

Study Report

Birth Registration in Cambodia

An Analysis of Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng Provinces, June 2003



បុគ្គលិកសិទ្ធិមនុស្ស (មរតក)
Cambodian Rights Foundation (CRF)

STUDY REPORT
BIRTH REGISTRATION IN CAMBODIA
—
AN ANALYSIS OF KOMPONG SPEU AND SVAY RIENG PROVINCES

Child Rights Foundation (CRF)

Sponsored by Plan Cambodia

June 2003

Foreword

This report summarises the results of a survey on birth registration in two provinces in Cambodia: Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng. The survey was initiated by Child Rights Foundation (CRF).

CRF is a local Cambodian child-focused, non-profit, non-political, and non-religious Non-Governmental Organization. It works in conformity with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

CRF aims at promoting long-term change in the way children are viewed, cared for, and treated by encouraging all individuals to take personal and collective responsibility to make children's lives safe, positive and wholesome through:

- Working for the understanding of children's rights and needs through awareness raising and advocacy at all levels.
- Assisting the government in the implementation of the UNCRC and monitoring its implementation in Cambodia.
- Promoting child participation and children's voices in society.

The present study was sponsored by Plan Cambodia through CRF and jointly conducted by LIDEE Khmer in cooperation with the Cambodian Research Centre for Development (CRCD, website: <http://www.camdev.org>).

The research team of the present study comprised Dr Thanakvaro T. De Lopez, Ph.D. (Cantab); Ms Berny C. Chong, LL.M. (Cantab); Dr Tin Ponlok, Ph.D. (Moscow); Mr Phok Samrech, M.Eng. (Minsk); Mr Saint Lundy, B.Sc. (Phnom Penh); Mr Sok Kosal, B.Sc. (Phnom Penh).

The following staff members acted as field surveyors in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng Provinces: Mr Nou Phirun, B.Sc. (Phnom Penh); Mr Preab Manel, B.Sc. (Phnom Penh); Mr. Im Sithul, B.Sc. (Phnom Penh); Mr Bin Chanvireak, B.Sc. (Phnom Penh); Mr Yuos Nivath, B.Sc. (Phnom Penh); Mr Nhoung Theary, B.Sc. (Phnom Penh).

CRF Contact Address:

House 29E1, Mao Tse Tung Blvd.,
Sangkat Boeung Keng Kang1,
Khan Chamcar Mon, Phnom Penh,
Kingdom of Cambodia

Tel./fax: 855-23 211 223

Email: crf2002@online.com.kh, crf2000@forum.org.kh

Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	6
LIST OF TABLES	7
LIST OF PICTURES	8
ABBREVIATIONS	9
ABSTRACT AND POLICY BRIEF	10
LOCATION MAP	13
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	14
INTRODUCTION	15
SECTION ONE: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES	16
1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	16
1.1.1 <i>Research questions</i>	16
1.1.2 <i>Geographic location</i>	16
1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	17
1.2.1 <i>Legal analysis, individual interviews and questionnaire survey</i>	17
1.2.2 <i>Questionnaire design and sampling allocation</i>	17
SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LEGAL ISSUES PERTAINING TO BIRTH REGISTRATION IN CAMBODIA	18
2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF BIRTH REGISTRATION	18
2.2 IMPEDIMENTS TO BIRTH REGISTRATION	18
SECTION THREE: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES	21
3.1 INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNE AND VILLAGE ADMINISTRATORS IN KOMPONG SPEU PROVINCE	21
3.2 INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNE ADMINISTRATORS IN SVAY RIENG PROVINCE	21
SECTION FOUR: ANALYSIS OF A SURVEY OF HOUSEHOLDS IN KOMPONG SPEU AND SVAY RIENG PROVINCES	23
4.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS	23
4.2 CHILDREN AND BIRTH REGISTRATION	24
4.3 BIRTH REGISTRATION PROCESS	26
4.4 ASSESSMENT OF THE BIRTH REGISTRATION PROCEDURE BY HOUSEHOLDS	30
4.5 HOUSEHOLDS MAKE SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING BIRTH REGISTRATION RATES	32
SECTION FIVE: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND COURSES OF ACTION	34
5.1 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	34
5.2 COURSES OF ACTION	34

<i>5.2.1 Revision of existing laws</i> -----	35
<i>5.2.2 Raising the awareness of the need to register births</i> -----	37
<i>5.2.3 Procedural improvements</i> -----	37
CONCLUSIONS -----	39
REFERENCES -----	40
APPENDIX 1: STATISTICAL TABLES -----	41
APPENDIX 2: HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONNAIRE -----	47

List of Figures

Figure 1 Percentage of children with birth certificates	25
Figure 2 Reasons for not registering children.....	28
Figure 3 Households' suggestions to improve registration.....	33
Figure 4 Households' suggestions to improve registration (percentage of all households in Svay Rieng).....	33

List of Tables

Table 1 Education level of the head of household (percentage of all households).....	23
Table 2 Occupation of the head of household (percentage of all households)	23
Table 3 Household income (percentage of all households)	24
Table 4 Place of birth and delivery (percentage of all children).....	25
Table 5 Purpose of registering children (percentage of registered children).....	26
Table 6 Province of registration (percentage of all registered children)	26
Table 7 Reasons for not registering children (percentage of head of households with unregistered children)	27
Table 8 Ability to register children (percentage of all households).....	28
Table 9 Payment for registration (percentage of registered children)	29
Table 10 Difficulties encountered in registration (percentage for most recent successful birth registration)	30
Table 11 Obligation to provide birth certificates (percentage of all households).....	30
Table 12 Assistance received during registration (percentage of all households).....	31
Table 13 Rating of the registration document (percentage of all households)	31
Table 14 Rating of the registration procedure (percentage of all households).....	32
Table 15 Households' suggestions for increasing registration (percentage of all households)	32
Table 16 Household size (percentage of all households).....	41
Table 17 Number of children in the household (percentage of all children)	41
Table 18 Age of the children in the household (percentage of all children).....	42
Table 19 Registered children (percentage of all children).....	43
Table 20 Age at which children were registered (percentage of all children)	43
Table 21 Number of days between registration and the issuance of a birth certificate	44
Table 22 Birth registration fees (percentage of all registered children)	45
Table 23 Difficulties in obtaining the registration form	45
Table 24 Person who fills in the registration form (percentage for most recent successful birth registration)	45
Table 25 Boundaries of a 95% confidence interval for proportions in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng	46

List of Pictures

Picture 1 Interview with a village leader in Kompong Speu	22
Picture 2 Asking for birth certificates in Svay Rieng	39

Credits: Picture 1 by T. De Lopez; Picture 2 by Tin Ponlok.

Abbreviations

CNCC	Cambodian National Council for Children
CRCD	Cambodian Research Centre for Development
CRF	Child Rights Foundation
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey of Cambodia
ICN	International Council of Nurses
KHR	Khmer Riel
km	kilometre
km ²	square kilometre
LIDEE Khmer	League of Khmer Students from Abroad
LRC	LIDEE Khmer Research Center
MOP	Ministry of Planning
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	United Nations World Food Program
WSC	World Summit for Children

Abstract and Policy Brief

Background

The rate of birth registration in Cambodia is thought to be approximately 30%. The problem is aggravated by the fact that many existing birth records have been destroyed as a result of years of conflict and political turmoil. This research report analyses the reasons underlying the low birth registration rate in the provinces of Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng. The report consists of an assessment of the Cambodian legal framework for birth registration, a survey of commune and village authorities, and a questionnaire survey of households.

Inadequate legislation on birth registration

Birth registration is an essential indicator of children's rights. Non-registration at birth may lead to negative consequences, including the inability to benefit from social services and to prove identity and age. The need to prove identity and age is particularly important for children in countries where the protection of child rights is minimal. Birth registration, by ensuring a child's name, age and nationality, can protect the child against rights violations including child labour, child trafficking, and child prostitution.

The existing Cambodian legislation on birth registration is inadequate. The current law provides that the parents of a child are obliged to register the birth of the child. However, it remains doubtful whether the requirement to register a birth is mandatory. The current legislation on birth registration suffers from a lack of important details. More information should be provided in the legislation on the actual procedure of registering a birth, and the powers and duties of the civil status official.

Inadequate capacity of registration officials at the commune and village levels

Commune and village administrators do not have the human resources and the physical means to publicise information about birth registration nor to register children efficiently. Dissemination has been limited to piece-meal efforts using loudspeakers during official ceremonies, homemade posters and door-to-door calls around commune and village centres. More significantly, local administrators admit that birth registration remains an issue that is secondary to other development activities.

Children and birth registration in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng

- **Some 17% of children, defined in the survey as individuals less than 18 years of age, have birth certificates in Kompong Speu, versus less than 9% in Svay Rieng.**

- In both provinces, the overwhelming majority of heads of households where children have not been registered are not familiar with the basic concept of birth registration. **In Kompong Speu, some 62% of cases of unregistered children can be attributed to the fact that the head of household had little or no understanding of birth registration. In Svay Rieng province, the level of familiarity of the population appears even lower, with some 91% of cases of unregistered children.**
- On average, it takes 20 **days between registration and issuance of a certificate** in Kompong Speu compared with 33 days in Svay Rieng. In both provinces, some 71% of children received their birth certificates within a week of the request.
- The **average cost of registration** is KHR 1,302 in Kompong Speu (three copies) and KHR 1,936 in Svay Rieng (one copy).

