

A Dream Deferred

Birth Registration and Access to Education in the Callejón de la Loma

Prepared for The DREAM Project by Masters students from
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April 2011

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The research team would like to extend its thanks to the DREAM Project – especially Catherine DeLaura, Julie De Smet and Ani Yanachkova – for their hospitality, support and insight throughout the development and implementation of this project.

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Birth Registration and Access to Education in the Dominican Republic

Executive Summary

A birth certificate is a crucial document in the Dominican Republic, securing citizens' access to secondary education, formal sector employment, a passport, social security and the right to vote. However, an estimated 20% of children living in the Dominican Republic are not registered. This is due in part to a series of laws passed over the last decade that prevent undocumented Haitian immigrants from registering their Dominican-born children, rendering thousands of children essentially stateless. These measures have also served to make the birth registration process more complicated and costly for all Dominicans, especially those living below the poverty line. Without a birth certificate, these individuals face limited options for education and employment and are in turn prevented from registering their own children, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

This study sought to understand the extent of the underregistration problem in Cabarete, a small beach town on the northern coast of the Dominican Republic. This community grew up around the booming tourism industry, which employs locals in hotels, restaurants, construction and sex work. The combination of under-resourced public schools and underregistration leads to an average adult education level of only seven years of education.

A team of students from Columbia University's School for International and Public Affairs traveled to Cabarete in April 2011 to conduct research in the community of the Callejón de la Loma, the largest Dominican neighborhood in Cabarete. This study was conducted with the assistance and cooperation of the Dominican Republic Education and Mentoring (DREAM) Project, a Cabarete-based NGO, with the purpose of informing DREAM's efforts to expand access to education to the community's children and youth. The study sought to answer the following questions: **1) What is the extent of underregistration in the Callejón de la Loma? 2) What are the barriers - real and perceived - to obtaining a birth certificate? 3) What are the risk factors associated with lacking a birth certificate?**

The team conducted a neighborhood survey, collecting information on 220 households and 443 children. The survey contained questions on education, socioeconomic indicators and birth registration status of members of the household, as well as several opinion questions around the issue of birth certificates. The researchers also conducted three focus groups after a community meeting about the issue in order to contextualize the survey responses.

The survey indicated that **28.6% of children in the sample did not have a birth certificate**. The most commonly reported reason was the parents' lack of documentation, underscoring the intergenerational and self-perpetuating nature of this problem. Other common reasons included parents' Haitian nationality, the absence of one or more parent, the prohibitive cost of obtaining a birth certificate, and one or more parent's lack of interest or initiative.

On the whole, respondents perceived birth certificates as extremely important, citing education as the primary reason to register their child. Respondents also perceived underregistration to be a problem in the community: three quarters of respondents reported knowing someone who had had difficulty obtaining a birth certificate. The perception of the difficulty of the process varied considerably and often depended on personal experience. Many respondents blamed parental negligence as the main source of registration problems, arguing that the process is easy if completed sufficiently early. The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed with the statement that all children born in the Dominican Republic should have the right to a Dominican birth certificate, regardless of their parents' nationality, and only a quarter of

respondents were aware of the change in legislation that barred immigrants in transit from registering their children.

The team then tested for differences between the cohort of children who had birth certificates and the cohort of children who did not have birth certificates with respect to a series of risk factors. We found that children who lacked birth certificates tended to have parents with 1.1 fewer years of education and a 37% lower weekly household income than children who had birth certificates. Birth setting, interviewee's birth certificate status, and Haitian heritage were also powerful determinants of the child's birth certificate status. These tests also revealed clear implications for educational enrollment and attainment: children with birth certificates were more likely to be enrolled currently, achieve higher grade levels in school, and continue school the following year. We also found that students who participated in DREAM programs were significantly more likely to have a birth certificate.

Our results lead us to make the following recommendations to the DREAM Project:

- Create a set of documents outlining the relevant laws and procedures in a simple and accessible way and have it available at the DREAM center for families and other interested members of the community.
- Train and support a member of the community to serve as a focal point for the documentation issue in the Callejón. Make this person available on a regular basis to respond to questions and to help people prepare for the application process.
- Provide regular transportation to the *oficialía* for those prepared to apply for documentation.
- Develop and maintain relationships among concerned community and religious organizations, NGOs, and, to the extent possible, government representatives, to coordinate efforts to address the problem of the lack of documentation.
- Create and maintain a database of additional resources available to the community, based on the network described above, to which to refer community members, especially for more complicated cases.
- Promote awareness of the issue in the community, through workshops, television and other media, and encourage new parents to register their children as soon as possible after birth.

Introduction

2. Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name.
3. Every child has the right to acquire a nationality.

