

Assessing the Effectiveness of Civil Registration Services in the Municipality of Balasan

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ABSTRACT

Civil registration is a fundamental public service that provides individuals with legal identity and enables access to various social, economic, and legal benefits. In the Philippines, civil registration services are implemented at the local level through Municipal Civil Registry Offices (MCROs) under the supervision of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). This study assessed the effectiveness of civil registration services in the Municipality of Balasan, Iloilo, a second-class municipality. A descriptive approach was adopted through the review and analysis of administrative records, program reports, and relevant national policy issuances on civil registration. The findings highlight key service initiatives of the MCRO of Balasan, including mobile registration activities, registration assistance programs, and the promotion of awareness campaigns in selected barangays.

The office's institutional performance is further reflected in its national recognition during the 4th National Convention on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics held on July 28–30, 2025 at SMX Convention Center, Malacabat, Pampanga, where it placed 4th as Most Outstanding Local Civil Registry Office in the Large Category. Despite these achievements, challenges such as delayed registration cases, complex documentary requirements, and limited public awareness of registration procedures remain evident. The study concludes that civil registration services in Balasan are generally effective, but continuous efforts are necessary to further enhance accessibility, information dissemination, and service responsiveness to ensure that all residents can fully benefit from civil registration.

INTRODUCTION

Civil registration is the continuous, permanent, and compulsory recording of vital events such as births, deaths, marriages, and other changes in civil status. These records serve as the legal foundation of an individual's identity and are essential in accessing basic services such as education, health care, employment, and social protection programs. In addition to individual benefits, civil registration systems provide governments with reliable demographic data necessary for policy formulation, development planning, and effective governance.

In the Philippines, civil registration is overseen by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), while the implementation of services is decentralized to Local Civil Registry Offices (LCROs) at the provincial, city, and municipal levels. Municipal Civil Registry Offices (MCROs) serve as frontline offices that directly interact with the public. Their responsibilities include registering vital events, issuing civil registry documents, and ensuring compliance with national policies and guidelines.

The Municipality of Balasan, Iloilo, classified as a second-class municipality, delivers civil registration services through its MCRO. Similar to other local government units, Balasan faces the challenge of providing accessible, timely, and responsive services to all residents. To address these challenges, the MCRO has implemented various initiatives, including mobile registration activities, registration assistance programs, and community awareness campaigns aimed at educating residents about the importance and procedures of civil registration.

In recognition of its performance, the MCRO of Balasan was awarded 4th Place as Most Outstanding Local Civil Registry Office in the Large Category during the 4th National Convention on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics held from July 28 to 30, 2025. This national recognition demonstrates the office's dedication to

improving service delivery and compliance with national standards. However, despite these accomplishments, issues such as delayed registration, stringent documentation requirements, and limited public awareness of registration procedures continue to affect service outcomes.

Given the importance of civil registration for both individual and community welfare, assessing the effectiveness of these services is essential. This study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of civil registration services in the Municipality of Balasan by examining documented service initiatives, operational performance, and ongoing challenges. Insights from this study can contribute to enhancing local governance, promoting more inclusive service delivery, and ensuring that all residents have equitable access to civil registration services.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Civil registration is a vital function of government that records important life events such as births, deaths, and marriages. It provides legal identity to individuals and ensures access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and social protection (UNESCAP, 2022). In the Philippines, the civil registration system is mandated under Republic Act No. 3753, and its implementation is overseen by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Ramos, De Guzman, and Villanueva (2020) conducted a study on the awareness of civil registration services among residents in rural Visayas. They found that while most residents understood the importance of birth certificates, they lacked awareness of the full range of civil registration services and requirements, particularly for delayed registration. This limited understanding contributes to registration delays and non-compliance. In the context of Balasan, these findings are reflected in the persistent challenges observed by the MCRO, where some residents still experience delays due to insufficient knowledge of procedures.

Accessibility is another critical concern in civil registration. Andrada and Tolentino (2021) noted that distance from municipal offices, lack of transportation, and limited outreach significantly hinder timely registration in remote barangays. Their research emphasizes the importance of mobile registration programs and barangay-based information campaigns. This directly connects to the initiatives implemented by the MCRO of Balasan, which conducts mobile registration and community awareness activities to reach residents who might otherwise face barriers to accessing services.

Government policies also affect the efficiency and accessibility of civil registration services. PSA Memorandum Circular No. 2024-17 introduced stricter requirements for delayed registration to combat document fraud. However, critics argue that these rules create additional burdens for poor and uneducated residents who struggle to comply due to lack of supporting documents (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024). This policy context is relevant to Balasan, where the MCRO must balance compliance with accessibility, ensuring that residents can meet requirements while still promoting timely registration.