Households make recommendations to government

Our research shows that large numbers of households request that government and local authorities provide **additional information** on birth registration (33% in Kompong Speu and 72% in Svay Rieng). Other recurring suggestions formulated by households include measures for **free birth registration** and **proximity registration**.

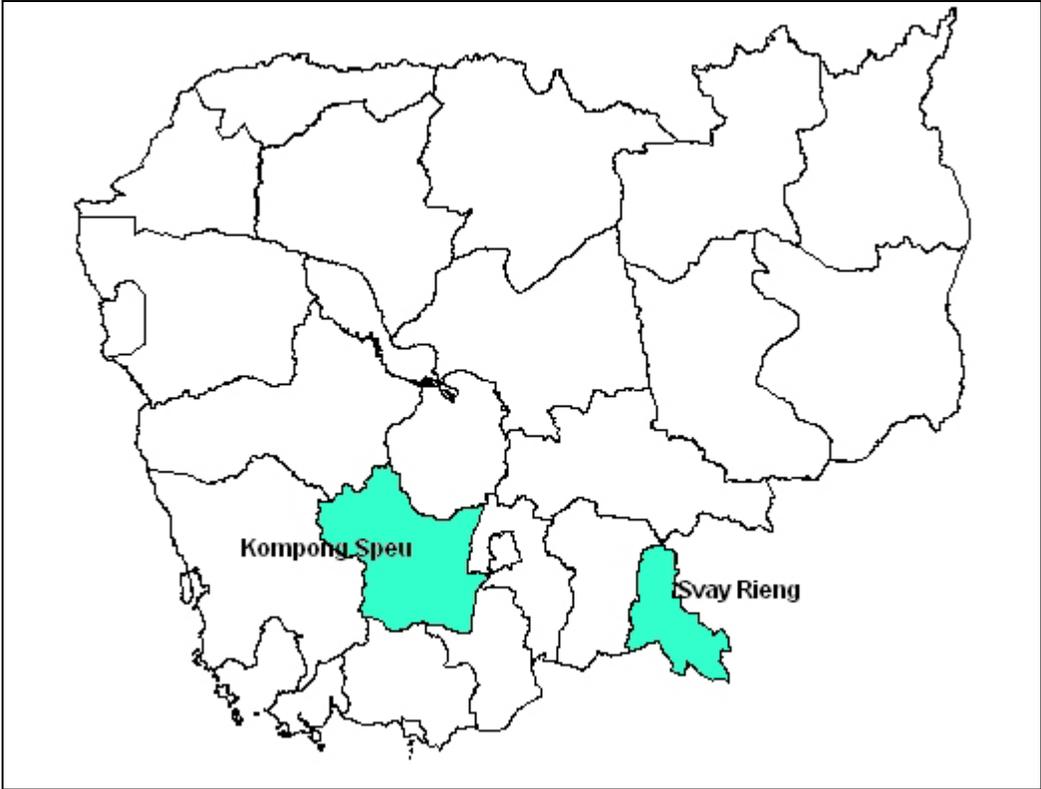
Possible courses of action to increase the birth registration rate

- **Amendments to the existing legislation.** The existing legislation may be altered to make it beyond doubt that registration is **mandatory**. **Penalties** for non-registration ought to be effectively enforced. The 30-day **grace period** for registration must also be examined to see if it is a realistic time-frame for the majority of the population. The **parents' marital status** is unnecessary and ought to be excluded from the required particulars of birth, as it constitutes an obstacle for unmarried couples.
- **Raising the awareness of the need to register births.** **Local officials** require adequate training on the procedures of birth registration and their benefits, so that they are able to communicate this effectively to others. At the same time, general awareness campaigns using the media may provide the **general population** with essential information on birth registration.
- **Improving the registration procedures.** **Simplified procedures** and additional support in completing administrative forms may contribute to increasing child registration. **Proximity registration** with mobile units and on-site registration would help overcome geographical constraints. **Free registration** needs to be considered as registration fees may prove to be an obstacle for the poorer households.

Conclusion

In Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng, the awareness of the benefits of child registration remains low, while local administrators have limited capability to conduct broad based information and registration activities. Low registration in the research area is due to a combination of legal, administrative, social, economic, and geographical factors. Making amendments to the existing legislation, raising the awareness of local officials and of the public, and improving registration procedures may help overcome these obstacles.

Location Map



Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the assistance of provincial and local authorities in the provinces of Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng, as well as the assistance of the Ministry of Interior in granting us official authorisation to undertake our research.

We would like to thank the families who kindly participated in the project and shared their views with us.

Introduction

The World Summit for Children (WSC) recommends birth registration as an indicator to monitor children's rights (UNICEF 2002). The rate of birth registration in Cambodia is poor and is thought to be approximately 30%². The problem is aggravated by the fact that many existing birth records have been destroyed as a result of years of conflict and political turmoil³. The government is still in the process of rebuilding its civil registry. This means that a significant proportion of births are currently unregistered. Recent studies have shown that in some villages and communes, the rate of birth registration can be as low as 7% to 20%⁴.

The present study was sponsored by Plan Cambodia through the Child Rights Foundation. Research was jointly conducted by LIDEE Khmer and the Cambodian Research Centre for Development (CRCD), with the goal of determining the reasons underlying low birth registration in Cambodia. The research focuses more particularly on two provinces: Kompong Speu, located in proximity to the capital city of Cambodia, and Svay Rieng, adjoining the border with Vietnam.

The first section of our report sets out research objectives and methodologies. In the second section, we review legal issues pertaining to birth registration in Cambodia. Section three discusses findings from interviews of commune and village authorities on birth registration. The results of a survey of households randomly selected in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng are reported in section four of the report. Finally, we discuss potential courses of action and alternatives for increasing birth registration in the study area.

² See www.childinfo.org/eddb/birthreg which sets out a useful jurisdictional comparison of birth rates.

³ See the NGO Report prepared by the NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child (the "NGO Report") at www.oggham.com/cambodia/archives/000389.html and www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.24/cambodiaNGOreport.pdf.

⁴ According to the NGO Report at page 6, 93% of children in the Kandal province do not have registration cards. Similarly, 80% of children in Toum Noup village do not have registration cards.

Section One: Research Objectives and Research Methodologies

1.1 Research objectives

1.1.1 Research questions

The primary objective of the research is to determine the reasons underlying the low birth registration of children in Cambodia. The study focuses on children's birth registration, formally defined as individuals below 18 years of age. More specifically, the purpose of our research is to attempt to answer the following questions:

- Does the Cambodian legal framework adequately provide for the registration of children?
- What are the barriers to birth registration?
- What are the attitudes of people towards birth registration?
- What policies may contribute to an increase in the level of birth registration?

1.1.2 Geographic location

According to the Demographic and Health Survey of Cambodia (DHS), conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) in year 2000, birth registration rates are lowest in Kompong Speu (0.6%) and highest in Svay Rieng (54.5%) (NIS & MOH 2001). This has led the Child Rights Foundation to choose these two provinces as the geographic location of the present research. The DHS reports statistics for "births in the five years preceding the survey that were registered with the civil authority and the percentage for which there is a birth certificate..."

The provincial capital of Kompong Speu is located in proximity to the capital city, Phnom Penh. In contrast Svay Rieng, which shares a border with Vietnam, lies about 122 km from Phnom Penh. Kompong Speu covers an area 7,017 of km² for a population 598,882 of inhabitants, while Svay Rieng an area of 2,966 km² for a population of 478,252 inhabitants (NIS 1999).

Using per capita per day consumption of KHR 1,214 for urban areas and KHR 1,036 for rural areas, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) estimates the poverty rate in Kompong Speu at 18%, compared with 44% in Svay Rieng (MOP & WFP 2002). Svay Rieng lags far behind Kompong Speu on most other social and economic indicators, including early childhood mortality (NIS & MOH 2001), child vaccination (NIS & MOH 2001), access to piped water (NIS 1999) and access to electricity (NIS 1999).

1.2 Research methodology

1.2.1 Legal analysis, individual interviews and questionnaire survey

To investigate the aforementioned issues, we use a combination of research methods: (1) legal analysis and review of national regulations; (2) individual interviews with provincial authorities in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng; and (3) household surveys in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng. By using different methods to investigate a single topic, we aim to gather data from a variety of sources so as to crosscheck our research findings.

1.2.2 Questionnaire design and sampling allocation

The 1998 General Population Census of Cambodia provides the basis for the determination of the sample used in the survey (NIS 2000). The sample is randomly stratified in two stages: at village and household levels. A total number of 406 households in 41 villages were interviewed, which represents a 2% sample size.

In the light of the relatively small sample size both in absolute terms and when compared to the total population sampled, we recommend that policy makers and other stakeholders involved in birth registration activities in Cambodia carefully interpret the results of the questionnaire survey. Thus, in addition to point estimates, we provide confidence intervals in the appendices of our research report. The household survey was conducted over a period of a month in April and May 2003.

