

## INFORMATION SHEET

### Birth Registration

UNICEF Nigeria, July 2007

#### Background

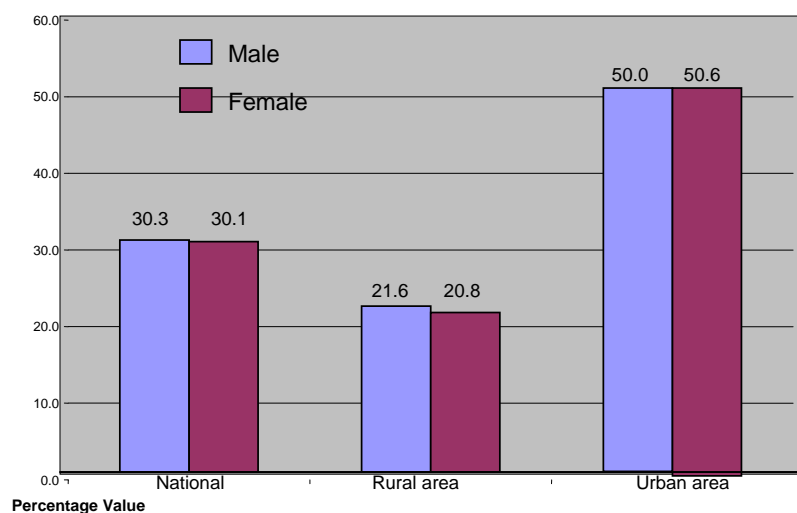
Birth registration is the first step towards recognizing a child's inalienable right as a human being. Globally the births of more than 50 million children - which represents more than 40 per cent of total births worldwide - go unregistered each year.

In Nigeria, about 70 % of the 5 million children born annually in Nigeria are not being registered at birth. They have no birth certificate and in legal terms, they do not exist. Their right to an identity, name and nationality is denied and their access to basic services is threatened.

#### Basic Statistics

- Estimated total population (2006): 140 Million
- Projected population by year 2010: 155 Million
- Estimated number of children born in Nigeria annually: 5 Million
- Urban population: 36 %
- Rural population: 64 %
- Fertility rate: 6 children per woman
- Births registered in Nigeria (2006): 30 %
- Births registered in the rural areas: 21.2 %
- Birth registered in the urban area: 50.3 %

#### Percentage of Birth by Gender and Urban /Rural Area



#### Definition

**Birth Registration** is the official recording of the birth of a child through an administrative process of the state and is coordinated by a particular branch of government. It is a permanent and official record of a child's existence

#### Legal Framework

In Nigeria, there are provisions in the current legislation for birth registration:

- The Federal Government's decree No. 69 of 1992 on vital registration states that registration shall be carried out free of charge, within a period of 60 days from the date of birth,
- 2003: the Child Rights Act in its Section 5 states that: 'Every child has the right to a name and the birth of every child shall be registered'.

The right of every child to be registered at birth, to acquire a name and nationality, and the responsibilities of the State in this area are also identified in international conventions which have been ratified by the Nigerian government.

- 1948: Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 15
- 1966: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 24: "Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name....Every child has the right to a nationality"
- 1989: Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 1990: African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Article 6

#### Benefits of birth registration

- Ensuring that children enroll in school at the appropriate age
- Providing access to health care services and immunization
- Effectively countering the problem of girls forced into marriage before they are legally eligible, without proof of age.

- Ensuring that children in conflict with the law are given special protection, and not treated (legally and practically) as adults.
- Ensuring that children are given adequate health care.
- Securing the child's right to nationality, at the time of birth or at a later stage.
- Helping to identify children who are trafficked, eventually repatriated and reunited with family members.
- Ensuring the right to a passport, the right to vote but also useful for opening a bank account or finding employment
- Helping the enforcement of laws relating to minimum age of employment, facilitating efforts to prevent exploitative child labor

#### **The unregistered children are often:**

- members of particular indigenous, religious or ethnic groups
- children born out of marriage between people of different nationalities or from cross-border ethnic groups
- children whose parents are displaced due to war or civil conflicts
- children from localities where there is low awareness of birth registration, especially rural and remote communities, as well children born in very poor families
- orphans or children whose parents have separated, divorced or widowed
- children of single mothers/teenage mothers/out of school girls
- children born by abused or sexually exploited girls and women

#### **National Response**

The first conscious effort to have a universal system of registration of births and deaths began in 1988 when the then Federal Military Government promulgated the *Births and Deaths Compulsory Registration Decree 39 of 1979*. The decree was aimed at establishing a uniform national and State level registration hierarchy, including the appointment of a Registrar General.

