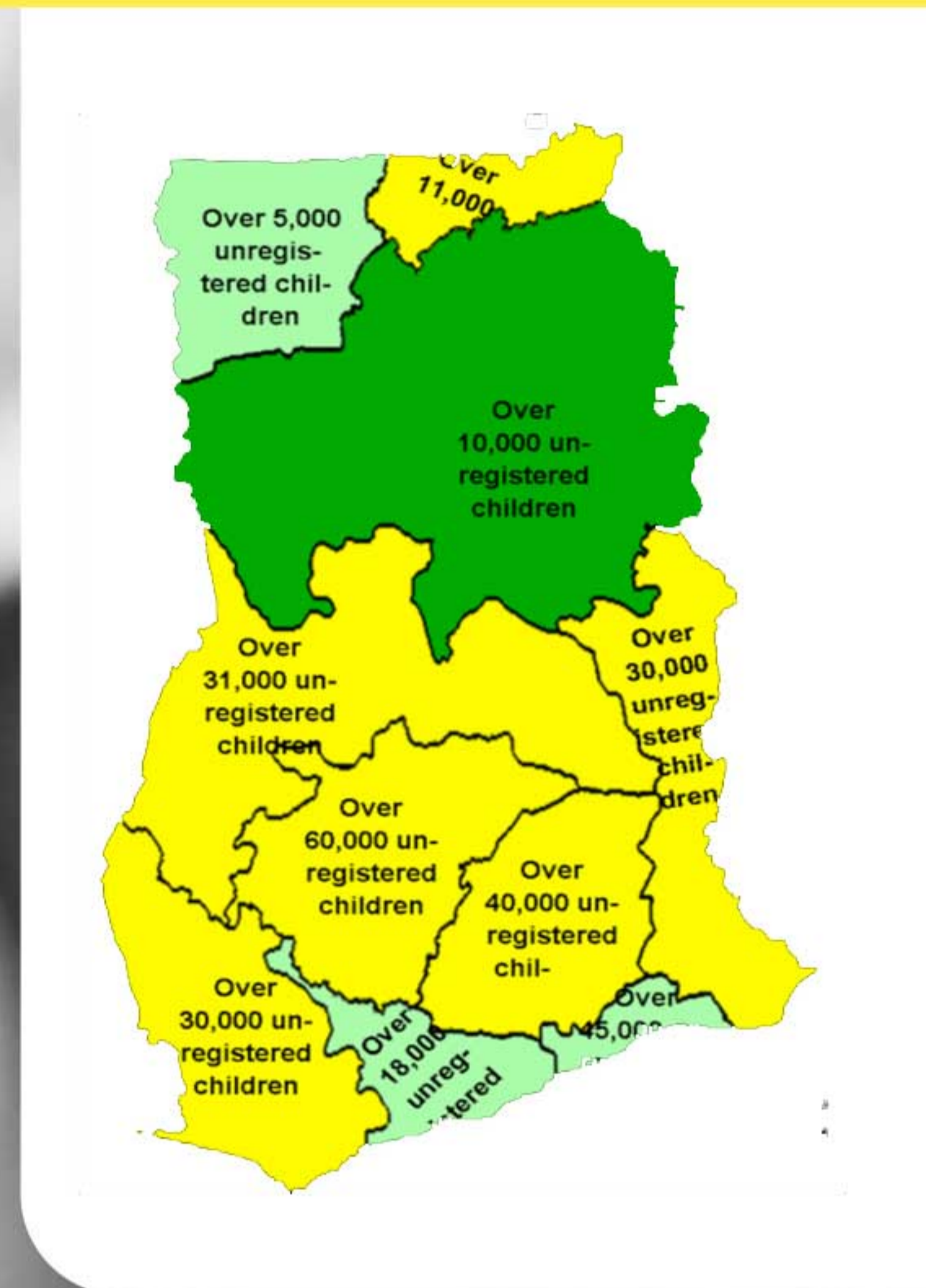


Birth Registration in Ghana

A Bottleneck Analysis for improved Coverage that Leaves no Child Out



unicef 

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Improved Coverage that
Leaves no Child Out**

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Copies of this publication are available from:

United Nations Children’s Fund

UNICEF House

4-8 Rangoon Close

Ward 24

Cantoments, Accra, Ghana

Email: accra@unicef.org

Text: Olele Johannes Gambo, NZ Dip Mgt; BComm; MCP; MComp; MComm Law (Hons)

Cover Title & Design: UNICEF

Cover Page Photograph: UNICEF

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Contents

Preface	6
Acknowledgement	7
Foreword	8
Acronyms	9
Executive Summary	11
Introduction	15
Importance of Birth Registration	15
Birth Registration System in Ghana	16
Legal Requirement to Register all Births	16
Objectives	17
Frameworks and Methodology	19
Frameworks	19
Consultation Process	19
Methodology	20
Findings: Barriers to Birth Registration	21
Report Structure	21
Inadequate Financial Resources:	21
Birth Registration Service is Inaccessible:	22
Cost of Birth Registration:	23
Shortages of Essential Materials:	25
Dissemination of Misleading Information:	25
Inadequate Knowledge and Understanding:	25
Findings: Performance Bottlenecks	27
Leadership Failure:	27
Lack of Effective Oversight:	27
Inadequate Staff Levels:	28
Weak ICT Infrastructure:	28
Lack of Service Delivery Plan:	28
Employee Disengagement:	28
Limited Partnership and Collaboration:	28

Contents

Unsystematic Use of Volunteers:	28
Findings: Equity Matters	31
The Missing Certificates:	32
Orphans and Vulnerable Children:	32
Common Themes:	32
Inadequate Financial Resources:	32
Discussion: Findings and Implications	35
Leadership Failure:	36
Birth Registration Service is Inaccessible:	36
Cost of Birth Registration:	37
Shortage of Essential Inputs:	37
Weak ICT Infrastructure:	38
Limited Partnership and Collaboration:	38
Lack of Service Delivery Plan:	38
Inadequate Staff Levels:	38
Unsystematic Use of Volunteers:	39
Enabling Equity, Removing Barriers:	40
Conclusion	41
Recommendations	43
Bibliography	44
Appendices	45
Regional Performance	50

Preface

“The future well-being for a child starts with a legal identity. This right is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Registering a child at birth lays the foundation for their future as citizens. It is a vital ingredient to make sure they have access to basic services and can protect them during childhood”. Dr. Martin Mogwanja, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director.

Globally, UNICEF supports universal birth registration within the context of an overall child protection system and as part of a civil registration system. This approach recognises the link between non-registration of children and the risk of them being victims of abuse and exploitation. The aim of UNICEF is, therefore, free and universal registration of births, particularly of excluded groups. In 2010, UNICEF launched a re-focus on equity under the premise that equity-focused programming is not only a right in principle, but a right in practice. UNICEF works with Governments to strengthen their ability to support effective and efficient birth registration in their countries.

It has been more than a decade since UNICEF Ghana started a partnership with the Births and Deaths Registry as part of efforts to improve birth registration coverage in the country. Although some achievements have been made, there are still about 40 percent of children whose births go unregistered every year. Many of these children are found in rural and deprived communities. This puts them at risk of being cut off from social services and legal protection, which is crucial to their survival and future. The commitment to reduce disparities has been clearly articulated by the Government of Ghana. The Ghana shared Growth and Development Agenda (GDA) (2010–2013) acknowledges the existence of disparities – especially between the north and the south of Ghana – and outlines strategies for reducing these.

UNICEF Ghana is committed to working with the Government of Ghana to register 90 percent of children under five by 2016, hence the bottleneck analysis in 2012.

The bottleneck analysis of the birth registration system in Ghana is therefore expected to be used to improve overall birth registration rates, in particular registration of children below the age of five years, with a focus on those less than 12 months of age. It is also expected to point out the drivers and barriers to registering the unreached children. The expectation is to raise birth registration rates from the current 60 percent to 90 percent by the end of 2016.

UNICEF wishes to express its profound gratitude to the consultant Olele Johannes Gambo for efficiently bringing to the fore critical issues that confront the registration of children in Ghana. We are also grateful to the Government of Ghana, especially staff of the Births and Deaths Registry at all levels, for their ardent commitment to seeing change and their tremendous co-operation throughout the process. We also recognize the commitment and contributions of likeminded organisations including Plan Ghana and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) among others who walked with us throughout the process. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of children.

Signature:

Ms. Susan Namondo Ngongi
Representative – UNICEF Ghana

Acknowledgement

This report is a collaborative effort between the Births and Deaths Registry of the Government of Ghana and UNICEF. The process involved engagement with various groups of people including traditional leaders, women, and community health workers in over 60 communities around the 10 regions of Ghana. Officials of key Government institutions, primarily of the Births and Deaths Registry at the different decentralized levels, were involved throughout the process. Organisations including Plan Ghana, UNFPA and the Department of Epidemiology of the Noguchi Memorial Institute, University of Ghana were also involved.

Removing barriers/bottlenecks is an important first step towards universal coverage of any intervention and for achieving any type of higher level result. In relation to birth registration, several countries, including Nigeria, have already undertaken bottleneck analysis of their systems, which identified key system barriers along with recommendations for future work.

The bottleneck analysis of birth registration in Ghana will also be linked to a multi-country study on public sector reform with birth registration as a case study and in which Ghana is one of the selected countries. The bottleneck analysis and the Innocenti birth registration/public sector reform initiative are expected to complement each other. Specifically, the public sector reform project will be of value to the bottleneck analysis by providing a thorough and comprehensive evidence-based analysis of policy coordination, thereby telling a detailed story that will serve to concretely illustrate findings from the equity/bottleneck analysis.

The data collection and report writing were undertaken by Olele Johannes Gambo. Various stakeholders provided their input during a two-day validation meeting. Review of the report was done by staff of the Births and Deaths Registry as well as UNICEF

We wish to thank all for their dedication, commitment and field support.

Foreword

A birth certificate is a fundamental human right and is indeed the “first right” the child enjoys. Without a birth certificate, many other rights are denied the child. Children whose births are not registered are more susceptible to abuse, trafficking and exploitation. Also, national and sub-national planning for social services (education, health etc) becomes difficult as inaccurate data affects forecasts, which in turn affects adequate provision of services including immunization and post-care services for babies and children.

In Ghana, non-registration of births of children is more pronounced in communities where access to birth registration facilities is not readily available. Other reasons cited for the poor coverage include ignorance of parents and the populace about the importance of registration, and the cost involved for late registration (registration in the first 12 months is free but begins to attract a penalty fee thereafter). Inadequate personnel and logistics remain central to the Births and Deaths Registry's challenges and are also often cited for fluctuating coverage rates in birth registration in Ghana.

However, improvements in the system have been noted in recent years, with a combination of strategies (use of community-based population registers managed by volunteers and supervised by the Chief in communities; birth registration volunteers; collaboration with health professionals in conjunction with growth monitoring centres and immunization campaigns; and birth registration volunteers ‘attached’ to health posts and hospitals). An improved process of national computerisation, covering nine out of the ten regions, ensures rather speedy processing of entering birth registration information collected through these processes, verification and printing/signing of birth certificates.

As a result of the various interventions mentioned above, which have been achieved with support from major partners such as UNICEF and Plan Ghana, birth registration coverage improved from 17 percent in 2002 to about 67 percent in 2005.

In spite of these interventions birth registration has stagnated at around 65 percent over the past few years, leaving about 35 percent of children born in Ghana unregistered.

Indications are that if care is not taken, the Registry may never attain its goal of achieving 90 percent of birth registration coverage by 2016. It is in this light that we welcome the findings of the Equity Bottleneck Analysis and the recommendation thereof. We do believe that the exercise could not have come at a more appropriate time than now.

It is therefore our hope that the findings of the analysis will pave the way for doing things differently at the Births and Deaths Registry and also galvanize Government and other stakeholders alike to reaffirm our collective obligations towards the achievement of the inalienable right of the 35 percent of unregistered Ghanaian children as stipulated in Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Hon. Julius Debrah

Minister for Local Government and Rural Development

Acronyms

BDR: Births and Deaths Registry

CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child

CRVS: Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

DBR: Determinants of Birth Registration

CAPIF: Capability Assessment and Performance Improvement Framework

DHS: Demographic and health surveys

GHS: Ghana Health Services

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

MICS: Multiple indicator cluster survey

NGO: Non-governmental organization

OVC: Orphans and Vulnerable Children

UN: United Nations

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund



Executive Summary

This report details the findings of the “Equity Bottleneck Analysis” of birth registration in Ghana, and presents a set of recommendations for improving the availability and delivery of birth registration services.

Birth registration is one of the most important rights contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the concomitant birth certificate is a legal document. The legal weight accorded to a birth certificate means that it is vital to the realisation of the rights to identity, nationality, and family relations as stipulated in Article 8 of the CRC. Notwithstanding the recognition of the importance of birth registration, a number of countries struggle to achieve universal birth registration coverage. Ghana is one of these countries. Although Ghana was the first nation to ratify the CRC, signalling the government’s commitment to protect the rights of children, it still faces significant challenges in relation to the provision of birth registration services.