	Number of villages in sampling frame	Number of households in sampling frame	Total
Kompong Speu	1,319	114,959	114,959
Svay Rieng	690	97,796	97,796

	Number of villages in sample	Number of households in sample	Total
Kompong Speu	26	221	221
Svay Rieng	15	185	185

Section Two: Review of Legal Issues Pertaining to Birth Registration in Cambodia

2.1 The Importance of birth registration

Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵ provides 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...”.

The consequence of non-registration at birth often leads to dire consequences for the person during both childhood and adulthood. For example, a person who was not registered at birth may not (among other things)⁶: (a) receive free health care (including important vaccinations) and other services that he or she would otherwise be entitled to; (b) attend schools and receive education; (c) vote; (d) obtain a marriage license; (e) in some cases, benefit from social security; (f) open a bank account; and (g) obtain a passport and/or identification card and thereby prove his or her name, age and nationality.

The need to prove identity and age (see (g) above) is particularly important for children in countries where the protection of child rights is minimal. Birth registration, by ensuring a child’s name, age and nationality, can protect the child against rights violations including premature marriages, child labour and premature recruitment into the army. In the context of juvenile justice, it also protects a child from being prosecuted as an adult. In countries where child exploitation is rife, the absence of birth registration and a proper birth certificate can have drastic effects. A child without a proper identity becomes easy prey to unscrupulous individuals involved in child trafficking, prostitution, pornography and child labour.

A poor rate of birth registration also has adverse consequences for the State. Governments need to know what the actual size of the population is and will be in the future in order that adequate resources may be allocated to the populace and services may be planned effectively.

2.2 Impediments to birth registration

The Cambodian legislative framework pertaining to child registration was adopted relatively recently and consists of the following legal texts: Sub-decree 103 on civil status, dated 29 December 2000; Amendment to Sub-decree 103, dated 24 June 2002; Sub-decree 62 on fees for civil status documents and stamps, dated 24 June 2002;

⁵ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, 20 November 1989.

⁶ See www.icn.ch/matters_birth.htm which sets out the views of and the role played by the International Council of Nurses (“ICN”) in the context of birth registration. The ICN has established a Code of Ethics for Nurses. This has been revised and reaffirmed in 2000. See also www.unicef.org/newsline/birthregfaq.htm which sets out the UNICEF fact sheet on birth registration (“Innocenti Digest No.9”).

Guidelines 12 of the Ministry of Interior for recording civil status, dated 8 November 2002; Guidelines 18 of the Ministry of Interior for collecting civil status documents, dated 21 December 2001.

The poor rate of birth registration in Cambodia and in many developing countries can be attributed to a number of factors, some of which are set out below⁷:

(a) Lack of knowledge of the importance of birth registration as a human right

The problem of a lack of knowledge of the requirement and importance of birth registration is particularly acute in rural areas. Parents in poverty-stricken areas may be illiterate and often do not know of the relevance or need for birth registration. There is also little knowledge on the procedure involved in registering a child's birth. In addition, local officials may not be aware of existing legislation concerning birth registration.

(b) Socio-cultural factors

Studies have shown that ethnic minorities and populations in rural areas often suffer from a relatively poorer rate of birth registration. The parent (often the mother, by default) tasked with registering the child's birth may already have a heavy workload. In addition, the birth registration process may make it embarrassing or even difficult for illegitimate children to be registered (i.e. under existing Cambodian legislation, the parent presenting the child for registration has to specify whether the parents of the child are married or not). Illegitimate births are still the subject of local taboos in traditional societies. In addition, parents in poorer and remote areas may not be able to afford the necessary time or travel expenses involved in the process of obtaining a birth registration for their child.

(c) Lack of access to registration facilities and lack of effective registration infrastructures

In Cambodia, there are no effective administrative mechanisms at the community or village level to facilitate the process of birth registration. Although existing Cambodian laws provide that the parents are obliged to report a birth before a civil status official at the khum (commune) or sangkat (district) of his or her permanent residence, access to such officials may be difficult or fraught with administrative obstacles. A local or village registration system may be in place but may not be recognised nationally.

Further, the existing laws are poorly enforced and registration infrastructures enable birth registration cards to be made at any time whenever required. This allows individuals to falsify their names and age. The use of fraudulent registration cards, when unchecked, only serves to promote child labour and exploitation.

⁷ See in general the report of the ICN at www.icn.ch/matters_birth.htm and Innocenti Digest No.9. Both documents examine the possible barriers to birth registration.

(d) Lack of effective legislation and enforcement

The existing Cambodian legislation on birth registration is inadequate. The current law provides that the parents of a child are obliged to register the birth of the child. However, it remains doubtful whether the requirement to register a birth is mandatory. Further, there does not appear to be a penalty for non-registration. All that is stated is that if the parent or guardian of the child does not have the birth registered within 30 days of the date of birth, the parent or guardian will need to request a judgment from a provincial or municipal court. It is only upon the presentation of such court judgment that such birth may be recorded in a civil status book. In addition, there is no provision in the existing legislation which states that birth registration is free of charge and there is little information on the actual procedure involved in registering a birth. As stated earlier, the requirement of parents to reveal the status of their marriage may also be an impediment in itself for socio-cultural reasons.

Section Three: Findings from Interviews with Local Authorities

3.1 Interviews with commune and village administrators in Kompong Speu Province

In Kompong Speu Province, we were able to discuss birth registration issues with commune and village administrators in all the areas where we conducted fieldwork (22 villages in 17 communes).

Commune administrators disseminated information about birth registration through loudspeakers at village festivities and religious ceremonies. In addition, meetings of village chiefs were organised at the level of communes to discuss birth registration legal requirements. In turn, village chiefs put up homemade posters urging for birth registration, and informed local people on a word of mouth basis. An inventive village chief took upon himself to systematically register all guests at wedding ceremonies for birth certificates. Commune and village administrators generally believed that they had adequately disseminated information about birth registration. However, most considered birth registration to be a secondary issue and preferred to focus their activities on rural infrastructure development.

When asked about the low rates of birth registration in Kompong Speu Province, administrators provided the following explanation: most people do not feel the need to register their children as schools do not usually require birth certificates for attendance. Some administrators suggested that all schools should ask for birth certificates, while others warned that the measure might dissuade parents from sending their children to school. Another recurring explanation among administrators was what could be likened to a “snowball effect”. A prevailing belief was that villagers had been appropriately informed, but waited for others to register first. Since birth registration might be an unfamiliar issue for large segments of the population, the general attitude was to “wait and see”. Administrators believed that leading by example was necessary for widespread voluntary registration to take place. Thus, several administrators had registered their families and neighbours in an attempt to encourage other villagers to do likewise.

The official cost of birth registration in Kompong Speu Province is KHR 1,200 for three copies of a birth certificate (a copy is kept for official records and two copies are given to the registrant). Commune administrators did not report any administrative problems and generally believed that they had been provided with enough registers and stamps to carry out registration.

3.2 Interviews with commune administrators in Svay Rieng Province

In the commune of Kruos and Svay Rieng, we were able to discuss birth registration issues with the commune authorities, including commune chiefs and vice-chiefs, as well as commune clerks.

Communal authorities contended that they had informed local people about the legal need to register children. A series of public broadcasts using loudspeakers was made during religious ceremonies at pagodas around the commune, which usually

coincided with public holidays, as well as during weddings and other festivities. Commune administrators admitted that these public broadcasts were of limited effect. Beyond the immediate circles of neighbours and relatives of commune administrators, and of villagers living in close proximity to commune centres, little information about birth registration is likely to have trickled down to individual households.

With a few exceptions, the commune administrators we interviewed usually had moderate understanding of birth registration issues. The public broadcasts essentially focused on the legal obligations of birth registration and provided little explanation as to the reasons why children ought to be registered. Commune administrators felt they were ill equipped for raising the awareness of local people about birth registration. They had been given instructions to inform villagers about registration, but no additional budget or administrative support. Most considered the promotion of birth registration to be an issue secondary to other commune administration tasks. Several commune administrators suggested that non-governmental assistance would be needed to better inform people about birth registration.

The official cost of birth registration in Svay Rieng Province is KHR 500 per official stamp. Commune administrators generally believed that they had been provided with enough registers and stamps to carry out registration. However, their administrative capacity to cope with larger scale registration of children remains uncertain.



Picture 1 Interview with a village leader in Kompong Speu

Section Four: Analysis of a Survey of Households in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng Provinces

4.1 Characteristics of respondents

Education

An insignificant proportion of heads of households interviewed in both provinces have university education. In Kompong Speu, some 10% completed higher secondary education, compared with an approximately equal proportion in Svay Rieng. The number of illiterate people or of people with only basic reading skills reaches some 37% in Svay Rieng. In contrast, a higher proportion of heads of household achieved secondary education in Kompong Speu. Education will presumably be a factor in the capacity of a household to register its children, as basic tasks such as filling in administrative forms cannot be carried out by illiterate households without adequate assistance.