The promulgation of Compulsory Registration of Births and Deaths Decree No 69 of 1992, gave the authority to register these events to the National Population Commission (NPopC). It also

empowered the Commission to establish a Vital Registration system nationwide.

During its the eighteen years of operation, the Commission has made considerable improvements, with the creation of 2322 registration centers spread across all Local Government Areas (LGA) with a maximum of three centers per local government.

Between year 2003 and 2005, the National Population Commission has developed an Action Plan to create a more sustainable birth registration system. The plan included the involvement of every part of society, local communities and stakeholders, especially to help raise awareness on the importance of birth registration. In addition, efforts were made for a better coordination between relevant government ministries and institutions involved in birth registration processes.

The NPopC waived the payment of registration fees for three years (from July 2005-July 2008). Payment of fees in the past had hindered considerable number of parents from registering the births of their children. The waiver, coupled with heightened sensitization, resulted in a slight increase of birth registration from a former national figure of 28 percent in 2001 to an average of 30.2 percent in 2006.

#### **Limitations and challenges**

- Number of registration centers grossly insufficient
- Limited financial support for birth registration processes
- Lack of awareness of the importance of birth registration as a human right
- Ignorance and illiteracy of the rural men and women on the importance of birth registration.
- Decline of women's access to maternity centers because of increased poverty and high medical costs
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- Distance to birth registration centers due to bad roads or non availability of public transport for those in rural areas
- Lack of effective registration infrastructures
- Low level of awareness of current legislation

## Strategies for Promoting Birth Registration in Nigeria

A long-term approach is needed to create birth registration systems that are permanent and sustained to generate consistent supply and demand. This would:

- Include every part of society, especially local communities
- Involve every stakeholder by raising awareness of the importance of birth registration
- Enforce and publicize existing legislation
- Ensure coordination between relevant government ministries and institutions involved in birth registration processes
- Provide necessary social infrastructure to facilitate birth registration in rural communities
- Integrate birth registration in other governmental activities and provide sufficient resources for the programs and service delivery
- Improve the capacity of the relevant government officials.
- Provide the resources required to ensure universal and effective system of birth registration

## UNICEF's strategic approach to promoting birth registration in Nigeria

- ◆ Support Government for conducting a national campaign to raise public awareness on the importance of birth registration. The campaign was launched on 24 July, 2007, in Abuja by the Vice President of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, and brought together over 500 participants including representatives from Government, Parliament, civil society, faith-based organizations, traditional rulers, community-based organizations, professional associations, partner/donor agencies, UN agencies and the media. This launch demonstrated the Government's commitment to increase birth registration coverage nationwide.
- ◆ Support the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (national radio) for broadcasting a three-months campaign on child trafficking on birth registration which will be aired on the national Network from 1st of October to December 31st 2007, including daily jingles.
- ◆ Provide financial, logistical and technical support for the development and publication of a clean and comprehensive report on the current level of births registered in Nigeria from

1995-2006. The published report will include the modalities for a sustainable systemic monitoring mechanism for documenting births of children born in Nigeria and will also be used for advocacy.

- ◆ In collaboration with partners, embark on strong resource mobilization strategies in and outside the country and involve governments, legislators, development partners, donor agencies, health and education sectors, civil society networks, children's parliament and other stakeholders.
- ◆ Strengthen institutional capacity of the National Population Commission (Vital Registration Department) to collate, analyze and process and generate birth registration data consistently at the States and country level

Other Agencies active in Birth Registration Process in Nigeria include WHO, UNFPA, ILO, UNAIDS, United Nations Statistics Division, USAID.

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