

Birth Registration in Bangladesh

-AKM Saiful Islam Chowdhury
Project Director (Additional Secretary)
Birth and Death Registration project.
Website: www.br.lgd.gov.bd
Email: saislach@yahoo.com
Phone: +(88) 01716206557

BACKGROUND

Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that every child has the right to a name, identity and nationality. We believe that Birth Registration (BR) is a first and significant step in meeting child rights as it is the first official acknowledgement of the child's existence and the recognition of the child's status before the law. In Bangladesh, specifically for child, we realized that birth registration is very essential to secure child rights. Birth registration is also essential for national planning and as a demographic base to build effective strategies.

In the above context, in 1996, with the assistance of UNICEF the Local Government Division started a pilot project in Holidhani Union Parishad of Jhenaidah district with a view to strengthen the birth registration system. From this pilot project, we experienced the key issues such as the absence of an effective and functioning birth registration system, the weak capacity of the relevant local government authorities and low level of awareness on the importance of birth registration.

Action

With active support of UNICEF, the government started a project called “Birth and Death Registration Project” in 2001 under the Local Government Division. At that time BR rate was at approximately 10% of the total population only. Since then the project has been working for policy formulation and implementation of birth and death registration in Bangladesh. The Birth and Death Registration Project implemented its activities during 2001-2006 as its 1st phase and 2007-2011 as 2nd phase. Now the project is implementing its 3rd phase. During the period 2001-2011, the project adopted different strategy to clear the back-log creating enormous scope and momentum to achieve mass coverage of birth registration. Now the number of birth registration is 155.57 million which is nearly to our population.

Legislative Reform

One of the critical steps taken to streamline the birth and death registration system in Bangladesh has been legislative reform. The Birth and Death Registration Act 1873 and the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1886 were repealed and the new Birth and Death Registration Act was adopted in 2004 and entered into force in July 2006. Following the act, the government also adopted corresponding birth and death registration rules in 2006. This act creates necessity to produce birth certificate as proof of age and identity for 16 different services.

Birth and Death Registration Information System

In 2009, the project took a very important initiative to establish an effective and functional electronic birth and death registration system called “Birth and Death Registration Information System (BRIS)”. This online BRIS software has been implemented in all the registrar offices. Computer equipments and necessary training have also been provided for smooth running of the software. Online registration as well as computerization of previous data is going on in all the registrar offices. We have more than 63 million data online now and hope rest of the manual data will be computerized by 2013. The registrar offices are 4571 Union Parishads, 310 Municipalities, 10 City Corporations, 15 Cantonment Boards in county and 38 Embassies abroad.

The BRIS has created a vast opportunities to perform and verify birth and death registration online, maintain birth and death registration data centrally, link the database to immunization and education as well as other services, create a demographic base to build effective strategies and also become an effective monitoring mechanism.

The nationwide huge transformation from manual birth and death registration system to electronic system has been possible for continuous and relentless efforts by the personals of registrar offices. They have done a tremendous job for the nation. More than 62 million data is in now online birth registration system.

Office of the Registrar General

The government has taken initiatives to set up an office of the Registrar General for overall supervision of the activities related to birth and death registration for its sustainability. The provision for setting up an office of Registrar General has been incorporated into the amendment bill of birth and death registration act which is now under process in the parliament. It is mentionable here that the proposed amendment bill consists of some other provisions which will expedite the birth registration as well as death registration in a right track.

Communication strategy and awareness rising

As the low level of awareness amongst the general public was identified as one of the obstacles for birth registration, the project has been conducting sensitization campaigns on the importance of BR. Communication and advocacy materials such as posters, and leaflets are produced and distributed, including audiovisual resources for mass media outlets. One of the key messages is the time-bound activity of free birth registration. Every year we celebrated 3 July as birth registration day. Priority should be given to children as registration realizes the right to a name, as well as providing a protection mechanism against exploitation and abuse.

Future action

The Government of Bangladesh has set the target to reach universal birth registration by the end of 2013. The Birth and Death Registration Act provides the way for birth registration to adopt a cross sectoral approach by linking its activities to the health and education sector. By registering students through schools and children through immunization programs, it can be a very effective and sustainable tool to achieve universal birth registration.