Table 1 Education level of the head of household (percentage of all households)

Education	Kompong Speu	Svay Rieng
Illiterate	9.19	13.1
Basic reading	15.68	23.5
Primary education	27.57	29.0
Lower secondary education	35.68	26.0
Higher secondary education	9.73	8.6
University	2.16	0.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Occupation

In both provinces, the main occupation consists of farming and other related agricultural activities in the overwhelming majority of cases. Office administration, retail, and other categories represent each less than 5% of total employment.

Table 2 Occupation of the head of household (percentage of all households)

Occupation	Kompong Speu	Svay Rieng
Farming	75.1	69.7
Office administration	4.5	3.2
Forestry/Logging	2.2	0.0
Retail	4.5	1.6
Transport	1.9	1.6
Other	11.8	23.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Household income

The proportion of households with declared income of less than KHR 10,000 a month is notably higher in Svay Rieng (46.5%) than in Kompong Speu (4.5%). Income data is of interest as the costs incurred for birth registration may be a deterrent for the poorer households. We discuss these issues further in the following sections.

Table 3 Household income (percentage of all households)

Province	Monthly household income, KHR	%
Kompong Speu	Less than 10,000	4.5%
	10,100-50,000	27.1%
	50,100-200,000	53.4%
	More than 200,000	14.9%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	Less than 10,000	46.5%
	10,100-50,000	31.4%
	50,100-200,000	16.8%
	More than 200,000	5.4%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

4.2 Children and birth registration

Number of children in the household

The distribution of the number of children is similar in both provinces, with the majority of households with one or two children. On average, households in Kompong Speu have 2.5 children, compared with 2.6 children in Svay Rieng.

Childbirth and place of delivery

Almost all children in Kompong Speu (94%) and in Svay Rieng (97%) were born at home, while a considerably smaller minority were delivered in district and provincial health centres. The place of delivery has important consequences for birth registration, as governmental health centres are also able to record births and issue birth notifications. However, notifications are not legally recognised as official birth certificates.

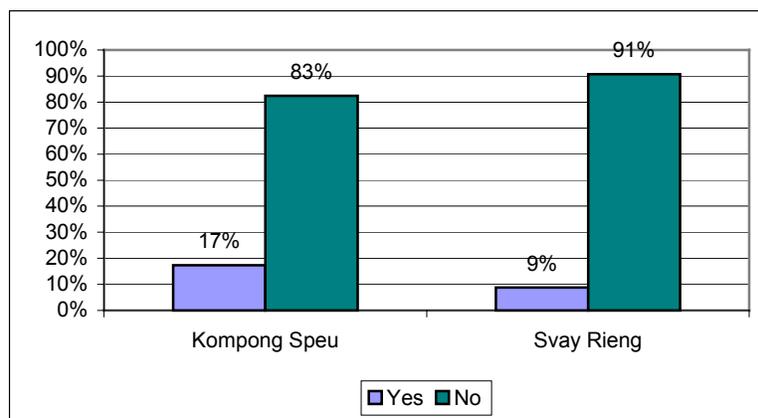
Table 4 Place of birth and delivery (percentage of all children)

Province	Delivery place	%
Kompong Speu	Home	94.1%
	District/ Provincial health centre	4.7%
	Private clinics	1.2%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	Home	96.9%
	District/ Provincial health centre	2.4%
	Private clinics	.2%
	Others	.4%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Percentage of children with birth certificates

Some 17% of children, defined in the survey as individuals less than 18 years of age, have birth certificates in Kompong Speu, versus less than 9% in Svay Rieng. An insignificant percentage of children in both provinces are registered but have lost their birth certificates.

Figure 1 Percentage of children with birth certificates



Age at which children were registered

Most children who have a certificate were registered at birth or before their first anniversary in both Kompong Speu (20%) and Svay Rieng (41%). More than half of all children with certificates were registered by the age of eight in Kompong Speu and by the age of four in Svay Rieng. Thus, it appears that children tend to be registered earlier in their lives in Svay Rieng than in Kompong Speu.

Purpose of registering children

Birth certificates are primarily required for attending schools and for earning wages. Schools and potential employers (positions within government and larger companies) may ask certificates for identification and administration. School attendance and employment are evenly distributed in both provinces. However, both reasons represent some 81% of cases in Svay Rieng, compared with 32% in Kompong Speu. Thus, parents in Kompong Speu register their children for a greater variety of purposes than in Svay Rieng.

Table 5 Purpose of registering children (percentage of registered children)

Province	Purpose	Total
Kompong Speu	School attendance	14.7%
	Employment	17.6%
	Others	67.6%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	School attendance	40.5%
	Employment	40.5%
	Others	19.0%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

4.3 Birth registration process*Province of registration*

The overwhelming majority of children obtained their certificates in the provinces of origin. All children in the Kompong Speu sample are registered in the province, while fewer than 5% in Svay Rieng are registered in Phnom Penh.

Table 6 Province of registration (percentage of all registered children)

Province	Province of Registration	Total
Kompong Speu	Kompong Speu	100.0%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	Phnom Penh	4.8%
	Svay Rieng	95.2%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Reasons why children are not registered

The survey further investigates cases where children have not been registered. In both provinces, the overwhelming majority of heads of households where children have not been registered are simply not familiar with the basic concept of birth registration and are unaware that official authorities can deliver a birth certificate. Thus, in Kompong

Speu, some 62% of cases of unregistered children can be attributed to the fact that the head of household had little or no understanding of birth registration prior to our conducting the survey. We were paradoxically thrown into a situation where we would explain to households what birth registration consisted of, and what the potential benefits for their children would be. In Svay Rieng province, we had the general impression that the level of familiarity of the population with birth registration was even lower, which is statistically confirmed by the fact that in some 91% of cases of unregistered children, the head of household does not have any understanding of birth registration.

Our research further shows that the cost of registration, at this stage, does not seem to be a direct major obstacle (5% in Kompong Speu and none in Svay Rieng). However, in Kompong Speu, some 15% of heads of households with unregistered children list time as a constraint for not registering their children. From an economic perspective, time may be considered to be an opportunity cost. Thus the time spent away from economic activities, such as farming, does constitute an indirect cost for households who decide to undertake the child registration process.

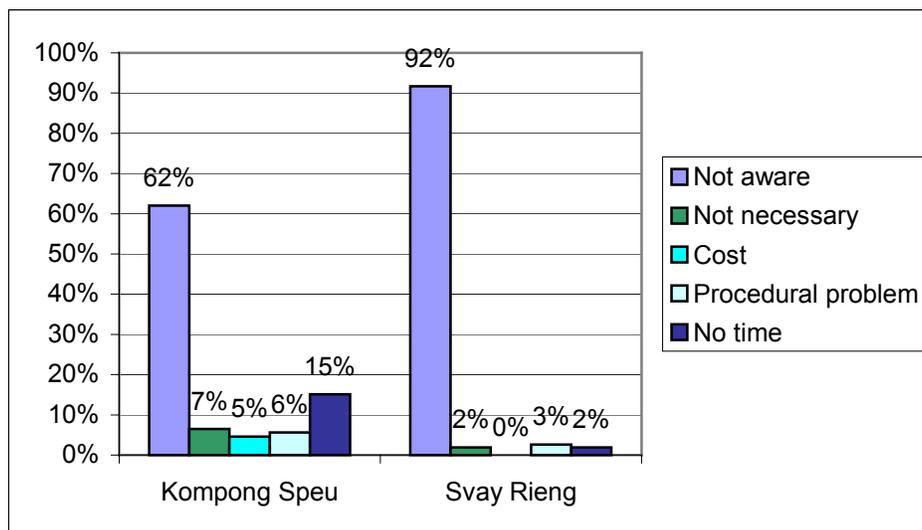
Problems with procedures that households have encountered include the fact that the parents or legal guardians are illiterate and unable to fill in the application forms, difficulties in finding witnesses and the fact that the commune offices were closed on the day where registration was attempted.

Table 7 Reasons for not registering children (percentage of head of households with unregistered children)

Province	Reasons	%
Kompong Speu	Not aware	62.0%
	Not necessary	6.5%
	Cost	4.6%
	Procedural problem	5.6%
	No time	15.1%
	Other	6.2%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	Not aware	91.7%
	Not necessary	1.9%
	Cost	0.0%
	Procedural problem	2.6%
	No time	1.9%
	Other	1.9%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

In summary, we believe that although the official cost of birth registration does not at this stage constitute an obstacle, the economic opportunity cost of registration in terms of time spent away from income generation activities is already an obstacle. We examine the time spent by households in obtaining birth certificates in the following sections. Furthermore, as large segments of the population have yet little understanding of birth registration, it is unclear whether procedural problems or costs would eventually dissuade households to register their children if they were otherwise better informed about the benefits of birth certificates.

Figure 2 Reasons for not registering children
(percentage of heads of households with unregistered children)



Heads of households who can obtain a certificate

When asked whether they know about the process of obtaining a birth certificate, about a third of heads of households in Kompong Speu answer positively, compared with only 16% of people in Svay Rieng.