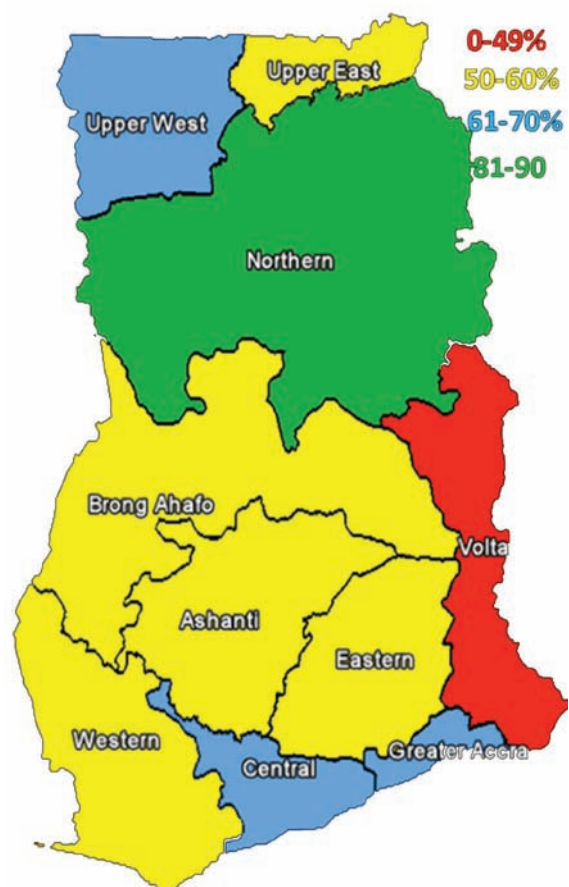
In Ghana, the Births and Deaths Registry (BDR) is the legal authority responsible for registering all

births and deaths occurring in the country. Over the years (from 2003 to 2009), BDR has significantly lifted the birth registration coverage from 30 percent to 70 percent through a mix of intervention measures such as mobile birth registration, the use of volunteers, removal of the registration fee for under 1-year-olds, and education and awareness campaigns. However, the significant progress made in improving birth registration coverage cannot mask the fact that about 30 percent (more than 300,000) of children born every year are not registered. In addition, there are legitimate expectations that the Government should honour its obligations by providing equitable access to birth registration services.

In the last four years, the coverage rate has not exceeded 65 percent, indicating that progress has stalled. The latest data from BDR shows that the 2012 national coverage rate is around 60 percent. This remains a serious concern given that all children born in Ghana are entitled to birth registration. While the downward slope is of concern, of equal or greater concern are the disparities between regions and within regions, between urban and rural areas, and between different socio-economic groups.

For example, the 2012 birth registration coverage shows that 51 percent of all children born in the Volta region were registered, compared to 81 percent in the Northern Region.

As a result, BDR with support from UNICEF initiated an “Equity Bottleneck Analysis” in relation to birth registration. One of the main purposes of the bottleneck analysis was to gain a comprehensive



understanding of the birth registration system as it currently operates, identify the barriers to birth registration and, based on the insights, make system improvement recommendations.

This “Equity Bottleneck” study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Data collection took place over a rolling period of 12 weeks, in 37 districts across the 10 regions of Ghana. In addition, a number of key stakeholders including government agencies, UN agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), research institutions, and faith-based organisations were consulted. The “Determinants of Birth Registration” (DBR) model (an analytical framework for assessing birth registration constraints) was used to identify and understand the barriers associated with birth registration. Due to inherent limitations of the DBR framework, the Capability Assessment and Performance Improvement Framework (CAPIF) was included to augment the DBR framework.

The result of the analysis shows that unregistered children are not a monolithic group. They are present in rural and urban areas; they are present in different socioeconomic situations; and they exist in different sociocultural settings. However, unregistered children are disproportionately present in rural or remote communities, orphanages, low-income households, and are more likely to be children of illiterate parents, and/or unmarried young mothers. It appears that the vast majority of unregistered children are unregistered because of weaknesses in the delivery of birth registration services, and not because of lack of awareness or demand for birth registration. From district to district, region to region, the evidence shows that lack of awareness is no longer a key factor in the low rate of birth registrations. Even in the remotest communities, most participants were able to talk about the association between birth registration and education, or birth registration and obtaining a passport for overseas travel (for example, going to Hajj in Mecca). In many of the areas visited, a significant proportion of parents cited the unavailability of birth registration services as the sole reason for not registering their children. Although the demand for birth registration has increased significantly, BDR’s service delivery capacity is not commensurate with the significant increase in demand. The result further shows that the “enabling environment” for birth registration in Ghana needs strengthening. Over the years, the unpredictable and inadequate budgetary allocations (fiscal dimension) for the provision of birth registration services have created structural and systemic weaknesses. It is clear that the Births and Deaths Registry cannot deliver an equitable, accessible, and timely birth registration service because of inadequate financial resources.

Faced with on-going funding shortfalls precipitated by inadequate budgetary allocations, as a measure of last resort, BDR relies on “black revenues” to fund its operational costs. The “black revenues” are generated by inflating the prescribed fees for late birth registrations or by charging for birth registrations, which should be free of charge for children under one year old. The reliance on “black revenues” has a detrimental impact on registering children because it incentivises BDR, albeit unwittingly, to focus on adult or late registrations, rather than children (adult and late registrations attract fees and provide opportunities for revenue generation).

The systemic problems combined with leadership and administrative failings have created a host of barriers, which limits BDR’s ability to deliver effective, efficient, and equitable birth registration services to all. The barriers include:

- **Inadequate financial resources**
- **Inaccessibility of birth registration services (geographical barriers)**
- **Shortages of essential materials**
- **Cost of birth registration**
- **Dissemination of misleading information about birth registration**
- **Lack of awareness, and inadequate knowledge and understanding of the birth registration system**

Apart from these barriers, the study identifies a number of bottlenecks affecting BDR's capacity and capability to deliver birth registration services. The bottlenecks include:

- **Leadership failure**
- **Inadequate staff levels**
- **Weak ICT infrastructure**
- **Inadequate management oversight**
- **Employee disengagement**
- **Lack of service delivery plan**
- **Unsystematic use of volunteers**
- **Limited partnership and collaboration with other key stakeholders**

Eliminating these barriers and bottlenecks will significantly improve access to birth registration.

The result of the analysis shows that inadequate financial resources lead to unequal access to birth registration services. This is evident in the high proportion of birth registration outreach visits to easily accessible areas in comparison to the dearth of outreach visits to remote or hard-to-reach areas. The propensity to concentrate on easily accessible areas creates unjustifiable disparities in the availability and delivery of birth registration services. Therefore, one of the key challenges for BDR is to find ways of providing better and more equitable birth registration services to all, irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances or place of residence.

The availability of adequate financial resources, effective leadership, and a trained and competent workforce are essential for the provision of equitable, efficient and effective birth registration services. Obviously, not all the barriers are equal. Barriers such as inadequate financial resources, shortages of essential material, ineffective leadership, inaccessibility of services and weak ICT infrastructure require immediate attention. There is also an association between the barriers. For example, there would be no shortages of forms and birth certificates if financial resources and good management systems were in place. Given the complexities and interrelatedness of these issues, it is useful to implement the recommendations in an integrative manner, because no single recommendation can bring about the transformative changes needed to improve the birth registration service in Ghana. Therefore, the recommendations are to:

Recommendations

Strengthen the enabling environment by establishing a sustainable funding mechanism capable of providing adequate financial resources.

Develop and strengthen leadership capability across BDR and improve management and leadership skills, and overhaul BDR's culture and values to align with its vision, purpose and strategic direction.

Strengthen the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure and enhance capacity, governance and security. Improve service delivery, communication, collaboration and efficiency through better use of ICT.

Develop an Equitable Service Delivery Plan (ESDP), taking into consideration the needs of users, equity, accessibility, timeliness, integrity and quality of service.

Recommendations

Enter into a formal partnership and collaboration agreement with Ghana Health Service and use the joint capacities and collaborative capabilities to extend geographical reach in order to register more children.

Systematically review staffing structure, job descriptions and staffing levels to realign and redeploy human resources to where they are most needed. Reassess the use of volunteers with a view to selecting the ones BDR needs and not the ones that need BDR, and develop an effective oversight mechanism to monitor volunteers.

Review and revise the operational policies and procedures manual and offer refresher training to staff and volunteers in order to deliver consistent and quality service to all customers.

Review education and awareness materials with a view to incorporating additional information about the birth registration process.

If implemented, the recommended changes will bring fairness, accountability, credibility, consistency, stability and transparency into the delivery of the birth registration service.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the “Equity Bottleneck Analysis” of birth registration in Ghana, which was initiated because of concerns that about 30 percent (over 300,000) of children born every year in Ghana are not registered. Although the main focus of this study is on birth registration, it is important to remember that the birth registration system is part of the broader system of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS). Civil registration is defined as “the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of events, including vital events, pertaining to the population” (United Nations, 2001, p. 4).¹ The focus on birth registration does not mean or imply that the registration of deaths is less important. After all, both births and deaths registration are the core pillars of CRVS. Taken together, they provide a sound demographic platform for determining, amongst other things, population size, fertility, and mortality. The epidemiological and demographic value of a functioning CRVS system is indisputable. In addition, the strengthening of the birth registration process is equally beneficial to the death registration process given the shared characteristics inherent in both processes.

Importance of Birth Registration

Birth registration is one of the fundamental rights contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Article 7 of the CRC stipulates that every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to acquire, amongst other things, a name and a nationality. As the glue that binds other rights, birth registration plays a pivotal role in the realisation of some of the rights laid down in the CRC, including the right to identity, development and protection.

As birth registration marks the first point of legal recognition of the existence of a child by the government, the absence of birth registration means that the government is yet to legally recognise or acknowledge the existence of the child. Once a child has been registered, the concomitant birth certificate (containing particulars of birth such as names, date of birth, place of birth and family relationships) is regarded as a legal document necessary for establishing identity. In addition, a birth certificate is instrumental in establishing proof of nationality and for obtaining identification documents such as passports and national identity cards. Therefore, the lack of birth registration is not benign, as identity documents are invariably used to establish proof of citizenship and entitlement to public services such as health and education or social benefits. In countries where access to education and health services are contingent on providing proof of eligibility, unregistered children may be denied access. The absence of birth registration can also have enduring consequences. When an unregistered child becomes an adult, they may experience difficulties in establishing their nationality, or establishing their eligibility to participate in the electoral process.

The birth registration system is also an integral part of the civil registration system. As such, aggregated data derived from a functioning civil registration system is vital for social and economic planning. Reliable and timely information is the cornerstone of good decision-making and governance. The Government can use the statistical information to monitor population trends, for planning, and provision of public services such as health and education. As a result, the absence of non-universal and continuous registration is detrimental to social planning and resource allocation.

¹This definition highlights the importance of universality, permanency and continuity, and with reference to the recording of vital events such as births, deaths, and marriages. As far back as 1839, The Lancet rightly posited that “it is quite evident that “it is quite evident that the registration, to possess its full value, should be universal; every birth, every death, every marriage in the Kingdom, should be registered” (p. 369). This line of argument is as valid (and more relevant) today as it was in 1839.

Article 32 of the CRC requires signatory nations to recognise the “right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development”. As a constitutive element of the child protection toolbox, a birth certificate can also thwart some types of abuse and exploitation. In the absence of a birth certificate, it is inherently problematic to fight child labour or child trafficking or bring offenders to justice because of difficulties in providing the documentary evidence necessary for establishing identity or proof of age.

Studies have shown that unregistered children are more vulnerable to exploitation, including child trafficking, unlawful adoption, early marriages and child labour.² Likewise, unregistered children are more likely to be recruited as child soldiers or prosecuted in adult courts if they cannot show proof of age. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the CRC as a legal instrument for the protection of the rights of the child depends on a number of critical factors such as the capabilities of the implementing agencies, the presence of an enabling environment, and strong political will. In relation to birth registration, an enabling environment must contain a legal framework; credible government commitment to ensure adequate financial resourcing; and favourable social norms towards birth registration.

Birth Registration System in Ghana

The Births and Deaths Registry is currently under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Environment. In Ghana, the Registration of Birth and Deaths Act 1965, ACT (301) (hereafter referred to as the “Act”) regulates the registration of births and deaths. Section 1 of the Act provides for the establishment of a Central Registry Office in Accra (the capital of Ghana) as well as local offices in the districts. The Act provides for the appointment of a Registrar of Births and Deaths and specifies their functions and powers. The Act also provides for the establishment and maintenance of a national births and deaths register, and sets out requirements for the registration of births and deaths. Section 4 of the Act allows for the creation of regional, district and local offices. Administratively, there are 10 regional offices (matching the 10 regions of Ghana), headed by 10 Regional Directors. BDR also has offices in most districts, and has about 391 registration centres. The central Births and Deaths Registry in Accra and all except one of the regional offices are computerised and the Government is in the process of computerising the remaining one.

Legal Requirement to Register all Births

Section 8 of the Registration of Birth and Deaths Act 1965 requires the birth of every child in Ghana to be registered. Section 11 of the Act requires the Registrar to issue a birth certificate immediately after the completion of the birth registration process. It is free to register a birth if the child is less than 12 months old. Births that are registered after the child is 12 months are deemed to be late registrations, and attract a fee of 10 Cedi (equivalent to \$5 USD)³ if the child is between one and five years. The fee is 20 Cedi (equivalent to \$10 USD) if the person is over five years. In practice, however, compliance with section 8 of the Act is constrained by a number of barriers. While the barriers to birth registration are not new⁴, an understanding of the underlying causes in a country-specific setting is important because any intervention will be of limited value if the diagnoses are wrong. Thus, it is vital to examine the root causes, not merely the symptoms. As a result, BDR with support from UNICEF initiated an **“Equity Bottleneck Analysis”** in relation to birth registration. One of the main purposes of the bottleneck analysis was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the birth registration system as it currently operates, identify the barriers and bottlenecks to birth registration, and based on the insights gained, make system improvement recommendations.

² For example, see Setel, P. W., Macfarlane, S. B., Szepter, S., Mikkelsen, L., Jha, P., Stout, S., & AbouZahr, C. (2007). A scandal of invisibility: making everyone count by counting everyone. *The Lancet*, 370(9598), 1569-1577.

³ 2cedis = 1USD - Exchange rate in March 2013

⁴ Unicef. (2005). *The ‘Rights’ start to life: a statistical analysis of birth registration.*

Objectives

The overarching goal of this bottleneck analysis is to use a consultative approach to identify barriers (bottlenecks) to birth registration and suggest a set of sustainable interventions to increase the birth registration rate to 90 percent by 2016. Within this context, the specific objectives are to:

- Assess the effectiveness of the four dimensions of the “Determinants of Birth Registration” (*enabling environment, demand-side, supply-side and quality of service*).
- Identify and understand demand-side and supply-side barriers and bottlenecks, and their impacts on birth registration.
- Gain a better understanding of the profiles of unregistered children and use the information to identify equitable, effective and efficient service delivery strategies and channels.
- Develop a framework (containing equity dimensions) in consultation with key stakeholders for continuous monitoring and reporting of progress based on agreed key performance indicators.