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 24

1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

- Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 7

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 15

In the Dominican Republic, the fundamental right to birth registration and nationality is denied to an overwhelming proportion of children, barring them from a wide range of essential social services throughout their lives. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that twenty percent of children under five years old living in the Dominican Republic (DR) are not registered with a birth certificate (*acta de nacimiento*). This number rises to thirty percent for children in rural areas.¹

The implications of underregistration in the Dominican Republic are formidable. Birth certificates are used as the primary means of identification for Dominican children until the age of eighteen. Although Dominican law does not require that a child have a birth certificate to attend public school, in practice, many children are barred from continuing beyond eighth grade without a birth certificate.² If a person turns eighteen without a birth certificate, it then becomes extremely difficult to obtain a *cédula*, or state identification card, which in turn limits access to formal sector employment, a passport, social security and the right to vote. Lack of official documentation essentially makes these children and adults stateless, which prevents them from exercising basic civil and human rights and renders them vulnerable to violations of these rights.

Children go undocumented in the Dominican Republic for a variety of complex reasons. The first reason lies in the registration process itself. If a mother gives birth to a child in a Dominican hospital, she receives a *certificado de nacimiento* (certificate of birth) from the hospital. This unofficial document establishes the name, birthplace, and parents of the child, but is not the official *acta de nacimiento* described above. In order to obtain the official birth certificate, the parents must then take the hospital *certificado*, along with their own identification documents, to the *Oficialía de Registro Civil*, the local civil registry. If the parents possess all of the proper documentation and if they register the child within the first thirty days after birth, the process is relatively simple. However, if the child is not born in a clinical setting, if a parent lacks an official form of identification, or if there are delays in registering the child, the procedures for obtaining an *acta de nacimiento* become significantly more complicated and costly. Administrative errors,

¹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "At a Glance: Dominican Republic," http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/domrepublic_statistics.html#81 [accessed 12 April 2011].

² Human Rights Watch, "Illegal People": Haitians And Dominico-Haitians In The Dominican Republic, 4 April 2002, B1401, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3cf2429a4.html> [accessed 19 April 2011]

especially the misspelling of names, are also surprisingly common. These can require a significant expenditure of time and money, especially in the form of lawyer's fees, to resolve.

The second factor leading to underregistration of children in the DR is official discrimination against Haitian migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent (DHD). The Dominican Republic shares an island with Haiti and is dependent on Haiti as its primary source of inexpensive, unskilled labor. The two peoples also share a long history of conflict, violence and racism, extending back at least to the Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1822 to 1844, and reaching a low point in 1937 when thousands of Haitians were slaughtered by Dominican soldiers under the command of dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina. *Antihaitianismo* continues to pervade the Dominican national psyche.³

Recently, the Dominican government, through a series of laws and policy changes, has made it increasingly difficult to for Haitians and DHDs to register their children born in the Dominican Republic or to renew or receive copies of previously issued identification documents. The Dominican constitution contains the principle of *jus solis*, which grants the right to citizenship to anyone born on Dominican territory, with two exceptions: the children of diplomats and of those in transit. Migration Law No. 285-04, passed in 2004, differentiates between "resident migrants" and "non-resident migrants", conflating non-residence and a lack of documentation "in transit" status.⁴ In 2007, the Central Electoral Board of the DR issued instructions to local civil staff, in the form of Circular 017, to refuse to issue birth certificates or to renew other official documents to people they suspected may have acquired the necessary documentation fraudulently. In practice, this means that those who appear to have Haitian ancestry, or those who have darker skin, are routinely and unlawfully denied access to citizenship.⁵ Finally, in 2010, the constitution was amended to state that the definition of "in transit", for the purposes of determining access to Dominican citizenship, would be determined solely by Dominican law. The effect of these changes has been to bar large numbers of children, both Haitian migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent, from receiving birth certificates, rendering them effectively stateless in the only home many of them have ever known.

The combination of costly and complicated registration procedures and the purposeful discrimination against people of Haitian descent has had severe implications not only for Haitian migrants but also for many Dominicans, especially those living below the poverty line. Without a birth certificate, these individuals face limited options for education and employment and are in turn prevented from registering their own children, perpetuating the cycle of statelessness and poverty.

Background

Cabarete is a small town on the northern coast of the DR, located in the province of Puerto Plata. The area is known for its beaches and wind and has become a Mecca for water sports enthusiasts from around the world. Tourism is the primary driver of the local economy: most residents work in hotels, restaurants, shops, and water sport agencies that flank the beach, in construction of new hotels, and by taxiing tourists on the backs of motorcycles. Sex tourism has

³ Human Rights Council, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Doudou Diène, and the independent expert on minority issues, Gay McDougall," March 18, 2008.