Table 8 Ability to register children (percentage of all households)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	Do you know how to obtain a birth certificate?	Yes	32.1%
		No	67.9%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%
Svay Rieng	Do you know how to obtain a birth certificate?	Yes	15.7%
		No	84.3%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%

Number of days between the registration and the issuance of a birth certificate

In both provinces, approximately a third of all registered children were successfully registered over a period of one day. In both provinces, some 71% of children received their birth certificate within a week of the request. However, in Svay Rieng, some 5% of children had to wait for a year before obtaining their birth certificates. On average, it takes 20 days between registration and issuance of certificate in Kompong Speu compared with 33 days in Svay Rieng.

Payments for birth registration

In Kompong Speu, for some 90% of registered children, parents or legal guardians had to pay for the issuance of a birth certificate. In Svay Rieng, households had to pay in some 67% of cases, while no payment was required in almost a third of cases.

Table 9 Payment for registration (percentage of registered children)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	Did you have to pay for the birth certificate?	Yes	90.2%
		No	9.8%
	<i>Total</i>		<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	Did you have to pay for the birth certificate?	Yes	66.7%
		No	33.3%
	<i>Total</i>		<i>100.0%</i>

According to local officials we interviewed, the official cost of birth registration in Kompong Speu Province is KHR 1,200 for three copies of a birth certificate. The official cost of birth registration in Svay Rieng Province is KHR 500 per official stamp. The survey shows that in the majority of cases where payments were incurred (64% in Kompong Speu and 50% in Svay Rieng), the official cost of birth registration was paid. We were careful to ask households for all official and non-official payments for the issuance of a birth certificate. In Kompong Speu, in some 21% of cases, households paid more than the official fee, compared with 28.6% in Svay Rieng.

Overall, when taking into account households which did not incur any expenses for registration, the average cost of registration is KHR 1,302 in Kompong Speu (three copies) and KHR 1,936 in Svay Rieng (one copy). Thus, although a larger proportion of certificates were obtained free of charge in Svay Rieng, payments, when incurred are on average substantially higher per copy than in Kompong Speu.

Difficulties encountered in the birth registration process

The survey explores difficulties encountered by households during the process of birth registration for their most recently registered child. Other children were not considered as we estimated that households would have had difficulties recalling earlier birth registrations. About 38% of households in Kompong Speu, faced problems in obtaining their most recent certificate compared with only 7% in Svay Rieng. In this section we explore in detail the different steps of birth registration and potential obstacles for households, including obtaining the form, and understanding and filling in the form.

Table 10 Difficulties encountered in registration (percentage for most recent successful birth registration)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	Did you have any difficulties registering your child?	No	61.8%
		Yes	38.2%
	Total		100.0%
Svay Rieng	Did you have any difficulties registering your child?	No	92.9%
		Yes	7.1%
	Total		100.0%

Households were asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 4 (very difficult, difficult, easy, very easy) difficulties in obtaining the birth registration form. In Kompong Speu, about 20% of households had difficulties obtaining the form, compared with only 5% in Svay Rieng.

In most cases, public officials filled in the registration form (90% in Kompong Speu and 63% in Svay Rieng). About 19% of heads of households had to fill in the form themselves in Svay Rieng, compared with only 8% in Kompong Speu.

Legal obligation to provide birth certificates

The survey asks households whether they are under pressure from authorities to provide birth certificates for their children. These may include village and commune authorities, and schools when parents attempt to register their children. In Svay Rieng, about a third of household interviewed have been asked to provide birth certificates for their children by authorities, compared with 17.0% in Kompong Speu.

Table 11 Obligation to provide birth certificates (percentage of all households)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	Are you under any pressure to provide birth certificates for your children?	Yes	17.0%
		No	83.1%
	Total		100.0%
Svay Rieng	Are you under any pressure to provide birth certificates for your children?	Yes	33.0%
		No	67.0%
	Total		100.0%

4.4 Assessment of the birth registration procedure by households

Large proportions of households in Svay Rieng were unable to answer questions related to the registration procedure, as they were unfamiliar with registration itself. However, we were able to record a more meaningful assessment of the procedure in Kompong Speu. With regards to the assistance they received from local authorities during the registration process, some 56% of households rate it as sufficient. Yet, more

than a quarter rate the assistance as insufficient, and some 4% believe that there was a total lack of assistance. The registration form is considered to be “difficult to understand” or “very complicated” by some 60% of households. Overall, fewer than a third of households in Kompong Speu considered the registration process to be “easy” or “very easy”, while 60% considered it to be “difficult” or “very complicated”.

Table 12 Assistance received during registration (percentage of all households)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	Rate the assistance you received during registration	Total lack	4.1%
		Insufficient	26.7%
		Enough	57.5%
		Full assistance	2.7%
		Do not know	9.0%
	<i>Total</i>		<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	Rate the assistance you received during registration	Total lack	2.7%
		Insufficient	1.6%
		Enough	8.6%
		Full assistance	.5%
		Do not know	86.5%
	<i>Total</i>		<i>100.0%</i>

Table 13 Rating of the registration document (percentage of all households)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	What do you think about the format of the registration document?	Very complicated	25.8%
		Somehow difficult to understand	34.4%
		Easy and understandable	27.6%
		Very easily understandable	1.8%
		Do not know	10.4%
	<i>Total</i>		<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	What do you think about the format of the registration document?	Very complicated	2.2%
		Somehow difficult to understand	1.6%
		Easy and understandable	9.2%
		Very easily understandable	.5%
		Do not know	86.5%
	<i>Total</i>		<i>100.0%</i>

Table 14 Rating of the registration procedure (percentage of all households)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	What do you think about the registration procedure?	Very complicated	23.1%
		Somehow complicated	37.1%
		Easy	27.6%
		Very easy	2.3%
		Do not know	10.0%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%
Svay Rieng	What do you think about the registration procedure?	Very complicated	2.2%
		Somehow complicated	.5%
		Easy	10.8%
		Do not know	86.5%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%

4.5 Households make suggestions for increasing birth registration rates

In the final section of our survey, we discussed with households their suggestions as to how the birth registration process can be improved and expanded to include larger segments of the population. Because people in Kompong Speu have a better understanding of, and more experience with birth registration, their suggestions cover a broader range than those of households in Svay Rieng.

In both provinces, significantly large numbers of households request that government and local authorities provide additional information on birth registration. A third of households in Kompong Speu ask for more information, compared with an overwhelming 72% in Svay Rieng.

Other recurring suggestions formulated by households comprise free birth registration and “proximity registration”. We use the term “proximity registration” to cover all suggestions to make registration physically more easily accessible, including the use of mobile registration units and the opening of new on-site registration offices to cover a broader geographical area.

Table 15 Households’ suggestions for increasing registration (percentage of all households)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	Suggestions for increasing registration rates	More information	33.1%
		Free registration	19.9%
		Proximity registration	26.4%
		Other suggestions	20.6%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%
Svay Rieng	Suggestions for increasing registration rates	More information	72.4%
		Free registration	7.0%
		Proximity registration	9.6%
		Other suggestions	11.0%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%

Figure 3 Households' suggestions to improve registration (percentage of all households in **Kompong Speu**)

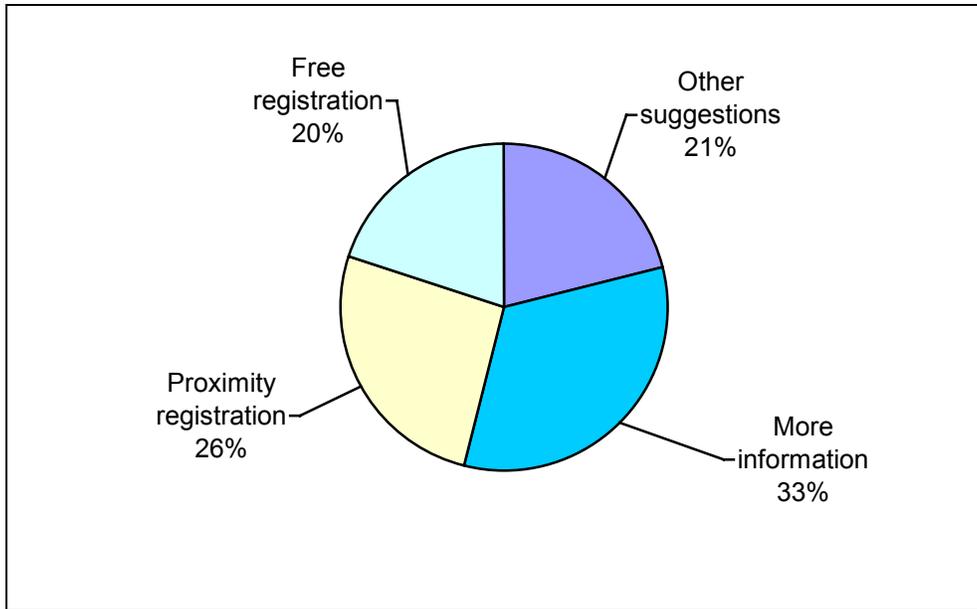
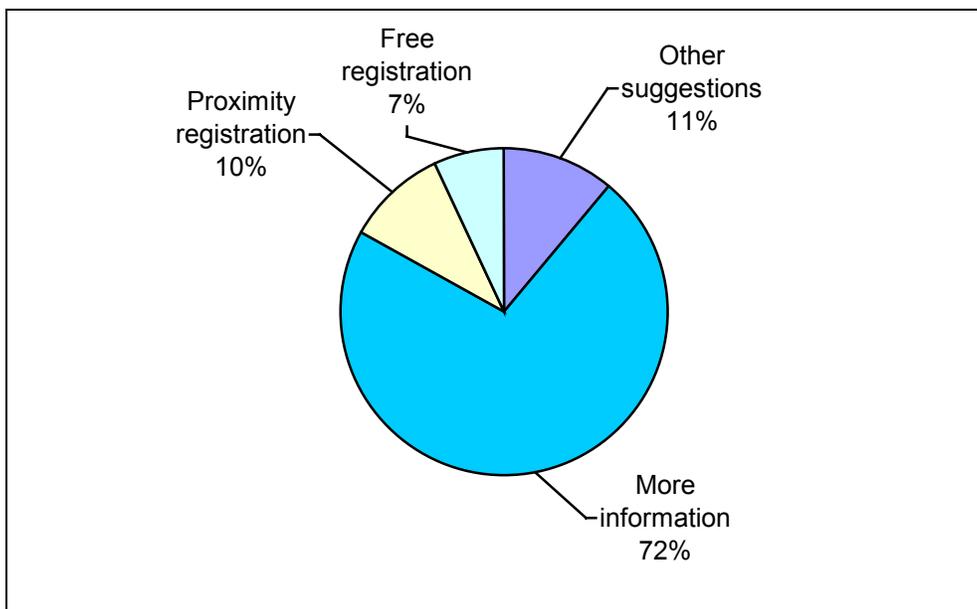


