in Maputo, **Mozambique**. He realised the importance of their having birth certificates and, with his local church, helped some to meet all the complex requirements for obtaining them. May this report act as a tribute and memorial to his pioneering work. Fr Juliao wrote: ...

It had been a concern for the Church that with most of the children under the school age, when they come for baptism, it is discovered that they have not been registered. So parents are sensitised to take them to a registration office in order to get a birth certificate. In the Bible it was predicted that, “The Lord will write a list of the peoples and include them all as citizens of Jerusalem” (Psalm 87:6). People grow from children to adults living out of the dump; boys and girls having the dump as their meeting place, where they work, play and fall in love, resulting in having children born of unregistered parents. Living without a birth registration means that even if they can begin the first school grades, they will stop somewhere because they cannot write examinations without the documents, cannot access work, basic services such as electricity, water, SIM card registration.



Children supported by the parish of St Barnabas.

Photo: Fr Juliao.

It is as if people are denied any aspect of development. We as the Church, filled with the spirit of the Lord, feel the pain of seeing our fellow human beings not having any right yet, because they are not yet citizens, but strangers in their own land. In that case, the Church uses God's anointment to proclaim the freedom and the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18-19).

4. ECUMENICAL ACTION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

The workshop of religious leaders held in Nigeria (see pp 7-8) showed the potential of the churches coming together and working in partnership with **UNICEF** and the state registration services. For **UNICEF**, which seeks free birth registration and a free birth certificate for every child in every country, see:

<http://www.unicef.org/newsline/2003/03fbirthregistration>

5. LINK WITH HEALTH SERVICES

Meeting of Government Ministers

A conference of Government ministers from 46 African countries, held in Durban in September 2012 and hosted by several UN organisations including UNICEF, called on more areas to integrate birth registration in health services and health information systems, taking advantage of the much greater coverage of health services compared to the generally limited reach of current civil registration systems. In **Namibia**, for example, 95 per cent of pregnant women attend ante-natal care services. See http://www.unicef.org/esaro/5440_UNICEF_giving_children_an_identity.html

Improving civil registration systems critical to improving health services

“When we know how many children are born, how many people die and what the principal causes of their death are, we know better where to prioritise health investments,” said Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation at the World Health Organization (WHO), Marie-Paule Kieny, speaking at a summit in Thailand which called on countries and development partners to remove barriers to universal civil registration, including out-dated laws, weak infrastructure, poor training of staff and inadequate funding. (see Bangkok Call for Action, April 2013 <http://www.bignewsnetwork.com/index.php/sid/213960808/scat/a1e025da3c02ca7c/ht/UN-backed-summit-calls-on-countries-to-prioritise-civil-registrations>)

6. GOVERNMENT ACTION

In **Australia** a push for governments to issue free birth certificates has won the support of Federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus. An estimated 15,000 children born in Australia every year do not receive birth certificates and about one-third are indigenous.

Mr Dreyfus planned to raise this when meeting his state and territory counterparts in April. He said he would lobby his colleagues to reconsider the fees charged for issuing the documents. “I am going to be urging them to have a look at the pricing,” he said.

“At the moment there is only one state where you can get a waiver, New South Wales. I’m keen for other states and territories to make birth certificates free or much more affordable than they are now.” See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-04-04/dreyfus-to-push-for-free-birth-certificates/4608932>

“Un enfant non enregistré est une perte pour la nation en ce sens qu’il devient difficile de bien planifier le développement du pays” (Mme Denise Nkurunziza, La Première Dame Burundaise)

IAFN is an Anglican forum for the exchange of information about challenges facing families in different countries and contexts, and the practical work being undertaken by churches and individual Christians. See website www.iafn.net for further information and how to receive the newsletters electronically or in the printed version.

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A PRAYER

Dear God

You know us completely.

You watch over our going out and our coming in.

You even count all the hairs of our head.

You are the place of our belonging.

How wonderful it is to know that we are your children loved and cherished.

Hear our prayer for your little ones.

Wherever children are not identified as citizens in the land of their birth

strengthen our determination to make sure they are registered and counted

- that their childhood is honoured and protected

- that they enjoy all benefits of citizenship

- that they thrive and can contribute to their communities

not hidden, but visible and valued

not forgotten, but remembered and lifted up

by the strong arms of societies that know how to treasure their young ones.

In the name of the one who welcomed the children and blessed them.

Amen

Rev. Terrie Robinson

IAFN RESOURCES

IAFN now has a range of extra resources using social media. These add to what you read in the Newsletter. It means that you can keep up to date with developments on birth registration and make your own comments or add ideas.

Our **Facebook** page is called “International Anglican Family Network” so you can sign in to your own Facebook page and then look for us. If you “like” us you will get all of the news as it is added. The online address is <https://www.facebook.com/pages/International-Anglican-FamilyNetworkBirthRegistrationinitiative/458560180871134?ref=ts&fref=ts>

As well as news, you can watch a short video by our President, Bishop James Tengatenga of southern Malawi, talking about how the Church can help with birth registration.

You can also add your own comments, respond to those already made and tell us something about the birth registration situation in your own country

We also have a **Blog** which has news about developments on birth registration. The blog provides links to other useful material and contacts. See <http://registerbirths.blogspot.co.uk/>

Finally you can follow us on **Twitter**. Our address is @IAFN2. This will tell you when new material has been posted or give you links to what other people are doing.

IAFN gratefully acknowledges the use of pictures and help given by PLAN. For their work on birth registration see <http://plan-international.org/birthregistration>