⁴ Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights, "MEMO: Constitutional Changes in the Dominican Republic," <http://www.rfkcenter.org/node/471> (accessed on March 5, 2011).

⁵ Open Society Initiative, "Discrimination in Access to Nationality," Statement Submitted by the Open Society Justice Initiative for Consideration by the United Nations Human Rights Council at its Sixth Session, on the occasion of its Universal Periodic Review of the Dominican Republic, November 30 – December 11, 2009, http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/DO/OSI_DOM_UPR_S06_2009.pdf (Accessed March 3, 2011).

also emerged as a part of the local economy, and this fact is of particular concern to the community's youth. While foreign tourism and its accompanying development has brought with it a rise in overall incomes, the roadblocks of a poor education system and lack of documentation prevent Cabarete's youth from fully realizing their potential, putting them instead at risk for involvement in prostitution and other high risk work.

The Callejón de la Loma, the main street running perpendicular to the beach strip, is home to many of Cabarete's permanent Dominican residents. Most have been drawn to Cabarete within the past twenty years by the booming tourist industry, but others, especially those families who live up in the hills where the recently paved road reverts to a dirt path, have lived there for generations. Many residents of the Callejón live in poverty. The community's elementary school, like many in the DR, faces a severe lack of resources.

Also located in the Callejón is the Dominican Republic Education And Mentoring (DREAM) Project, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that for the past nine years has offered a range of educational services to the community's children and youth. DREAM has identified lack of documentation as a barrier to education for a significant proportion of its beneficiaries and has implemented a number of measures to assist local families in registering their children. DREAM staff have trained a member of the community on the issue and facilitated her work in guiding families through the process. They have also provided transportation for parents to the local *oficialía*. This study was conducted with DREAM's assistance and cooperation with the purpose of informing their efforts to expand access to education to the residents of the Callejón.

With DREAM's support, the research team set out to answer three main questions: **1) What is the extent of underregistration in the Callejón de la Loma? 2) What are the barriers – real and perceived – to obtaining a birth certificate? 3) What are the risk factors associated with lacking a birth certificate?**

Methods

Tools

In order to gauge the extent of the birth certificate issue in Callejón de la Loma and perceptions around its causes and implications, the team used both quantitative methods (a household survey) and qualitative methods (focus groups). Prior to reaching the field, the research team developed a two-page paper-based survey (see Appendix A). The survey focused on three key areas: (1) opinions around the importance and difficulty of birth registration; (2) the educational and birth registration status of children in the household; (3) the socioeconomic, educational, and documentation profile of the survey respondent and household as a whole. The team developed focus group questions after conducting the field survey in order to contextualize the responses from the survey.

Sampling Method and Randomization

DREAM's 2008 census surveyed 616 households and 1155 children in the Callejón de la Loma. The community consists of one main road with 13 side streets. The end of the paved main road continues as an unpaved path into a less developed hilly area where older houses are situated, called "La Loma." The team designated each street with a number from 1 to 13 from the entrance of the community to La Loma, which was designated as section 14.

Eight Spanish-speaking surveyors were divided evenly into the 14 survey areas. To randomize households, each surveyor carried three playing cards (two number and one face card), which he shuffled and drew in front of each potential household. In the case a face card was drawn, the surveyor would attempt to interview the household, resulting in a randomized sample of approximately one third of the population.

Surveying Technique

Due to varying levels of literacy in the community, the surveys were conducted orally. To prevent the problem of double counting of children, care was taken to ask the participant to only provide data on those children under 18 who lived in the household being surveyed. Although most questions on the survey could be answered with a 1-2 word response and coded immediately on the form, one question asked for the primary reason why a child did not have a birth certificate. While recording the answer for this question, which often elicited a longer response, the surveyor attempted to code the response immediately into one of twelve categories and/or noted key facts from the respondent's description and coded the response at the end of the survey day.

Focus Group Process

On the final day of the research team's field visit, a community meeting was held with representatives from Centro Bono to answer the community's questions around the birth certificate process and resulting challenges. Over 100 community members attended the meeting. After the conclusion of the meeting, the team held three focus groups – nine men, eleven women and six male community leaders - in order to gain more anecdotal and qualitative knowledge of the challenges faced by the community. The groups were asked about their perceptions of the underregistration problem, their understanding of the registration process, individual problems they had encountered, and their suggestions for moving forward. This sample was self-selected and therefore inherently biased, as it was taken from a group of adults who had voluntarily attended a meeting about birth registration problems.

Limitations

Although data was collected randomly from all 14 areas, assignment of area to surveyor was not randomized. As such, bias in recording responses, differences in Spanish-language ability, gender, or respondent's trust in the surveyor may have skewed the data.

