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**Making Civil Registration System Work Better  
Through the Inception of the Barangay Civil Registration System:  
A Strategic Maneuvering**  
by  
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# **Making Civil Registration System Work Better Through the Inception of the Barangay Civil Registration System: A Strategic Maneuvering**

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Management must empower its people in the deepest sense and remove the barriers and obstacles that hinder the success of attainment of its goals. This is the management principle that triggered the National Statistics Office – Region 10 (NSO –R10) to launch in 1992 the Barangay Civil Registration System (BCRS) as a flagship project after it had conducted a thorough examination and assessment why it rated low in civil registration in the national evaluation of the 1992 Field Awards.

It should be noted that the responsibility for the country's civil registration system rests with the National Statistics Office (NSO) by virtue of P.D. No. 418 and the Civil Registry Law (Act No. 3753). Despite the legal bases that have boosted compulsory registration of vital events, statistics show significant levels of under registration and delayed registration which can be traced back to the following problems: lack of awareness on the importance of civil registration, difficulty of reaching the city or town proper considering the topographical features consisting of valleys, mountains and rivers aggravated by expenses in transportation, language barriers due to the presence of tribal groups, peace and order situation and varying cultural beliefs and practices.

To arrest such problems, NSO -R10 decided to put every cog and wheel to work efficiently within and even outside the organization and this resulted to a strategic maneuvering of bringing civil registration closer to the barangay through the Barangay Civil Registration System (BCRS). The BCRS conceptualized to make the barangay secretaries aggressively involved in providing assistance in filling up forms, most particularly the illiterates and those with language barriers. It also tasks them to visit those households which failed to report newly born babies for registration. The BCRS empowers barangay chairmen to submit the accomplished forms to MCRs who examine the forms before recording them to the civil register during the monthly meetings of the association of barangay council.

Through the inception of the BCRS, civil registration has been made easier and convenient for the registrants. It has improved both level of registration and quality of data. BCRS is now replicated in other provinces after piloting it in the provinces of Bukidnon and Agusan del Sur. After almost a decade of

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implementation, it was presented in international forum as one of the civil registration best practices in the Philippines.

## THE ALARMING STATISTICS

If one were to imagine life like a puzzle of many interlocking pieces and three of those pieces represent the three vital events of one's life- birth, death and marriages- chances are that a rather large percentage will end up looking for those pieces which have not been recorded in the civil registry book. This would mean that people put little value on those pieces of paper, which mark the proof that such vital events were registered. This would mean that people would only recognize the importance of those pieces of paper when imperative needs arise, such as taking board examinations, traveling or working abroad, claiming for inheritance, and other purposes which those pieces of paper are greatly needed.

The analogy illustrates the alarming statistics which showed that based on the National Statistics Office's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) of 1999 five million or 7 percent of the 75 million Filipinos living in the country are still not registered with the Local Civil Registrar. This is also supported by the CENSUS 2000 report which indicated that that three out of ten Filipino children under the age of five do not have birth certificate ([http:// www. Inq.7net /met2002/nov/08/met\\_1-1.htm](http://www.Inq.7net/met2002/nov/08/met_1-1.htm) ).

Such development is not new ; it dated back to more than seven decades since Civil Registry Law was enacted in the Philippines in 1931. Since then the dilemma on lack of consciousness among the people regarding the laws and procedures on Civil Registration has posed a problem.

The table that follows gives a glimpse of the reasons for non-registration which were generated by the NSO-UNIFEF Multi Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).

Proportion of Children 0-6 Years Old Whether Birth Was Registered; by Reason for Non-registration and by Caretaker's Age, Philippines: November 1999

Age of Caretaker	Total Number of Women	Births Registered	Reason for Non-registration						
			Cost Too Much	Must Travel Too Far	Did Not Know It Should Be Registered	Late, Did Not Want To Pay Fine	Does Not Know Where To Register	Others	Don't Know
15-19	224	145	7.6	6.5	1.3	-	5.1	9.3	1.4
20-24	2,021	1,630	3.0	0.8	0.7	0.8	1.3	10.1	0.9
25-29	3,336	2,798	2.4	1.8	1.0	0.7	1.3	6.3	1.1
30-34	3,321	2,870	0.9	1.6	1.2	0.6	1.4	6.0	0.8
35-39	2,297	1,989	1.0	1.4	0.6	0.7	1.7	4.5	0.8
40-44	1,148	974	3.5	0.9	0.3	0.5	0.8	6.3	1.0
45-49	429	345	2.5	0.9	-	2.2	2.4	7.0	2.7
50-54	206	180	2.0	0.8	-	1.2	-	6.2	-

55-59	140	108	1.6	4.7	1.2	-	-	1.9	1.8
60 & Over	164	137	1.2	1.5	-	-	2.5	3.6	1.2

Note: Details may not add up to total due to rounding.