Figure 4 Households' suggestions to improve registration (percentage of all households in **Svay Rieng**)



Section Five: Discussion of Results and Courses of Action

5.1 Discussion of results

As previously quoted, the Demographic and Health Survey of Cambodia reports birth registration rates for Svay Rieng that are substantially higher than for Kompong Speu (NIS & MOH 2001). In contrast, our household survey records higher birth registration rates in Kompong Speu than in Svay Rieng. The results of the two surveys cannot be directly compared for the following reasons: (1) the DHS 2000 reports registration for infants of five years of age and below, while we recorded registration for all children up to eighteen years of age; (2) our survey was conducted more three years later than the DHS 2000 survey; (3) our survey exclusively focuses on child registration while the DHS 2000 covers broader scope.

Assuming that education and economic factors are determinants of birth registration rates, our results are consistent with what could be logically expected, that is, better educated and better off households have a higher probability of registering their children. As discussed earlier, Kompong Speu is well ahead of Svay Rieng on a number of economic and social indicators, including poverty rates. Our findings suggest that not only are registration rates lower in Svay Rieng, but also that these are consistent with lower level of awareness of birth registration than in Kompong Speu. Thus, we believe that, in the main, and taken into account confidence intervals and sample size limitations, our results are dependable. However, we must also recommend that further analysis be conducted and extended to other provinces to confirm our findings. A larger sample would allow us to conduct correlation analysis as well as dependence testing between variables.

5.2 Courses of Action

The findings of our analysis suggest that low registration in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng is due to a host of legal, administrative, social, economic, and geographical factors. The lack or absence of awareness about the importance of birth registration at the household level, combined with low levels of education and high poverty rates, constitutes a major obstacle to child registration, and ultimately to the protection of the rights of children. Among commune and village administrators, the general attitude has been to consider child registration as a secondary issue, when compared with other urgent needs such as income generation, healthcare, infrastructure development, etc.

In this section, we discuss possible courses of action and alternatives for increasing the rate of child registration in the study area. To be clear, as researchers, we do not believe it is our place to give advice to government or international donors involved in child's protection in Cambodia. Our role is to thoroughly investigate topical issues and to provide knowledge for sound decision-making. The courses of action that we present must be openly discussed amongst stakeholders, including government, donors, national and local authorities, and the target populations, before any policy can be adopted and implemented effectively.

5.2.1 Revision of existing laws

Mandatory registration

The existing legislation may be altered to make it beyond doubt that registration is mandatory. This may require the imposition of a penalty if a birth is not registered within a specified period. As the law currently stands, parents who do not register their child's birth within 30 days from birth will not be entitled to have that birth recorded in a civil status book unless a court judgment is produced. This requirement for a court judgment does little to encourage parents to register the birth of their child after 30 days. Access to courts in Cambodia for this reason will incur unnecessary costs and further delay the process of registration. It is conceivable that most parents (particular those in remote and rural areas) will not bother to register their child in such circumstances. Accordingly, it is recommended that the requirement of a court judgment should be removed. As an alternative penalty, it is worth considering whether a minimal fine should be imposed on parents or persons who fail to register a birth within the specified time. In some jurisdictions where birth registration is compulsory, the failure to obtain a birth registration within a statutory time-frame is considered an offence that is triable summarily and punishable with a small fine. Knowledge that a fine may be imposed would be a good incentive for parents to register their child's birth as soon as possible.

Grace period for registration

The 30-day grace period for registration ought to be examined to see if it is a realistic time-frame for the majority of the population. Access to civil status officials or a local representative of a civil status representative from remote villages will take time and incur costs. It is not unexpected to assume that for a parent with a heavy workload, the 30-day grace period for registration is inadequate. Comparative legislation (for example, the Birth and Deaths Registration Act 1953 in the United Kingdom) allows a parent 42 days to satisfy their obligation to furnish information concerning birth to a registrar. Further, the registrar in the United Kingdom has the power to compel persons to attend before him and produce information concerning a birth where such information has not been given within 42 days after birth. It may be worth considering if the civil status official or any other person in a similar capacity may be given a more pro-active role in compelling parents or relevant persons to register the birth of a child.

Particulars of births

The existing legislation in Cambodia requires a parent to specify whether he or she is legitimately married (and if so, to produce a marriage certificate) as a prerequisite to registration. This prerequisite does little to encourage persons who are not lawfully married to register their child in more conservative social settings. In many other jurisdictions, the only particulars required to be furnished for the purposes of registering a child's birth are the:- (a) date and place of birth of the child; (b) the name and surname of the child; (c) the name, surname, place of birth, occupation and address of the mother and father (details of the mother's maiden name and surname is sometimes required); and (d) similar details of the person presenting the child for registration (where this is not done

by the parent). The need to furnish details of the status of the parent's marriage is unnecessary and not helpful in the circumstances.

Falsifying birth registrations

The use of falsified or bogus birth registration cards may be common in Cambodia and often exposes children to exploitation. The process of registering births under existing legislation is open to abuse by unscrupulous individuals who are able to falsify their name and age or the name and age of a child. In order to check such abuse, the civil status official may be given wider powers to compel a person presenting particulars of birth to verify such particulars. Furthermore, the forging of birth registration cards or the giving of false information concerning a birth may be stated to be an offence under existing law. A penalty of a fine could be imposed on the commission of such offence.

Lack of details

The current legislation on birth registration suffers from a lack of important details. More information ought to be provided in the legislation (or perhaps in guidance notes or subsidiary legislation) on the actual procedure of registering a birth (i.e. whether it costs money to have a birth registered, the nature of particulars and documentation that need to be produced before registering a birth and the consequences of non-registration). The powers and duties of the civil status official (or a person with the equivalent function and capacity) ought to be more clearly spelt out (i.e. whether such person has the power to compel a parent to verify particulars, whether it is an offence for a civil status official to omit to register a birth or to register a birth without certain particulars being verified, whether the civil status official is obliged to submit regular reports to a general registrar or equivalent person) in order to minimise fraud and enhance the role played by the civil status official.

Awareness and enforcement of laws

The existence of clear legislation on birth registration is, on its own insufficient to improve birth registration rates. Such legislation will only be useful if (a) the population is aware of it; and (b) it can be effectively enforced. To accomplish both (a) and (b) in a decentralised environment where a significant proportion of the population may be illiterate can be difficult. Penalties, if any, for non-registration ought to be effectively enforced. The need to have recourse to the courts should be minimised as this only takes time and additional resources. Small fines may be imposed by the civil status official. The Cambodian National Council for Children and/or an equivalent independent body may be given the task of monitoring compliance with existing birth registration legislation. Furthermore, there ought to be increased coordination and communication between the relevant Ministries and institutions/officials in charge of birth registration. Registration facilities and infrastructure should also be put in place in order to reach every child.

5.2.2 Raising the awareness of the need to register births

Raising the awareness of local officials

Local officials must be made aware of the procedures (and penalties) involved in birth registration such that they are able to communicate this effectively to others. Training of civil status officials is required to provide them with appropriate legal, procedural and communication skills.

The option of registering births at health facilities should be explored as this has proven to improve birth registration rates in other countries. However, this may have less impact in areas where delivery often takes place at home. In addition, systematic registration at schools ought to be considered. In practise, parents are not always required to provide certificates as this might dissuade them to send children to school. Teachers and other school officials may be able to play an important role in communicating the benefits of birth registration if they themselves receive relevant training on the issue.