Frameworks and Methodology

Frameworks

The “Determinants of Birth Registration” (DBR) model (an analytical framework for assessing birth registration constraints) provided the framework for identifying and understanding the barriers associated with birth registration. The DBR model focuses on four dimensions of the birth registration service: *enabling environment, demand-side, supply-side and quality of service.*

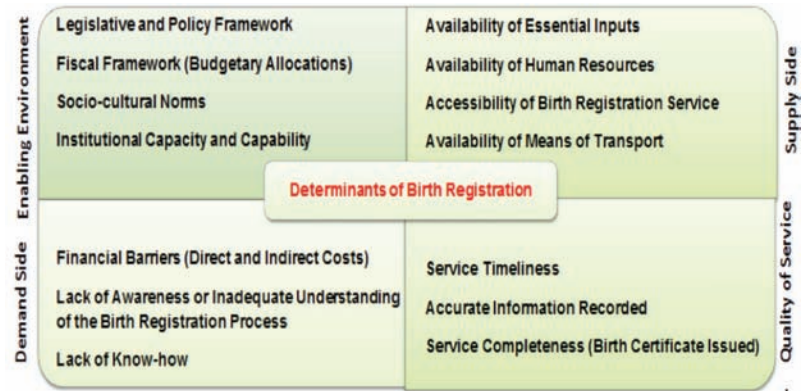


Figure 1: DBR Framework

Consultation Process

The DBR framework was selected after consultations with a number of organisations including:



Figure 2: CAPIF Framework

UNICEF, Plan Ghana, UNFPA, Ghana Health Service (GHS), Noguchi Memorial Institute (Department of Epidemiology), Ghana Statistical Service, and faith-based organisations. Although the DBR framework offers a logical structure for assessing various dimensions of an effective birth registration system, it does not take into account other important factors such as organisational culture and effective leadership. Without taking a closer look at the wider organisational capabilities, it is possible to misidentify the bottlenecks. For this reason, the Capability Assessment and Performance Improvement Framework (CAPIF) was included to augment the DBR framework.

The CAPIF framework examines the effectiveness, or otherwise, of seven dimensions of organisational capability, including *leadership, human resources, culture, business practices, accountability, inter-agency relationships (partnership and collaboration), and facilities and equipment.*

CAPIF was included for two important reasons. First, the BDR does not operate in a vacuum and exists for a purpose. For a public entity to deliver the desired outcomes, an effective enabling environment is necessary.

Methodology

This study combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data collection took place over a rolling period of 12 weeks, from 37 districts across the 10 regions of Ghana. In some of the districts, birth registration officers from BDR also came along to help register the children. Because of the inherent complexities in the research questions, qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used as they allowed for the examination of the factors enabling or impeding birth registration from multiple viewpoints. In addition, both research approaches made it possible to obtain “rich data” and enabled triangulation of the findings (through a crosschecking process), which would otherwise not have been possible.

Five districts were randomly selected from each of the 10 regions of Ghana. At the district level, four communities were selected randomly from each of the districts. In addition, a minimum of one hard-to-reach place was chosen in each of the districts. The reason for this was to obtain an in-depth understanding of birth registration challenges faced by parents and employees of the BDR. Data collection strategies included interviews, community group sessions and questionnaires. There were 61 community forum sessions, 24 group interviews with employees of Ghana Health Service, one-on-one interviews with 37 employees of BDR and eight volunteers, 117 one-on-one survey interviews with mothers, and one-on-one interviews with administrators of four orphanages.

Community Forum Sessions: In the qualitative phase, 61 community forum sessions were held in various communities across the country. As the communities are important stakeholders and users of birth registration services, it was vital to obtain their perspectives in relation to birth registration. The participants were asked questions designed to measure their understanding or awareness of birth registration, the issues they face in accessing birth registration services, and their views on how the service can be improved.

Employees of Births and Deaths Registry and Volunteers: In the randomly selected districts across the country, 37 employees of BDR and 8 volunteers were interviewed. A topic guide was used to ask research questions.

The topic guide included a number of open-ended questions designed to identify the barriers and bottlenecks to birth registration and other challenges employees face in delivering the birth registration service, and possible areas of improvements.

Employees of Ghana Health Services: In the randomly selected districts, 24 group interviews (2 to 4 participants in each) were held with employees of the GHS. GHS is one of the most important stakeholders in relation to birth registration given that most children are delivered in health centres. In addition, GHS also collects similar data to BDR and has an extensive network of health centres. In collecting the data, a topic guide was used to ask questions about availability and accessibility of the birth registration service, quality of service, and participants’ views on any other issues affecting the delivery of effective and quality birth registration.

Quantitative Interviews: Data for this part of the study was obtained using face-to-face administered questionnaires. One hundred and seventeen mothers were interviewed using a structured questionnaire designed to measure their understanding and awareness of birth registration, barriers they face when accessing the birth registration service, and the quality of service.

Number of Children Registered: During the course of this study, 304 children were registered across the country, as it is unethical not to register the children given the presence of registration officers.

Findings: Barriers to Birth Registration

Report Structure

This report is divided into five parts, including the introduction section. The methodology and frameworks are described in Part 2. Part 3 of the report contains a summary of key findings (barriers, bottlenecks, and equity matters). Part 4 provides a detailed discussion of key findings, including their implications for birth registration in Ghana. Part 5 provides conclusion and recommendations on what changes are required in order to improve birth registration coverage in Ghana.

Inadequate Financial Resources: Births and Deaths Registry is unable deliver equitable, accessible, quality, and timely birth registration services to all because of inadequate financial resources. Because of persistent funding shortfalls precipitated by inadequate financial resources, as a matter of necessity, BDR relies on “black revenues” to fund its operational costs. The “black revenues” are generated by increasing the prescribed fees for late birth registrations or by charging for birth registrations, which should be provided free of charge for children under one year old. The reliance on “black revenues” has a detrimental impact on registering children because it incentivises BDR, albeit unwittingly, to focus on adult or late registrations, rather than children (adult and late registrations attract fees and provide opportunities for revenue generation).



One of the registration centres



A chair at one of the registration centres

Employees of BDR, as well as other stakeholders including GHS reported that persistent and inadequate funding places BDR’s leadership team in a constant state of financial fire-fighting, and threatens to reverse the progress made in improving birth registration in Ghana. If financial resources are inadequate, it is impossible to run a functional birth registration system. Without adequate financial resources, it is also not feasible to renovate dilapidated offices or replace broken office furniture, as evident in the above images.

Some employees highlighted that despite generating a significant amount of revenue for the government, BDR is one of the least funded government departments. Others said that they could do more (register more children) if the government was prepared to adequately fund the services. Employees noted that inadequate funding is seemingly the reason for the current practice of charging for a free birth registration service and the inflation of the prescribed fees. It also appears to be one of the root causes of low staff morale. Another by-product of lack of adequate funding is stress. Some employees reported feeling stressed out because of their working conditions combined with

the constant struggle to find the financial resources needed to keep the services going. As a result, employees share the view that the government is not committed to birth registration and does not value their work.

Birth Registration Service is Inaccessible: Inaccessibility (caused by geographical barriers) of birth registration services is one of the major reasons cited for lack of birth registration. Not surprisingly, the impact of geographical barriers is largely felt in rural and remote communities. A significant proportion (66 percent) of parents said that they did not register their children because the birth registration service was inaccessible (not close to where they live). In some cases, the road is inaccessible during the rainy season, and potholes make the journey long and arduous. For communities living on islands (for example, Afram Plains), access to birth registration is more difficult and expensive because of the unavailability of affordable commercial water and land transport services. Birth registration officials also confirmed that the service is not easily accessible to some communities, and they are unable to visit some of these communities because of the lack of means of transport.

In some of the sparsely populated and remote areas, the chiefs and assembly-people spoke enthusiastically about the need to register their children and the difficulties they face in accessing the birth registration service. Some participants said they were aware of the importance of birth registration, but officials from BDR had not visited their communities or their clinics for over 12 months⁴.



Rural community



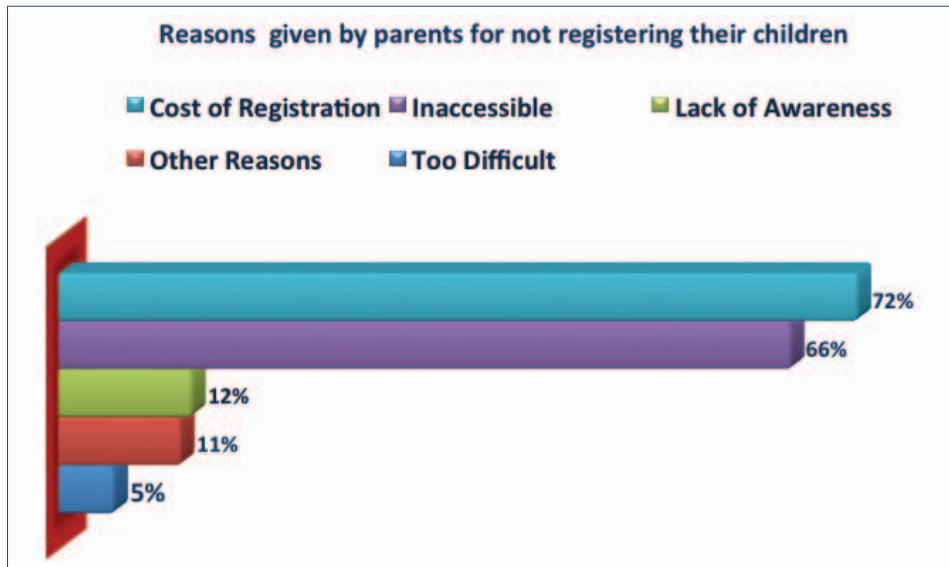
Mothers on Okada



Parents talked about service uncertainty – they travelled long distances to their nearest office to register their children, but were unable to do so because their local birth registration centre did not have birth registration forms or certificates. For example, one woman narrated her experience of the challenges she faced when she wanted to register her daughter. She said that she spent 8 Cedi on transportation (using Okada);⁵ only to be informed by the officials when she arrived that they did not have birth certificates.

⁴ For nearly three years in some cases

⁵ Commercial use of motorcycles for public transport



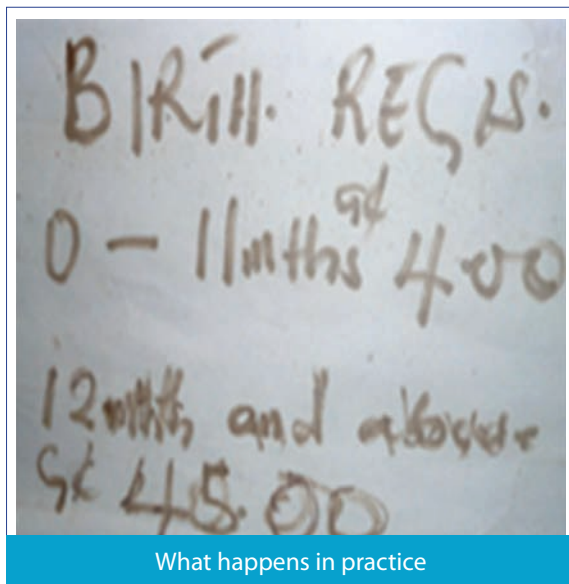
Some of the health workers confirmed that the birth registration service is not readily accessible, and they do not know where the BDR offices are located. They mentioned that mothers often inquire about the birth registration service, but they were unable to provide any meaningful assistance. The impact of geographical barriers is exacerbated by the legislative requirement of section 8(1) of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act (1965), which stipulates that every child must be registered in the district where the child was born. This legislative requirement becomes a problem if the nearest birth registration centre is not located in the district where the birth took place.

Cost of Birth Registration: A significant proportion (72 percent) of parents who did not register their children identified cost of birth registration as one of the major barriers.

Although the law states that birth registration is free for all children under the age of one year, this is not applied consistently in practice. The practice of charging for birth registration is widespread. The fees vary from place to place, but usually fall within the range of 2 to 7 Cedi. Similarly, the practice of inflating the fees for registering children between the ages of one and five years is also widespread.



What the law says



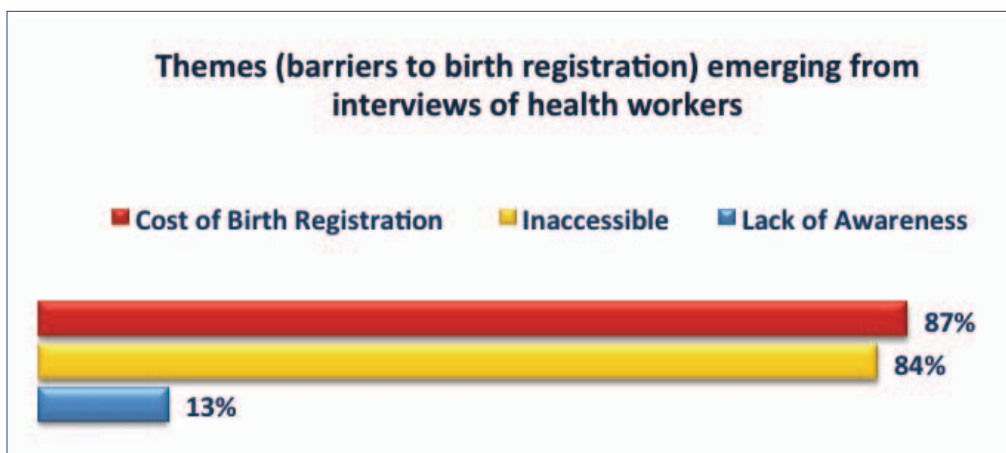
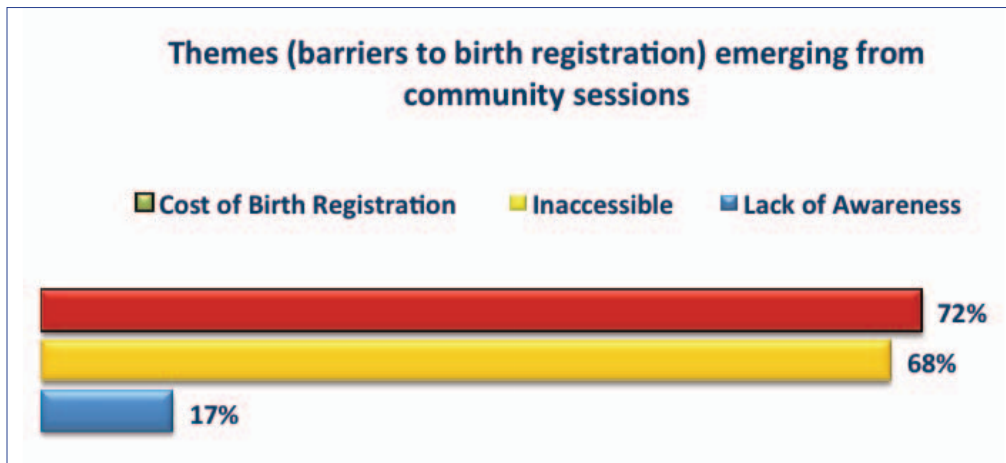
What happens in practice

Although the prescribed fee is 10 Cedi, officials are charging 15 to 60 Cedi. For completeness, it is important to note that the inflation of the prescribed fees also extends to the registration of persons over the age of 5 years.

