



Asia-Pacific CRVS Research Forum

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First Line of Defense: Perspectives of Children and Youth in Asia Pacific on CRVS

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Introduction/Motivation

Birth registration is crucial for protecting the well-being of children. It is the first step in ensuring the rights of a child, as outlined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 7 and 8, are upheld. The Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) is essential for state planning and decision-making. It involves recording important events in people's lives such as births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, legitimations and recognitions in a continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal manner, in accordance with national law.

The impact of birth registration is significant, as it affects a child's nationality, education, health, and protection from child marriage, among other things. Therefore, it is crucial that children's and youth's voices and opinions are considered in political and policy-making.

Unfortunately, globally, there are still 166 million children under the age of 5 whose births have never been recorded. Of these, about 1 out of 3 (65 million) live in Asia and the Pacific. Even if children's births are recorded, many lack proof. Shockingly, 237 children under the age of 5 do not have birth certificates and South Asia has the largest number of under-five children without birth certificates.

In 2014, the 'Get Everyone in the Picture' Asia and the Pacific Ministerial Declaration was adopted, and the 'Asia and Pacific CRVS Decade 2015-2024' was proclaimed. Since then, progress has been made in Asia-Pacific regarding political commitment and coordination, with many strong country initiatives. However, there is still much work to be done in ensuring universal and responsive CRVS in the region.

Children and young people are among the most vulnerable sectors when it comes to ensuring everyone in the picture. Unregistered children are uncaptured and are left behind, so it's essential to give them the space to share their experiences, the challenges they face with CRVS and their recommendations on how to improve CRVS services.

To harness political pledges and advocate for the opinions and perspectives of children and youth on CRVS, the UN ESCAP, World Vision International and Child Rights Coalition Asia (CRC Asia) conducted a series of in-country consultations and a regional forum with children and young people on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific in 2021. The consultations which were conducted in 11 countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The consultations and forum were part of the preparations for the Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific on November 16-19, 2021, where delegates from the forum presented a joint statement of children and youth.

Methods/Work performed

The data gathering was conducted through child-friendly and child and youth co-led consultations. The consultations used qualitative research methods and principles, employing both offline and online instruments such as focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews and surveys. The consultations aimed to

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capture a range of views in response to open-ended and pointed questions while adhering to the basic requirements for effective, ethical, and meaningful child participation.

Of the participants, over 63% were children aged 6 to 17 (109 males and 124 females), while the rest were youth aged 18 to 24 (103 males and 206 females, and 3 preferred not to disclose their sex). The participants belonged to various organizations working with children, including child-led organizations, communities considered isolated or remote in their respective countries, ethnic minorities, and working children. The consultations also included children and youth from indigenous and migrant communities, children in alternative care, young couples and children/youth from other groups.

Child safeguarding protocols were implemented to ensure that all respondents were able to participate in a child-friendly, age-appropriate and safe manner.

Discussion

The ‘Getting Children and Youth in the Picture’ report (2021) highlights the results of consultations with children and youth on CRVS. Over 80% of those surveyed had direct or indirect experience of registration and shared how it impacted their lives or the lives of others. Less than 20% of the participants had opinions on CRVS without direct or indirect experience with it.

Registration is important for children and youth, as positive registration experiences were reported, such as good government registration systems and parents’ support for civil registration. Most participants with positive registration experiences were from stable urban homes, were citizens of their home countries, and were born in hospitals.

Governments and parents were identified as key players in successful registration, with governments making registration simple, affordable and accessible, while the parents valued registration and registered themselves and their children.

The participants encountered institutional and social barriers related to the aforementioned key actors. Institutional barriers stem from policies and practices of CRVS-related agencies. These included a lack of coordination between government departments, insufficient human resources and capacity gaps in the agencies responsible for CRVS processes. Specific barriers included a complex and time-consuming registration process, including late registration, strict requirements such as the need for witnesses to confirm one’s birth and parents, and the requirement for parents’ birth certificates and national identity cards. There was no registration process available for individuals with special needs. Technical issues arose in processing certificates and correcting errors, and there was a shortage of facilities and staff to assist with the registration process.

During the in-country consultation, several participants raised concerns about the intergenerational impact of the lack of registration. When parents are unregistered, they often do not see the value in registering their children, as they do not have a marriage certificate. Additionally, obtaining a death certificate without a birth certificate can be challenging.



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To address these barriers, children and youth urge all CRVS stakeholders to involve them in the decision-making process, ensuring that civil registration is accessible to all, and no child is left behind. They emphasized the important role of the government in streamlining registration processes, strengthening personnel’s capabilities, expanding services to rural areas, and enhancing digital infrastructure. NGOs can also support communities by raising awareness about the importance of CRVS and acting as intermediates in birth registration.

For children and youth, ensuring that everyone is registered requires a collective effort. Birth, marriage and death certificates are more than just documents; they demonstrate how much stakeholders care about them. By including every child and youth in the picture, upholding their first line of defense, they become less vulnerable and more protected. For some children, the consultation was an eye opener as it helped them learn how they contribute in advocating for an inclusive civil registration. “We did not have information about some issues, for example death registration and also about marriage registration. The consultations should be continued and the recommendations applied,” said a participant from Afghanistan.

The children and youth statement was delivered during the 2nd Ministerial Conference on CRVS which was attended by over 400 participants including ministers, senior officials and stakeholders from 48 countries and 15 international and civil society organizations. Currently, children and youth are working with CSOs, advocates and local government to raise awareness on the importance of timely birth, marriage and death registration.

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