

Birth Registration In Ghana

**A Country Paper
Presented at the Birth
Registration Workshop for
Anglophone Countries in Africa**

**October 21-24, 2002
Kampala, Uganda**

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BRIEF DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF GHANA

1	Total Population(2002 Census)	18,912,079
	Male	9,357,302

	Female		9,554,697
2.	Child Population	Less than 1 year	525,258
		1 - 4	2,244,163
		5 - 9	2,775,206
		10 – 14	2,262,216
		15 – 19	1,883,753
3.	Estimated Birth Rate		39 per thousand
4.	Estimated percentage of births currently registered(2001)		
	Expected births(2001)		737,571
	Registered births in 2001(within 12 months of occurrence only)		211,081
	Percentage of expected births registered(2001)		27%

STATUS OF REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS IN GHANA

INTRODUCTION

Vital registration in Ghana (the Gold Coast) started as far back as 1888. However, at its inception, it was limited to the registration of deaths, mostly of expatriate workers of the then colonial government.

It was not until 1912 that the registration of births was introduced. The registration system has gone through a series of transformations, just as the law establishing it has seen a number of amendments. All this was aimed at improving upon the final delivery of the system.

Starting as the Cemeteries Ordinance of 1888, it saw its first amendment in 1891. In 1912, it became the Births, Deaths and Burials Ordinance, which was once again amended in 1926. This was finally replaced with the Registration of Births and Deaths Act 301 of 1965 which is the legislation currently in force.

The Births and Deaths Registry was therefore established by the Act 301 of 1965, within the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, to handle and develop the births and deaths registration system in Ghana. Its core business is to “provide accurate and reliable information on all births and deaths occurring within Ghana for Socio-economic development of the Country through their registration and certification.”

PROCEDURE FOR THE REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS

Operations of the Births and Deaths Registry is co-ordinated from the Central Registry Office, which is located

in Accra, the capital of Ghana. The entire country has been divided first into 10 Registration Regions, which coincide with the political and administrative regions of Ghana. The Registration Regions have further been partitioned into 110 Registration Districts, which also coincide with the country's administrative local authority areas.

There is at least one Registry Office in each registration district manned by one District Registration Officer, who supervises the registration system through the registries and reporting centres in the district.

The Registration Officer submits monthly, all registration forms, numbered serially to the Regional Office for further processing and onward transmission to the Central Registry Office, where national data is compiled. Registration records are kept at all three levels to secure the information for development activities at all three levels.

PROCEDURE

1. The birth of every child is to be registered in the district where the birth occurred
2. There is no *de jure* or *defacto* discrimination between mothers and fathers in the registration process. Fathers name is entered even if the parents are not married.
3. It is the duty of one parent (father or mother) to report the birth of a child for registration. In the absence of the parents, one of the following persons is allowed by law to report the birth for registration.
 - (a) The owner of the premises in which the child is born.
 - (b) A person present at the birth.
 - (c) A person having charge of the child to furnish the prescribed particulars for registration.
1. The informant will be required to produce evidence of birth, such as a clinical weighing card.
2. A Registration Assistant administers a questionnaire, (the birth report form A) to the informant. Information thereby collected is recorded in the register of births. A birth certificate is issued after the registration of the birth.
3. The birth should be registered, free of charge, within 21days of occurrence. Registration outside this period attracts a prescribed fee. The Registry has submitted a proposal to the relevant authority seeking to extend the free period of birth registration, to within 12 months of occurrence, to serve as an added incentive for the public.
4. The law establishing birth registration makes provision for late registration of births. It however, stipulates that the birth shall not be registered after the expiration of 12 months from the date of birth except with the written authority of the Registrar of Births and Deaths and upon payment of the prescribed fee.
5. The parent or child can apply for a certified copy of entry in the Register of births any time the need arises.
6. Hospital based registration is not possible, nor is registration by mail. In most cases, children born in health facilities are registered with the support of health personnel at immunization centres.

BIRTH REGISTRATION FEES

REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS

1	Registration of birth when the child is between one day and 21 days	FREE
2	Registration of birth when the child is between 22 days and 12 months	¢10,000 (¢=Cedis)
3	Application for registration of birth when the child is over 12 months.	¢20,000
4	Application for registration of name within 12 months of registration of birth.	¢10,000
5	Application for alteration in the Register of Births.	¢5,000

MISCELLANEOUS

13	Each general search of Registers of Births or Deaths	¢5,000
14	Each particular search of Registers of Births or Deaths	¢2,000
15	Each certified copy of entry in Register of Births or Deaths	¢2,000
16	Each general search of the indices in the Central Registry Office	¢5,000
17	Each particular search in the indices in the Central Registry Office	¢2,000
18	Marking of exhibit	¢2,000
19	Registration of Death of a Child under 12 months	FREE

MAJOR CHALLENGIES/BARRIERS TO BIRTH REGISTRATION

1. STAFFING

The total number of staff, their level of training and remuneration imposes a major constraint on the efficient operation of the registration machinery. Currently the Registry has a mere 342 personnel (this figure includes non-registration staff such as Drivers, watchmen, typist etc) operating in 286 registration centers nationwide. This number is supposed to serve the total population of over eighteen million persons in Ghana.

2. INADEQUATE FUNDING :-

Birth registration depends wholly on government funding. Inadequate provision of funds by government therefore poses a major challenge to the efficient operation of the registration system.

3. LACK OF LOGISTICS

The unavailability of a number of facilities ranging from office accommodation, vehicles stationery and equipment impinges negatively on the performance of the Registry.

4. **MOTIVATION**

The lack of motivation on the part of the populace to register their births cannot be discounted. The problem is pervasive in the rural areas of Ghana where poverty, ignorance and the absence of adequate registration facilities have contributed immensely to this state of affairs.