The prescribed fee for registering a person who is over the age of five years is 20 Cedi. However, in

practice the fees vary from 40 Cedi to over 150 Cedi, depending on a number of variables such as the applicant’s circumstances, location of service, and inclusion of affidavit fees. While the practice of charging for birth registration for children under one year old is widespread, it is significantly so in rural communities. BDR staff and volunteers posit that it would not be possible to deliver birth registration services to most rural communities without the “unofficial fees”, given the significant shortfall in government funding.

Some volunteers are of the view that the cost of birth registration remains a deterrent factor for many parents, especially in the rural areas where the volunteers operate. Some parents reported that birth



registration is unaffordable because of the transportation cost from their villages to their nearest BDR office and the exorbitant fees being charged. In most of the communities, the financial difficulties faced by parents trying to register children who are over one year old were evident. While the lack of awareness is frequently cited as one of the major barriers to birth registration, one of the consistent themes from the communities, parents, health workers and employees of BDR is that inaccessibility and the cost of birth registration are some of the main reasons for non-registration.

Many parents said that they had wanted to register their children, but were turned down by officials of BDR (officials in this context include volunteers) because they were not able to pay the amount of money (unofficial fee) requested by the officials. Some parents ask why the government is charging for birth registration if it is the right of the child to be registered.

Shortages of Essential Materials: Over 90 percent of employees reported that perennial shortages of essential inputs such as forms and birth certificates remain one of the major barriers to effective and efficient delivery of the birth registration service. Employees of BDR reported that sometimes the forms are available, but the certificates are not. Other times, the certificates are available, but there are no forms to complete the registration process.

They added that shortages of essential materials affect productivity and it is demoralising to disappoint parents who have come to register their children. As essential materials are an integral part of the service delivery process, irregular availability of birth registration forms and certificates hinders service delivery and has quality of service implications. For example, some parents reported making up to three trips before finally collecting the birth certificates. In some cases, parents waited for over six months before receiving the certificates. Other parents said they registered their children, but have not received the certificates because of shortages.

Dissemination of Misleading Information: The dissemination of false information about birth certificates represents a low threshold barrier. The original birth certificate issued to children under one year old is free, but computerised birth certificates (certified copies) attract a fee. Motivated by the desire to charge inflated fees, some employees of BDR and volunteers are persuading parents to obtain what they call the “national birth certificate”⁶, indicating that the original non-computerised certificates are worthless. Although this information is untrue, some parents form the view that registering their children is pointless, as the concomitant birth certificates are putatively useless.

Inadequate Knowledge and Understanding: Inadequate knowledge and understanding of the birth registration process prevents some parents from registering their children at birth. While most parents are aware of the importance of birth registration, gaps in knowledge and understanding of the birth registration process lead some to conclude that they would have to register their children again if the birth certificates are misplaced or damaged. In areas prone to bushfires, some parents think it makes no sense for them to register their children at birth given the high probability of misplacing or damaging the birth certificates. They did not understand that they could obtain certified copies of birth certificates, as all birth records are kept in a centralised database.

⁶ Computerised birth certificates



Findings: Performance Bottlenecks

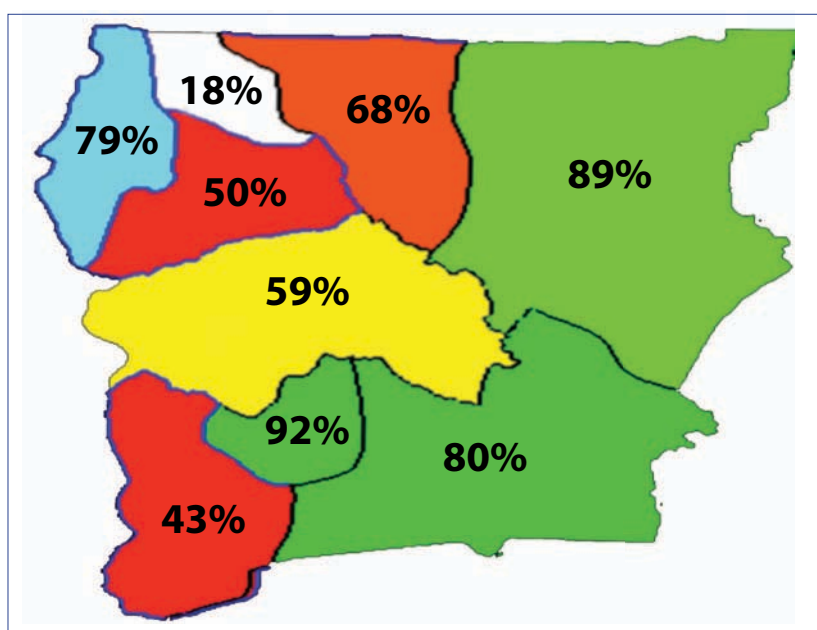
Leadership Failure: Almost all employees interviewed believed that leadership failure and mismanagement are major contributory factors to BDR's performance issues and represent a major bottleneck. Indicators of poor organisational leadership and ineffective management practices were present at virtually all levels of BDR. Failure of leadership and poor management practices are manifested in the following ways:

- Lack of clear vision and focus
- Lack of integrity and presence of unethical practices
- Diffusion of accountability and responsibility
- Absence of transparency in decision-making
- Ineffective oversight and weak accountability structure
- Rationalisation of failures and poor performance culture

Some employees commented that some members of the leadership team have no credibility because they fail to set good examples. As a result, it is difficult for the leadership team to address some of the challenges (for example, unethical practices, poor performance culture, and poor customer service) facing BDR.

Lack of Effective Oversight: The lack of effective monitoring and oversight mechanisms represents a bottleneck because of misuse of assets, productivity losses, and misdirection of resources. In a number of cases, the regional directors did not know the location of their offices or whereabouts of their employees. Some district managers are not always at their assigned district stations, and others use volunteers to run their offices.

In one extreme case, the district manager had not been to the office for many months, and claims he was working from home. As a result, the entire district had no effective birth registration centre and



most of the children in the districts were unregistered (see the white region on the map)



One of BDR's offices



View of entrance to one of BDR's offices



Evidence of poor oversight



One of the Birth Registration Centres

In another case, BDR is sharing an office space with a major political party (without the approval of the leadership team). This raises the question of political neutrality and may prevent ardent supporters of opposition parties from going to the office to register their children.

Inadequate Staff Levels: Almost all employees interviewed reported that inadequate staffing limits their ability to register more children within their catchment areas. As a result, they believe that inadequate staffing at all levels of BDR is a major barrier to birth registration. However, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of understaffing because of the presence of operational inefficiencies, ineffective leadership and inadequate resourcing.

Weak ICT Infrastructure: The BDR's ICT operating environment is suboptimal, which creates a bottleneck in capturing and processing birth registration data and managing birth records. There is a widespread view that the current ICT infrastructure is not fit for purpose, and represents a major bottleneck in the delivery of birth registration services. There is a current backlog (tens of thousands dating back to 2010) of unprocessed birth registration applications. Some employees reported that the backlog is partially attributable to frequent computer breakdowns and poor ICT management practices. Ineffective and poor ICT management practices include lack of an ICT governance framework, inadequate policies and procedures, poor security practices, and a non-standardised operating environment. Other contributory factors identified include an ad hoc and non-uniform software licensing regime. Due to inadequate financial resources, BDR is unable to employ ICT managers. Some of the ICT managers are volunteers, which raises a number of questions about sustainability.

Lack of Service Delivery Plan: The absence of service delivery planning represents a significant bottleneck, as the delivery of the birth registration service is asymmetrically distributed. This is evident in the high proportion of birth registration outreach visits to easily accessible areas in comparison to the dearth of outreach visits to remote or hard-to-reach areas. Birth Registration

Officers and volunteers go to Child Welfare Clinics (known as weighing centres) to register babies. At the weighing centres visited during this study, the average monthly number of children registered was seven, whilst the average number of mothers in attendance was 62. The reason for the difference in these numbers is that the same cohort of mothers attends the monthly weighing sessions (apart from the inclusion of about five new mothers per month). Employees and volunteers explained that the propensity to concentrate on easily accessible areas is attributable to the lack of means of transport.

Employee Disengagement: Staff disengagement and associated productivity losses represent a bottleneck in the delivery of the birth registration service. Employees and volunteers commented about the lack of visibility of the leadership team and their inability to “walk the talk”. Over 80 percent of employees interviewed said that they are disengaged and unmotivated. Employees reported that they are demotivated, disillusioned, and disengaged for the following reasons:

- Poor working conditions (for example, lack of office space and office furniture)
- Lack of integrity
- Poor communication practices
- Not being valued, appreciated or recognised
- Not being listened to or consulted before decisions are made (command and control management style)
- Lack of trust and confidence in the management and leadership team
- Lack of training and development opportunities
- Lack of materials or resources required to perform their duties

The Regional Directors said that they do not receive sufficient support from upper management. Some Regional Directors reported that decisions are usually made at the head office without their input, and their suggestions for performance improvements are generally discarded. As a result, the regional directors feel disrespected, devalued and demotivated.

Limited Partnership and Collaboration: Over 70 percent of women deliver their babies in health centres, but there is no formalised framework for partnership and collaboration between BDR and GHS. Although the ad hoc and informal collaboration between GHS and BDR has been instrumental in improving birth registration coverage, the levels of collaboration vary across the regions. Given GHS’s extensive network of health service delivery centres, the absence of a formal partnership and collaboration between GHS and BDR limits potential opportunities to register more children at the health centres or weighing centres.

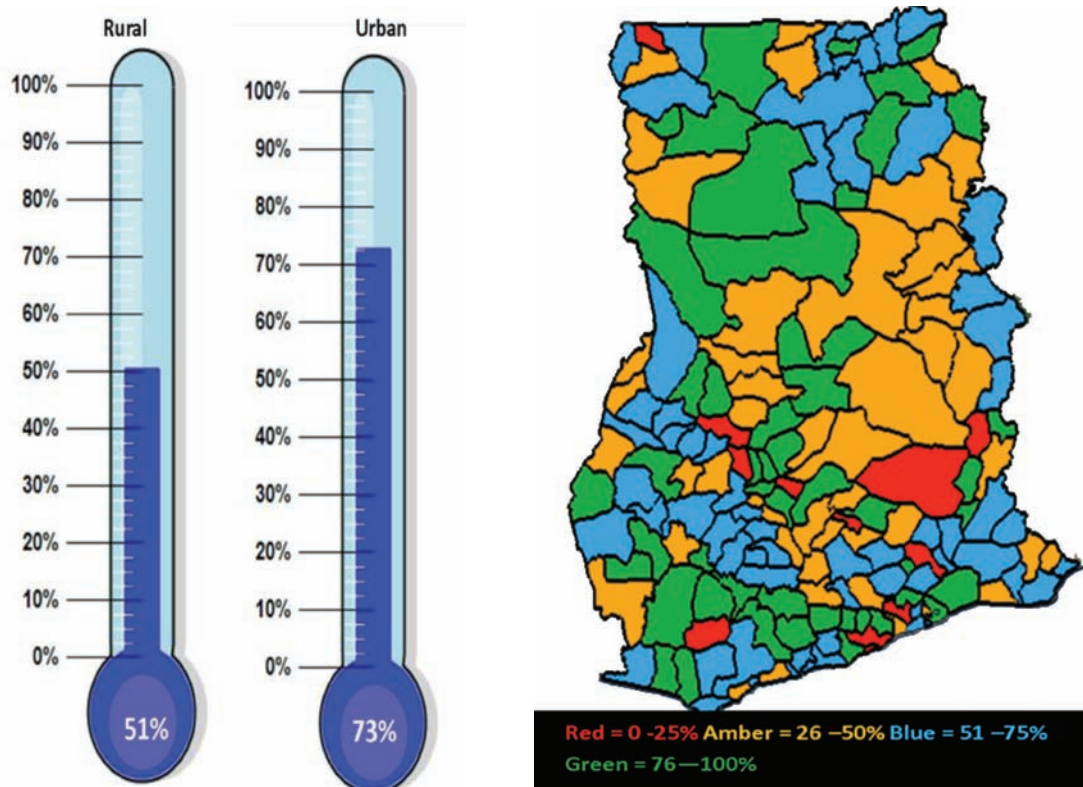
Unsystematic Use of Volunteers: BDR uses volunteers extensively to deliver birth registration services across the country. It must be acknowledged that the coverage rate for birth registration in Ghana would not be anywhere near the current rate without the hard work and efforts of these unpaid volunteers. There is no doubt that the volunteers are now an integral part of service delivery in relation to birth registration. Most of the volunteers work within their own communities and act as birth registration couriers. They collect the birth registration information from parents, and take the information to their district office. Once the children are registered and the birth certificates issued by the district office, the volunteers collect the certificates and distribute them to the parents of the registered children. However, the extensive use of volunteers for birth registration services is unsupported by a robust oversight structure. As a result, some volunteers and employees of BDR are charging for birth registrations, which the law states should be free of charge. Moreover, the unofficial fee-charging practice is tainted with commercial exuberance, as some volunteers are charging up to 40 cedi (\$USD 20) for birth registration. This unregulated fee-charging practice lacks transparency, integrity and accountability, and impacts on BDR’s reputation. In addition, it stops some parents from registering their children.