Because there is some degree of stigma surrounding lack of documentation, especially for Haitians with tenuous immigration status, respondents may have falsely reported a positive birth registration status for themselves or their children.

In some instances, a respondent did not have complete or accurate data on all children living in the household. Also, the respondent may not have been the primary relation to the children in question, limiting the researchers' ability to connect information on the respondent's background to the children's birth certificate status.

Weekly income was also a problematic data point, as many respondents indicated that they did not know an exact number or that income varied week to week. The use of proxies like bathroom type, floor type and wall type helped partially, but did not vary enough to provide a nuanced understanding of the range of socioeconomic levels in the community.

Results

We have organized the survey results into three sections: 1) a profile of the interviewees, households and children 2) a discussion of the community's perceptions around birth certificates, including perceived barriers and 3) an analysis of the underlying risk factors associated with lacking a birth certificate. We then provide a brief summary of focus group results; an in-depth analysis will be included in a future appendix.

Profile of Interviewees, Households and Children

Interviewees

The team interviewed adults in a total of 220 households providing information on 454 children. The average age of respondents was 37 years, and 79.5% of interviewees were female. This unbalanced gender ratio was due in part to the time of day when we conducted interviews: in this community, most men work outside the home during the day. Because women are more likely to be able to provide reliable information about the birth circumstances and education of the children living in their household, the oversampling of women interviewees was helpful for the collection of data on children (the principal unit of analysis). Table 1 shows a demographic profile of population of interviewees.

Table 1: Interviewee Profile	
Average Age	37
Sex	79.5% Female 20.5% Male
Marital Status	67.1% Married 32.9% Not Married
Birth Country	88.6% Dominican Republic 11.4% Haiti
Birth Province	33% Puerto Plata 21% Espaillat 18% Maria Trinidad Sanchez 11% Distrito Nacional 17% Other
Years of Education (average)	6.8 years
Years in Cabarete (average)	16.6 years
Years in the Dominican Republic (for those born in Haiti)	9.8 years
Percent of Interviewees Lacking a Birth Certificate	21.9%

Slightly over one tenth of the interviewees were born in Haiti: the new laws that bar the children of immigrants from obtaining a birth certificate affect a significant minority of the community. It is notable that of those respondents who were born in Haiti, the average number of years lived in the Dominican Republic was 9.75, suggesting that the Haitian population in the Callejón is relatively well established.

Households

We also obtained data on the socioeconomic situation of each household in order to determine possible correlations with the children's birth certificate documentation status (Table 2).

Table 2: Household Profile	
Median Weekly Household Income	2000 pesos (US\$53.04)
Bathroom Type	79.8% indoor flush toilet 13.3% outdoor latrine 6.88% no toilet/shared toilet
House Material	57.3% cement block 25.4% wood

	17.4% corrugated metal
Floor Material	17.8% tile
	75.7% cement
	6.1% dirt

This data shows that a strong majority of Callejón residents live in cement block houses with cement floors and indoor toilets. As mentioned in the Limitations section, this limited spread of material indicators and the unreliable nature of the income data points weaken the strength of these variables in our analysis.

Children

Interviewees were asked to report on the status of all children living in their households, as children in this community are not always the biological or legal children of their caretakers. **We found that 28.6% children in surveyed households lack a Dominican birth certificate.**

