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Influence of Local Cultural Practices on Caregivers' Birth Registration for Children Under 18 Years in Ololunga Sub-Location, Narok South Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: **Birth registration is a fundamental human right that provides legal identity and enables access to education, healthcare, social protection, and other essential services. Despite efforts to strengthen civil registration systems, birth registration coverage remains uneven among marginalized and pastoralist populations. In Kenya, disparities persist across counties, with Narok County recording a registration rate of 52.8% compared to the national average of 77.1%. Limited evidence exists on how local cultural practices influence caregivers' decisions to register children in pastoralist communities. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour, this study examined the influence of local cultural practices on birth registration among children under 18 years in Ololunga Sub-location, Narok South Sub-County, Kenya. Specifically, it assessed the influence of traditional naming and childbirth practices, household and community decision-making norms, and pastoralist lifestyle practices on birth registration. A descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted. The study targeted household heads with children under 18 years and key informants from relevant stakeholder groups. A sample of 105 respondents was selected from 150 households using Yamane's formula. Quantitative data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that local cultural practices significantly influenced birth registration outcomes ($p < 0.001$). Traditional childbirth practices, community decision-making norms, and pastoralist mobility affected registration timing, access to services, and interaction with formal registration systems. The study recommends culturally responsive interventions, strengthened community engagement, integration of birth registration with maternal and child health services, and expansion of mobile and decentralized registration services to improve coverage among pastoralist populations.**

Keywords: **Birth registration, socio-cultural determinants, caregivers, pastoralism, legal identity, Narok County, Kenya.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Birth registration is critical for upholding human rights and enabling access to essential services, making it a foundational component of effective civil registration systems (Wolsink et al., 2026). It provides legal recognition of a child's existence and facilitates access to education, healthcare, social protection, nationality, inheritance rights, and other services throughout childhood and adolescence (AbouZahr et al., 2021; Ebbers & Smits, 2022). The Convention on the Rights of the Child and Sustainable Development Goal 16.9 emphasize universal birth registration as a foundation for legal identity and inclusion in society (United Nations, 2019). Beyond individual benefits, birth registration generates vital demographic data that support governance, planning, and equitable service delivery (Aboagye et al., 2023).

Despite global progress, birth registration remains a challenge in many low- and middle-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where substantial numbers of children remain undocumented (Aboagye et al., 2023; Bhatia et al., 2021). Children without birth certificates often face barriers in accessing education, healthcare, social welfare programmes, and other rights that require proof of age and identity (Ebbers & Smits, 2022; AbouZahr et al., 2021). While administrative and socioeconomic barriers have received considerable attention, recent studies increasingly recognize that registration decisions are also shaped by cultural beliefs, community norms, and household perceptions regarding the value of legal identity (Robert et al., 2026; Aboagye et al., 2023).

Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that birth registration is not merely an administrative process, but a social and cultural practice embedded within local belief systems and family structures. Cultural norms surrounding childbirth, naming ceremonies, child-rearing practices, gender roles, and household decision-making may influence whether births are reported to formal authorities and the timing of registration (Ebbers & Smits, 2022; Bhatia et al., 2021). Community perceptions of government institutions and traditional understandings of identity may further shape engagement with civil registration systems, particularly in rural and culturally distinct populations (AbouZahr et al., 2021; Aboagye et al., 2023).

These influences are particularly important in pastoralist communities, where cultural identity, traditional authority structures, and livelihood practices strongly shape interactions with formal institutions (Forsingdal et al., 2022; Hodgson, 2011). Decision-making concerning children often involves extended family members, elders, and customary social structures, which may influence whether and when birth registration occurs. Consequently, understanding birth registration among pastoralist populations requires attention to the cultural environment within which household decisions are made.

Kenya has made substantial progress in strengthening its civil registration system through legal reforms, digitization, and the integration of registration services within health facilities, contributing to an increase in birth registration coverage to approximately 77.1% in 2023 (CRS, 2024; KNBS, 2025). Despite these gains, considerable regional disparities persist. Counties within the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs), including Narok, continue to report birth registration levels below the national average despite improvements in infrastructure and service accessibility (CRS, 2024; Robert et al., 2026). This suggests that factors beyond physical access to services may contribute to persistent under-registration.

