

# **BIRTH REGISTRATION IN UGANDA: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND LESSONS**

*Ssekisaka Farouk Kavuma  
Statistician,  
Uganda Local Government Authorities*

Lessons learned from local initiatives supporting  
sustainable civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS)  
systems in Africa

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# Outline

- Introduction
- Overview of Birth Registration
- Why Birth Registration
- Current Birth Registration workflow
- Barriers to proper Birth Registration
- Strategies employed by Uganda to improve Birth Registration
- Recommendations

# Introduction

- This paper provides a basis to assess the inherent factors affecting birth registration and identify best practices and recommendations to improve systems and procedures for effective birth registration in the sub-Saharan Africa taking Uganda as the case study. The researcher used both primary (key informant interview with a randomly selected sample of 500 individuals and secondary data, using the Uganda Demographic Health Survey 2011 dataset and a descriptive design. A functioning system of birth and civil registration ensures that the country has an up-to-date and reliable database for planning, maintaining education, health and other social services for the community.

# Birth Registration

- Birth registration is the continuous, permanent, compulsory, and universal recording within the civil registry of the occurrence and characteristics of births in accordance with the legal requirements of a country (UNICEF 2013).
- Civil registration is a system where the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population like births, deaths, marriages and divorces are recorded in a continuous, permanent and universal manner. The purpose of civil registration is primarily for establishing the legal documents provided by the law. These records serve also as a primary source of vital statistics.

## ***Birth registration: overview***

- On a procedural level, birth registration involves three interrelated processes. First, there must be the declaration of the occurrence of the birth to civil registrars. Second, once notified, civil registrars officially record the birth
- Third, the State issues a birth certificate, a personal document to attest birth registration and the most visible evidence of the State's legal recognition of the child
- While the global rate of birth registration grew from approximately 58 to 65 per cent between 2000 and 2010, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 230 million children under the age of 5 still have not been registered. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 85 million of these children, while 135 million live in Asia and the Pacific

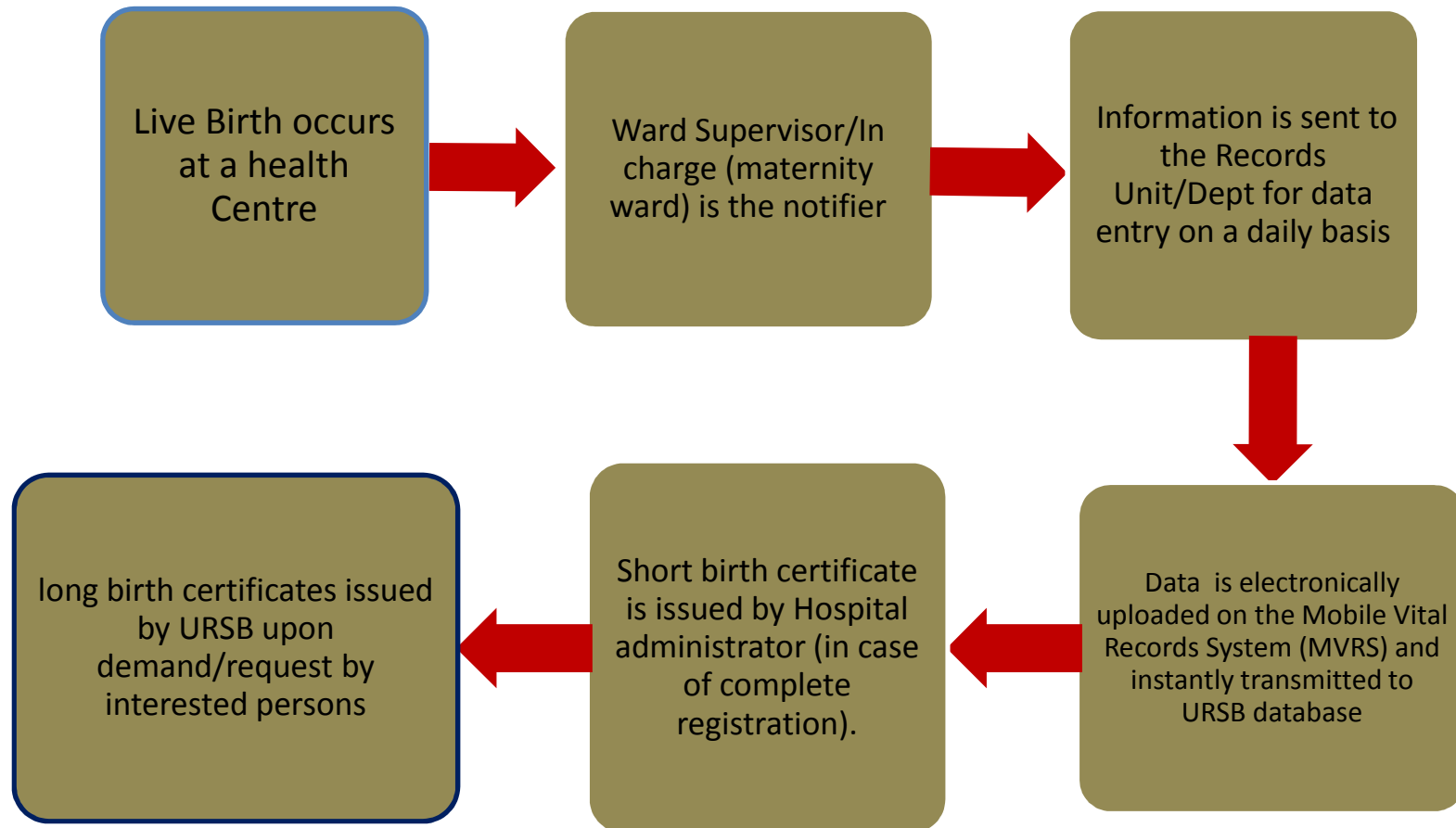
## ***Birth registration: overview*** *cont....*