⁶ Computerised birth certificates



Findings: Equity Matters

Ghana has made significant progress in improving the birth registration system in general, and in increasing the coverage rate from a very low base of 17 percent to an average rate of 65 percent in recent years. However, the results of the study show that the increase in coverage rate is unevenly distributed. The pattern of birth registration coverage shows disparities between regions and within



regions, between urban and rural areas, and between different socio-economic groups. The average coverage rate for rural areas is 51 percent, while the average rate for urban areas is 73 percent.

Other studies have also documented such disparities. For example, the 2008 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reported that “households in the highest wealth quintile (88 percent) are much more likely to have a birth registered than those in the lowest wealth quintile (60 percent)”. Likewise, the Ghana 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) found that 47 percent of children in the lowest quintile were registered compared with 82 percent in the highest quintile. This pattern of disparities is seemingly persistent, which may indicate the presence of entrenched structural barriers. The disparities are largely a manifestation of asymmetric access to birth registration, rather than lack of awareness.

As mentioned in the previous sections, the practice of charging for birth registration for children under 12 months is prevalent in rural areas. In addition, birth registration services are more readily available and easily accessible to urban dwellers, which creates geographically based disparities. The inaccessibility of birth registration services combined with the “unofficial” birth registration fees and high indirect costs result in unequal access to birth registration services. Therefore, the disparities are natural consequences of unequal access to birth registration services, rather than a lack of demand for

birth registration. Even when the children have been registered, the markers of inequalities remain present. This indicates that equitable access to birth registration is only possible with the complete removal of avoidable and unjustifiable barriers to birth registration services.

The Missing Certificates: Some of the children registered did not have birth certificates because none were issued at the time of registration. BDR employees explained that in some cases certificates were not issued at the time of registration because of shortages. Previous MICS and DHS studies have also identified the problem of registrations without certificates⁸. Again, these findings further indicate that children in rural areas are more likely to be registered without the concomitant birth certificates than children living in urban areas.

Orphans and Vulnerable Children: There is a general belief that orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) are less likely to be registered. In the orphanages visited during the study, 90 percent of the children were not registered. This is a matter of great concern as the children are already in a vulnerable situation. Additional research is required to establish the magnitude of the issues of non-registration in relation to OVC children.

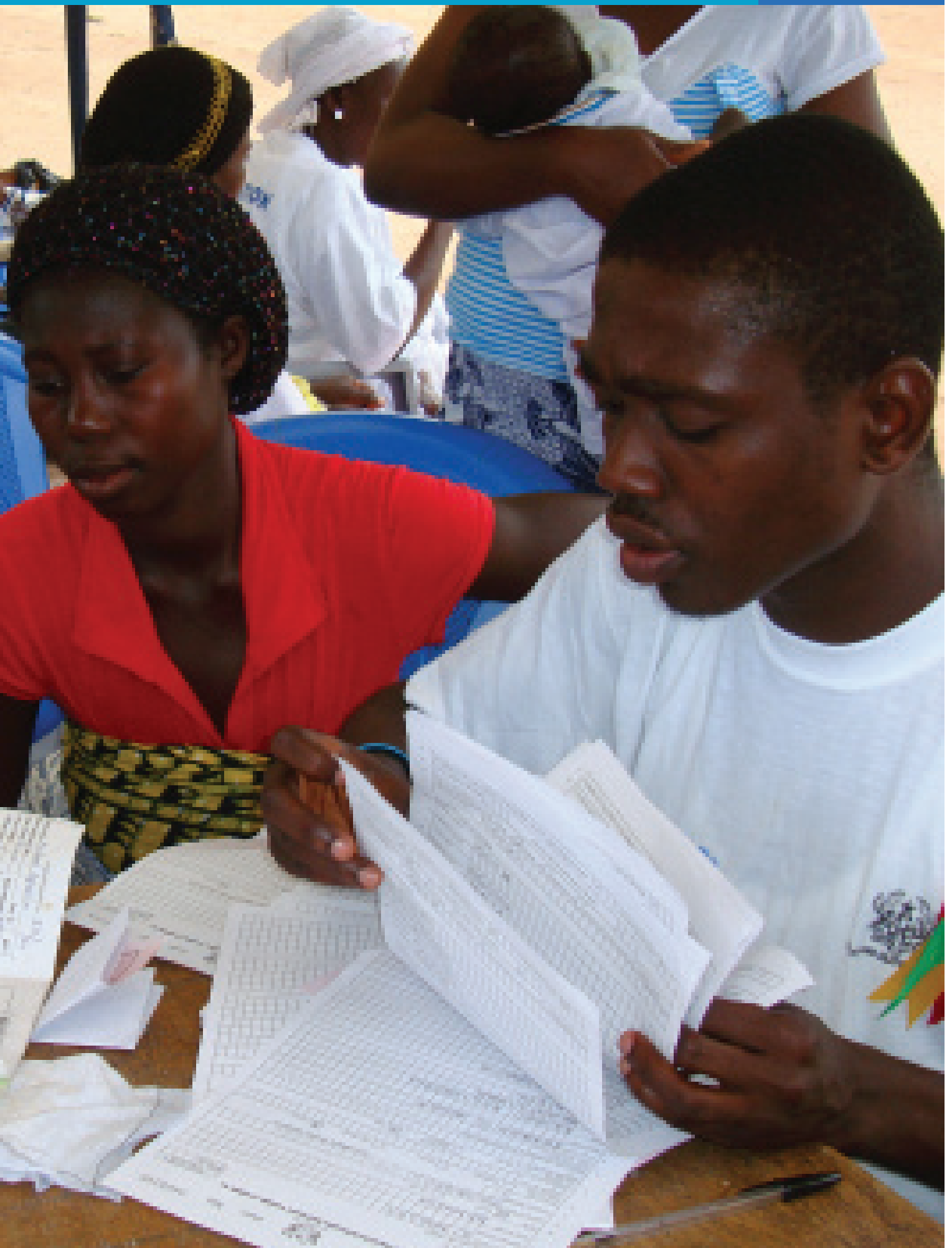
Common Themes: One of the suggestions was to identify common threads or characteristics present in areas with low rate of birth registration. Further analysis was undertaken during the annual workshop in December 2013. The result of the analysis identified the following factors:

- Poor leadership
- Inadequate supervision of staff and volunteers
- Lack of courage to address non-performance issues
- Insufficient staffing levels
- Absence of birth registration offices or services
- Lack of transport for outreach registration

Conversely, the areas that are doing well have good leadership, adequate managerial oversight, and in some cases means of transportation.

⁸ For example, see Ghana MICS (2011)

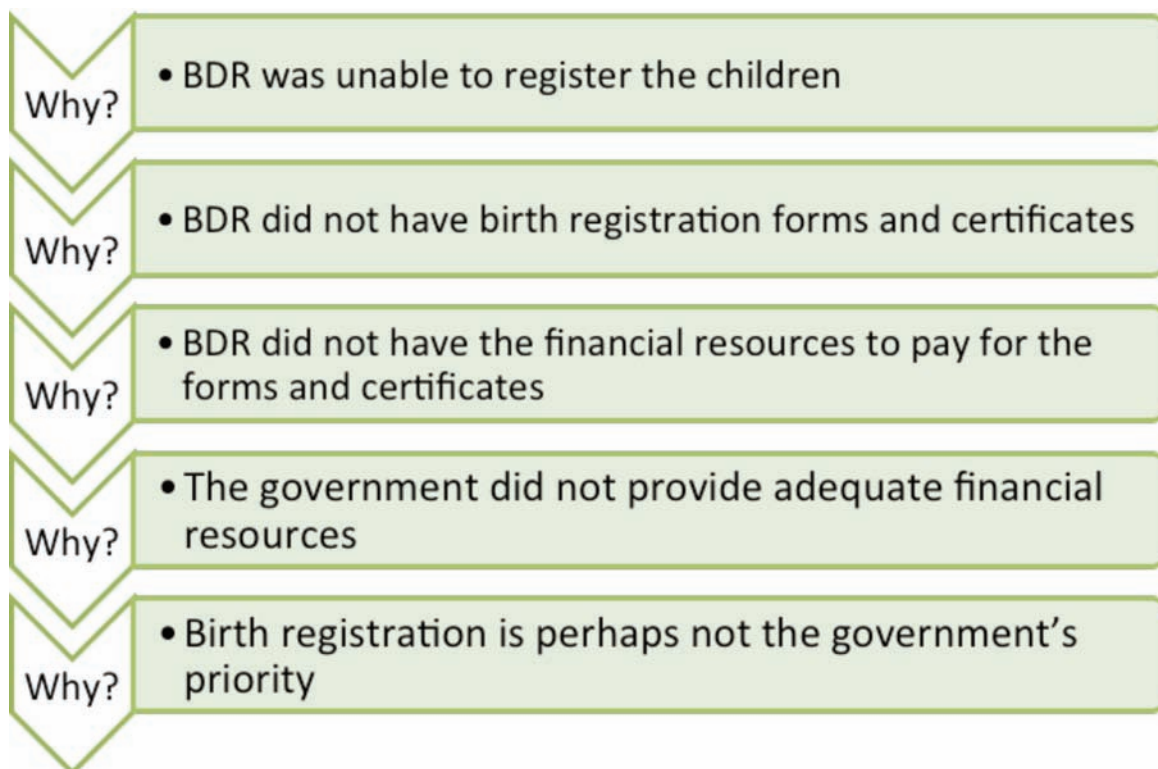




Discussion: Findings and Implications

Inadequate Financial Resources: In the Determinants of Birth Registration framework, adequate financial resources are indispensable constituents of the “enabling environment”. The systemic under-resourcing injects a degree of operational uncertainty because BDR is unsure from where its next operating funds will come. The operational uncertainty is exacerbated by the fact that BDR does not usually receive its allocated funds on time. On a number of occasions, UNICEF has had to come to the rescue by providing financial assistance. The evidence shows that most barriers and bottlenecks identified in this report are attributable to inadequate financial resources. This simple root cause analysis shows the link between shortages of essential materials and inadequate financial resources:

5-Whys Analysis



Inadequate funding of birth registration services carries serious implications. One of the major implications of underfunding of birth registration services is the systemic exclusion (albeit unwittingly) of over 300,000 children born every year from realising their rights to birth registration.

In addition, underfunding has negative impacts on the availability and quality of birth registration services, as evidenced by the frequent shortages of essential materials, and lack of means of transport. In one extreme case, the birth registration centre (office) had no electricity for over 14 months because they could not afford to pay the bill. In this particular case, the office space is unwelcoming and the sweltering heat makes it unbearable for anybody, let alone mothers with newborn babies. Most of the offices visited were ill-equipped, and have no toilet facilities.

All actions and inactions have consequences. Inadequate funding of the birth registration system is ultimately more costly for the government because it creates an efficiency drag, reduces productivity,

and undermines confidence in the system. Productivity loss caused by lack of essential materials is irretrievable even when the materials become available. This is not consistent with the Government's drive for greater productivity and accountability. The reliance on "black revenue" is unsustainable, and devoid of transparency, integrity, and accountability. For an organisation that deals with personal information and identity-related matters, integrity, trust and privacy must be indispensable elements of the service delivery. Therefore, any unethical practices undermine credibility, trust, and confidence in the system.

Leadership Failure: No organisation can succeed or thrive without positive and effective leadership and good management practices. Even in an environment of abundant resources, ineffective leadership and poor management practices will inevitably lead to poor performance and wasted resources. Fundamentally, the BDR leadership team is ultimately responsible for, amongst other things: (1) providing clarity of vision, purpose and direction; (2) shaping organisational culture and values (for example, integrity, trust, work ethic and respect); (3) ensuring efficient and effective use of resources (planning, implementation, control and performance monitoring); and (4) providing effective management oversight. While not understating the corrosive impact of under-resourcing on the operational capability of BDR, the absence of capable and effective leadership and poor management practices have not helped.

Although the new Registrar General has taken a number of positive leadership steps to improve leadership standards, ineffective leadership will remain a major bottleneck without significant improvement in the collective leadership skills and competencies of the leadership team.

Birth Registration Service is Inaccessible: One of the most encouraging aspects of birth registration in Ghana is the willingness of parents to register their children as evidenced by the following images:



Mothers waiting to register their children

While most parents are willing to register their children, their circumstances (where they live or financial impediments) often circumscribe their ability to do so. In addition, the high rate of service failures caused by shortages of certificates does nothing to instil confidence in the birth registration system. Obviously, parents are unlikely to travel long distances to register their children if the service is unreliable. Therefore, it is understandable that some people are beginning to question the wisdom of promoting birth registration if the service is inaccessible.

One way of removing the geographical barriers is to take the birth registration service to the people, which could include the following strategies:

- Developing and building strategic partnerships with GHS and other key stakeholders
- Providing transport to enable registration officers to travel to communities and register children (mobile registration)
- Better use of technologies to improve communication, collaboration and service delivery

BDR recognises that accessibility is an impediment to the birth registration service and has introduced a number of initiatives to improve access. Two of these initiatives are Community Population Registers (CPR), and working with Community Volunteers. However, the results of these initiatives are mixed. Interestingly, virtually all volunteers reported that the lack of means of transport is their biggest barrier. Some of the volunteers explained the hardship they face having to use their own money for transportation. This means that the use of volunteers has not solved the accessibility problem.