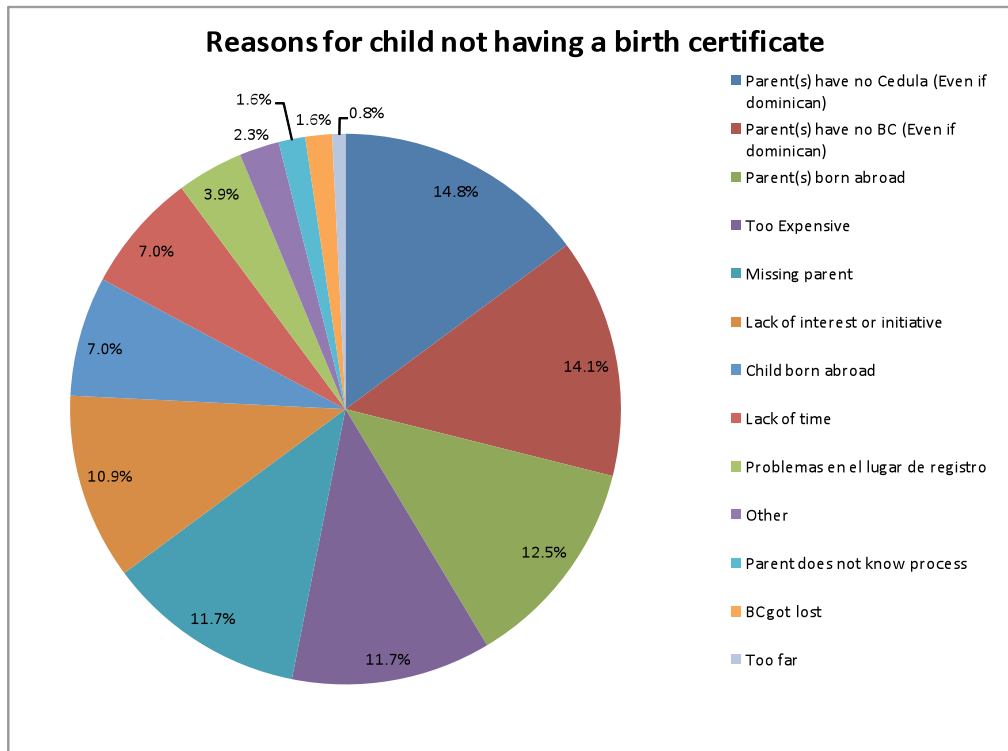
Table 3: Child Profile

Average Age	9 years
Sex	47.8% female 52.2% male
Birth Setting	76.4% hospital 19.2% clinic 4.0% home
DREAM Participation Rate	42.7%
Percent Lacking a Birth Certificate	28.6%
Age Obtained Birth Certificate (average)	2.15 years

Perceptions about Birth Certificates

When an interviewee reported that a child in her household lacked a birth certificate, she was asked to identify the principal reason. **In 28.92% of cases, the parents were Dominican but one or more parent lacked the necessary documentation (birth certificate or national ID card) to declare her child.** In 12.5% of cases, the parents were Haitian and therefore were legally barred from declaring their child in the Dominican Republic. 11.72% of cases involved an absent parent, another 11.72% cited prohibitive costs (presumably incurred after missing the 30-day period), and 10.94% cited a lack of interest or initiative on the part of one or more parents.

The implications of this spread of reasons are many. First, the fact that parental documentation was the most highly cited reason underscores the intergenerational and self-perpetuating nature of this issue, and it suggests that the government and local stakeholders should prioritize the registration of undocumented adults. A particular group to target is women who gave birth before the age of 18 and who therefore did not have a *cédula* at the time of the child's birth. Second, we see that Haitian nationality is a significant problem, though not the primary problem in this community, and one that has few solutions except at a government policy level. Third, the complications that arise from delaying birth registration suggest the importance of community outreach and education about declaring children early.



We found that, in spite of high levels of underregistration, most respondents were very passionate about the importance of having a birth certificate: **100% of surveyed cited that having one was “very important” or “extremely important.”** When asked to freely cite reasons, the most common responses were **education, identification, travel, sense of identity, and work.** (We grouped under “sense of identity” any response that reflected the personal value or sense of self associated with having a birth certificate, for instance, “You’re nobody without a birth certificate.”) Importantly, there was a gender differential in these responses: for instance, 52% of women mentioned education as compared to 33% of men; whereas 42% of men mentioned work as compared to 18% of women. The breakdown of these responses is particularly insightful from the perspective of designing outreach materials that reflect the community’s priorities, as we will discuss in the Recommendations section.

Respondents’ perception of the difficulty of obtaining a birth certificate was mixed: 33.6% reported that obtaining one was “easy” or “very easy,” while 45.6% reported that obtaining one was “difficult” or “very difficult.” The 20.7% who reported “neither easy or difficult” often included a caveat: it was easy if you obtained it right after birth, but if you waited too long, it became very difficult. **An overwhelming 73.5% of those surveyed reported knowing someone who had a problem obtaining a birth certificate,** suggesting that even those who had not personally struggled to obtain a birth certificate recognized underregistration as a relatively common problem in the community.

To gauge the community’s reaction to the series of laws passed over the last decade, we asked each interviewee whether they agreed with the statement, “Every child born in the Dominican Republic should have the right to a birth certificate, even if his parents come from a different country.” 89.04% responded, “agree” or “strongly agree,” while 9.14% responded, “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” While this may suggest that the population of the Callejón de la Loma is largely in disagreement with laws that deny citizenship to children of Haitian immigrants, the researchers’ choice not to explicitly mention Haitians in the question may have neutralized the

response. Only 22.7% had heard of the constitutional change preventing undocumented immigrants from obtaining Dominican birth certificates for their children.

Risk Factors

In addition to determining the direct barriers to access, we were interested in exploring the deeper social determinants of a child’s birth certificate status. In an effort to uncover these underlying risk factors, we separated the children data into two cohorts, “has birth certificate” and “does not have birth certificate.” Then, we compared each group over a series of indicators and performed significance tests on each.