Source: NSO-UNICEF, 1999 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)

Indeed, the reasons identified above for non-registration of civil registration events pointed out to the same barriers that are cited in the succeeding sections of this paper. They dovetailed with what Region 10 identified as barriers to a successful implementation of civil registration, which clearly indicates a need for innovations to be introduced into the civil registry system in the country.

## MAXIMIZING THE STRUCTURE: AN IMPETUS FOR INNOVATION

Civil Registration was established in the Philippines by the Revolutionary government on 18 June 1898 or barely six days after the declaration of its independence from Spain on 12 June 1898. Originally, the system was decentralized in the sense that civil registration was purely a local government responsibility. There was no central agency of the government responsible for civil registration. It was made a centralized system only in 27 February 1931 when Act No. 3753 entitled An Act to Establish a Civil registrar took effect. Under this law, the National Library was responsible in the implementation of Civil Registry matters. However, the civil registration function of the National Library was transferred by Commonwealth Act No. 591 on 16 August 1940 to the Bureau of Census and Statistics, now known as National Statistics Office. Thus, the Administrator of the National Statistics Office is the ex-officio Civil Registrar General of the Philippines.

Looking at its structure, one would see that although geographically the country is divided into regions, and the region into provinces, the registration centers are established only in cities and municipalities of each of the provinces. There is only one registration center in each city or municipality regardless of the size of the area and population. At present, there are 1,607 registration centers in the country corresponding to the number of cities and municipalities. The registration center is headed by a city or municipal civil registrar (C/MCR) who is appointed by the mayor. While the C/MCRs are under the administrative supervision of the mayors, the Civil Registrar General exercises technical supervision and control over them (Africa and Lalicon, 2000).

This set –up yields an obvious implication, that is, the unavailability of a barangay registration system that will cater to the civil registration activities in the barangay level. If one would consider the number of barangays in the country, one would see a total of 41,195 barangays as of May 2002 against a total of 1,607 registration centers. Definitely, this will create a gap – a big gap in terms of addressing the need of the barangays.

This is one imperative need that necessitates a maximizing of the structure through innovative ways. It was, therefore, in this context that the Barangay Civil Registration System (BCRS) was conceptualized by this author in 1993.

## THE INCEPTION OF THE BARANGAY CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM

What other event in the past which triggered the birth of the Baranagay Civil Registration System?

To gauge the performance of the field offices, the National Statistics Office Central Office conducted in 1992 the First National Field Award Competition, which declared Region 10 as second placer. Apparently, the criteria included among others the performance in civil registration. Analysis of the results pointed out that one of the Region 10's weaknesses was in the field of civil registration. Guided by the management principle which says that **“misdefining the problem maybe the biggest barrier to making good decisions, and that management decision is usually sparked by the identification of a problem”** (Dresler,2001).,an analysis of the situation revealed several barriers to a successful civil registration ,which pointed to the following:

### A. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Low registration levels were observed in rural areas that suffer harsh geographic conditions. People in mountainous areas, rugged terrains, areas that are separated by bodies of water find it difficult to register because they are situated in inaccessible areas.

### A. Economy

Registrants far from civil registration centers fail to register because it entails exorbitant transportation rates (*ex. habal-habal and skylab*) In addition, certain municipalities collect considerable fees. Furthermore, going down to poblacion/municipalities centers would mean additional cost for meals and other travel needs which is actually not within the budget. Likewise, some LGUs are charging exorbitant fees in registering civil registration events.

### B. Transportation

In some areas, frequency of transportation services are infrequent and entails so much time traveling. In other areas the presence of transportation could be nil or none at all. Aggravating the situation of transportation problems is the poor maintenance of road network.

### C. Language

Poorly educated sector of our population including cultural minority groups inhibit themselves from transacting business with the government offices because of the perceived lingual difference especially that tribal people speaks only their native dialects.

## **E. Peace and Order**

It is a well-documented fact that unlawful elements still lurk in interior areas. Moreover, rebels are still active in their activities which sow fear among the people to travel. In the same vein, tribal wars occur every now and then. These are enough reasons for some registrants to refrain from traveling solely for the purpose of registering any of the vital events.

## **F. Indifference of Officials**

There is a perceived discrimination among members of the cultural communities (e.g. highlanders, lumads) that leads them to think that the government is indifferent to them.