Narok County, predominantly inhabited by the Maasai community, is characterized by strong cultural traditions and pastoralist livelihoods that continue to shape family and community life (Hodgson, 2011). Although access to education, health facilities, and civil registration services has improved over time, birth registration completeness remained at only 52.8% in 2023, significantly below the national average (CRS, 2024). The persistence of low registration rates despite enhanced service availability raises questions about the influence of local cultural practices on registration behaviour. Practices related to traditional naming and childbirth customs, household and community decision-making structures, perceptions of formal documentation, and pastoralist mobility patterns may affect whether children are registered and the timing of registration.

Previous studies have largely focused on socioeconomic, educational, and service-related determinants of birth registration, with limited attention given to the influence of local cultural practices within pastoralist Maasai communities. Furthermore, most existing research concentrates on children under five years of age, overlooking older children and adolescents who may remain unregistered and continue to face challenges associated with the absence of legal identity (Aboagye et al., 2023; Ebbers & Smits, 2022). Consequently, there is limited evidence on how local cultural practices influence birth registration among children under 18 years in Ololunga Sub-location, Narok South Sub-County. Addressing this knowledge gap is important for informing culturally responsive interventions aimed at improving birth registration coverage among pastoralist populations.

Despite improvements in Kenya's civil registration system and increasing national birth registration coverage, Narok County continues to record substantially lower registration levels than the national average, with birth registration completeness standing at 52.8% in 2023 (CRS, 2024). The continued under-registration of children despite expanded access to registration services suggests that administrative and infrastructural improvements alone may be insufficient to achieve universal birth registration. Emerging evidence indicates that cultural practices, community norms, family decision-making processes, and pastoralist lifestyles can influence caregivers' engagement with birth registration systems (Aboagye et al., 2023; Ebbers & Smits, 2022). However, limited empirical research has examined how these factors specifically shape birth registration outcomes within Maasai pastoralist communities, particularly among children under 18 years who remain underrepresented in existing studies. Therefore, this study investigated the influence of local cultural practices on birth registration among children under 18 years in Ololunga Sub-location, Narok South Sub-County, focusing on traditional naming and childbirth practices, household and community decision-making norms, and pastoralist lifestyle practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991), which posits that behaviour is influenced by behavioural intention, itself shaped by three constructs: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2021). TPB has been widely applied to explain behaviours influenced by individual beliefs, social expectations, and contextual factors (La Barbera & Ajzen, 2020; Hagger et al., 2022).

The theory is relevant to this study because birth registration is a behavioural decision shaped by cultural beliefs, community norms, and caregivers' perceptions of the registration process. Within the Maasai pastoralist context, traditional practices and social structures may influence whether and when children are registered.

The construct of attitude toward the behaviour explains how traditional childbirth and naming practices may shape caregivers' perceptions of birth registration. Where cultural recognition of a child through customary ceremonies is considered sufficient, registration may be delayed or deprioritized. Conversely, caregivers who perceive birth registration as complementary to cultural practices may be more likely to register their children.

Subjective norms refer to perceived social expectations from significant others. In Maasai communities, decisions concerning children are often influenced by elders, household heads, spouses, and clan members (Hodgson, 2011). The support or disapproval of these influential actors may affect caregivers' decisions regarding birth registration. This construct therefore aligns with the study objective examining family and community decision-making structures.

Perceived behavioural control relates to an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour. In pastoralist settings, cultural practices associated with mobility, settlement patterns, and perceptions of formal government systems may influence caregivers' ability and willingness to engage with registration services (Forsingdal et al., 2022). Caregivers who perceive birth registration as accessible and beneficial are more likely to register their children than those who encounter cultural or practical constraints.

The TPB therefore provides a useful framework for examining how traditional naming and childbirth practices (attitudes), family and community decision-making structures (subjective norms), and pastoralist cultural practices and perceptions of registration (perceived behavioural control) influence birth registration among children under 18 years in Ololunga Sub-location. Although the theory emphasizes behavioural intentions, its application in this study is strengthened by considering the broader socio-cultural realities of Maasai pastoralist communities, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of birth registration behaviour.

2.2. Empirical Review

Local cultural practices shape how caregivers perceive childhood, identity, and engagement with state institutions, making them important determinants of birth registration behaviour. Recent literature increasingly recognizes that birth registration is not solely an administrative process, but a socially embedded practice influenced by cultural beliefs, traditions, and community norms (Ebbers & Smits, 2022; Aboagye et al., 2023). Across many low- and middle-income countries, caregivers' decisions to register children are shaped by customary practices surrounding childbirth, naming, kinship systems, religious beliefs, and local understandings of identity and citizenship (AbouZahr et al., 2021; Bhatia et al., 2021). These cultural influences may affect both the timing and likelihood of registration, particularly where traditional systems of social recognition coexist with formal civil registration systems.

Studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that cultural norms often interact with institutional processes to influence registration outcomes. For example, caregivers may perceive community recognition of a child through naming ceremonies or clan affiliation as more immediately important than formal state documentation, reducing the urgency of birth registration (Ebbers & Smits, 2022; Aboagye et al., 2023). Similarly, household decisions related to child registration may be governed by extended family structures, traditional authority systems, and gendered power relations that determine when and whether interactions with government services occur (Bhatia et al., 2021). Despite growing recognition of these influences, empirical studies examining the specific cultural mechanisms affecting birth registration remain limited, particularly within rural and pastoralist contexts.

Among pastoralist communities, birth registration is frequently examined through the lens of geographical access and mobility. Research in East Africa shows that seasonal migration, dispersed settlements, and limited interaction with administrative institutions contribute to lower registration rates among pastoralist populations (Forsingdal et al., 2022; Manby, 2021). However, recent scholarship argues that pastoralism should not be viewed solely as a logistical barrier. Rather, pastoralist livelihoods are embedded within broader cultural systems involving clan structures, traditional leadership, social obligations, and community-based decision-making processes that shape interactions with formal institutions (Hodgson, 2011; Forsingdal et al., 2022). Consequently, understanding birth registration among pastoralists requires examination of the cultural context within which registration decisions are made, rather than focusing exclusively on mobility and service accessibility.

Within Maasai communities, local cultural practices may influence birth registration in several ways. Traditional naming practices are particularly relevant because formal naming may occur weeks or months after birth, potentially delaying interactions with civil registration authorities (Paukwa, 2020). Cultural practices surrounding childbirth and early infancy may also influence the timing of public recognition of a child, which in turn affects the perceived urgency of registration. Furthermore, Maasai social organization places significant value on family and communal decision-making, where elders and male household heads often play a central role in decisions affecting children and household affairs (Hodgson, 2011; Guyo, 2017). Such structures may influence caregivers' ability or willingness to seek registration services independently.

Gender relations constitute another important cultural dimension influencing birth registration. Studies in Kenya and other African settings have found that women's autonomy in household decision-making is positively associated with uptake of child-related services, including civil registration (Aboagye et al., 2023; Robert et al., 2026). In settings where decision-making authority is concentrated among male household members or elders, mothers may face constraints in initiating birth registration even when they understand its benefits. Cultural perceptions regarding the ownership of children's identities, responsibilities for documentation, and interactions with government structures may therefore influence registration outcomes.

Recent evidence also highlights the role of community perceptions and trust in formal institutions. Caregivers may be less likely to prioritize birth registration when traditional systems of identity recognition are viewed as sufficient or when the benefits of registration are not immediately apparent (Ebbers & Smits, 2022; Aboagye et al., 2023). In pastoralist communities, where customary institutions continue to play a significant role in regulating social life, formal registration may be perceived as less relevant than traditional forms of belonging and recognition. Understanding these perceptions is essential for designing culturally responsive strategies that improve registration uptake without undermining existing cultural practices.

Although studies have identified cultural beliefs, household authority structures, gender relations, and pastoralist lifestyles as potential influences on birth registration, important knowledge gaps remain. First, most existing studies focus on socioeconomic, administrative, or geographic barriers, giving limited attention to specific local cultural practices that influence registration decisions (Ebbers & Smits, 2022; Aboagye et al., 2023). Second, research on pastoralist populations often treats nomadic lifestyles as a barrier to registration without exploring how cultural values, traditions, and decision-making processes shape caregivers' engagement with registration systems (Forsingdal et al., 2022; Manby, 2021). Third, empirical evidence examining the influence of Maasai cultural practices on birth registration remains scarce, despite the persistence of relatively low registration rates in areas predominantly inhabited by Maasai communities. Finally, most studies focus on children under five years because of international reporting requirements, leaving limited evidence regarding factors influencing birth registration among older children and adolescents under 18 years (Aboagye et al., 2023; Bhatia et al., 2021).

