**BIRTH REGISTRATION AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL EXCLUSION: INSIGHTS FROM PARTICIPANTS NARRATIVES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Birth registration is becoming an important arena of political mobilization for human rights. Discourses about civil registration advanced in the civil society and academic circles tend to frame birth registration in citizenship terms, arguing that (a) a birth certificate is indispensable in realizing the child’s right to a name, nationality and citizenship; and (b) both the delay in and failure to register a child’s birth compound the social exclusion of that child. However, narratives that connect birth registration and social exclusion in a causal relationship are seldom premised on empirical evidence. Drawing on qualitative key informant interviews, this article examines how non-birth registration relates to social exclusion of children. Participants’ narratives generated in Zimbabwe’s Bindura District revealed that non-birth registration is entangled with multiple dimensions of social exclusion, potentially giving rise marginalization of children in various spheres of society.

**Keywords:** birth registration, child rights, citizenship, integration, social exclusion, Zimbabwe

**INTRODUCTION**

Whereas birth registration literature claims that registration and certification of births constitute a gateway to citizenship (Setel et al., 2007), more than 56 per cent of children in Sub-Saharan Africa remain unregistered (Pelowski et al., 2015). In Zimbabwe, not more than 38 per cent of the children are registered and have birth certificates issued by the fifth birth day (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT, 2015) This article examines non-birth registration in Zimbabwe as an aspect of social exclusion.

In it, I draw upon participants’ narratives to interrogate the connection between non-birth registration and social exclusion. The narratives were generated in the context of a mixed-method study of birth registration and child-sensitive social protection conducted in 2015 in a district located approximately 90km north-east of Harare (Zimbabwe). Although the study was largely quantitative, key informant interviews were conducted with participants purposively selected on the bases of their potential to provide an insight into birth registration and social exclusion.

That little evidence has been presented to back the claim that non-birth registration increases the risk of social exclusion provided the motivation for writing this article. Mainly as part of a motivational frame to boost advocacy around universal birth registration, writings of society actors in the broader civil society and – of late – academic commentary, have framed birth registration as the first (legal) step and a mechanism for ensuring civic integration (Amo-Adjei and Annim, 2015; O’Brien and Penna, 2008; Owen, 2013). Moreover, in this burgeoning literature, a birth certificate is said to be “a ticket to citizenship,” (Dow, 1998: 5). Contrastingly, non-birth registration is presumed to increase the risk of social exclusion of the child, across his or her life span. This claim is, in and of itself, very persuasive. For example, it is not hard to think that not having a birth certificate will more likely impedes a child’s access to basic services, without which the child will not meaningfully participate in society. However, particularly in Zimbabwe, existing literature hardly provides data to demonstrate the connection between birth registration and social exclusion. Existing analyses of datasets which contain data on birth registration, generated from nationally representative surveys (e.g., the Census, and the regular Demographic Health Survey (DHS) in Zimbabwe, seem to emphasize material deprivation and poverty in explaining non-birth registration levels in the country. As I show in the analysis, social exclusion transcends material deprivation and poverty.

**BIRTH REGISTRATION, CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

The notion that birth registration constitutes a human right flows from international human rights law, specifically Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates that, “The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality”(OHCHR, 1990: 3). Consequently, failure to register a child’s birth constitutes a violation of his or her right to a name and nationality. Global and national level civil society (Salamon, Sokolowski, and Anheier, 2000) tap into this international human rights regime to construct discourses that frame children as rights-bearing subjects, emphasizing that they “are social actors, *subjects in their own right*, not merely objects of social concern or the targets of social intervention” (Freeman, 1998: 440, my emphasis).

However, in practice, children in many countries have yet to achieve this ideal rights-holding citizen status. In fact, while the UNCRC and other child-related international legal instruments have become tools for standardizing and universalizing citizenship (Ong, 2006; Wabwile, 2010), there is a tacit acknowledgement in literature that rights-holding is more of a situated rather than a universal status, and that the state and its institutions of citizenship play an indispensable role in *making* rights-bearing subjects (Sassen, 2009). As a result of these shared perceptions about outstanding child rights work, birth registration has become an important arena for making citizenship. Narratives which frame birth registration as a citizenship issue typically assume that birth registration is a critical precondition for the recognition of children as equal members of society with equal access to rights and benefits of citizenship. This is exemplified by statements that represent a birth certificate as a ‘ticket’ to or ‘proof’ of, citizenship (Amo-Adjei and Annim, 2015; Dow, 1998; Pelowski et al., 2015).