## **G. Lack of Awareness on the Importance of Documents**

The value of the document is not generally known until one is confronted with such requirement. The document is not listed among the immediate priorities.

## **H. Customs and Religion**

There are still cultural practices among IPs and Muslims that are not compatible with the requirements of registration. One case is that other tribes still insist on using single name or their names are changed after Haj.

## **PHILOSOPHIES OF OVERCOMING BARRIERS**

The identification of the aforementioned barriers opened up to the need for good philosophies. Anchored on that philosophy which says that **“If Mohammed cannot go to the mountain, then let the mountain go to Mohammed,”** the proactivity philosophy did fit and sparked a concept. These two philosophies mean more than merely taking initiative. It means taking the responsibility to innovate new concept to solve the problem. Thus, to enhance the low level of civil registration in Region 10, the National Statistics Office-10 had come up with a project that extended the services of civil registration up to the barangay level. The project was dubbed **Barangay Civil Registration System (BCRS)**.

BCRS was introduced to the public in 1993 with the belief that if civil registration is conveyed to the barangay level, the recognized constraints will be countered, thus extending the civil registration services to the barangay constituents. The objective of the project is to include IPs and Muslims in the Civil Registration System, thus, including them in the privileges that complement those who are registered. BCRS was first introduced in Bukidnon and Agusan del Sur as a flagship project of Region 10. Which later on became a viable model of improving the civil registration with the blessings of the town/city mayors.

## **PROCEDURES OF BARANGAY CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM**

The Barangay Civil Registration System is basically a process of facilitating the registration of vital and registrable events at the barangay level through the barangay LGUs with the Barangay Secretary as the Focal Person.

#### A. Stakeholders and Roles

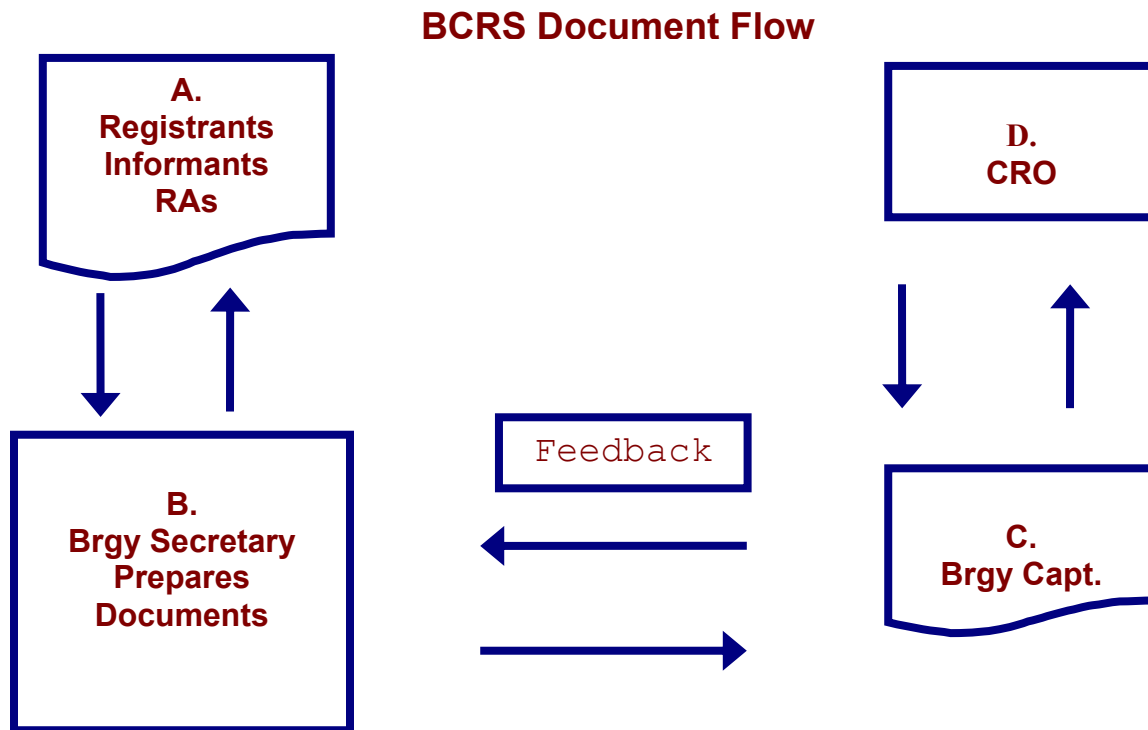
- 1.) Registrants - Registrants are the persons registering the events (Birth, Marriage, Death, etc.)
- 2.) Informants – The Informants are the persons who give information as to the needed entries in the different items of the civil registry documents.
- 3.) Registration Agents (RAs) – The RAs are persons who assist the Local Civil Registry Office in the registration of events. They could be any of the following: Hilots/Midwives; Teachers; Barangay Officials; Tribal Chieftains/Leaders; etc. The assistance could also be in the form of information campaign, assist in actual registration, and other support activities.
- 4.) Barangay Secretaries – The Barangay Secretaries are the focal persons of the civil registration activities in the barangays. They maybe involved in a myriad of activities such as: Preparing civil registry documents; assist in the actual registration; registration campaign; facilitating data benchmarking; submitting civil registry documents; facilitating mass-weddings; other related functions and activities.
- 5.) Barangay Captains – The Barangay Captains are the Barangay Local Chief Executives who see to it that programs and projects are implemented in their barangays including BCRS.
- 6.) Civil Registry Office – The department in the city/municipal government headed by a Local Civil Registrar who is tasked to implement the Civil Registry Law in its jurisdiction.