International research underscores similar challenges. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2022) identified issues such as lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, and rigid procedures across Southeast Asia. The report recommends best practices such as digitization of records, staff training, and mobile registration units to improve coverage and efficiency. These solutions are aligned with practices observed in Balasan, suggesting that local adaptations of international best practices can further enhance service effectiveness.

Collectively, the literature highlights that improving civil registration requires a combination of policy support, community engagement, and service innovation. In the context of Balasan, Iloilo, where geographic and socio-economic challenges exist, the current study builds on these findings by examining how well the system operates at the municipal level, evaluating the effectiveness of service initiatives, and identifying areas for improvement to ensure comprehensive and accessible civil registration for all residents.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive approach using documentary analysis to assess the effectiveness of civil registration services in the Municipality of Balasan, Iloilo. The assessment was based on the review of existing

administrative records, official reports, and documentation related to civil registration services implemented by the MCRO of Balasan. Relevant national policy issuances, including PSA memorandum circulars and guidelines on civil registration and delayed registration, were examined to establish the policy context and standards guiding local implementation.

The reviewed documents were analyzed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to service delivery initiatives, institutional performance, and challenges encountered in the implementation of civil registration services. This approach allowed the study to present a grounded and realistic assessment based on documented practices and officially recorded information, without relying on primary survey data. The use of secondary data ensured that the study remained ethical while providing insights into both achievements and areas for improvement.

RESULTS

The analysis of administrative records and official documents indicates that the MCRO of Balasan has undertaken various initiatives to improve the delivery of civil registration services. Key initiatives include mobile registration activities conducted in selected barangays, which enable residents who live in remote areas to access services without traveling to the municipal office. The MCRO also participates in registration assistance programs that address cases of delayed registration and help residents comply with documentary requirements.

Institutional performance is further demonstrated by the MCRO's compliance with PSA policies and guidelines, as reflected in program reports and documentation. The office's recognition as 4th Most Outstanding LCRO in the Large Category during the 4th National Convention on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in 2025 serves as an external indicator of operational efficiency, service quality, and adherence to national standards.

Despite these positive developments, challenges persist. Delayed registration of births and other vital events remains a recurring issue, particularly among residents with limited access to information or resources. Updated PSA guidelines have increased the complexity of documentation requirements, which can pose additional barriers for some residents. Limited public awareness about civil registration procedures further contributes to delays and under-registration in certain barangays.

These findings suggest that while services are available and institutional performance is commendable, gaps in accessibility and information dissemination remain, highlighting the need for continued outreach, education, and procedural simplification.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that civil registration services in the Municipality of Balasan are generally effective, particularly in terms of institutional performance and implementation of service initiatives. Mobile registration activities support previous studies emphasizing the importance of accessibility for improving civil registration coverage, especially in rural and geographically dispersed communities. National recognition further reinforces the MCRO's capacity to deliver services in line with established standards.

However, the persistence of delayed registration cases highlights the need for targeted interventions. Limited public awareness, combined with increasingly complex documentation requirements, may discourage timely registration, especially among vulnerable populations. Addressing these issues requires a combination of strategies, including strengthening information campaigns at the barangay level, maintaining mobile registration services, and enhancing coordination with other local offices.

By focusing on both compliance with regulations and accessibility for residents, the MCRO of Balasan can further improve the effectiveness of civil registration services. These efforts are essential to ensure that all residents, particularly those in remote or disadvantaged areas, have equitable access to civil registration and its associated benefits. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation of strategies can help the MCRO sustain service quality while responding to the evolving needs of the community.

UNESCAP (2022) recommends mobile registration units and digital systems to reduce these barriers. Balasan could benefit from such approaches, especially in isolated barangays. Strengthening barangay-level partnerships, improving information dissemination, and simplifying the registration requirements could enhance service delivery.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the civil registration services provided by the MCRO of Balasan are generally effective and demonstrate a strong commitment to service delivery and compliance with national standards. Initiatives such as mobile registration, registration assistance programs, and community awareness campaigns have contributed to improving accessibility and reducing barriers to registration, particularly in geographically and socio-economically challenged areas. National recognition as the 4th Most Outstanding LCRO further highlights the office's dedication to excellence.

Despite these achievements, challenges such as delayed registration, complex documentation requirements, and limited public awareness remain significant. To ensure continuous improvement, it is recommended that the MCRO enhance outreach efforts, simplify procedures where possible, and maintain innovative programs that bridge gaps in access. By addressing these challenges, Balasan can further strengthen its civil registration system, ensuring that all residents are able to secure their legal identities and benefit fully from the services provided.

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