First, we ran t-tests with unequal variances to compare birth certificate status against five quantitative risk factors. We found significant relationships with parent education level, average weekly household income, number of children in household, and number of moves in the last ten years all had significant relationships with birth registration (see Table 4). This confirmed our suspicion that lower parent education, low income, large family size, and frequent migration would all contribute to a child’s risk for not having a birth certificate. The number of years that a family lived in Cabarete had no significant relationship with birth certificate status.

Table 4			
Risk Factor	Has Birth Certificate	Does Not Have Birth Certificate	p-value
Parent Education Level	7.01 years	5.88 years	0.0056
Average Weekly Income	2688 pesos	1687 pesos	0.0004
Number of Children in House	3.27 children	3.82 children	0.0075
Number of Moves in the Last Ten Years	0.47 moves	0.84 moves	0.0020
(Number of Years in Cabarete)	(17.92 years)	(15.99 years)	(0.1019)

Next, we ran a series of proportionality tests on categorical variables to calculate the risk of lacking a birth certificate under each circumstance. Here, we define risk as the percent probability that the child will lack a birth certificate.

We found that birth setting was one of the most powerful determinants of both a child’s birth certificate status and the age at which a child obtained a birth certificate (Table 5). This is intuitive for two reasons. First, a family would be less likely to have access to the appropriate paperwork if a child were born at home. Second, birth setting is an indicator of a household’s socioeconomic status (poorer families are more likely to give birth in a public hospital while wealthier families might be able to afford care at a private clinic), and we have already seen that income and birth certificate status are related.

Table 5			
Birth Setting	% Probability that the Child will Lack a Birth Certificate	Average Age Child Obtained Birth Certificate	p-value
Hospital	30.84%	2.24 years	0.000
Clinic	12.64%	1.38 years	
Home	55.56%	7.43 years	

We used a number of qualitative variables to gauge relative socioeconomic status, including bathroom type, house material and floor material. Bathroom type was shown to be one predictor of birth certificate status (Table 9). The latter two factors did not yield a significant relationship with birth certificate status.

Table 9		
Bathroom Type	% Probability that the Child will Lack a Birth Certificate	p
Indoor Toilet	25.21%	
Outdoor Latrine	44.44%	
No Toilet/Shared Toilet	34.38%	
		0.010

The interviewee's birth certificate status was also a strong predictor of a child's birth certificate status (Table 6). This is due in large part to the restrictions on obtaining a birth certificate if a child's parent lacks proper documentation. This confirms once again that lack of documentation is an intergenerational and cyclical problem.

Table 6		
Interviewee Documentation Status	% Probability that the Child will Lack a Birth Certificate	p-value
Interviewee Has Birth Certificate	28.19%	
Interviewee Lacks Birth Certificate	65.88%	
		0.0000

Even before the practice was standardized by law, the de facto policy for years was to deny Dominican birth certificates to the children of Haitian immigrants. Therefore, the data shows that having a parent from Haiti is the single greatest risk factor determining whether a child will have a birth certificate (Table 7). We must take into account the fact that some of these children will also have been born in Haiti, which automatically prevents them from having a Dominican birth certificate. Eliminating the nine children in our sample who were born in Haiti, we still find a highly significant result.

Table 7		
Interviewee Country of Origin	% Probability that the Child will Lack a Birth Certificate	p
Parent born in Haiti	86.4%	
Parent born in Haiti and child born in DR	82.9%	
Parent born in DR	22.4%	
		0.000

We found no significant relationship between parent marital status or parent employment status and child's possession of a birth certificate.

Encouragingly, we found a significant relationship between a child’s participation in DREAM programs and his possession of a birth certificate (Table 8). This could be due in part to DREAM’s efforts over the last few years to help parents of its students obtain documentation for their children, through transportation to the registry as well as parent education and counseling. It could also suggest that the DREAM population is self-selecting. For instance, a family that participates in DREAM programs might value education more, which might make them more likely to have gone through the birth certificate process early. In addition, misperceptions that DREAM requires a birth certificate for enrollment might prevent parents whose children lack birth certificates from enrolling them in DREAM programs.

Table 8		
Participation in DREAM Programs	% Probability that the Child will Lack a Birth Certificate	p
Yes	18.52%	
No	34.25%	
		0.0002

In order to control for the effects of other variables (for instance, to make sure that birth setting was a factor by itself and not just another reflection of income), we ran an ordinary least squares linear regression. Our final regression model found that parent documentation status and Haitian heritage outweighed all other risk factors, rendering parent education, birth setting and other socioeconomic indicators insignificant unto themselves. Interestingly, even when controlling for all other variables, a child’s participation in DREAM still made him or her significantly more likely to have a birth certificate. Future manipulations of this data could include a predictive logit model that quantifies the individual contribution that each risk factor toward a child’s birth certificate status.