#### B. BCRS Document Flow

The BCRS registration process follows unique but simple steps putting into practical motion the local governance hierarchy:

- Step A. The Registrant/Informant/Registration Agent prepares the information and/or document for registration.
- Step B. The document is brought to or prepared by the Barangay Secretary.
- Step C. The document is brought by the Barangay Secretary to the Barangay Captain for submission to the Civil Registry Office when he attends the monthly ABC meeting or other official transactions.

Step D. The document is submitted to the Civil Registry Office for registration. The Local Civil Registrar gives back to the Barangay Captain the registrant's copy of the registered document. In case there are problems, the feedback is duly passed on to the registrant.



## BCRS IMPLICATION FOR THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The idea of BCRS was conceived largely due to the concern of the author for the less privileged and deprived sector of the populace, the indigenous peoples. It was hoped to be a humble contribution and vehicle in instituting change that could propel them towards the mainstream of Philippine society while protecting their distinct cultural practices and traditions as guaranteed by the Constitution at the same time. As written by Antonio J. Montalvan (Phil.. Inquirer, June 28,2004) ,”the Aves concept of BCRS had intended to extend civil registration to the indigenous peoples or lumads who, unknown to many of us urbanites, are the ones most often neglected by our civil registry system.” What happened since then is more clearly visualized by the following experiences

### A. On Birth Registration

IPs seldom register their births, compounded by the aforementioned barriers. Several strategies were tried by the LCR and NSO such as mobile registration, legislated exemptions from fees, moratorium on fines and IECs. The success however was temporary and could not be sustained.

Things turned better for Barangays which implemented BCRS. The Registration Agents, usually the Barangay Secretaries, who also belong to the same tribe, are right there on their doorsteps and very much one of their own who could talk to them in their own native tongue and could give them the necessary assistance. Such intimacy and comfort of registering children are simply irresistible and overwhelming, which successfully removed the barriers .

The IPs have finally come to term with their neighbors and the requirements of properly documenting their identity. The use of one name is even becoming a thing of the past.

### **On Marriage Registration**

Tribal marriages were never documented. With the advent of strict compliance for Birth Certificates of schooling children and dependents, the issue of being illegitimates surfaced which had direct bearing with other transactions such as health insurance and benefits. The specter and magnitude of disenfranchisement loomed catastrophic.

The immediate remedy of some LCRs consisted of mass weddings, civil and religious mass weddings. The IPs, however, were left confused and bewildered. The process clearly implied of invalid tribal marriages and conversion to certain religious sect. The exercise was like a bitter pill which was hard to swallow. It was a social disaster. Still at the end, there's the tedious process of reconciling the date of births of children with the date of marriage of parents.

The implementation of BCRS preserved what could be saved in many of the affected areas. The system was instrumental in properly documenting the tribal marriages. The basic strategy lay in packaging the securing of Certificate of Registration of Authority to Solemnize Marriage (CRASM) by the tribal Solemnizing Officers and Imams that included seminar-workshops, proper coordination with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), Office of the Muslim Affairs (OMA) and the funding sponsors (LGUs and donors).

The strategy is a civil registration success story. To date tribal Solemnizing Officers are already registered. All the marriages they officiate are properly documented and registered mainly through the BCRS.

### **B. On Death Registration**

This was one facet of civil registration which was seldom given importance as far as tribal deaths were concerned. As part of their customs and tradition, dead persons were buried immediately. The barangays have cemeteries.; however, tribal

communities have their own burial places. Death registration had been an unknown culture.

NSO and Local Civil Registry Offices did attempt on numerous information campaigns. The messages, however, seemed to have landed on deaf ears.