- Around 51 million births go unregistered every year in developing countries, which translates to 1 in 3 children globally. One out of every three developing countries has a birth registration rate of less than 50%. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest percentage of children under age of five who are not registered at birth, with 66 %.
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# Why Birth Registration

- Decision makers depend on sound and timely statistics for policy development
- Birth registration is crucial for the implementation of national policies and legislation establishing minimum age for work, military conscription and marriage,
- certificate of birth is fundamental to the realization of a number of rights and practical needs such as:- Ensure that children enroll in school at the right age, To prevent child labour by enforcing laws relating to minimum age for employment, To effectively counter the problem of forced marriage for girls before they are legally eligible without proof of age, Getting an educational, health and or insurance policy cover for a child, Protecting a child orphan from being disinherited by guardians/ relatives, Ensure that children in conflict with the law are given special protection and not treated (legally) and practically as adults.

# Current Birth Registration workflow





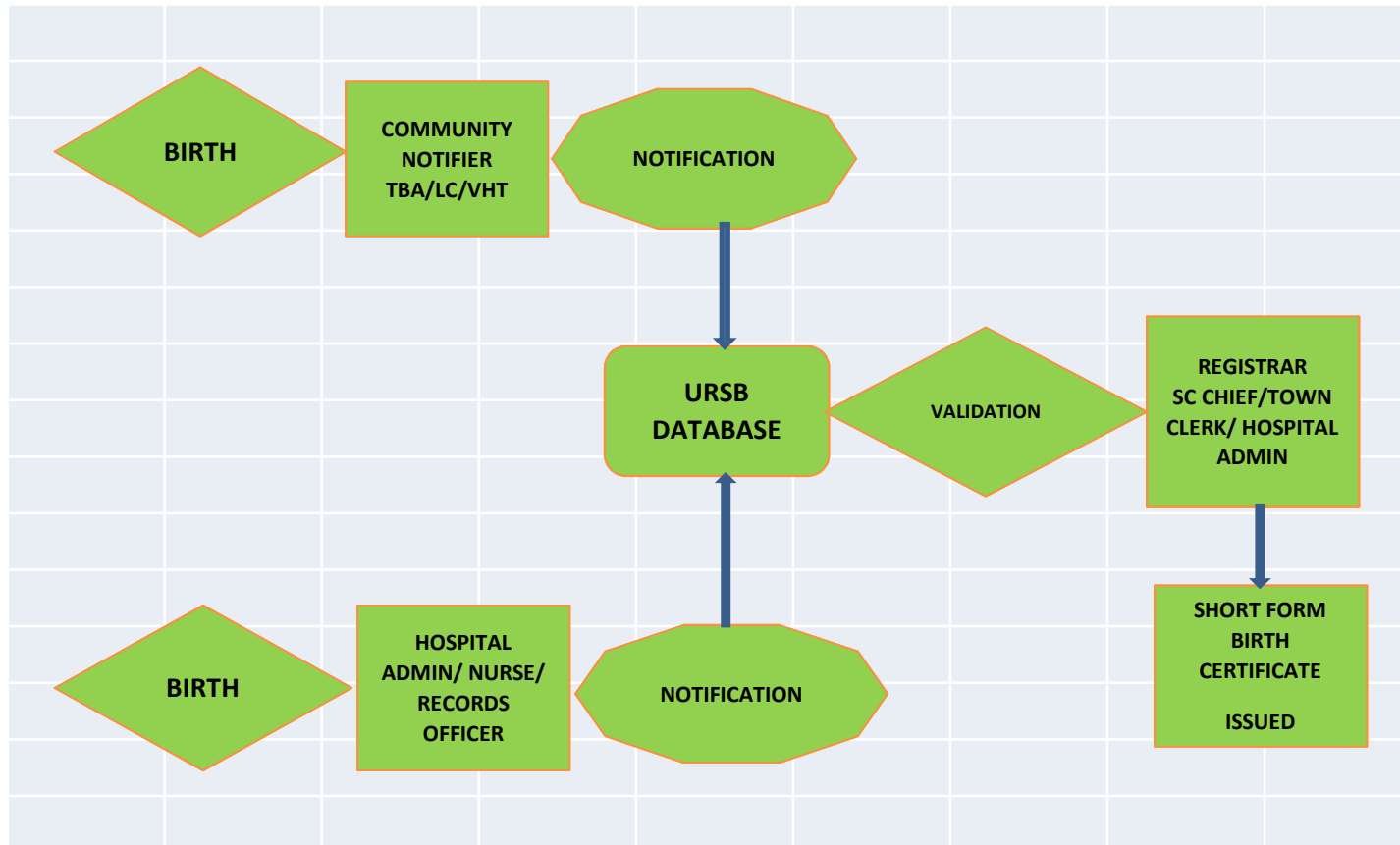
# Barriers to birth registration

- *Political barriers*
- *Legislative barriers*
- *Administrative barriers*
- *Economic barriers*
- *Neglect of cultural and community realities*
- *Geographic barriers;*

## Strategies employed by Uganda to enhance Birth Registration

- ***Mobile VRS Project***; In 2011, through a public-private partnership between URSB, Uganda Telecom and Unicef, the electronic birth and death registration system known as the Mobile Vital Records System (Mobile VRS) was developed. Mobile VRS enables birth notifications to be sent by mobile phones to URSB's server and enables health and government officials who have access to the internet and a printer to register and print birth certificates in real time. The Mobile

# How the *Mobile VRS* works



# How the *Mobile VRS works*

- Mobile VRS has been designed to work in both healthcare and non-healthcare environments. For example, in a healthcare setting where a child is born in a hospital, local administrators simply enter and upload birth details to a web-based registration portal — with connectivity delivered through Uganda Telecom's existing 3G network. Data is transferred almost instantaneously, and it cuts the uncertainty about whether records will reach the national

# Non-healthcare settings

- To cover non-healthcare settings — where births take place in the home or outside a hospital — SIM cards have been provided to a network of registration agents (usually village chiefs). The SIM is mapped to the registration agent's name and allows them to send information on births from their mobile phone using an Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) application — which acts as a secure gateway to a central database. This

## Strategies employed by Uganda to enhance Birth Registration cont.....

- ***Community-level initiatives (decentralization of the services);*** The Government of Uganda/UNICEF country programme sees a community-based household census as the first step towards a grassroots structure for registration. Members of the local Parish Development Committee visit every household and the data collected will be entered in a household register. This register will be updated by