Arguably, linking birth registration and citizenship makes a potentially persuasive motivational frame for advocates of universal birth registration. Citizenship has been successfully deployed in the area of dementia (Bartlett, 2016). Yet, while acknowledging the efficacy of citizenship as a framework for advancing the rights of people with dementia, others argue that citizenship “is a never fully realized ideal that always has to be invoked, revisited and discursively reconstructed in order to be effective” (Hansen, 2015: 231, quoted in Bartlett, 2016: 454). Perhaps the key message for birth registration from these observations is that, apart from the institutional settings of the school, alternative care and so on, spaces where daily interactions of children occur such as the home, neighborhood and community are important sites in which citizenship is invoked appropriated, reconstructed and enacted.

In order to mobilize political action around birth registration, civil society actors and academics have also tended to frame incomplete birth registration as a “space of endangerment and neglect” (Ong, 2006: 503). The arguments amount to the assertion that children who do not possess birth certificates occupy a space of indistinction: unregistered children have little or no access critical services including education, health and social protection. In addition, they may not easily access legal protections at law (UNICEF, 2013a). This precarious situation arises largely because, in the eyes of policy makers, unregistered children may remain anonymous and subsequently experience multiple deprivations throughout their life span (Setel et al., 2007).

Nonetheless, the manner in which the notion of social exclusion has been deployed in birth registration literature requires more scholarly scrutiny for a number of reasons. The conceptualizations of social exclusion in NGO-led literature on birth registration hardly specify the dimensions of deprivation (including the drivers and outcomes) that interact with birth registration outcomes. Furthermore, we know little about the sites of exclusion for unregistered children (UNICEF, 2013b). Comparably, it would appear, analysis of data generated through surveys conducted in Zimbabwe, which included questions on birth registration, for example the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of 2014 (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT), 2015), does not sufficiently specify the notion of social exclusion. Instead, reports from these surveys tend to discuss birth registration as a function of personal and household characteristics, such as income, wealth and other variables. In so doing, they tend to portray non-birth registration and its implications for social exclusion strictly as a personal and poverty-related issue. And, the relationship of non-possession of a birth certificates and non-personal (social) factors of social exclusion remains obscure.

**Citizenship and Social Exclusion**

In light of the foregoing background discussion, it is necessary to examine in greater detail the two related concepts of citizenship and social exclusion. There is no single agreed upon definition of citizenship. However, it suffices to observe that citizenship is a multidimensional concept which captures the status of *being* a member in a polity, and the position of the individual vis-à-vis other members and the state. Citizenship can be conceived of in formal terms to refer to the rights, entitlements and social benefits of members specified at law (Patel, 2005). Economic, political and social cultural rights and entitlements of members are part of citizenship. The equal recognition of the rights and responsibilities of all individuals and social groups gives rise to social integration, which ensures that each individual actively participates in the life of society (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016).

Additionally, subjective and normative aspects are important aspects of citizenship. This is because citizenship is both an ideal and a social construction which is manifested in situated practices, in everyday life (Ong, 2006; Sassen, 2009). According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016), a significant number of people in all societies are – to varying degrees – denied access to economic opportunities, basic services and an active voice in matters that affect their lives. Consequently, such people are socially excluded; they are unable to actively participate in society, and they live in conditions of material deprivation.

Whereas the search for a universal definition of social exclusion can be a futile enterprise, lack of participation is at the core of many conceptualizations of social exclusion. In this article, social exclusion “describes a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2016: 18).

Social exclusion is often associated with poverty but the two terms are different (Williams and White, 2003). Poverty relates more to an outcome of material deprivation yet social exclusion denotes both processes and outcomes of marginalization. Unlike the notion of poverty which was more inclined to measures of financial income and need, social exclusion provides rich conceptual vocabulary for understanding multidimensional forms of disadvantage, as well as the structures and processes that produce it. Social exclusion transcends material deprivation although lack of material needs fuels social exclusion in these sense that it hinders active participation. Therefore, social inclusion, which in some sense is the reverse of social exclusion, entails more than enhancing people’s access to economic resources (United Nations, 2016). At the very least, social inclusion involves engendering genuine participation of people through enhancing their access to economic opportunities, resources and the recognition of their voice and rights. For this reason tackling social exclusion, i.e., improving social inclusion, is the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Thus far, I have attempted to show that social exclusion is a phenomenon with many faces. It refers to both processes and outcomes which, together, feeds into a denial of rights, opportunities, agency and voice (Saunders, 2008). However, a theme that emerges from literature is the idea that it is also possible to use social exclusion as part of a framework for making sense of multifactorial disadvantage and thinking about social inclusion (Tanton, Harding, Daly, McNamara, and Yap, 2010; United Nations, 2016). According to A O’Brien and Penna (2008), social exclusion can be thought of as aheuristic for predicting what could happen in contexts of deprivation and when integrative mechanisms fail. I elaborate on the framework next.