In general, the findings from our focus groups echoed our survey results. While some participants were well informed about the birth certificate attainment process, others were generally uninformed. Just as some participants perceived the lack of a birth certificate to be the result of negligence, others genuinely believed it was a lack of money or time due to strict work schedules. When asked how DREAM can help the community to acquire birth certificates, the participants largely requested financial assistance (i.e. covering transportation and associated costs) and that they receive preferential treatment at the government’s registry office. A more in-depth analysis of focus group transcripts will be included as a future appendix, and the team recommends a follow-up qualitative survey on individuals’ experiences with the process with and without DREAM’s assistance.

Recommendations

Our results lead directly into a series of recommendations of actions that DREAM can undertake in order to continue to help families in the Callejón obtain birth certificates for their children.

1. **Create a set of documents outlining the relevant laws and procedures in a simple and accessible way. Have it readily available at the DREAM center for families and interested members of the community.**
 - a) Though DREAM is an organization focused on children and youth, our survey uncovered that parents’ lack of documentation is one of the greatest bottlenecks in the process for children’s documentation. Thus, these documents should focus on both children and adults.

- b) Consider using an online, auto-sync format for storing the documents (suggestions: Evernote or Dropbox). It may also be useful to have a physical folder.

These documents should include:

1. A timeline of the birth certificate process
 - i. prenatal to the first 30 days of a child's life: required parental documents
 - ii. the limit on birth certificate processing time without a fee
 - iii. the age it is first required that a child show their birth certificate at school
 2. A printout of each relevant law and its explanation
 3. The location and hours of the nearest birth certificate registry offices
 4. A list of needed documents (and examples, where possible) for the parent to take to the registry office
 5. A list of common questions and their answers
 - i. Single parents
 - ii. Parents lacking documentation
 - iii. One parent is not Dominican
 - iv. Both parents are not Dominican
 - v. Both parents are absent
 - vi. Lost documentation
 - vii. Erroneous documentation (e.g. misspelled names)
 - viii. Fees associated with documents
 - ix. Homebirths
 6. Distinguish between the official birth certificate (*acta de nacimiento*) and the certificate given at the hospital by healthcare workers (*certificado de nacimiento*)
 7. A list of lawyers and organizations in the area who will work *pro bono* or at very nominal fees to secure birth certificates for community members
 8. The monthly bus/shuttle schedule that DREAM operates to the *oficialía* in Sousa and how community members can participate
 9. A statement of responsibility and commitment from DREAM emphasizing that the organization can and will provide information and support where possible, but parents and community members are ultimately responsible for the process.
 - i. This is useful for community members and for DREAM staff to avoid making promises that cannot be fulfilled by the organization and for being clear from the start on the extent to which DREAM can provide support
- 2. Train and support, including financially, a member of the community to serve as a focal point for the documentation issue in the Callejón. Make this person available on a regular basis to respond to questions and to help people prepare for the application process.**
- a) DREAM can use the data provided in our Results section, emphasizing the persistence of the documentation issue in the community and its preexisting track record for success to make a convincing case for foundations and grants to fund this position.
- 3. Provide regular transportation to the civil registry for those prepared to apply for documentation.**
- a) Though this is something that DREAM has previously committed to, we recommend continuing this transport service on a certain day each month (say the 3rd Friday) that community members can regularly use. Funding for this type of service should

ideally come from the same grants/foundations that supply money for the position described in recommendation #2.

- 4. Develop and maintain relationships among concerned community and religious organizations, NGOs, and, to the extent possible, government representatives, to coordinate efforts to address the problem of the lack of documentation.**
 - a) Conduct bimonthly meetings to update progress from each group and continue dialogue on projects
 - b) Appoint a rotating chair for this consortium of groups, alleviating DREAM of long-term management of the project
 - i. Based on the response from the Junta de Vecinos, they may be an ideal group to begin organizing these meetings and interested parties
 - c) Continually update the list mentioned in 1g based on participating groups
 - d) Include summaries of these meetings in the folder (#1) and/or database (#5)

- 5. Create and maintain a database of additional resources available to the community, based on the network described above, to which to refer community members, especially for more complicated cases**
 - a) Though this a separate recommendation from #1, it should be integral to the process. Ideally this will be kept online (using an automatically synced program like DropBox or Evernote)
 - b) This database should focus not only on children, but (like the folder in recommendation #1), have answers for parents and adults in the community on how to start the process