Although the law states that the “birth of every child is to be registered in the district where the birth occurred”, it does not say that one district cannot collect the relevant information and forward it to the relevant district for processing. Any procedural or legislative requirement that impairs the effective and efficient provision of birth registration service discourages parents from registering their children. From the customers’ point of view, BDR is one entity. Therefore, adopting a one-BDR approach would lower the accessibility hurdle for parents caught by the exclusionary rules.

Cost of Birth Registration: Once a child is over one year old, the fee and other procedural requirements such as the requirement for an affidavit have a deterrent effect. Hence, it is important to register all children before their first birthday. In practice, a number of factors may hinder the uptake of the birth registration service. Two such factors are the practice of charging for what should be a free service and geographical barriers. Studies have shown that cost can be a significant barrier to birth registration⁹.

This is one of the reasons for the removal of the birth registration fee in the first 12 months of a child’s life. However, free birth registration is indeed hollow if parents are unable to access the service. The evidence shows that it is not free for all children, especially those living in remote or rural areas. The inflation of the late registration fees equally impedes birth registration. In most cases, inaccessibility of the birth registration service is the root cause of late registration. Some parents who want to register their over one-year-old children face significant financial hurdles. For example, one woman wanted to register her child (the child was two years old at the time), but was unable to do because the officer demanded 30 Cedi and the woman could only afford 25 Cedi (the official fee is 10 Cedi). If parents are unable to pay an unofficial fee of 2 to 7 Cedi when the child is under one year old, how does one expect them to pay the prescribed fee of 10 Cedi for late registration? The fee-charging practice places a disproportionate financial burden on low-income households and rural dwellers. In addition, it is self-defeating as the government is unlikely to collect timely statistical information required for optimal socioeconomic planning and development.

Shortage of Essential Inputs: The evidence shows that shortages of essential materials stifle efficiency and effectiveness because it:

- Causes service disruptions
- Impacts on productivity
- Causes customer dissatisfaction
- Lowers staff morale

In the current operating environment, birth registration forms and birth certificates remain indispensable materials for registering births, and frequent shortages have a detrimental impact on the quality of service. In a number of offices visited, it was noted that employees are using photocopied forms for birth registration because of the lack of original birth registration forms. However, the scanning machine often rejects a number of the photocopied forms, necessitating rework (the transfer of data to new forms). This causes delays (bottleneck) in the birth registration process and affects productivity.

⁹ UNICEF. (2005). The ‘Rights’ start to life: a statistical analysis of birth registration. UNICEF.

Parents are dissatisfied because service failures necessitate more than one visit before they can register their children. Obviously, such service failure is costly given the time and expense involved. Some employees shared their negative experiences of being verbally abused by unhappy parents. They said that frustrated parents often blame them for the lack of birth certificates and forms, as the parents cannot understand how a Government department cannot afford to print forms or birth certificates.

In addition, some volunteers reported that they have stopped registering children because it is pointless collecting birth registration information from the parents when BDR is not able to issue birth certificates. They talked about the intense pressure from some of the parents who have been waiting for their children's birth certificates for many months.

Weak ICT Infrastructure: Effective and efficient use of ICT can drive operational efficiencies, enhance communication and collaboration, support responsive service delivery, and improve performance monitoring. ICT plays a vital role in supporting the functions and business processes of BDR – enabling the capturing, processing, and verification of birth registration forms. However, the current ICT infrastructure needs to be strengthened and the operating environment needs improvement. In one of the data processing centres, employees were unable to capture and process birth registration forms because the ICT manager was not available to activate the system. This type of restrictive operating environment makes it difficult for employees to do their job, and injects operational inefficiencies. In addition, reliance on one person is incompatible with sound ICT management practices and raises obvious business continuity issues.

BDR faces considerable challenges with the current ICT infrastructure and operating model. Currently, BDR has 10 data processing centres and none of these centres have a robust ICT infrastructure or an optimal ICT capability to operate efficiently and effectively. In addition, the operating model requires 10 ICT managers and 10 assistants to run the 10 processing centres. Given the gap in ICT capability and the associated costs of running 10 processing centres, a "Shared Service Model" (SSM) would provide better value for money. A shared service model refers to the consolidation of common transactional activities with the aim of improving effectiveness and efficiency.

If properly implemented, an SSM should drive costs down, improve resource utilisation, and enhance the robustness of the ICT infrastructure. For example, it is better to have two processing centres that are fit for purpose, well equipped, well secured, well managed and well operated than 10 ineffective and inefficient centres. The reason for recommending two centres is to create a redundancy in case of a natural disaster or other catastrophic events.

Limited Partnership and Collaboration: Given that most mothers deliver their babies at health facilities, and given the similarities in the information collected, a systematic collaborative approach would enable BDR to tap into GHS's extensive network and staff capabilities. In addition, there is also potential for a shared transport infrastructure. A One-Ghana-Government (OGG) approach to service delivery would improve operational efficiencies and eliminate duplication of resources. In addition, a partnership agreement would enable BDR to increase its visibility using GHS's extensive network of health centres.

Lack of Service Delivery Plan: A good service delivery plan is necessary to ensure effective and efficient utilisation of resources and the delivery of equitable service. By focusing management attention on key priorities, an effective service delivery plan should inject operational discipline, as well as provide a monitoring and reporting mechanism. The monitoring and reporting dimensions of the service delivery plan must contain early warning signs of deviation from the desired path, which will enable the management to take corrective measures. For these reasons, it is essential to develop an equitable service delivery plan (ESDP).

Inadequate Staff Levels: Most employees hold a firm view that inadequate human resources is a major barrier to birth registration because of the size and population of the country. However, the

combined presence of low productivity rates, operational inefficiencies, shortages of materials, and ineffective leadership makes it difficult to determine whether BDR is understaffed. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that some employees lack the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to do the job effectively. In all the cases examined, the results showed that one officer completes an average of two to five birth registrations daily. This is not value for money, and shows that there is considerable scope to improve performance and productivity.



Perhaps the putative need for more human resources is the manifestation of inadequate financial resources, reactive human resource practices, inadequate staff training and development, poor workforce planning, unsystematic use of volunteers, and inadequate oversight. With the provision of means of transport, adequate financial resourcing, better partnership and collaboration with GHS, and effective leadership, BDR should be able to reach more communities and register more children.

Unsystematic Use of Volunteers: While volunteers may have a role to play in assisting BDR to register children, the current volunteer schemes are evidently problematic. Volunteers are supposed to be supplementary resources, but have now ended up (in some places) as stand-ins for some paid employees. This obviously limits the extensional capabilities and benefits of using volunteers. For example, if the district manager is in the office, the volunteers will be available to undertake outreach work. In a number of the communities visited, it emerged that the volunteers were no longer active. Consequentially, most of the children in those areas were not registered. There is no effective supervision and monitoring mechanism to identify what the volunteers are doing. There is no support structure for volunteers to escalate issues that are beyond their competency levels. Inadequate training and the absence of a functional support process means that mothers are sometimes turned away when they should not be. While most of the volunteers are motivated by altruism, a small but significant proportion of them are driven by money. Some volunteers reported that they became volunteers to cushion the blow of unemployment. Some volunteers explained

that they charge for birth registration services, use the revenues to cover their transportation costs, and retain the balance.

Enabling Equity, Removing Barriers: For BDR to deliver equitable access to birth registration services, the enabling environment, including credible government commitment, fit for purpose legislation and policies, and adequate financial resources must be present. The availability of free birth registration alone does not guarantee equitable access.

The 2011 Ghana MICS report noted that “while birth registration is fully subsidised for children below 12 months, less than half (45%) of children in this age-group are registered, meaning that some parents are still not taking advantage of free registration”. However, parents cannot take advantage of free registration if the birth registration service is out of reach. The absence of equity benefits the already better-off segment of the population, and further marginalises the already marginalised segment of the population. If the current situation remains, over one million children born between 2013 and 2016 will not be registered. However, two of the most promising ways of addressing disparities in birth registration are the removal of registration fees and improving accessibility. The evidence suggests that improvement in service delivery capacity (SDC) enhances the level of service (LOS), resulting in more children being registered.

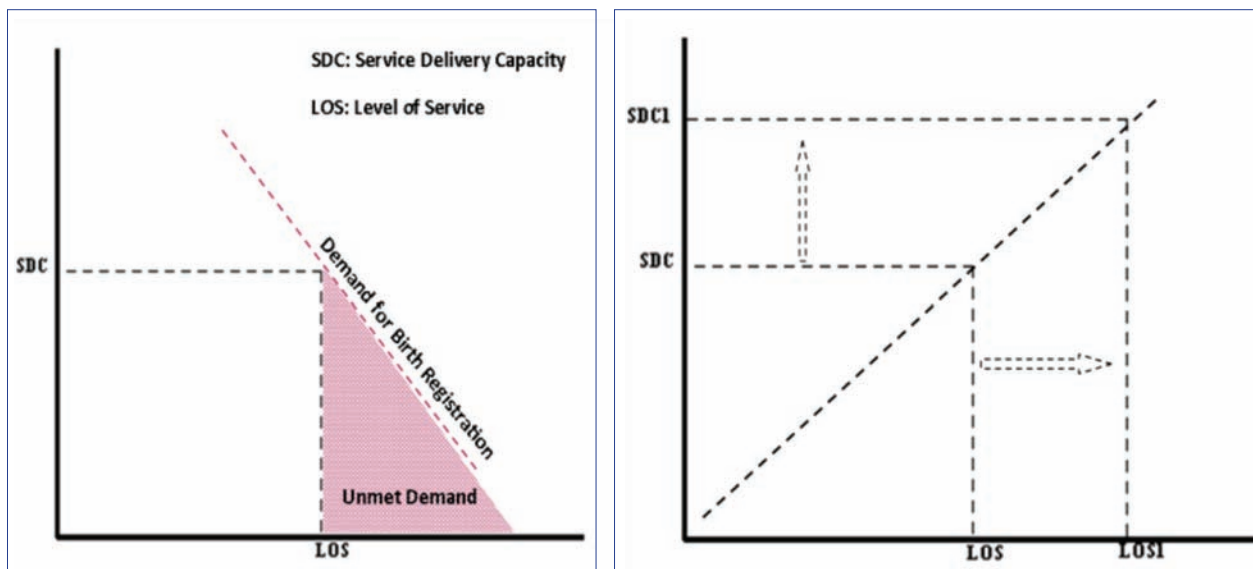


Figure 3: SDC and LOS

For example, the Northern region received a vehicle from UNICEF, which improved its capacity to reach more communities and register more children. The improved coverage (81 percent) in the Northern region shows that equitable access reduces disparities.

Conclusion

Most of the barriers and bottlenecks identified in this report are interrelated. The root cause of shortages of essential inputs is lack of funding. Poor performance culture is related to weak and ineffective leadership and poor management practices

A functioning and stable enabling environment is fundamentally important to the administration of the birth registration service; it is the glue that holds the demand, supply and quality dimensions of the “Determinants of Birth Registration” framework together. No organisation can thrive in an environment of persistent and systemic under-resourcing. In order to address the financial constraints, it is crucial that Government demonstrates its commitment to birth registration by establishing a sustainable funding model. In addition, the Government needs to inject additional financial resources to address some of the problems caused by historical under-resourcing. One funding model idea that has been discussed is for BDR to retain a portion of the revenue generated from late registration for funding its operational activities. Whatever model is chosen, it needs to be sustainable and predictable. A predictable and sustainable funding model would ease the financial pressure and help redirect focus from registering adults to registering children. It would also remove the cover for questionable practices such as charging for a free service and inflating the prescribed fees. Given the increased demand for birth registration services, positive changes in the funding model would provide a more stable operating environment, and enable BDR to effectively plan and deliver equitable birth registration services. The reliance on “black revenues” is incompatible with integrity and transparency. BDR is entrusted with sensitive personal and identity-related information. Integrity, trust, accountability, privacy and transparency are fundamental to BDR’s entire operation and service delivery.

Even in a functioning enabling environment, progress will stall without effective leadership and good management practices. The quality of leadership is of fundamental importance because leadership affects virtually every aspect of the organisation, including defining the organisation’s vision and setting of strategic direction. Therefore, an effective and positive leadership is necessary to drive changes, and improve performance and productivity.

As a number of senior managers are about to retire, BDR should urgently put measures in place to ensure that leaders are not appointed solely on seniority or tenure, but also on merit. A useful starting point is to develop a leadership framework to identify the skills, knowledge and competencies needed to transform the BDR. It is important to note that leadership can be present at all levels of the organisation. The leadership team must have the right mix of skills, knowledge, and competencies required to make the necessary changes with confidence. A skills gap analysis will help to identify the skills and knowledge gaps, and should guide the up-skilling of the leadership team.

The systemic weaknesses inherent in the ICT infrastructure hinder the delivery of efficient and effective birth registration services. As BDR collects identity-related information and manages a national database, a robust ICT infrastructure and good ICT management practices and processes are essential. The operational effectiveness of the information system will be suboptimal in the absence of an effective and robust ICT infrastructure and sound management practices.

Given the inherent disparities in birth registration services, there is a need to develop an ESDP, which will help BDR to:

- Reset priorities by focusing on registering children at birth
- Identify areas of disparities and take corrective actions
- Identify where additional resources are needed
- Provide a means of measuring and monitoring equity progress

The district plan will feed into the regional plan, and the regional plan will feed into the national plan. The synergistic value derived from joint capacities and collaborative capabilities should enable BDR to register more children through GHS's extensive network of health centres. A partnership and collaboration agreement based on the One-Ghana-Government (OGG) approach to service delivery would also eliminate duplication of efforts and enable both entities to share resources (for example, transportation). In addition, BDR would also have the opportunity to promote birth registration using the information space available at health centres.