**A Framework for Analyzing Birth Registration and Social Exclusion**

As a framework for understanding disadvantage and marginalization in various spheres of society, social exclusion is concerned with relational aspects, especially the nature and degree of participation. Marginal participation in different spheres of society indicates that the individual and social group in question are not genuine members of the moral and social community within which they exist. Such people are not accorded equal recognition of their status as members of society.

The term society is often loosely used but can more appropriately define the broader collective of individuals bound by rights and obligations founded on a moral order (Room, 1995 in Saunders, 2008), which may be aligned with the boundaries of a political community as discussed above. For research purposes, however, the term society remains vague. Social science researchers use abstract terms such as “systems” and “levels” in order to make sense of exclusion. Social exclusion, then, is understood as the inability of individuals and people to participate in the multiple systems that comprise society. These systems have been conceptualized in abstract terms as “the democratic and legal system”, “labor market system” and the “welfare system”, which give rise to civic integration, economic integration and social integration, respectively. The family and proximal community also constitute a system from which interpersonal integration of individuals flows (Berghman, 1995 cited in O’Brien and Penna, 2008). The terms micro- and the macro-level often refer to the individual and his or her proximal social group and the broader collective, respectively.

Social exclusion occurs at many levels in various groups and collectives both of a formal and informal nature. It may come about when individuals have been left out of networks of caring and supportive relationships in family and community spheres. For example, we can assume that a double orphan who has lost both parents may be, to a larger degree, excluded from meaningful relationships of care and support.

Society can also be defined as a configuration institutions, understood here as both formal and informal rules of the game and bureaucracies. Informal rules of the game include those normative aspects of culture which tend to preclude the access of some individuals and social groups to resources, opportunities and specific environments. Examples include values systems which force girl children into early marriages or deny girls an education. Formal legal instruments, policies and agencies are at the center of social exclusion analysis because they either hinder or enhance people’s participation through restricting their access to occupational environments. Therefore, the role of institutions in facilitating or denying the incorporation and integration of social groups into the mainstream processes of development is at the heart of social exclusion analysis (O’Brien and Penna, 2008).

Because social exclusion denotes the inability or lack of capacity to participate in principal activities of society, an analysis of agency is a fruitful enterprise in social exclusion analysis. Agency captures individuals’ ability to influence the world around them and achieve those things they value (Battaglia,1997). Understanding how disadvantaged people act on inequality and marginality in order to engender their own integration is relevant to a study of social exclusion. Similarly, examining the factors that either catalyze or undermine the incorporation of individuals and social groups into the society constitutes a relevant area of social exclusion analysis. Those structures that restrict individuals in their quest to realize their full capabilities is central to social exclusion analysis.

Social exclusion outcomes have been conceptualized in various terms as well. For example, lack of ownership and assets required for production, inability to participate in any form of employment or education is said to give rise to *production exclusion* (Hazari and Mohan, 2015). A state of *consumption exclusion* or *impoverishment* arises when individuals lack capacity to purchase goods and services (O’Brien and Penna, 2008). Furthermore, a failure to access social support in a range of dimensions including not having someone who can listen to or relax with the individual can be deemed *social interaction exclusion* (Tanton et al., 2010).

Birth registration is best understood as a process comprising three stages namely, *notification* of birth by a state official who witnessed the birth of the child as well as *registration* and *certification* of birth by a civil registrations officer. As observed in the introduction, birth registration constitutes an initial legal step toward integration of the newborn child into society. Without it, it is presumed, the risk of deprivation and marginalization for the unregustered child increases throughout the life cyle. Non-birth registration leads to marginal integration of the child in many sectors of society including the political, economic and welfare systems.

The conceptualizations of social exclusion, citizenship and birth registration discussed thus far have influenced the content analyses (Finfgeld-Connett, 2013) of interviewer accounts which will be presented in the results section.