Raising the awareness of the population

Education and awareness is the first step towards the effective implementation of birth registration laws. Existing resources ought to be maximised to achieve this. The media may be engaged in the process of conveying the importance of birth registration to the public. The Cambodian National Council for Children (whether by the use of volunteers or inspection teams) may also be involved in the process of educating the public on the importance of birth registration. In addition, doctors, nurses and midwives may be enlisted to advise parents of the need to register births. In villages where illiteracy is high and access to hospitals and civil status officials is limited, a person in an official capacity or a village head may be given the task of ensuring that parents are aware of the need to register births.

5.2.3 Procedural improvements

Simplified procedures and additional procedural support

In a context where large segments of the population may be poorly educated or illiterate, signing a form, let alone filling it in, is an impossible task for households. Parallel to legislative amendments, the procedure of registration can be simplified so as to collect only necessary civil status data. The birth registration form ought to use simple Khmer language and avoid legal and administrative terminology. Households may still require assistance in filling in the form step by step. Officials ought to provide special support to illiterate individuals.

Administrative measures to decrease waiting times for registration and for the issuance of certificates ought to be explored. At times, officials are overwhelmed by the number of people requesting registration, which results in lengthy queues and wasteful time away from economic activities. By setting up registration by appointment and separate hours for registration by walk-in, birth registration could be more evenly distributed so as to use existing administrative resources more efficiently. If possible,

certificates ought to be issued on the day of registration by granting signatory powers to a greater number of civil status officials.

Proximity registration

The dearth of adequate means of public transportation to commune centres where civil status officials are posted is an obstacle to registration. When travelling on foot or by oxcart, distances beyond a few kilometres make for an arduous and lengthy journey. Bicycles may be of little help if roads are in poor conditions, and travel by motorcycle-taxi adds to the overall cost of registering a child.

Following the old adage, if households do not come to registrars, then registrars may consider going to households. We use the term “proximity registration” to include all measures that would make registration geographically more accessible. A possible course of action is to operate mobile registration units, comprising staff and vehicles moving on land and water. At the most basic level, officials may travel to villages on a regular basis by bicycle, motorcycles, cars or boats, to register new births. Another measure would be to open registration offices in new locations to cover broader geographical areas.

Free registration

According to Sub-Decree No 103 ANK/BK on Civil Registration, "the act of child registration is free of charge" (Article 48). However, our survey shows that in practise people do pay for birth registration. The fees vary from KHR 1,302 in Kompong Speu to KHR 1,936 in Svay Rieng. In Kompong Speu, over 90% of households paid for registration compared with 68% in Svay Rieng. The fees charged for a "letter certifying birth", which is applicable for those who were born before the Sub-Decree came into force and do not have a birth certificate, and for additional copies of birth certificates, vary across different regions (Sub-Decree No 62 ANK/BK).

As we have witnessed, there may be some confusion or misinterpretation of the sub-decrees at the local level as to whether birth registration is free or not. We define registration as the act of registering a child on public records and of issuing a corresponding original birth certificate. The legislation ought to leave no room for doubt that birth registration is free of charge. In addition, civil registrars and public officials at the commune and village levels must be made aware that birth registration is free.

In many countries of the world, birth registration is free of charge. The cost of official stamps and paperwork may not be deterrence to registration on its own, except for the poorest households. However, when added to the opportunity cost of time spent away from income generating activities, registration fees are an unnecessary financial burden that the majority of households can ill afford.



Picture 2 Asking for birth certificates in Svay Rieng

Conclusions

Our survey of households shows birth registration rates for children of 17% in Kompong Speu and 9% in Svay Rieng. In both provinces, the awareness of the benefits of child registration remains low, while local administrators have limited capability to conduct broad based information and registration activities. Large segments of the population request that authorities publicise additional information on the legal and procedural aspects of birth registration. Our analysis suggests that low registration in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng is due to a combination of legal, administrative, social, economic, and geographical factors. In the light of these findings, government agencies and organisations involved in child rights activities in Cambodia may consider a combination of measures to increase child registration in the provinces studied. These consist of amendments to the existing legislation, campaigns to raise the awareness of local officials and of the public, and administrative improvements of the birth registration process.

References

International Council of Nurses, *ICN on Birth Registration*, Available at http://www.icn.ch/matters_birth.htm

Ministry of Planning and United Nations World Food Program 2002, *Estimation of Poverty Rates at Commune-Level in Cambodia*, MOP & WFP, Phnom Penh

National Institute of Statistics 1999, *General Population Census of Cambodia 1998*, NIS, Phnom Penh

National Institute of Statistics & Ministry of Health 2001, *Demographic and Health Survey 2000*, NIS, Phnom Penh

NGO Committee on the Rights of Child 2000, *Cambodia NGO Report*, Available at <http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.24/cambodiaNGOreport.pdf>

United Nations 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, 20 November 1989

United Nations Children's Fund 2002, *The State of the World's Children 2002*, UNICEF, Geneva

United Nations Children's Fund 2002, "Birth Registration Right from the Start", *Innocenti Digest*, no. 9, Available at <http://www.unicef.org/newsline/birthregfaq.htm>

Sub-decree No 103 on civil status, dated 29 December 2000 and its Amendment dated 24 June 2002

Sub-decree No 62 on fees for civil status documents and stamps, dated 24 June 2002

Guidelines No 12 of the Ministry of Interior for recording civil status, dated 8 November 2002

Guidelines No 18 of the Ministry of Interior for collecting civil status documents, dated 21 December 2001

Appendix 1: Statistical Tables

Table 16 Household size (percentage of all households)

Province	Question	Answer	Household head		%
			Male	Female	
Kompong Speu	How many members does your family have?	2	-	20.7%	2.7%
		3	12.5%	27.6%	14.5%
		4	19.8%	6.9%	18.1%
		5	17.2%	20.7%	17.6%
		6	14.6%	17.2%	14.9%
		7	12.5%	6.9%	11.8%
		8	14.1%	-	12.2%
		9	5.2%	-	4.5%
		10	2.6%	-	2.3%
		11	1.6%	-	1.4%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Svay Rieng	How many members does your family have?	2	0.6%	8.3%	1.1%
		3	13.9%	8.3%	13.5%
		4	24.9%	8.3%	23.8%
		5	15.6%	25.0%	16.2%
		6	19.7%	25.0%	20.0%
		7	11.6%	25.0%	12.4%
		8	6.4%	-	5.9%
		9	4.6%	-	4.3%
		10	1.7%	-	1.6%
		11	1.2%	-	1.1%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 17 Number of children in the household (percentage of all children)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	How many members of your family are aged under 18 years old?	1	25.8%
		2	32.1%
		3	14.9%
		4	14.0%
		5	9.5%
		6	2.3%
		7	1.4%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%
Svay Rieng	How many members of your family are aged under 18 years old?	1	25.9%
		2	32.4%
		3	18.9%
		4	17.8%
		5	3.8%
		6	1.1%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%

Table 18 Age of the children in the household (percentage of all children)

Province	Age	Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
Kompong Speu	1	5.9%	5.8%	5.9%
	2	5.3%	5.0%	5.2%
	3	3.8%	3.9%	3.8%
	4	5.3%	5.4%	5.4%
	5	5.9%	6.6%	6.2%
	6	5.9%	6.6%	6.2%
	7	5.9%	5.0%	5.5%
	8	7.2%	4.7%	6.1%
	9	4.7%	3.9%	4.3%
	10	6.3%	8.1%	7.1%
	11	4.4%	5.8%	5.0%
	12	10.6%	7.0%	9.0%
	13	4.7%	7.4%	5.9%
	14	6.6%	6.6%	6.6%
	15	4.4%	5.4%	4.8%
	16	6.3%	6.2%	6.2%
	17	6.9%	6.6%	6.7%
		<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	1	10.0%	11.4%	10.4%
	2	6.0%	4.5%	5.3%
	3	3.2%	4.5%	3.8%
	4	4.8%	6.4%	5.5%
	5	7.6%	6.4%	7.1%
	6	6.4%	5.4%	6.0%
	7	5.2%	9.4%	7.1%
	8	4.8%	7.4%	6.0%
	9	4.4%	5.9%	5.1%
	10	8.0%	7.4%	7.7%
	11	4.8%	9.4%	6.9%
	12	6.8%	4.0%	5.5%
	13	6.8%	5.0%	6.0%
	14	5.6%	5.4%	5.5%
	15	6.0%	3.5%	4.9%
	16	5.2%	5.4%	5.3%
	17	4.4%	3.0%	3.8%
		<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Table 19 Registered children (percentage of all children)

Province	Question	Answer	%	95% confidence interval	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Kompong Speu	Has a birth certificate?	Yes	17.3%	12.3%	22.3%
		No	82.4%	77.4%	87.4%
		Lost	0.3%		
	Total		100.0%		
Svay Rieng	Has a certificate?	Yes	8.8%	4.7%	12.9%
		No	90.7%	86.5%	94.9%
		Lost	0.4%		
	Total		100.0%		