Consequently, there is insufficient context-specific evidence on how traditional naming practices, household and community decision-making structures, gender relations, and pastoralist cultural practices influence birth registration among children under 18 years in Ololunga Sub-location, Narok South Sub-County. Addressing this gap is necessary for developing culturally appropriate interventions that can improve birth registration coverage while responding to the realities of Maasai pastoralist communities.

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3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design and Sampling

A cross-sectional descriptive study design was adopted to investigate the influence of local cultural practices on birth registration among children under 18 years in Ololunga Sub-location, Narok South Sub-County, Kenya. The design was appropriate because it enabled the collection of data at a single point in time and facilitated the examination of relationships between birth registration and local cultural practices, including traditional naming and childbirth practices, household and community decision-making norms, and pastoralist lifestyle practices (Setia, 2016; Wang & Cheng, 2020). The study targeted household heads or primary caregivers residing in Ololunga Sub-location who had at least one child under 18 years of age, as they are primarily responsible for decisions concerning children's welfare, including birth registration. According to local administrative records, 150 households met the inclusion criteria and constituted the study population. A sample size of 105 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A census approach was then used to recruit eligible household heads and caregivers until the required sample size was achieved. For the qualitative component, key informants were purposively selected based on their involvement in birth registration and child welfare issues. These included civil registration officers, local administrators, health workers, community leaders, teachers, and child protection actors. The final number of key informant interviews was determined by data saturation, whereby interviews continued until no new information emerged (Guest et al., 2020; Malterud et al., 2016).

3.2. Data Collection and Instrumentation

Quantitative data were collected using 105 semi-structured questionnaires administered through face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to capture information on traditional naming and childbirth practices, household and community decision-making norms, pastoralist lifestyle practices, perceptions of birth registration, and the registration status of children. Qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews (KIIs). KIIs explored community perceptions of birth registration, cultural beliefs and practices, traditional leadership structures, and experiences with birth registration processes. The KIIs included the local area chief, health facility in-charge, primary school headteacher, community leader, a child welfare services representative, and an NGO representative. The final number of interviews was determined by the principle of data saturation, with interviews continuing until no new information emerged. Interviews were conducted at locations convenient for participants, audio-recorded with their consent, and supplemented by field notes.

3.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered into SPSS Version 20, cleaned, and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Tables of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize study variables. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and field notes were coded and grouped into themes relating to traditional naming and childbirth practices, family and community decision-making structures, pastoralist cultural practices, and perceptions of birth registration. The findings were presented using verbatim quotes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics

A total of 109 questionnaires were distributed to heads of households with children under 18 years in Ololunga. Of these, 105 respondents consented to participate in the study and were administered the questionnaire, representing a participation rate of 96.3%. All 105 questionnaires were completed and returned with no missing responses, resulting in a 100% questionnaire completion rate among participants and an overall response rate of 96.3%.

Table 1: Social demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	20-24 years	15	14%
	25-35 years	49	47%
	36 – 45 years	36	34%
	46 years and above	5	5%
Gender	Female	53	50%
	Male	52	50%

Marital Status	Married	76	72%
	Single	22	21%
	Widow/Widower	7	7%
First Child Registered	No	6	6%
	Yes	99	94%
Registration of last child	No	19	18%
	Yes	86	82%
Possession of birth certificate	No	8	8%
	Yes	97	92%

The study surveyed 105 respondents, the majority of whom were aged 25 - 35 years (47%), followed by those aged 36 - 45 years (34%). Respondents were equally distributed by gender, with females and males each comprising 50% of the sample. Most participants were married (72%), while 21% were single and 7% were widowed. The predominance of married adults within the active child-rearing age groups suggests that respondents were well positioned to provide insights into household decision-making and birth registration practices.

Birth registration rates were generally high, with 94% of respondents reporting that their first child had been registered and 82% indicating registration of their last child. Additionally, 92% reported possessing birth certificates for their registered children. However, the lower registration rate among last-born children points to potential socioeconomic, logistical, and family-related constraints that may emerge as households expand.