**DATA ANALYSIS**

This section analyses three case studies generated from participants. Based on the conceptualization of social exclusion discussed above, the analysis (i) reveals drivers of exclusion embedded in the narratives and (ii) identifies sites/subsystems of exclusion in order to, and (iii) attempts to reveal the relationships between social exclusion outcomes and birth registration outcomes. In addition, the analysis of the narratives reveals perceived causal pathways of drivers and outcomes of exclusion.

**Case study 1: Informality, Marginalization and Multiple Deprivations**

Mr and Mrs Chidhakwa live in an emerging low density suburb located on a plain – previously a commercial farm – west of Bindura, a small town north-east of Harare. They live with their eight children, three of whom are girls, on a rented property. The oldest child is a 15 year-old boy enrolled at a local secondary school. Not unlike the house they rent, most houses in the neighborhood are either under construction or they have been left unfinished, with some currently at foundation and window levels.

Not a single house in the vicinity was connected to the electricity grid. Neither are they linked to the water and sewer networks. One dirt road cuts across the plain, connecting the emerging suburb with two established neighborhoods on both ends. The dirt road is wide enough to accommodate two streams of traffic flowing in opposite directions. Winding footpaths and narrow strips connect the houses and building sites to the main dirt road, literally crisscrossing the terrain, creating a patchwork of bare land – possibly used as fields during the rainy season – and waist-high grass. Occasionally, a car drifts along the main dirt road, stirring dark clouds of dust and carbon gases in its wake. The clouds of dust stay afloat the air for a while, but quickly sink in the plain, leaving behind a rustic feel.

This is where Mr and Mrs Chidhakwa reside, on an unfinished property. Thus far, the owner has erected only one of the many rooms on the house plan. Corrugated metal sheets balanced on bare brick walls provide protection from rain and other elements. The floor is a rough unfinished dried mass of concrete. Still, the Chidhakwas are grateful for the providence; to have a place to call home, at least for now. The children use the room to keep important belongings and to change clothes. They sleep outside. A pit latrine complete with poles and plastic sheets wrapped around the perimeter provides privacy for ablutions for the family. An unprotected well provides water for cooking and drinking.

Asked how 10 people could share a room, Mrs Chidhakwa mentioned that children sleep outside at night. She said that the family was taking advantage of the dry weather until they find an alternative. And yet, she revealed, money had been hard to come by. Recently, her vegetable vending business attracted a few more competitors. She could hardly raise money for rental. Mr Chidhakwa also plies his trade in the informal sector. When their irregular incomes are combined, Mr and Mrs Chidhakwa struggle to provide two regular meals per day.

No one at the Chidhakwas had a birth certificate at the time of the interview. Mrs Chidhakwa never acquired a birth certificate or a national identity card. Her husband had a birth certificate but lost it some time back when changing houses. One of the children was enrolled in a secondary school at the time of the interview. Two children who are in primary school had failed to benefit from the Basic Assistance Education Module (BEAM) due to lack of a birth certificate.

Table 1 demonstrates social exclusion drivers, sites of exclusion as well as potential social exclusion outcomes.



By probing during the interview and analysis why a situation of perceived exclusion exists, establish the potential connections among the multiple factors which have shaped the marginal status of participations in birth registration. Figure 1 depicts the perceived social exclusion factors that has shaped the immediate circumstances of the Chidhakwas such as poor enforcement of housing control standards and resultant urban informality. Table 1 further identifies the drivers of social exclusion, spheres of exclusion and potential outcomes of exclusion embedded in the story of the Chidhakwas (C1) and the other two cases for Mai Taruvinga and Musiyiwa, that is, C2 and C3 respectively. It shows, for example, that children’s lack of adequate decent housing affects their participation in the social welfare system, which potentially generated marginal social integration.

**Figure 1: Unregistered Girls Living in Crowded and Shared Living Spaces**

**(Place figure 1 here)**

Figure 1 illustrates the perceived causal pathways of the drivers and outcomes of social exclusion associated with circumstances of unregistered children living in a crowded incomplete house in an emerging suburb.