# Impact of *Mobile VRS Project*

- Mobile VRS is now operational in all 135 government and missionary hospitals and 36 out of 112 districts across Uganda. From 30% in 2011 to approximately 65% today, compared to the nominal increase from 21% in 2006 to 30% in 2014
- What this means is that the majority of Uganda's 58 districts that are using Mobile VRS are registering more than 50% of their district's births, with some districts registering more than 70% of their district's births.

## Strategies employed by Uganda to enhance Birth Registration cont.....

- ***Registration on the spot***; Uganda has placed registration services right in hospitals – in maternity wards and pediatric wards – so that mothers can register their children’s births immediately after delivery, or when they come back to have immunization or health check-ups for their children. Records are then transferred to a web-based application linked to a government database. After verification by a hospital



## **Strategies employed by Uganda to enhance Birth Registration cont.....**

- **Establishment of the Uganda Registrations Services Bureau** which is mandated to ensure that all Births, Deaths, Adoptions and Marriages and Divorce of Mohammedans occurring in Uganda are registered Stronger collaboration among Uganda Bureau of Statistics with other relevant government agencies; The Uganda Bureau of Statistics has the statutory responsibility for civil registration, their existing working

## Registration Centres include;

- Government hospitals
- Missionary hospitals
- Industrial hospitals
- Health Centre Ivs
- Health Centre IIIs

*\*Private hospitals are not included as they are not registration Districts under the Births and Deaths Registration Act, Cap 309 Laws of Uganda. However they do compilations and make returns to the registrar of births and deaths*

## Recommendations for Improvement of Birth Registration

- ***Use of computer technology***; there is a need to develop and pilot online/computerized civil registration models, to improve the automation and computerization of the processes involved in the production of information on birth and death registration
- **improved links between birth registration and social services** relevant to children (immunization, basic education, special education, orphan care) e.g. *Integrating birth registration into health services*; as a mechanism for increasing birth registration through on spot registration.
- ***Empowering traditional birth attendants***; in developing countries, traditional birth attendants

## Recommendations for Improvement of Birth Registration cont.....

- ***Make legal reforms***; Update and simplify legislation to ensure that birth registration and issuance of birth certificates are performed free of charge
- ***Advocate for system strengthening***; to achieve universal, free and timely birth registration for all children, with special emphasis on those belonging to excluded populations establish political commitment.
- ***Greater political commitment by all tiers of government and distribution of resources from national to the lower level***

**THE END**

**THANK YOU**