Table 20 Age at which children were registered (percentage of all children)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	At what age did the child obtained the birth certificate?	1	19.6%
		2	2.0%
		3	6.9%
		4	4.9%
		5	4.9%
		6	3.9%
		7	6.9%
		8	6.9%
		9	3.9%
		10	2.0%
		11	4.9%
		12	5.9%
		13	5.9%
		14	3.9%
		15	2.9%
		16	8.8%
		17	5.9%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%
Svay Rieng	At what age did the child obtained the birth certificate?	1	40.5%
		2	7.1%
		4	2.4%
		5	2.4%
		6	4.8%
		7	4.8%
		8	7.1%
		9	7.1%
		10	4.8%
		11	4.8%
		12	2.4%
		13	7.1%
		15	2.4%
		16	2.4%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%

Table 21 Number of days between registration and the issuance of a birth certificate
(percentage of registered children)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	How many days did it take in the successful case?	1	29.4%
		2	8.8%
		3	2.0%
		4	7.8%
		6	8.8%
		7	13.7%
		8	10.8%
		30	5.9%
		60	2.0%
		90	3.9%
		150	6.9%
	<i>Total</i>		<i>100.0%</i>
Svay Rieng	How many days did it take in the successful case?	1	33.3%
		2	9.5%
		3	11.9%
		5	4.8%
		7	11.9%
		10	2.4%
		15	2.4%
		30	9.5%
		60	2.4%
		90	2.4%
		120	2.4%
		150	2.4%
		365	4.8%
			<i>Total</i>

Table 22 Birth registration fees (percentage of all registered children)

Province	Question	Answer, KHR	%
Kompong Speu	Total payment for birth registration	500	4.3%
		600	1.1%
		1000	9.6%
		1200	64.7%
		1500	7.5%
		1800	1.1%
		2000	5.3%
		3000	4.2%
		5000	2.1%
		8000	1.1%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%
Svay Rieng	Total payment for birth registration	400	14.3%
		500	50.0%
		800	3.6%
		1000	3.6%
		1500	3.6%
		3000	10.7%
		5000	7.1%
		20000	3.6%
		30000	3.6%
	<i>Total</i>		100.0%

Table 23 Difficulties in obtaining the registration form (percentage for most recent successful birth registration)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	Task rating for obtaining the registration form	Difficult	19.6%
		Easy	68.6%
		Very easy	11.8%
		<i>Total</i>	100.0%
Svay Rieng	Task rating for obtaining the registration form	Difficult	4.8%
		Easy	95.2%
		<i>Total</i>	100.0%

Table 24 Person who fills in the registration form (percentage for most recent successful birth registration)

Province	Question	Answer	%
Kompong Speu	Who filled in the registration form?	Household	7.8%
		Public official	88.2%
		Third person	3.9%
		<i>Total</i>	100.0%
Svay Rieng	Who filled in the registration form?	Household	19.0%
		Public official	66.7%
		Third person	14.3%
		<i>Total</i>	100.0%

Table 25 Boundaries of a 95% confidence interval for proportions in Kompong Speu and Svay Rieng

Province		95 % confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
Kompong Speu	90%	86%	94%
	80%	75%	85%
	70%	64%	76%
	60%	54%	66%
	50%	43%	57%
	40%	34%	46%
	30%	24%	36%
	20%	15%	25%
	10%	6%	14%
Svay Rieng	90%	86%	94%
	80%	74%	86%
	70%	63%	77%
	60%	53%	67%
	50%	43%	57%
	40%	33%	47%
	30%	23%	37%
	20%	14%	26%
	10%	6%	14%

Appendix 2: Household Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

(Child Birth Registration Module)

Confidential
All information collected by this survey will remain confidential and will be used for statistical purposes only.

A. To be completed by Supervisors before interview		Enter Code	
Province / City			
District / Khan			
Commune / Sangkat			
Village			
Sample Reference Number			
Interviewer's name			
Interviewer's Signature			
Time start	hour	minute	
Date of Interview	(dd)	(mm)	(yy)
Supervisor's name			
Supervisor's Signature			
Date	(dd)	(mm)	(yy)

I. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Q 1. Characteristics of household:

No.	<i>Head of Household</i>	Sex	Age	Literacy	Occupation	Nationality	Religion	Income group
1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10
1		Male						
2		Female						

Code Col 5	<i>1= Illiterate; 2= Basic reading; 3= Primary education; 4= Lower level secondary education; 5= Higher level secondary education; 6= Higher education/University;</i>
Code Col 7	<i>1= Farming; 2= Fishing; 3= Forestry/Logging; 4= Quarrying; 5= Mining; 6= Retail trade; 7= Whole sale trade; 8= Transportation; 9= Construction; 10= Health services; 11= Education; 12= Factory workers; 13= Service Industry; 14= Administrative personnel; 15= Other (specify)</i>
Code Col 8	<i>1= Khmer; 2= Cham; 3= Chinese; 4= Vietnamese; 5= Other (specify)</i>
Code Col 9	<i>1= Buddhism; 2= Muslim; 3= Christian; 4= Other (Specify)</i>
Code Col 10	<i>1= Less than 10,000 a month; 2= 10,100-50,000 ; 3= 50,100-200,000 ; 3= Over 200,100</i>

Q 2. How many members does your family have? []

Q 3. How many members of your family are under 18 years of age? []

Q 4. Please give birth certificate information on all under-18-years-old members?

Child's ID	Sex	Age	Delivery house (use code)	Relationship of head of household with this child (use code)	Possesses a birth certificate? (1=Yes; 2=No;3=Lost) If no, skip to col. 13	How old was the child when he obtained the birth certificate?	Purpose for obtaining the birth certificate (use code)	Place of Registration				Reasons why the child doesn't possess a birth certificate
								Province	Code	District	Code	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1												1..... 2.....
2												1..... 2.....
3												1..... 2.....
4												1..... 2.....
5												1..... 2.....
6												1..... 2.....
7												1..... 2.....
8												1..... 2.....

Code Col 2	<i>1= Male; 2= Female</i>
Code Col 4	<i>1= Home; 2= District/ Provincial health center; 3= Private clinics; 4 = Other, specify:</i>
Code Col 5	<i>1= Parents; 2= Guardian; 3= Other, specify:</i>
Code Col 8	<i>1= School attendance; 2= Wage/salary requirement; 3= Other, specify:</i>

II. REGISTRATION PROCEDURE

Q 5. If you have obtained birth certificates for your children, please discuss your experience in requesting the birth certificates.

Child's ID	Do you know how to obtain a birth certificate? (1= Yes; 2= No)	How many times did you request birth certificates in each child's case?	How many days did it take in the successful case (number of days)	Did you have to pay for the certificate? (1=Yes; 2= No)	Total amount paid for each successful request	What difficulties did you have during the process? (use code)	Issuer of birth certificate (use code)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							

Code Col 7	<i>1= None; 2= Personal constraints; 3= Procedural constraints; 4= Political constraints; 5= Others constraints, specify.....</i>
Code Col 8	<i>1= Communal Office; 2= Hospital; 3= Court system</i>

Q 6. Please provide the stages involved in producing a birth certificate in the latest successful case.

No.	Stage	Who performs the task?	Task Rating	<i>Discuss difficulties encountered for each stage</i> (if codes 1 or 2 are entered in column 4)
1	2	3	4	5
1	Obtaining form			1..... 2.....
2	Filling in form			1..... 2.....
3	Checking form			1..... 2.....
4	Registrar's signature			1..... 2.....

Code Col 3	<i>1= Respondent; 2= Public official; 3= Third person</i>
Code Col 4 for row 1 to 3	<i>1= Very difficult; 2= Difficult; 3= Easy; 4= Very easy</i>
Code Col 4 for row 4	<i>1= Head of Commune; 2= Head of District; 3= Head of Hospital; 4= ; 5= Other, specify:</i>

III. COMMUNITY CONCERNS

A. General Issues

Q 7. Please express your opinion about the importance of the birth certificate: []
(1= Not important; 2= Somewhat important; 3= Important; 4= Very important)
Why do you think it is important? _____

Q 8. Are you under any pressure to register your children? [] (1=Yes; 2= No) (If 1 ask question a, if 2 ask question b)
a- If yes, you are under pressure to provide birth certificates, what is the reason? []
(1= School attendance; 2= Wage/salary requirement; 3= Other, specify:)
b- If no, would you like to register your children? [] (1=Yes; 2= No)

Q 9. Please provide suggestions on how to promote birth registration.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

Q 10. What do you think the Government should do to encourage people to register their children?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

B. Specific Issues

Q 11. Please list specific concerns regarding birth registration in order of decreasing importance:

	Constraints
1	
2	
3	

Q 12. What do you think about the registration form? []
 (1= Very complicated; 2= Somehow difficult to understand; 3= Easy and understandable; 4= Very easily understandable)

Q 13. What do you think about the registration procedure? []
 (1= Very complicated; 2= Somehow complicated; 3= Easy; 4= Very easy)

Q 14. What do you think about the assistance provided during registration? : []
 (1= Total lack; 2= Insufficient; 3= Enough; 4= Full assistance)

Q 15. What do you think about the attitude of the registration staff? []
 (1= Unwelcoming; 2= Indifferent; 3= Somehow sociable; 4= Very sociable)

Time finished: _____ Hour _____ Minutes

Thank You