

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

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ABSTRACT

Birth registration is becoming an important arena of political mobilisation 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 realising the child's right to a name, nationality and citizenship, and (b) both the delay in registering 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 to marginalisation 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

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by the fifth birthday (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 90 km north-east of Harare (Zimbabwe). Although the study was largely quantitative, key informant interviews were conducted with participants purposively selected on the basis 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 children across their 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 impede 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, for example, the Census, and the regular Demographic Health Survey (DHS) in Zimbabwe, seem to emphasise 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. Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically 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 children's births constitutes a violation of their right to a name and nationality. Global and national level civil society (Salamon, Sokolowski, and Anheier 2000) taps into this international human rights regime to construct discourses that frame children as rights-bearing subjects, emphasising 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 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other child-related international legal instruments have become tools for standardising and universalising 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 realised 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, spaces where daily interactions of children occur such as the home, neighbourhood and community are important sites in which citizenship is invoked, appropriated, reconstructed and enacted.

In order to mobilise 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 to 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 policymakers, 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 conceptualisations of social exclusion in literature by non-profit organisations 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 (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 certificate 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 in relation to 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, the lack of participation is at the core of many conceptualisations 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 marginalisation. 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 the lack of material needs fuels social exclusion in the 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 Department of Economic and Social Affairs 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 at 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, feed into a denial of rights, opportunities, agency and voice (Saunders 2008). However, a theme that emerges from the 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 et al. 2010; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2016). According to O'Brien and Penna (2008), social exclusion can be thought of as a heuristic for predicting what could happen in contexts of deprivation and when integrative mechanisms fail. I elaborate on the framework next.

A Framework for Analysing Birth Registration and Social Exclusion

As a framework for understanding disadvantage and marginalisation 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 conceptualised in abstract terms as "the democratic and legal system", "labour 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 macro-level often refer to the individuals and their 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 of 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 centre 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 catalyse 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 realise their full capabilities are central to social exclusion analysis.

Social exclusion outcomes have been conceptualised in various terms as well. For example, the 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 the 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 the notification of birth by a state official who witnessed the birth of the child, the registration and the certification of the 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 marginalisation for the unregistered child increases throughout the life cycle. Non-birth registration leads to marginal integration of the child in many sectors of society including the political, economic and welfare systems.

The conceptualisations 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 conceptualisation of social exclusion discussed above, the analysis (i) reveals drivers of exclusion embedded in the narratives, (ii) identifies sites or subsystems of exclusion, 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, Marginalisation 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 neighbourhood 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 were they linked to the water and sewer networks. One dirt road cuts across the plain, connecting the emerging suburb with two established neighbourhoods 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 criss-crossing 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 into 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 the 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 the 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 of 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 of the children who were in primary school had failed to benefit from the Basic Assistance Education Module (BEAM) owing to the lack of a birth certificate.

By probing during the interview and analysis why a situation of perceived exclusion exists, the potential connections among the multiple factors which have shaped the marginal status of participations in birth registration were established. Figure 1 depicts the perceived social exclusion factors that have shaped the immediate circumstances of the Chidhakwas, such as poor enforcement of housing control standards and the 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 (C2) and Musiyiwa (C3). It shows, for example, that the children's lack of adequate decent housing affects their participation in the social welfare system, which potentially generated marginal social integration.