- 6. Our results showed that misinformation is a major factor in the lack of documentation in El Callejón de la Loma. DREAM should promote awareness of the issue in the community, through workshops, television and other media, and encourage new parents to register their children as soon as possible after birth.**
 - a) DREAM may want to dedicate a day in each school year to talk to students and educate them on citizenship rights, government processes and even the issue of birth certificates (in a fun, child-friendly way) to begin educating community members from a young age on this issue (Informed children grow into informed adults!)
 - b) Advocacy Materials
 - i. Publish materials, flyers and handouts in partnership with the group from recommendation #4 to be distributed at all DREAM events
 - ii. Use mixed media like radio, televisions, community plays (in addition to traditional flyers and pamphlets) to communicate important messages, stigmas and updates surrounding birth certificates
 - c) Use materials to
 - i. Debunk myths revealed in survey data (costs, single parents unable to obtain a birth certificate, time frame, etc)
 - ii. Target residents of La Loma and children who had home births
 - iii. Educate parents about the relationship between their own lack of documentation and what it means for their children
 - iv. Emphasize the reasons having a birth certificate is so critical, as identified by community members (education, identity, work, travel, etc..)

7. **Conduct a follow-up survey of the community after 1 year of implementing these programs.**
8. **Transparency and organizational memory will be critical to this process. DREAM, like many NGOs, suffers from high staff turnover rates and growing community in demand of their services. In addition, the issue of documentation is not the mainstay of DREAM's mission, which makes any project on birth certificates tenuous under changes in staff and leadership. DREAM may consider:**
 - a) Discussing the importance of this issue with all staff members and the Board of Trustees
 - b) "Formally" recognize the necessity for DREAM to act on this issue (within its capacity)
 - c) Regularly update the contents of the folder (#1) and the database (#5) to assure that all staff members (new and old) can easily understand and find out up-to-date information on laws, procedures and the status of documentation in the community
 - d) Incoming staff members
 - i. Should be briefed on the issue
 - ii. Ask outgoing staff members working on the issue to brief incoming staff members

Appendix A: Household Survey



Encuesta sobre actas de nacimiento en Cabarete

Me llamo ___ y soy voluntario/a del DREAM Project. Estamos haciendo una encuesta informal sobre el tema de las actas de nacimiento en Cabarete. Nos interesa saber algunos datos sobre los residentes del Callejón para poder ayudar a la comunidad en la obtención de las actas de nacimiento de sus hijos. No vamos a pedir nombres; cualquier información que nos de hoy será usada por el equipo de DREAM Project. Podemos hacerle algunas preguntas?

Primero, quiero saber su opinión sobre lo siguiente.

¿Qué tan importante es tener una acta de nacimiento?

- No es importante para nada No es muy importante Es más o menos importante
 Es muy importante Es sumamente importante

¿Cuáles son las razones más importantes para obtener una acta de nacimiento?

- Educación Cédula Trabajo Visa de viaje Seguridad Voto Abrir cuenta bancaria
 Tenencia de propiedad Ser dominicano Otro (_____)

¿Qué tan difícil es obtener una acta de nacimiento?

- Muy fácil Relativamente fácil Ni fácil ni difícil Relativamente difícil Muy difícil

¿Conoce a alguien quien ha tenido dificultad en obtener una acta de nacimiento? (Y / N)

Voy a leerle una frase, y usted me dice si está totalmente de acuerdo, de acuerdo, le da igual, está en desacuerdo, o está totalmente en desacuerdo: *Todo niña o niño nacido en la República Dominicana debe de tener el derecho a una acta de nacimiento, incluso si sus padres no son dominicanos.*

- Muy de acuerdo De acuerdo Le da igual En desacuerdo Muy en desacuerdo

El año pasado, el gobierno modificó la constitución, y ahora los hijos de "extranjeros en tránsito" no tienen derecho a una acta de nacimiento de RD. ¿Usted sabía sobre este cambio en la ley? (Y / N)

Ahora, voy a hacerle algunas preguntas sobre su familia.

¿Cuántas personas que viven en su casa tienen menos de 18 años?

	Niño 1	Niño 2	Niño 3	Niño 4
Sexo				
Edad				
Lugar de nacimiento (Pueblo/Ciudad, Provincia, País)				
¿Nació en una hospital, en una clínica o en casa?	<input type="checkbox"/> Hospital <input type="checkbox"/> Clínica <input type="checkbox"/> Casa	<input type="checkbox"/> Hospital <input type="checkbox"/> Clínica <input type="checkbox"/> Casa	<input type="checkbox"/> Hospital <input type="checkbox"/> Clínica <input type="checkbox"/> Casa	<input type="checkbox"/> Hospital <input type="checkbox"/> Clínica <input type="checkbox"/> Casa
¿Asiste a la escuela ahora?				
¿En qué curso está?				
¿Asistirá a la escuela el año que viene?				
¿Ha participado en programas del DREAM Project?				