Not until BCRS. The system again proved effective in catching death events in cultural communities. The newfound function of the Barangay Secretaries was inscribed in concrete application.

## **LEGAL BASES OF BCRS**

The Barangay Civil Registration System was created based on Rule 6 of Administrative Order NO. 1, Series of 1993, which states that “Barangay Secretaries shall assist the Municipal Civil Registrar in the registration of births, deaths and marriages occurring in his jurisdiction” and the Local Government Code of 1991, Sec. 394 that paralleled Rule 6, AO #1, S. 1993.

With these laws in mind, the National Statistics Office-10 had put BCRS into action by empowering the Barangay Captains and Barangay Secretaries through Barangay Civil Registration Seminars. The BCRS seminars included the First Regional Seminar that was conducted on November 15-16, 2001 followed by the Second Regional Seminar on Barangay Civil Registration System on October 23-24, 2003 and many other seminars for the purpose.

## **BCRS GOES REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL**

The initiative of NSO-10 has eventually spread to other regions in the country which have implemented the system. BCRS was brought to a global venue when Former Administrator Tomas P. Africa and Former Civil Registry Director Carlito Lalicon presented the Barangay Civil Registration System in Surabaya, Indonesia during the Birth Registration Best Practices Workshop on December 12-14, 2000. They stressed that BCRS is one of the civil registration best practices which is in fact had been replicated in other provinces. The concept of BCRS was intended to reach all people in the rural areas even in the most isolated portion of the barangay. As stated by the Hon. Tomas P. Africa, Director of the United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and Pacific, the German funding agency, GTZ, intends to try this scheme in Indonesia where a civil registration cum population administration system is being established.

Lately the Unregistered Children Project of PLAN International was introduced which was comfortably married with the BCRS. The excellent performance of UCP in barangays with BCRS was very evident in the recent search for outstanding UCP pilot barangay in Region 10. The winner including the top

nominees were BCRS barangays. The following table shows the effective results of the marriage of BCRS and UCP in the pilot barangays.

**LEVEL OF BIRTH REGISTRATION  
UCP Pilot Areas by Province/Municipality  
2002-2004**

Province /Municipality	Before UCP and BCRS Integration 2000					After UCP AND BCRS Integration 2000				
	Popula- tion 0-18	Registered		Unregistered		Popula- tion 0-18	Registered		Unregistered	
		Number	%	Number	%		Number	%	Number	%
Bukidnon										
Magasaysay	1,979	1,623	82.01	356	17.99	1,979	1,979	100.00	-	-
Camiguin										
Sagay	601	273	45.42	328	54.58	601	601	100.00	-	-
Lanao del Norte										
Baloj*	14,065	5,257	37.38	8,808	62.62	14,065	6,571	46.72	7,497	53.30
Misamis										
Occidental	3,088	1,303	42.20	1,785	57.80	3,088	2,953	95.63	135	4.37
Don Victoriano										
Misamis Oriental	2,753	2,687	97.60	66	2.40	2,753	2,751	99.93	2	0.07
Binuangan	4,484	3,081	68.71	1,403	31.29	4,484	3,614	80.60	870	19.40
Laguindingan**										

\* Started on the 2nd Quarter of 2002 as replacement of Nunungan.

\*\* Expansion for Misamis Oriental (started September 2003)

## CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The Barangay Civil Registration System has proven its effectiveness beyond doubt. It epitomizes the true essence of a mass-based people improvement.

The way ahead might still be long and tedious but the fact remains that what has been conceived has been given the right to be born and to bear fruits not only in Region 10 but in other regions as well.

Emulation of the System can not be over-emphasized. The lessons learned from the experience of implementing the System are enough inspiration for the implementers to highly recommend the following:

1. Adoption of the System by all cities/municipalities. Barangays with difficult terrains or those which are inaccessible could be prioritized. BCRS is especially tailor-made for these barangays.
2. Logistical support of LGUs for Barangay Secretaries. Mobility of Barangay Secretaries are hampered by lack of funds. Yet they have to be mobile for a lot of concerns like mobile registration, attending trainings and relevant activities. They will also need continuous supply of Civil Registry Forms.
3. Permanent appointment of Barangay Secretaries. Be it included among the legislative advocacies of local and national officials through DILG for the permanent appointments of Barangay Secretaries. A lot of investments in terms of trainings, experience and expertise placed with the Barangay Secretaries are put to naught every time veteran Barangay Secretaries are whimsically replaced by the newly elected Barangay Captains.

The Barangay Civil Registration System will always seek its place of origin-Region 10. Thus, it is highly recommended that in the process of implementation by other places, reference should be given where it is due.

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