

Birth certificate a right for all kids

Challenges

By Andrew Masinde

In 2014, Patricia Alore's niece was defiled. When she reported the matter to the Police, she was asked to produce documents that proved the girl was underage.

"We went to the hospital where the girl was born and they gave us a birth notification card that we took to the district, from which they made a birth certificate. We took the document to the Police to prove the girl was 14 years old. The defiler was taken to court and was punished accordingly," says Alore, a resident Mairbill Zone in Tororo district.

She says before that incident, she had never thought that birth registration was important.

Michael Adama, a 37-year-old father of seven who fled to Uganda from South Sudan last year in November, went through the same experience.

His children were denied access to medication and education in the schools and health centres located in the host community because they did not have birth registration cards.

"I had to have the children registered and after getting the cards, they accessed services," says Adama.

About 1.5 million babies are born in Uganda every year, but not all of them are registered at birth.

Birth registration

According to UNICEF, the United Nations children's agency, birth registration is the process by which a child's birth is recorded in the civil register by the Government authority. It provides the first legal recognition of the child and is generally required for the child to obtain a birth certificate and as a result, any other legal documents and rights.

Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, "the child shall be registered immediately after



A woman displays a birth registration card of one of her children at home in Tororo district recently. All children have a right to be registered at birth. Photo by Andrew Masinde

birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents".

Agatha Achom Mutenyo, the director of finance and administration at the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA), says the authority is mandated by the Parliament to register all persons in Uganda and issue them with national identity cards.

She notes this is done to develop a comprehensive national identification register.

Why registration

Mutenyo says currently, NIRA is supposed to issue birth certificates to all children born in the country, whether of a Ugandan citizen or a non-Ugandan. This is to help children get a National Identification Number (NIN), when they are of age.

She says the first right of a child must be birth

registration because it identifies a child to a certain home and clan. "Many children do not know where they belong and the country does not know them. All this is because they are not registered or do not have birth certificates," says Mutenyo.

According to Patrick Adupa, the national programme manager for Plan International Uganda, when children are fully registered, they are assured of full protection against certain abuses. He says the card will protect children from such vices as child labour, defilement, child trafficking and inheritance.

"Without documents to prove the age of a child, winning a court case, say of defilement, becomes difficult.

Adupa says many children have lost out on inheritance rights because of improper documentation.

"If a child is unregistered and the parents pass away, to claim inheritance of family property, the children need

to legally prove they are related to the deceased. The certificate will have legal proof of their family ties, ensuring they receive what belongs to them," Adupa says.

Grace is a resident of Kwapa village in Tororo district. When her husband died, she was left with their five children to take care of. Her in-laws wanted to take away her late husband's land, claiming she had not been legally married to their brother.

When the children's grandparents learnt of the land conflict, they filed a case at police. When they demanded documents proving the identity of the children, Grace did not have any.

"I was advised by a friend to get the birth certificates for the children and the death certificate of my husband. I got them and presented them to police, after which our property was restored," she says.

Mutenyo explains that

without documentation of a child's existence, the law is incapable of protecting children against crimes and abuse.

"We must know the categories of people we have in the country such that the Government can plan for them accordingly. Birth registration makes it possible for a country to have accurate information on its infant mortality rate and under-five mortality rates," she notes.

Adupa says if a child got separated from his or her family, reunion would be difficult.

Robert Baryamwesiga, the settlement commandant at Bidi Bidi refugee settlement in Yumbe district, says registration of refugee children is to have them profiled so we are aware of who and how many they are."

He says they have done biometric registration for all of them.

Adupa says records of births and deaths are a source of demographic, epidemiological, social, and health information, useful for planning programmes such as education, labour, and health. If all births are registered immediately, then the Government will be able to update its systems often.

"The Government will know how many children have been born in a year and how many have died, to easily update their systems. The Government can also project population growth and as such, plan for its population well," he says.

Requirements

Mutenyo says when applying for a birth certificate, one is required to pay sh5,000, plus sh2,500 for bank charges, and present a form from the hospital where the child was born. For children not born in a hospital, one can go to the sub-county for assistance.

For death certificates, there must be evidence of death, which is a certificate acquired from a hospital or sub-county.

William Mulabya, the district planner for Tororo and the focal person for birth registration, says the costs involved in getting a birth certificate demoralise people.

"Sh5,000 sounds little to many, but it is a lot to the poor person in the village who cannot afford a meal a day. Some have to incur transport costs to their respective sub-counties to pick birth notifications, then to the district to fill the forms. From there, they have to travel to the regional offices, where they are issued birth certificates," says Mulabya.

Lydia Lanyero, a resident of Nyoko village in Yumbe district, says she had the thought of registering her eight children, but failed because she could not afford to pay for the birth certificates, on top of the travel expenses involved.

Patrick Adupa, the national programme manager for Plan International Uganda, says illiteracy is another challenge. He says many people are not educated and easily fall victim to those who are can read and are crafty.

"They ask for money to help them read the forms or fill them out," Adupa says. "Some documents should be written in local languages so that people understand what they are filling. Then the final product can be in English," he suggests.

He advises the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) to consider decentralising the issuance of birth certificates to at least sub-county level to relieve people of costs and time.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

COMPLIMENTARY FEEDING FOR CHILDREN SIX MONTHS AND ABOVE

- At six months, your baby is ready to be fed additional foods, in addition to breast milk.
- Breastfeed and give soft and mashed foods to the baby until s/he reaches two years of age.



- If the baby is breastfeeding, feed him/her at least 3 times a day; if the baby is not breastfeeding, feed him/her 5 times a day.

Children have small stomachs.

Important to note

When giving complementary food to your child, think about the following:

- Frequency