Inferential analysis revealed significant differences in age, marital status, birth registration of first and last children, and birth certificate possession ($p < 0.001$), while gender distribution was not statistically significant ($p = 0.922$). Overall, the findings indicate that the study population was largely composed of experienced caregivers with direct exposure to birth registration processes, providing a strong foundation for examining the socio-cultural factors influencing birth registration in Ololunga Sub-location.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' perceptions of the influence of local cultural practices on birth registration among children under 18 years in Ololunga Sub-location. The analysis focused on traditional naming and childbirth practices, household and community decision-making norms, and pastoralist lifestyle practices in line with the study objectives.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Local practices and birth registration	No	27	26%
	Yes	78	74%
Influence of culture on decision to register a child	No	97	92%
	Yes	8	8%
Community and birth registration	No	23	22%
	Yes	82	78%
FGM/C in community	No	2	2%
	Yes	103	98%
Effect of FGM/C on birth registration	No	14	13%
	Yes	91	87%
Campaigns on FGM/C	No	3	3%
	Yes	102	97%
Influence of nomadism on birth registration	No	12	11%
	Yes	93	89%
Nomadism and place of birth	No	7	7%
	Yes	98	93%

Most respondents (74%) reported that local practices influence birth registration, suggesting that registration decisions are shaped by the socio-cultural environment in which caregivers live. Respondents associated positive registration outcomes with increased community awareness, support from local leaders, and growing recognition of the benefits of birth registration. Similar findings have been reported in other African settings where community mobilization and sensitization strengthened acceptance of civil registration and increased registration uptake (Makinde et al., 2016; AbouZahr et al., 2021). This suggests that cultural practices are not static barriers but can also become enabling factors when communities perceive birth registration as beneficial for children's welfare and future opportunities. The findings further indicate that local cultural practices operate through interconnected family, community, and livelihood systems that shape how and when birth registration occurs, highlighting the importance of examining traditional childbirth practices, community decision-making norms, and pastoralist lifestyles as distinct but related influences on registration outcomes.

Although most respondents (92%) indicated that culture does not directly determine whether a child is registered, qualitative responses revealed that traditional naming and childbirth practices continue to influence registration behaviour indirectly. Practices such as reliance on traditional birth attendants, beliefs surrounding child recognition, restrictions on counting children, and cultural rites associated with childhood may delay formal engagement with registration systems. These findings suggest that traditional systems of recognizing and integrating children into the community may affect the timing of birth registration rather than the decision to register itself. For example, in some households, a child may not be publicly recognized or formally named immediately after birth, making caregivers less likely to prioritize early registration. Similarly, births attended by traditional birth attendants rather than skilled health personnel may reduce opportunities to obtain birth notifications, which are often required for registration. Similar observations have been reported by Bhatia et al. (2021) and Kraemer et al. (2023), who found that traditional norms increasingly coexist with formal civil registration systems, influencing when registration occurs rather than whether it occurs. The findings therefore indicate that efforts to improve registration should not necessarily seek to replace traditional practices but rather integrate them with formal registration processes through culturally appropriate approaches.

Community influence emerged as another important factor, with 78% of respondents indicating that community dynamics affect birth registration. Respondents highlighted the role of chiefs, village elders, community health volunteers, and family members in encouraging registration and disseminating information. This suggests that birth registration is influenced by collective expectations and social norms rather than individual decision-making alone. In pastoralist communities such as Ololunga, decisions affecting children are often embedded within household and community structures, making community acceptance an important driver of registration behaviour. The findings specifically illustrate the influence of household and community decision-making norms, where decisions concerning children are frequently made collectively by parents, elders, extended family members, and respected community leaders. As a result, caregivers' actions regarding registration are often shaped by shared social expectations and advice from influential household and community actors. These findings support previous studies which demonstrate that endorsement from trusted community leaders strengthens compliance with civil registration processes and facilitates behavioural change (Setel et al., 2020; Muthoni & Kabiru, 2022). The findings further indicate that community sensitization efforts have contributed to shifting social norms, increasing the perception that birth registration is both socially acceptable and beneficial.

The findings also point to the continued influence of FGM/C as a contextual cultural practice within the community. Nearly all respondents (98%) confirmed the presence of FGM/C, while 87% perceived a relationship between FGM/C and birth registration. However, the findings suggest that this relationship is largely indirect. Respondents indicated that fear of stigma, legal repercussions, and avoidance of formal health services may contribute to home deliveries and delayed contact with institutions responsible for birth notification and registration. Similar findings have been reported by Banks et al. (2021) and Obare et al. (2023), who observed that harmful cultural practices can influence health-seeking behaviour and engagement with government services. At the same time, the widespread existence of anti-FGM/C campaigns (97%) demonstrates ongoing social change within the community. These campaigns appear to have strengthened awareness of children's rights and promoted greater interaction with formal health and administrative systems, which may indirectly support improvements in birth registration. The findings therefore suggest that childbirth-related cultural practices influence registration outcomes primarily through their effects on healthcare utilization, birth notification, and early engagement with formal institutions.