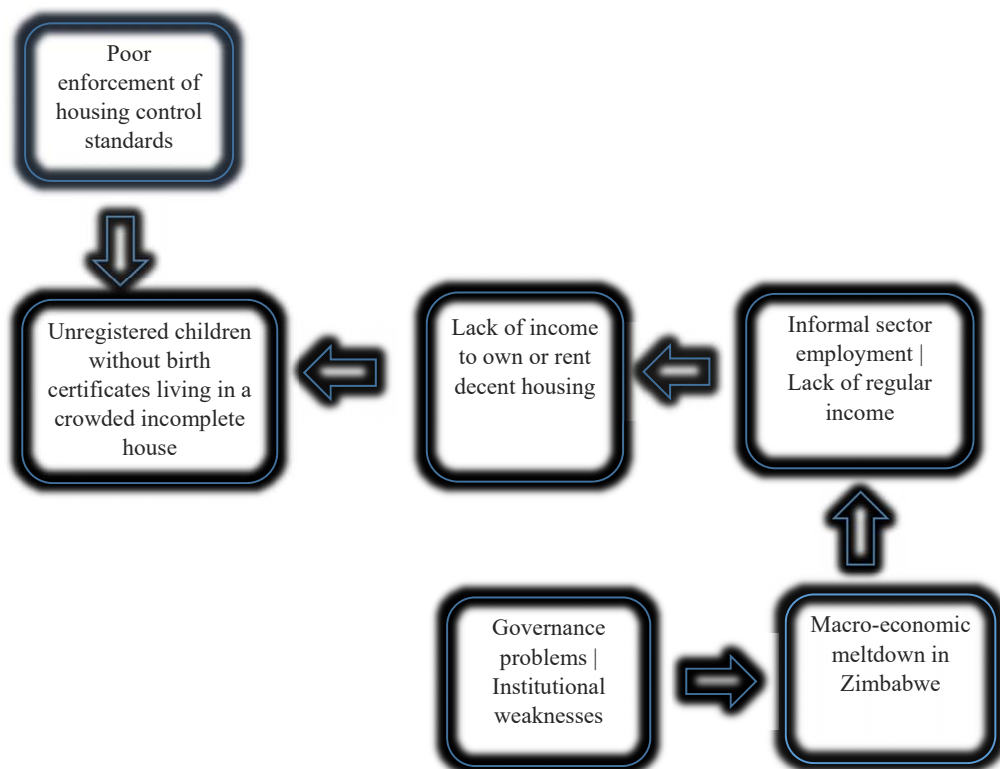


Figure 1: Unregistered children living in crowded and shared living spaces

Figure 1 also 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.

Case 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 regarded 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 a birth certificate was getting the registrar general’s (RG) 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 her biological father or he was simply not forthcoming. Then one day, her mother 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 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 RG's office twice to follow up. Mai Taruvinga informed me that each time she followed up at the RG's office, she had to walk more than 8 km to reach the main dirt road where she gets a shuttle to the RG's office in Bindura at a cost of USD6 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 the 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 the birth certificates on the same day.

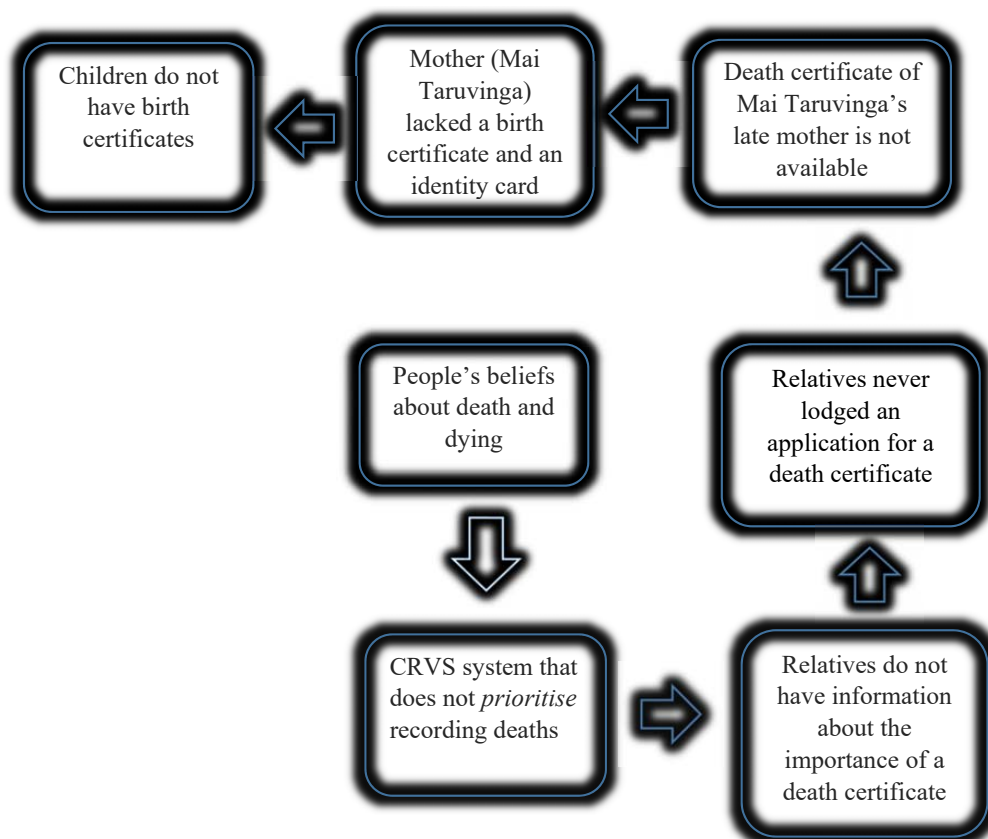


Figure 2: Why Mai Taruvinga's children remained unregistered beyond the fifth year

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 Extracurricular 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 his 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's 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 breakthrough was momentarily rolled back: he had no proper birth certificate to prove his age and aspects of his identity such as the place of origin and the details of his parents. Strictly speaking, Musiyiwa could not compete without a birth certificate. Yet the social worker at the institution and the headmaster concurred that competing in the 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 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 subnational 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 examination 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 RG's office requires that relatives [of an abandoned child] be traced before a birth certificate can be issued". Tracing relatives was a huge setback for Musiyiwa since his probation officer's report indicated that blood relatives exist somewhere in the Gweru 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 of 120 who lacked 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 the perceived causal pathways that help explain Musiyiwa's marginal participation in sport.