5. **LOW COVERAGE OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS**

Another difficulty facing the Births and Deaths Registry is physical inaccessibility to registration centers. This situation is quite pervasive in rural areas where communities are scattered and isolated making access to such areas extremely difficult.

In 2000, for example, the Registry captured only 31% of total births expected for the year. In 2001, the coverage level dropped to 27% of expected births. Such coverage levels make it very difficult for the Registry to make any meaningful demographic analysis for the nation.

The reality of the situation presented here is that every year, over 60% of newly born children are not registered. These children are therefore denied the right to a legal identity, the right to a nationality, and all the civic and social rights that belonging to a nation confers on the individual. This phenomenon needs to be checked.

6. **MULTIPLE REGISTRATION**

Multiple registration is a very serious problem in births and deaths registration as it affects the quality of data generated by the department. A lot of our people out of ignorance, or perhaps willfully, have their births registered more than once and this complicates our records. While double registration is known to occur, there is no mechanism to tap it. Registration levels may therefore be lower than the 27% mentioned. If our operations were fully computerized, it would be easy to detect such lapses, and either minimize or eliminate them.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE BIRTH REGISTRATION SYSTEM AND FOR INCREASING COVERAGE OF BIRTHS REGISTRATION

1. **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

There is the need to embark on effective public education and sensitization programmes, to create the awareness among, and also to motivate, the population to register their births and deaths because of the importance of such events. This is important because in Ghana certificates are needed for school entry and other social services. In this direction, extensive use should be made of both print and electronic media. Religious bodies, identifiable groups and organisations, chiefs, community heads, assemblymen and public health teams, could be of tremendous assistance in reaching out to the masses.

We propose a "Birth Registration Awareness Week" which should be observed annually nationwide.

2. **ACTIVE APPROACH TO DATA COLLECTION**

The Government of Ghana, through the Department of Births and Deaths, has decided to revolutionize the mode of collecting information on births. This involves the shift from the passive approach of data collection to a more active method. This will include extensive use of mobile registration assistants who will make regular visits to communities within the registration areas to collect information on all births (and deaths) that have occurred within a period.

3. **COLLABORATION WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

A partnership is in the process of being arranged between the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Health to register births. The MOH is better resourced and has the capacity to cover a wider field in its operations. Birth registration officers will be included in the Public Health Teams that visit various communities on immunization programmes in anticipation of this allowing for better recording of births.

4. MOTIVATION OF STAFF

Improved conditions of service and enhanced remuneration packages are a sure way of eliciting competence and efficiency among staff.

It is important to attract and retain highly qualified and competent officers into the Registry. The functions of the Registration Staff at all levels of the organisation involve legal, administrative and statistical activities. This implies that the registration officer is expected to possess or exhibit not only the meticulous attention of a lawyer, the management efficiency of the administrator, and the professional integrity of the statistician, but a combination of all three skills and qualities. This therefore, is a special kind of responsibility which must be appropriately rewarded. Training and self-improvement is also very important.

5. COMMUNITY POPULATION REGISTER PROGRAMME (CPRP)

The Department of Births and Deaths has begun a pilot scheme known as the Community Population Register Programme within selected communities. It is designed to elicit birth registration at the community level. It makes provision for the continuous recording and updating of information on every individual in the population of a community. It is a system of data collection in which details of names, sex, date of birth, educational level, marital status, immunization status etc. of persons residing in the community are recorded and regularly updated with the occurrence of births, deaths and movements.

The efficient implementation of this programme would offer the following advantages.

- a. It will facilitate the timely reporting of births (and deaths) for registration in the various communities.
- b. It would prove beneficial for planning at the community level during inter-census periods.
- c. The records can be used as checks in the review of electoral registers and of social security records.
- d. It would facilitate the issuing of National Identity Cards.
- e. It will provide an effective means for the evaluation of decennial censuses.

6. **COMPUTERISATION OF THE REGISTRATION SYSTEM**

The Births and Deaths Registry has embarked on the computerization of its operation.

An IBM AS-400 server has been installed and linked to an initial number of 10 workstations at the Head office. Data entry personnel have been appointed and trained to key-in records on registered births and deaths occurring in the country (started in January 2001).

Within the next 3 years (medium term), it is expected to equip all the ten Regional Offices with computers that will be networked to the Central Registry. The long-term vision is to get computers to all the 110 district registration offices, in order to facilitate the transfer of records of registered births (and deaths) expressly from the district to the Central Registry Office in Accra for processing and analysis. Registration and computerization and storage of information are needed at all levels to facilitate development through the system of local government. This way, local and central government systems can plan for children simultaneously.

7. **FUNDING**

The last, but most important, factor for improving the efficiency of the birth registration system is that of finance. As stated earlier, funding of the birth registration system is very low.

African governments need to recognize that all development programmes, meant to improve the welfare of their population, are based on proper planning. Proper planning depends on the continuous availability of accurate, reliable and timely information about their populations. Such information is obtained largely from vital registration records. Thus, the time for African governments to reconsider their perceptions about births and deaths registration is **now**. The Births and Deaths Registration agencies (departments) all over the continent, should, as a matter of urgency, be adequately resourced and financed to enable them discharge their duties with professional competence for the benefit of their people

At the centre of the issue is the future development of the child. It would not be fair on our part as adults to trample upon the rights of the innocent child. His/her right to a name and an identity, his/her right to protection and to the provision of the basic necessities of life, the right to a secured future is dependent on what society and the nation guarantees. The birth certificate remains the fundamental document through which they can lay claim to these privileges and the rights that the laws of their sovereign countries confer on them. We cannot by any act of omission or commission deny them this.

***Prepared by the Registrar of Births and Deaths of Ghana,
Mr. P.S Ankrah, October 2002.***