**Cased Study 2: Mai Taruvinga’s Struggle for Legal Documents**

When I met Mai Taruvinga a mother of four in her early 30s, she informed me that none of her children lacked a birth certificate. She represented this birth registration success as a “miracle”. On further probing of what she actually meant, Mai Taruvinga revealed that until the previous year, she had no single positive identification document issued by the state, be it a birth certificate, identity card, driver’s licence or passport. None of her children, too, possessed a birth certificate or any other document. As Mai Taruvinga narrated her story, I learnt that one of the barriers to acquiring birth certificate was getting the registrar general’s office to issue her mother’s death certificate – a requirement for a successful application for birth registration. Mai Taruvinga’s parents, I learnt, had either divorced before she was born or her father had refused paternity. Consequently, Mai Taruvinga had to adopt her maternal surname at school. After six years in primary school, she dropped out.

Mai Taruvinga went on to recount that, when her mother attempted to acquire a birth certificate for her, she had either failed to locate him or he was simply not forthcoming. Then one day, she died in her sleep. No one could have guessed the cause of death since she had no history of known illnesses. She was buried the next day. No autopsy was done. After a few months, the belongings of Mai Taruvinga’s mother were shared among close relatives at a ceremony, according to the Shona traditional custom. The ceremony that mirrors what legal officials do when executing the deceased’s estate.

When Mai Taruvinga’s son started grade seven, which is the last year of primary education in Zimbabwe, she knew that a birth certificate was needed to register his candidacy for public examination that school year. At that time she knew that she had to pursue all the necessary legal documents for her family. The starting point was to lodge an application for her mother’s death certificate. After the initial application, Mai Taruvinga, her brother and her 16 year old son, each visited the registrar general’s office twice to follow up. Mai Taruvinga informed me that each time she follow-up at the registrar general’s office, she had to walk more than 8 km to reach the main dirt road where she gets a shuttle to the registrar general’s office in Bindura at a cost of USD 6 per return trip.

She revealed that, at some point, one of the officials at the RG’s office asked for a bribe in order to fast-track her application. But another official, *Janet*, a woman in her mid-thirties got to know about it and vowed to help her. That is how Mai Taruvinga acquired her mother’s death certificate, her own birth certificate and a national identity card. Janet wrote official letters to relevant authorities to help Mai Taruvinga access birth notification papers and other documents required to apply for a birth certificate. As soon as the birth notifications and other documents were available, Janet processed Mai Taruvinga’s application for birth certificates on the same day.

**Figure 2: Why Mai Taruvinga’s Children Remain Unregistered Beyond the Fifth Year? (place figure 2 here)**

The perceived social exclusion and causal connections between socio-cultural factors and institutional aspects which might explain why Mai Taruvinga’s children remained unregistered through beyond five years are depicted in Figure 2 and Table 1.

**Case study 3: Exclusion From Extra-Curricular Activities and Institutions**

We learnt about *Musiyiwa* – a 15-year old teen who had lived in alternative care since he was barely a week old – from Mr Kugotsi, the social worker at the Children’s Home. Speaking of Musiyiwa, Mr Kugotsi related that, not unlike other children under the institution’s care, Musiyiwa had no memory of his mother who had successfully concealed his birth and clandestinely abandoned him at a *cul de sac* three or so days after birth. He was not aware of his relatives either. But that fact of life could not entirely hold him back as far as sport was concerned. Mr Kugotsi’s estimation of his sporting abilities was very positive. He reckoned that Musiyiwa was naturally talented in track and field sports and he invested a lot of effort in practice. The headmaster of a local authority school located a stone throw away shared this opinion. In fact Musiyiwa was part of the school’s athletic team.

Despite his enduring passion for sport, Musiyiwa had to contend with huge barriers before he could compete at interschool and higher levels. When he was first selected to represent the school team, his break-through was momentarily rolled back: he had no proper birth certificate to prove his age and aspects of identity such as place of origin and details of parents. Strictly speaking, Musiyiwa could not compete without a birth certificate. Yet the social worker at the institution and the school head concurred that competing in interschool competition was good for Musiyiwa’s self-efficacy. And it was good for the school too. The headmaster, Mr Kugotsi recounted, reckoned that Musiyiwa’s involvement in a competition helped to put the name of the school on the map.

As a remedy, the school authorities agreed to do something so unconventional. They let Musiyiwa use a fellow pupil’s birth certificate in the competitions. And it worked, at least from the school’s point of view. Musiyiwa *actually* competed at sub-national and national levels and collected accolades in recognition of his abilities. But for Musiyiwa, something was not going right, the social worker revealed. The schoolmate’s name rather than his name was on the accolades. This has remained a sore point for Musiyiwa.