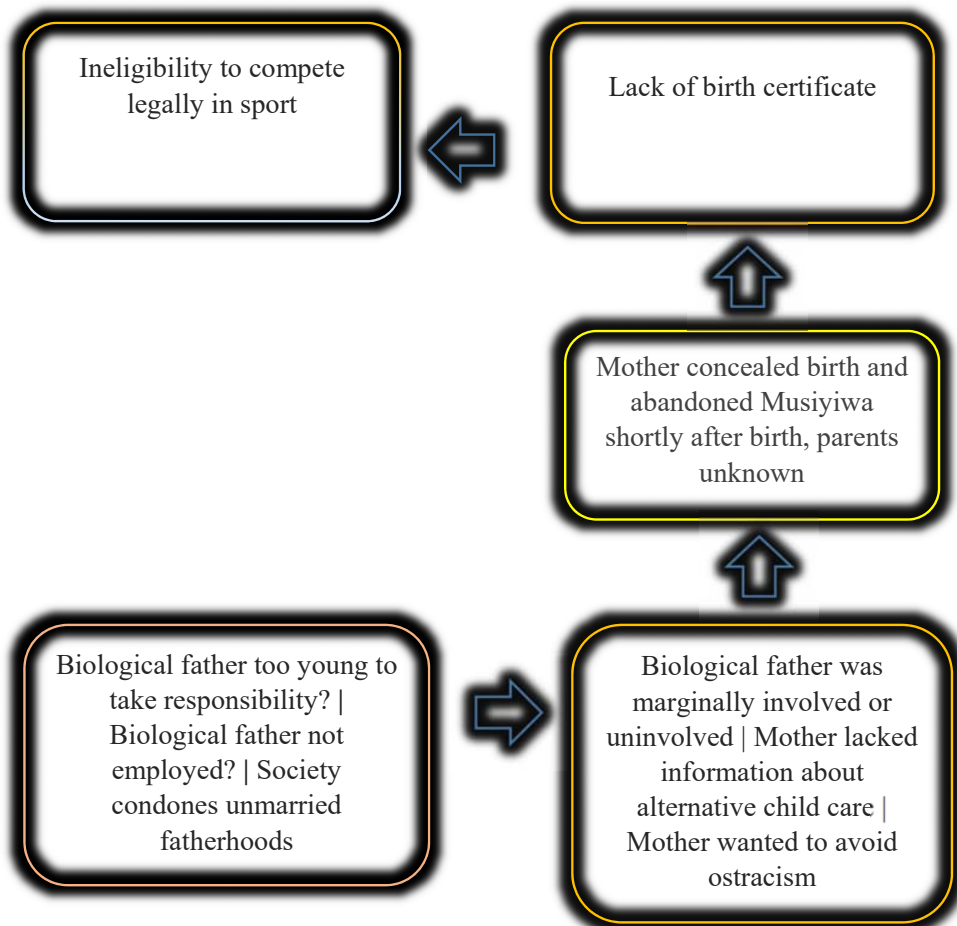


Figure 3: Factors that explain Musiyiwa's marginal participation in extracurricular activities

Table 1: Social exclusion drivers, sites of exclusion and potential social exclusion outcomes embedded in participants' stories

| | | Drivers of social exclusion | Subsystem in which exclusion occurs | Potential exclusion outcome |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Micro-level factors | Personal attributes and relational factors | Child abandonment (C3) Lack of knowledge of parents and relatives (C3) Unmarried father (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 or social interactions exclusion (C1; C2; C3) |
| | | Alternative care arrangements or institutionalisation (C3) | Family and community system (C3) | Poor social integration or poor interpersonal integration or 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 marginalisation 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 certificate to prove death of a parent (C2) | Democratic and legal system (C2) | Civic marginalisation Poor civic integration (C2) |
| | | Conflicts over paternity, unmarried father, lone parenting (C2; C3) | Family and community system (C2; C3) | Social interactions exclusion Poor interpersonal integration (C2; C3) |
| | | Lack of knowledge of and attitudes to death registration (C2) | The democratic and legal system (C2) | Civic marginalisation Poor civic integration (C2) |
| | | Income poverty Informality or participation in the informal economy (C1) | The labour market system The social welfare system Legal and democratic system (C1) | Civic marginalisation 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 fathers while ostracising unmarried mothers (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 marginalisation 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 RG officers Poor institutional arrangements including weak coordination mechanisms (C1; C2; C3) | Social welfare system Democratic and legal system (C1; C2; C3) | Civic marginalisation Poor civic integration Poor social integration (C1; C2; C3) |
| | | Exclusive sporting regulations Exclusion from extracurricular field and track sports (C3) | Social welfare system Democratic and legal system | Civic marginalisation 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 initial legal step toward the integration of a child into society. Both the delay in registering 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 marginalised 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 fathers 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 prioritise the registration of deaths as a critical policy aspect of birth registration.

Another key point emphasised 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 Musiyiwa's case, the 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 multilevel 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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