

ATD Fourth World
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Dar es Salaam
Tanzania

HILFE FÜR AFRIKA BIRTH REGISTRATION AT TEGETA (KINONDONI)

*The poorest of Tegeta stand up
for giving an identity to their children*

1st period – from August 2012 to January 2013

To learn by practice...

Before starting the action of birth registration, a period of learning was necessary. The procedures of birth registration are not described anywhere, they are different depending on the districts and the only way of learning is by practice. In theory, the registration has to be done in the first three months after birth. In the reality most of the children in the families we are with are not registered. For the families living at Dar es Salaam, the registration has to be done in the district of the birth if the child was born in a district of Dar es Salaam Region (Kinondoni, Ilala and Temeke) or in one of the closest districts of Pwani Region (Bagamoyo, Kibaha, Kisarawe). If the child was born somewhere else, the registration of birth is possible at the headquarters of RITA (administration in charge of the birth registration) at Muhimbili.

How to motivate the parents ?

The Tanzanian law says that children have to be registered within 90 days after the birth, but in fact registration is accepted at any moment and not to register is not punished.

At the beginning, most of the poor people we meet are not aware of the importance of birth registration. They know that the birth certificate is needed when they try to



register their children at school (at the age of seven). However, they know as well that, in many cases, it is still possible to have a child accepted at school if you pay a bribe to the class teacher. On the other hand, many parents have discovered already that this way of proceeding does not lead to a proper formal inscription of the child, the bribe has to be re-paid every year and doesn't allow the child to pass the national exams. Some parents know as well about cases where someone didn't get the job in the public sector he was aspiring for because he didn't have a birth certificate.

So, in the first place we bring the people together in small groups of neighbours and discuss about the issue. In this way, neighbours convince themselves mutually that having the birth certificate is really important.

Besides, even those parents who seem to have understood the importance of the birth certificate, don't go and register their children by themselves. Why ? The easy answer is : "because they don't have the money", but that seems only partly true. There are many different reasons for which the parents don't register their children.

For example we know already that the procedures are quite complex and vary from one district to another. It took us already a long time to understand and we are still learning. The fee of the certificate and the papers needed depend on the age of the child, the place where they register, the hospital in which they are born or if they're born at home and the paper they have to prove it. And if the family has no paper at all, then they are really in front of problems they can't solve by themselves. Besides, we start to understand that there are other hindrances, as well, more in link with missing self-confidence for example. One important aspect of the project is to discover them all in order to find solutions so that even the poorest of the Tanzanian citizens register their children or as we formulated it in the project description : "to discover which are the necessary conditions in order to allow even the poorest families to face their responsibilities and then to open the access to their rights".

What do the parents say ?

Some mothers told us :

"In our women's group, we discovered that we were many faced with the problem of not having the birth certificate for one or more of our children. (...)

The causes are different, but the result is the same : we miss the birth certificate of our child and it is a problem when he or she is of school going age. Usually the teacher accepts the child without a birth certificate if we are able to give him some money, 5.000 or 20.000 Tsh for example : that is why some of us thought that the birth certificate is not really necessary. But then, we have to pay again every year because our child is not officially registered.

Moreover, the lack of a birth certificate is not only a problem for the children, it is also a problem when they become adults. One mother

tells us that her nephew could not get a job in the police because he had not got his birth certificate : when she understood that her children would need their birth certificates also after finishing school, she started the process of getting them.

Finally we realised that by not obtaining our children's birth certificates, we put them at a disadvantage and do not give them the best chance for their future.

Some parents are not aware of the responsibility entrusted to them and as a result we should take on this responsibility, not only of our own children, but also of the children in our neighbourhood. (...)"

A father working at Kunduchi quarry said :

"Most of us we have no birth certificate for our children. We know that it is not a good situation for their future, but we never applied because of different reasons : lack of money, lack of documents, lack of information about the procedure, the distance of the place for application, etc." (Beatus, Kunduchi)

Going until the end of the process...

Motivating the families to register their children, especially if you promise to pay most of the fees is not really a problem. What is sometimes difficult is to take the procedure to the end : to re-motivate the family that is discouraged because they were asked to bring another document, or because the certificate is not ready and they are asked to come back next week, for example. To visit a family again and again until the mother finds the courage to come to the registration office, a quite intimidating place for many of them.

And then there are other difficult aspects of this project :

- involving the families as much as possible in the procedures for themselves and for others and the running of the project as a whole,
- make them feel responsible for this kind of administration issues conditioning the future of their children, make them feel proud and gain strength,
- recreate neighbourhood links and strengthen the community including the poorest, the weakest, the most lost...
- allow the poorest people to demonstrate to less poor that they are capable of taking action and thus provoke a change in the way society looks at its poorest members...

It is these less quantifiable aspects of the project that determine our choice of limiting the number of families and our very regular presence with the families at their living and working place, preparing the campaign with them, meeting regularly in order to run the project together...

With the poorest people...

The number of families that we can include at one moment in the project depends on the capacity we have of establishing a strong personal link with them, through which they will feel not as users of a "public service" but as members of a "community initiative", as responsible and active parents which are building the future of their family.

We are especially aiming at running the project with extremely poor people and we know that we'll have to invest a lot of energy in order to make them succeed. But we don't use people's "degree" of poverty as a selection tool, we rather delimit an area geographically (starting from very poor families we know already) and make sure that every family inside this area has the possibility of joining the project (independently of how much encouragement they will need to go through the process) and not only the most dynamic families that come by themselves and could nearly do without us.

Cooperation with local authorities.

Local authorities start for us at the level of the responsible for a block of 10 houses or 10-cell-house-leader. They are the ones living in close neighbourhood with the families (and most of the time they need to register their own children as well). They are the ones helping us to identify the families, to spread the information about the project, to motivate the families to join, to call them to a meeting and sometimes to reflect together about why the project got stuck at one point or another and find a solution together.

The next level is the street government. We need their collaboration when a family has no paper at all proving the birth of the child, but first of all we need them as a witness to the project. Allowing them to follow how the project is going through visits and meetings, they witness the energy and the strength that the poorest of the families in their area are mobilising in order to be responsible parents. They witness the difficulties that the families encounter during the process of registration when in front of different officers, policemen, secretaries, judges... And being witness it allows us at a final stage of the project to formulate ideas and propositions together on how to make birth registration globally more accessible for the poorest families.

We also need to meet the registration managers in the different districts (if possible together with the families) in order to exchange and so to promote mutual understanding and to bring down the barriers of registration that exist today.

Which concrete results ?

Thanks to the grant of Hilfe für Afrika during this six-month period (from August 2012 to January 2013), we were able to support the registration of 53 children.