Pastoralist lifestyle practices emerged as the strongest local cultural influence on birth registration. Nearly nine in ten respondents (89%) reported that nomadic lifestyles affect registration, while 93% indicated that mobility influences place of birth. Respondents explained that seasonal migration in search of pasture and water limits access to health facilities and registration centres, increasing the likelihood of home births and delayed registration. These findings align with studies showing that pastoralist mobility remains one of the most significant barriers to timely birth registration across sub-Saharan Africa because civil registration systems are largely designed around sedentary populations (Aboagye et al., 2023; Tenaw et al., 2023). The findings directly support the objective examining the influence of pastoralist lifestyle practices by demonstrating that mobility, temporary settlement patterns, and distance from service delivery points reduce opportunities for timely registration. Seasonal movement also increases the risk of missing registration timelines and limits caregivers' contact with government administrative services. The findings further suggest that place of birth plays an important role in determining registration outcomes, as children born outside health facilities are less likely to receive birth notifications required for registration. Consequently, pastoral mobility influences registration not because caregivers oppose registration, but because mobility restricts opportunities to access services and complete administrative processes.

The inferential analysis further reinforces these interpretations by demonstrating statistically significant associations between birth registration and all local practice variables ($p < 0.001$). These findings confirm that traditional naming and childbirth practices, household and community decision-making norms, and pastoralist lifestyle practices, corresponding to the three study objectives, significantly influence birth registration outcomes. However, the finding that culture was not perceived as a direct barrier by most respondents suggests that local cultural practices exert their influence indirectly through social norms, mobility, place of delivery, family structures, and interactions with formal institutions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that local cultural practices continue to shape birth registration among children under 18 years in Ololunga Sub-location. Traditional naming and childbirth practices influence the timing and process of registration, household and community decision-making norms shape caregivers' registration choices, and pastoralist livelihood practices influence physical access to registration services. While increasing awareness and community sensitization have reduced direct cultural resistance to birth registration, structural and socio-cultural realities continue to influence registration outcomes. These findings underscore the need for culturally responsive interventions that strengthen community engagement, integrate birth registration with maternal and child health services, and expand mobile and decentralized registration mechanisms to accommodate the realities of pastoralist populations (Ebbers & Smits, 2022; Aboagye et al., 2023; Robert et al., 2026).

Policy and Practical Implications

The findings suggest that improving birth registration in pastoralist communities requires culturally responsive and accessible service delivery rather than attempts to change local traditions. Since cultural practices primarily influence the timing of registration, policies should integrate birth registration into community structures, traditional child-recognition practices, and maternal and child health services. The significant role of community leaders, elders, and community health volunteers highlights the importance of community-based approaches in promoting registration awareness and reinforcing positive social norms. Strengthening collaboration between registration authorities, health workers, and local leaders can enhance registration uptake. The strong influence of pastoral mobility underscores the need for decentralized and mobile registration services. Expanding outreach registration, mobile units, and integrated health-registration services would help reach nomadic populations and reduce access barriers. Overall, the findings indicate that achieving universal birth registration requires a combination of community engagement, culturally sensitive interventions, and flexible registration systems that accommodate the realities of pastoralist households.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that local cultural practices significantly influence birth registration among children under 18 years in Ololunga Sub-location, primarily through their effects on community norms, childbirth practices, family decision-making, and pastoralist mobility. While cultural beliefs do not directly prevent registration, they often affect the timing of registration and caregivers' interaction with formal registration systems. Pastoral mobility emerged as the most significant factor, limiting access to health facilities and registration services, while community leaders and increasing awareness positively influenced registration uptake.

The findings demonstrate that birth registration outcomes are shaped by an interaction of cultural, social, and structural factors rather than cultural resistance alone. Consequently, policies and programs aimed at improving birth registration should adopt culturally responsive approaches that engage local leaders, strengthen community awareness, integrate registration with maternal and child health services, and expand mobile and decentralized registration mechanisms to reach pastoralist populations. Such interventions can help increase registration coverage and support the realization of every child's right to legal identity.

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