Mr Kugotsi detailed that, ideally, a set of official documents is required to sufficiently place a child in alternative care. These include a probation officer’s report, police report, medical examinational report, an age estimation report as well as a birth certificate. However, as with many other children in need of care, Musiyiwa’s placement was sort of an emergency and he lived at the institution without documents for many years. Mr Kugotsi revealed that,

[Acquiring the birth certificate] becomes our [the Children’s Home] responsibility to go and remind them that this child has no birth certificate….It becomes a burden on [our shoulders]…You face the child every day. She asks….I want to participate in sport, I don’t have a birth certificate…

Mr Kugotsi further clarified that “[where possible] the Registrar General’s Office requires that relatives [of an abandoned child] be traced before a birth certificate can be issued”. Tracing relatives was a huge a setback for Musiyiwa since his Probation Officer’s report indicated that blood relatives exist somewhere in the Gweru’s countryside. His birth certificate could not be processed until a witness has been located. Mr Kugotsi revealed that in 2009, 87 out of 150 children at the institution lacked birth certificates. Fifty out of 120 children at the institution had no birth certificates in 2014 compared with 27 out 120 who lacked a birth certificates in 2015.

From the story of Musiyiwa, one learns that personal and relational factors interact with institutional aspects to construct social exclusion outcomes, including non-birth registration. For Musiyiwa, this compromises his participation in extracurricular activities at school. Figure 3 represents perceived causal pathways that help explain Musiyiwa’s marginal participation in sport.

**Figure 3: Factors that explain Musiyiwa’s marginal participation in extra-curricular activities (place figure 3 here)**

**Table 1: Social exclusion drivers, sites of exclusion and potential social exclusion outcomes embedded in participants’ stories (place Table 1 here)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | **Drivers of Social Exclusion** | **Sub-system in which exclusion occurs** | **Potential Exclusion Outcome** |
| **Miro-level factors** | **Personal attributes and relational factors** | Child abandonment (C3)| Lack of knowledge of parents and relatives (C3) | Unmarried fathering (C2; C3), lone parenting (C2) | Family and community system (C1; C2; C3); Social welfare system (C1; C2; C3) | Poor social integration (C1; C2; C3); poor interpersonal integration/ social interactions exclusion (C1; C2; C3) |
| Alternative care arrangements/institutionalization (C3) | Family and community system (C3) | Poor social integration / poor interpersonal integration/ social interactions exclusion (C3) |
| Children’s lack of a birth certificate(C1; C2; C3) | Social welfare system **|** legal and democratic system (C1; C2; C3) | Poor social integration | Civic marginalization/Poor civic integration (C1; C2; C3) |
| Parents’ lack of birth certificates (C1; C2) | Legal and democratic system | Social welfare system (C1; C2) | Marginal social integration | Services exclusion (C1; C2) |
| Lack of death certificates to prove death of a parent (C2) | Democratic and legal system (C2) | Civic marginalization/Poor civic integration (C2) |
| Conflicts over paternity, unmarried fathering, lone parenting (C2; C3) | Family and community system (C2; C3) | Social interactions exclusion/ Poor interpersonal integration (C2; C3) |
| Lack of knowledge and attitudes toward death registration (C2) | The democratic and legal system (C2) | Civic marginalization/Poor civic integration (C2) |
|  |  | Income poverty **|** Informality/participation in the informal economy (C1) | The labour market system |The social welfare system| legal and democratic system (C1) | Civic marginalization/Poor civic integration | Poor social integration | Marginal economic integration (C1) |
|  |  | Children’s lack of access to basic housing services (C1) | Social welfare system (C1) | Marginal social integration (C1) |
| **Macro-level factors** | **Informal norms and practices** | Societal values that condone unmarried fatherhood and while ostracizing unmarried motherhood (C2; C3) | Family and community system (C1; C2) | Social interactions exclusion/ Poor interpersonal integration (C1; C2) |
|  |  | Shared beliefs and practices associated with death and dying | Family and community system | social welfare **|** The democratic and legal system | Poor social integration | Civic marginalization/Poor civic integration |
| **Institutional factors** | Cumbersome procedures for acquiring requisite vital documents; Transactional costs; Weaknesses of the CRVS systems as far as registering birth and deaths and causes of death is concerned; Complacency of Department of Child Welfare Officers and Registrar General officers; Poor institutional arrangements including weak coordination mechanisms  (C1;C2;C3) | Social welfare system **|** democratic and legal system (C1;C2;C3) | Civic marginalization/Poor civic integration **|** Poor social integration (C1;C2;C3) |
| Exclusive sporting regulations **|** exclusion from extra-curricular field and track sports (C3) | Social welfare system **|** democratic and legal system | Civic marginalization/Poor civic integration | Poor social integration (C3) |

