



## Emmy K. Hudson

Acting-Administrator General/  
Chief Executive Officer  
Registration Insolvency and  
Trusteeship Agency  
Tanzania

# To help people and her country

**In just seven years, Tanzania has increased its birth registration rate more than four-fold... and counting.**

Emmy Hudson, Acting-Administrator General/Chief Executive Officer of Tanzania's Registration Insolvency and Trusteeship Agency (RITA), honed her leadership skills at a young age, after the death of her mother when she was five. As the eldest of 15 children from three mothers, "I used to take care of my siblings when my parents were absent," she says, "I had the responsibility to lead them, to make sure they were fed and safe. I depended on myself to make decisions on my own. I think it made me the leader I am today."

A law graduate from the University of Dar es Salaam, Hudson also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Women's law from the University of Zimbabwe. After graduation, in 1992 she joined the Attorney General's Office as State Attorney, moving to the Administrator General's Department — RITA's predecessor — the following year. There she rose through the ranks from junior officer to her current role as Acting CEO in 2015, leading a staff of more than 200 at head office and in the districts.

Hudson is driven by the wish to help people and her country. This impetus has led to a fundamental reform of Tanzania's civil registration system, which in turn has led to more than four-fold increase in birth registration rates.

## Simplified birth registration

Until recently, civil registration was embedded in Tanzania's colonial legacy, enshrined in the *Births and Deaths Registration Act* enacted in 1920. Under that Act, the registration of Africans was not compulsory: it only became so in 2009 when the registration of births and deaths was made compulsory for all. Likewise, the *Law of the Child Act*, 2009 recognized every Tanzanian child's right to a name and nationality and further established the responsibility of each parent or guardian to register the birth of their child.

Despite these changes, however, the country still had the second lowest rate of birth registration in the East and Southern African region, only 13%.

In 2011, with UNICEF support, RITA developed a five-year Under-Five Birth Registration Strategy. RITA's new approach was to implement a "one stop shop" system, whereby registration agents in local government offices, hospitals, and health clinics would register the child at birth or when the child is immunized. And rather than waiting for the birth certificate at district headquarters, it was delivered immediately at the health facility, at no cost, a substantial saving for families.

First launched in Mbeya — her birthplace — in 2013, the new system has since been rolled out to 20 of 25 regions, most recently to Arusha and Manyara on May 11, 2021. The decentralized system marks a significant shift in accelerating birth registration in mainland Tanzania, after years of stagnation. “We are transforming the system to make it easier for children and their families to access the entitlement of a birth certificate.” Notable is that by 2019, the number of registration points had grown from 97 to 7,433. The distance families had to travel to get to a registration point fell to 5-6 km from up to 140 km.

“Now, we are counting more than five million children who are registered, which brings the rate of registration to 55%. This, I can say is a big achievement, but, equally critical, there is also increased awareness of citizens of the importance of registration.”

To support the new system, Hudson worked with the Law Reform Commission to amend the outdated registration law, coordinating stakeholders and informing members of parliament on the proposed changes: a new law was passed in September 2019, ensuring that parents can register their children close to home, at no cost, thereby removing financial and distance barriers to registration.

Hudson points out that this remarkable achievement relied on existing political will from higher levels of government to support the national CRVS strategy, as well as strong financial and technical partnerships with development organizations such as UNICEF, the Government of Canada, and TIGO, a telecommunications company.

## Showing the way

The COVID-19 pandemic hit RITA's work hard, reducing revenues and increasing operational costs to ensure staff and customers are protected. The number of staff was reduced, restricting the number of customers who can be served and the rate of registrations. To address this, Hudson and her team introduced an online registration system, which minimizes physical contacts. Linking the civil registration system with other systems, such as the health system, has also enabled them to ensure the continuity of registration services at health facilities.

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Hudson credits her staff for RITA's achievements. “I trust my people, so they support me,” she says. “When they see things happening, they gain confidence in me.”

“One of the things a leader has to do is show the way,” she says. “I give them the chance to do. Even if I'm not there, they will do their job, innovate, and share.” And their views are respected. “We meet in management meetings and they can advise, can share their views, which makes our institution grow.”

She also lists creativity among key leadership skills. In RITA's case, this includes collaborating with a local telecom company to develop an innovative technology to quickly upload birth registration records to a centralized system through SMS sent on mobile phones. This ground-breaking system allows for real time monitoring of birth registrations at national, regional and local levels.

Her next challenge is to register all under-5-year-olds by 2022, while also focusing on clearing the backlog of unregistered 5-17-year-olds through the formal education system. Working through education departments, the initiative is already being implemented through schools in various districts. Currently, 497,613 in 30 districts have been registered and issued with birth certificates. “As a leader I want to see that all unregistered children in the country are registered and put into our database.” There is little doubt she will succeed. “I am motivated by accomplishment. I'm satisfied when I feel I have accomplished my goals, when I achieve what I planned.” She has inspired her staff to do the same. ■

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### Learn more about CRVS in Tanzania:

Read the [country profile](#) or a [technical brief about maintaining civil registration during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).