The extension of the free birth registration scheme to all children between two and five years would help to increase birth registration coverage in Ghana, as the evidence strongly suggests that the current late registration fee of 10 Cedi is prohibitive (especially for low-income earners and rural dwellers) and represents a strong barrier to birth registration.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen the enabling environment by establishing a sustainable funding mechanism capable of providing adequate financial resources.
2. Develop and strengthen leadership capability across BDR and improve management and leadership skills, and overhaul BDR's culture and values to align with its vision, purpose and strategic direction.
3. Strengthen the ICT infrastructure and enhance capacity, governance and security. Improve service delivery, communication, collaboration and efficiency through better use of Information and Communications Technology.
4. Develop an Equitable Service Delivery Plan (ESDP), taking into consideration the needs of users, equity, accessibility, timeliness, integrity and quality of service.
5. Enter into a formal partnership and collaboration agreement with Ghana Health Service and use the joint capacities and collaborative capabilities to extend geographical reach in order to register more children.
6. Systematically review staffing structure, job descriptions, and staffing levels to realign and redeploy human resources to where they are most needed. Reassess the use of volunteers with a view to selecting the ones BDR needs and not the ones that need BDR, and develop an effective oversight mechanism to monitor volunteers.
7. Review and revise the operational policies and procedures manual and offer refresher training to staff and volunteers in order to deliver consistent and quality service to all customers.
8. Review education and awareness materials with a view to incorporating additional information about the birth registration process.

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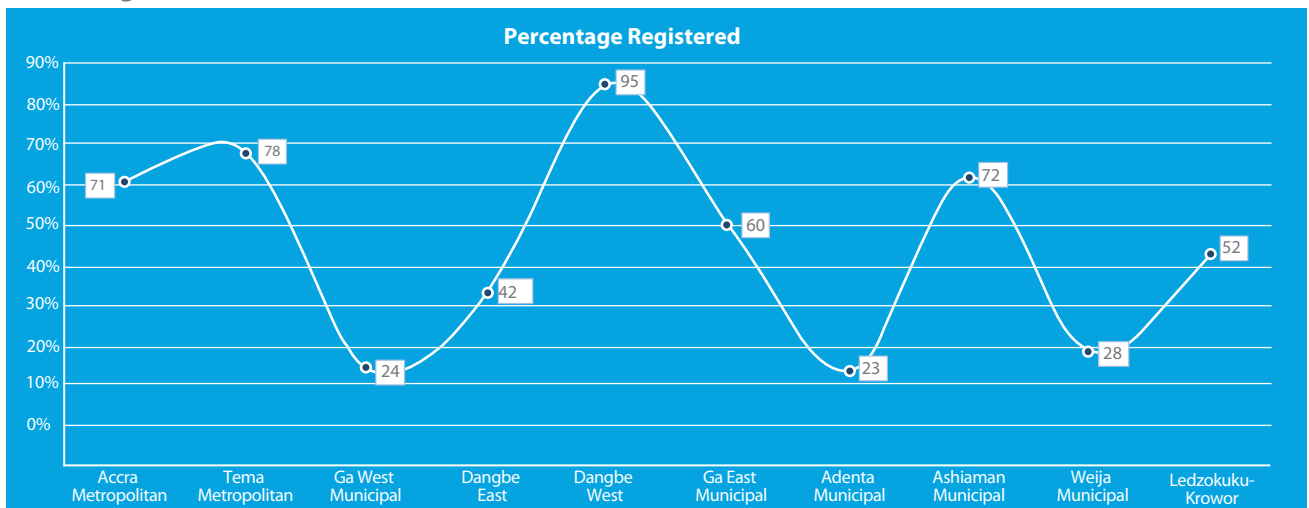
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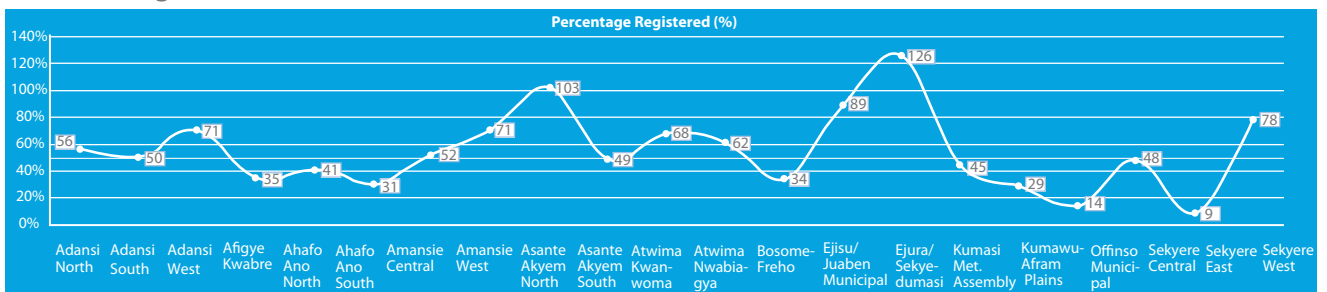


Regional Coverage of Birth Registration for 2012

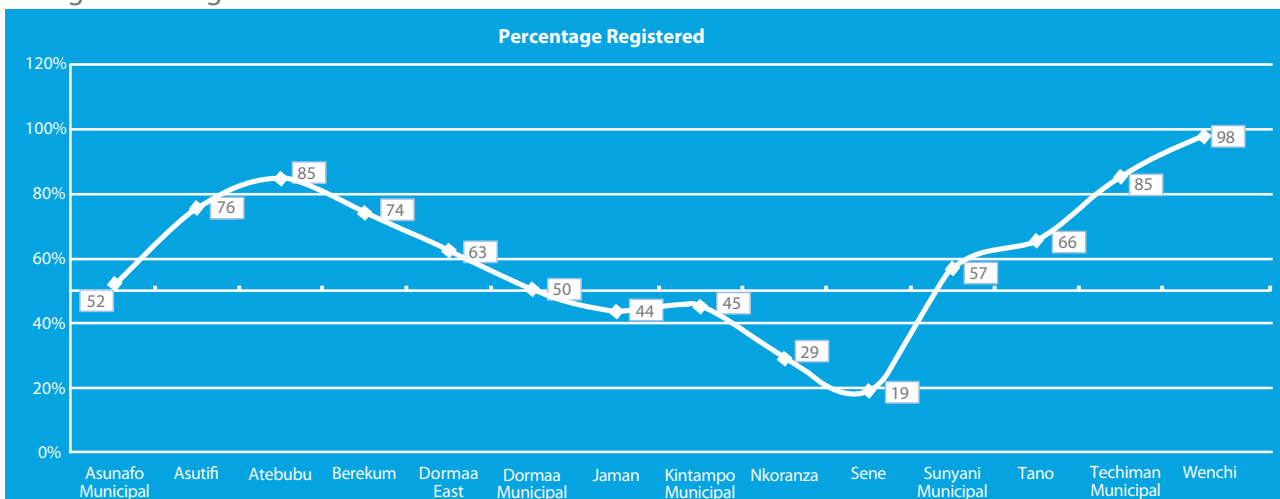
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Ashanti Region

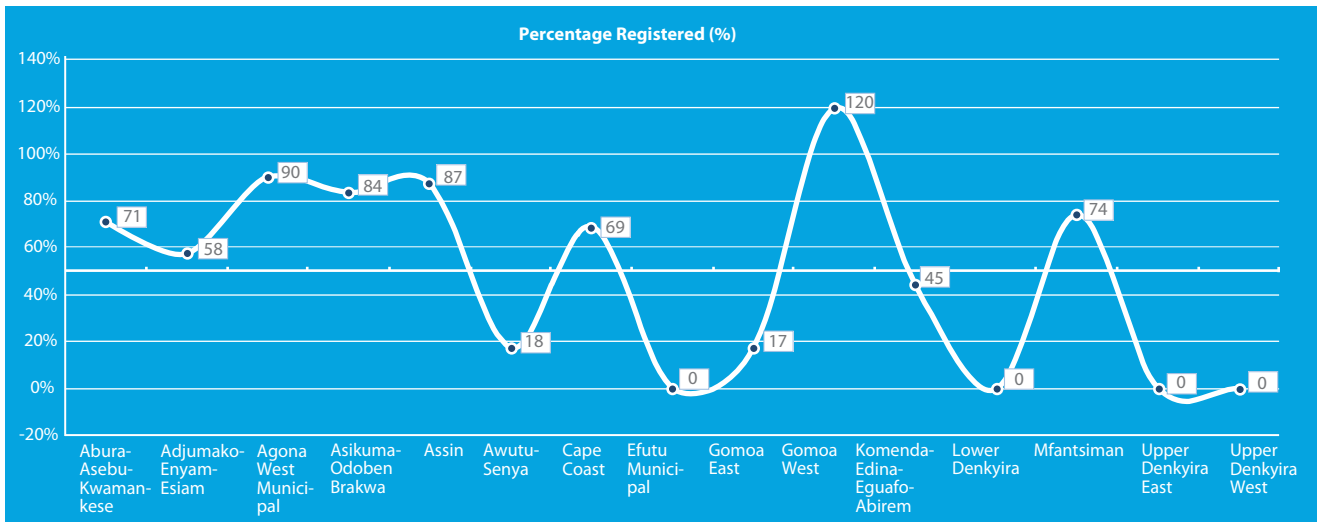


Brong Ahafo Region

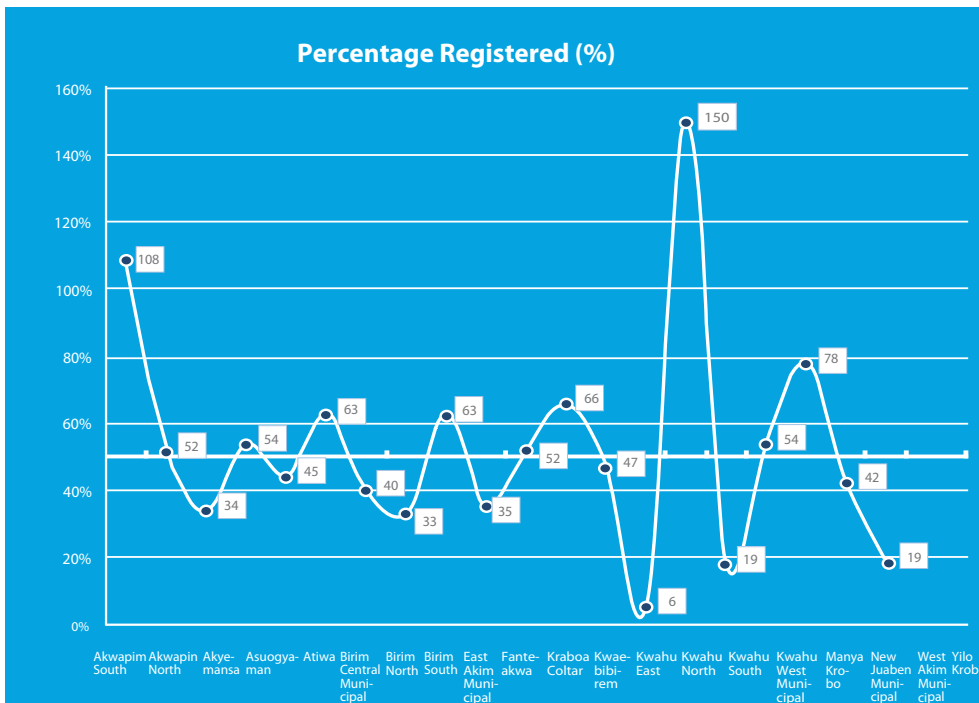


Regional Coverage of Birth Registration for 2012 (cont'd)

Central Region

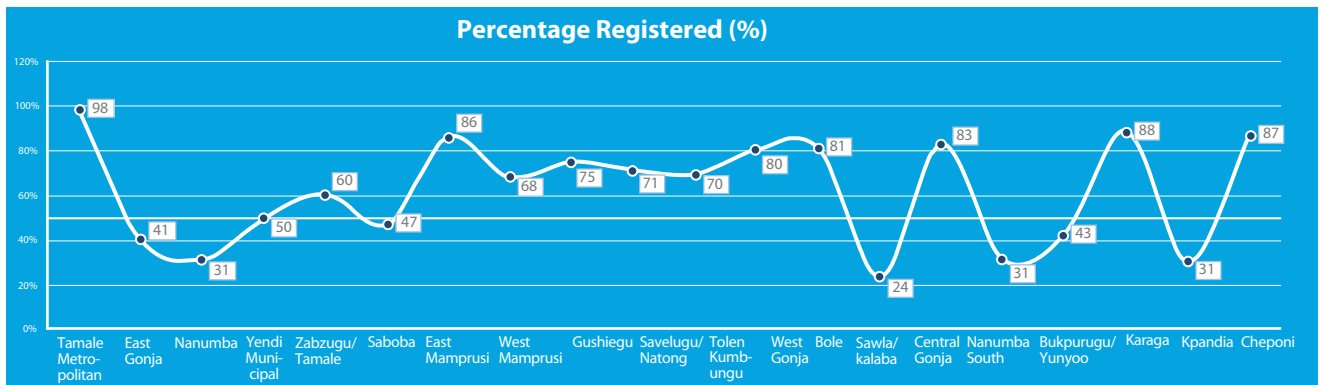


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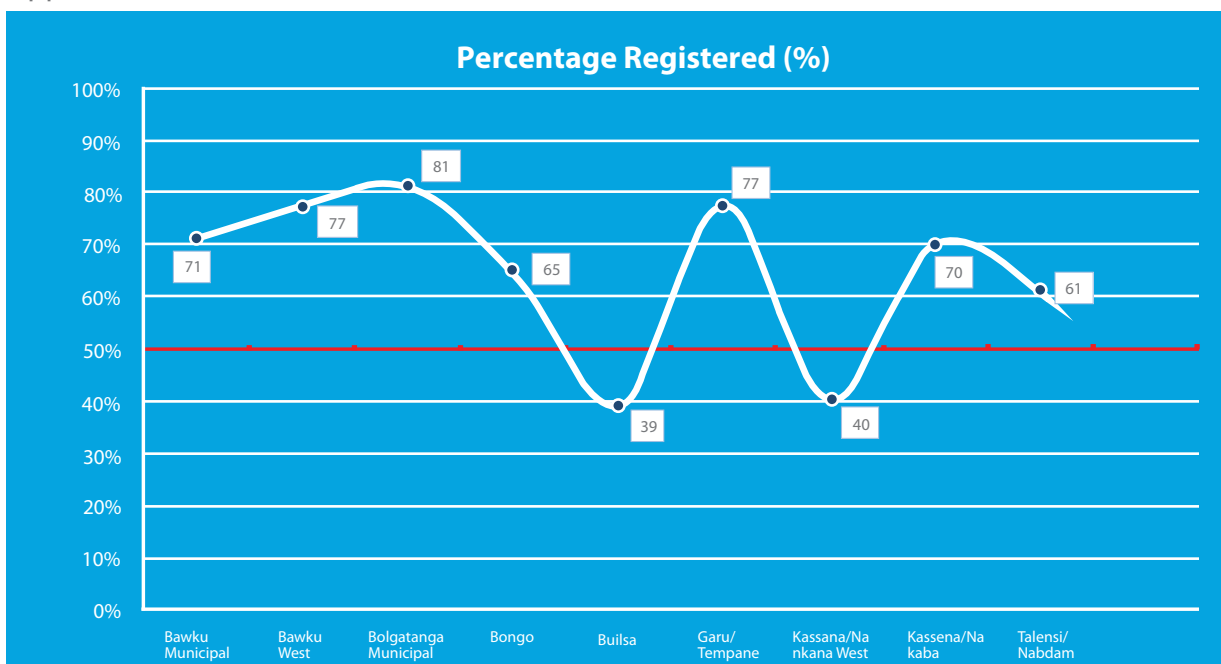