C1 = Case study 1; C2 = Case study 2; C3 = Case study 3

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Narratives that seek to marshal public action to boost civil registration of vital events tend to frame birth registration as a citizenship issue. A birth certificate is said to be an important intial legal step toward the integration of a child into society. Both the delay in and failure to, register a child’s birth compound the social exclusion of that child. While the claim that non-birth registration increases the child’s risk of social exclusion is arguably persuasive, it is hardly supported by evidence. Therefore, this article set out to examine the various aspects of social exclusion connected with non-birth registration embedded in participants’ narratives.

Examining the agency – that is, the situated practices improvised by marginalized people in order to enact their integration (Gomberg-Muñoz, 2010) – of participants embedded in their narratives inevitably exposes the ways in which structures interact with multiple other factors to shape the perceived situation of marginality (see Moen, 2008). As both an outcome and driver of social exclusion, non-birth registration is part of a dynamic in which multiple informal, formal, institutional, personal and social factors interact over time. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this dynamic is the finding that the seemingly “far-fetched” normative aspects of culture, for example, people’s shared beliefs and practices around death and dying tend to increase the likelihood of non-birth registration and other social exclusion outcomes. In Musiyiwa’s case, societal value systems that diminish the status of unmarried mothers while condoning unmarried fatherhood might have influenced his mother’s decision to abandon him. The story of Musiyiwa (C3) demonstrates that the limited involvement of the biological father and the eventual abandonment separated Musiyiwa from close relatives thereby precluding his participation in social relations of care and support (Hazari and Mohan, 2015). As shown in Table 1, this situation amounts to poor interpersonal integration which, when combined with institutional factors such as the preconditions for registering the birth of a child in alternative care, gave rise to further marginal participation in extracurricular activities. Musiyiwa’s ineligibility to legally compete in sport at school, at par with his compatriots, further compromises his participation, now and in the future, in multiple systems including the social welfare, political and labour market system.

Similarly, from Mai Taruvinga’s story, we learnt that people’s beliefs and practices around death and dying are not disconnected from factors that give rise to non-birth registration across generations. A corollary of this, is the idea that, in the social exclusion dynamic, the personal and the social (England, 2016) influence each other in ways that negatively affect birth registration outcomes. Mai Taruvinga’s case suggests that death practices may equally wield influence over how individuals in family and community systems pursue deaths registration procedures. Similarly, those beliefs may equally influence the ways in which government bureaucrats prioritize the registration of deaths as a critical policy aspect of birth registration.

Another key point emphasized by the narratives is the notion that social exclusion is constructed over time, sometimes across generations. In this dynamic, drivers of social exclusion tend to interact with and reinforce each other thereby complicating an individual’s risk of exclusion (Tanton et al., 2010). Interestingly, some factors that were outcomes of social exclusion at one point may become drivers of further exclusion. In Masiyiwa’s case, lack of a birth certificate – an outcome of circumstances of abandonment and alternative care – is considered a causal factor in his marginal participation in sport.

The cases have shown that multi-level factors combine to undermine the individual’s participation in multiple systems of society. Dimensions of exclusion which affect birth registration outcomes manifest at multiple levels and they typically transcend generations. Table 1 demonstrates that an individual’s marginal participation in many systems may result from one driver of exclusion. For example, in the case of the Chidhakwas, urban informality, as evidenced by poor enforcement of housing standards and informal employment activities, tends to impede the family’s access to the social welfare system and the labour market system.

To end this article, it is pertinent to reflect on its limits. The reader is reminded that the motivation for writing this article flowed from the paucity of empirical evidence to back the claim that non-birth registration increases the risk of social exclusion. Although, I believe, the article provides some insight into non-birth registration as an aspect of exclusion, a bigger qualitative sample could have enriched the analysis. Because social exclusion is a multidimensional phenomenon, it is less likely that a single study that draws on qualitative data can sufficiently illuminate all the processes and outcomes of social exclusion for unregistered individuals.

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