Regional Coverage of Birth Registration for 2012 (cont'd)

Northern Region

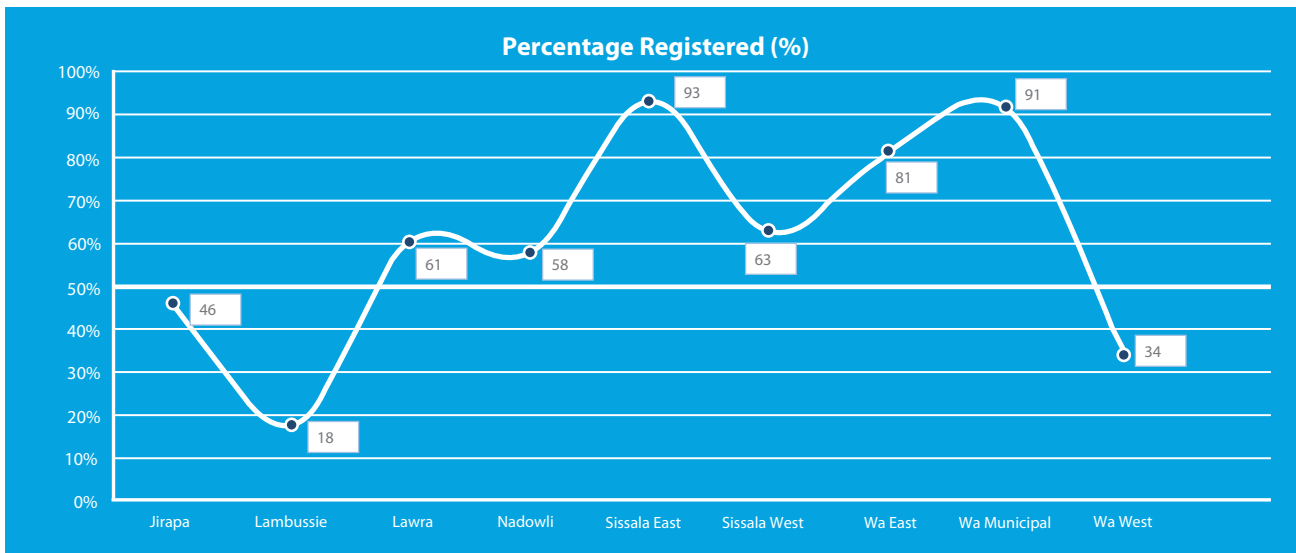


Upper East

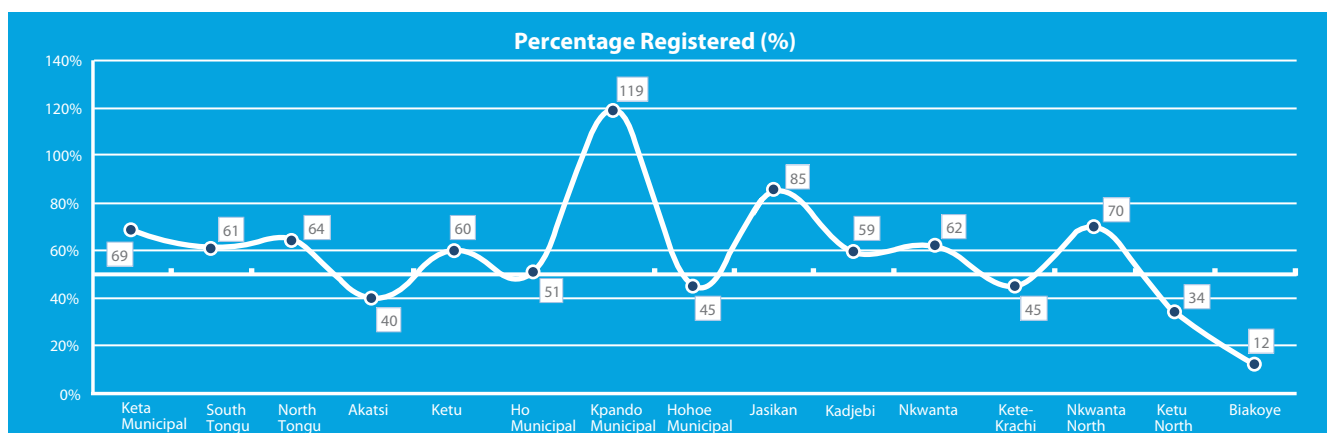


Regional Coverage of Birth Registration for 2012 (cont'd)

Upper West



Volta Region

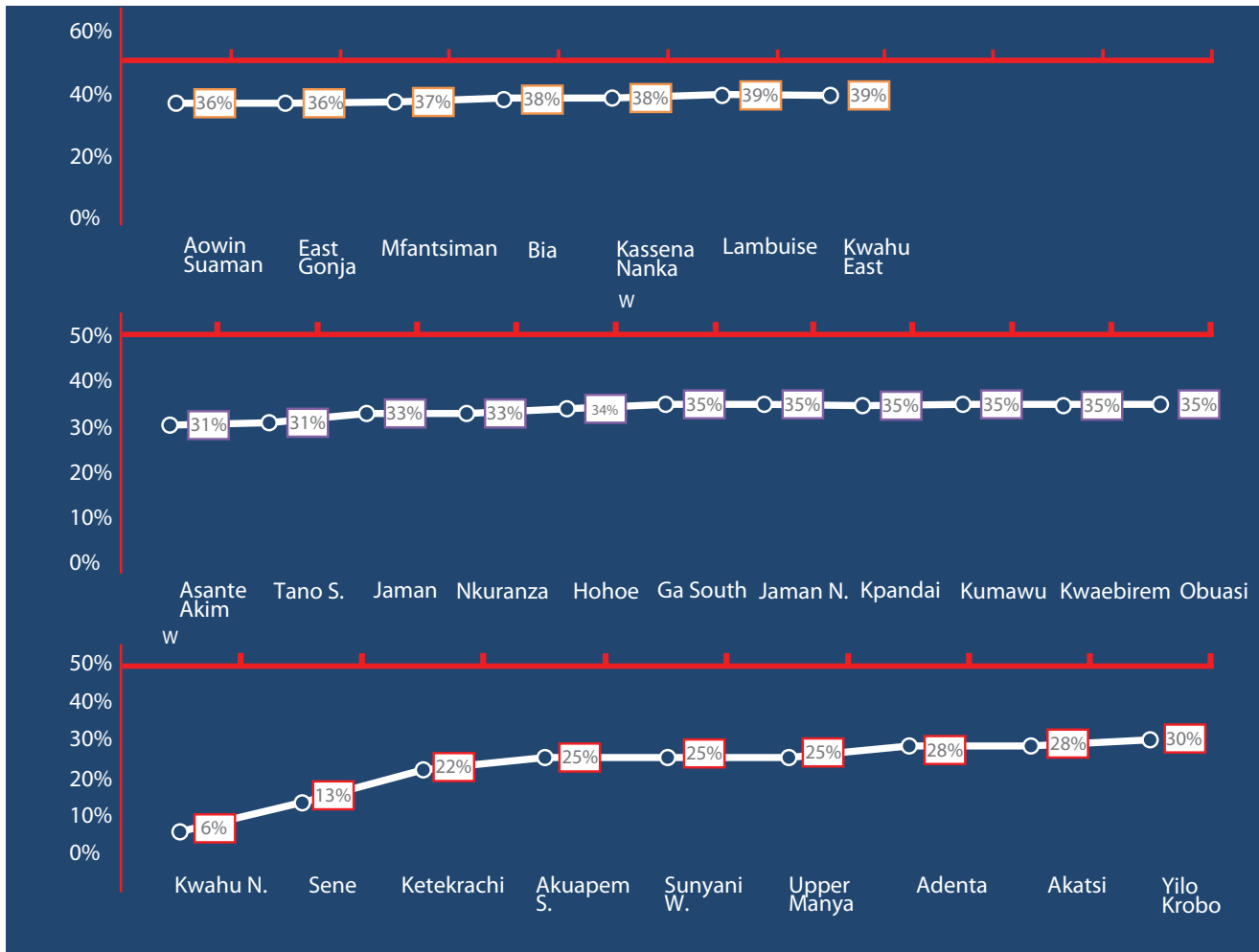


Regional Coverage of Birth Registration for 2012 (cont'd)

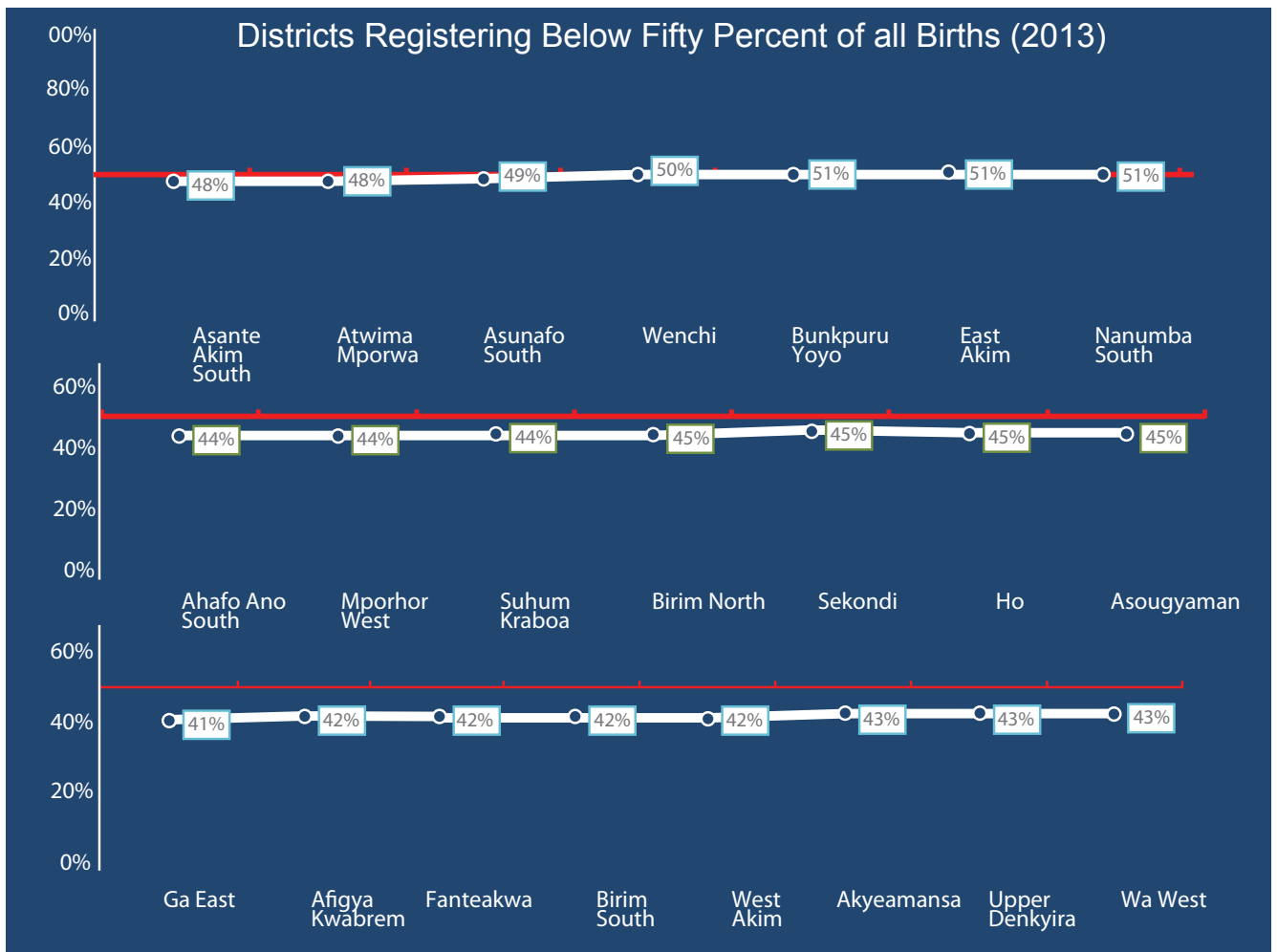
Western Region



District Performing below 50% Birth Registration Coverage in 2013



District Performing below 50% Birth Registration Coverage in 2013 (cont'd)



Birth Registration in Ghana

A Bottleneck Analysis for improved
Coverage that Leaves no Child Out



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