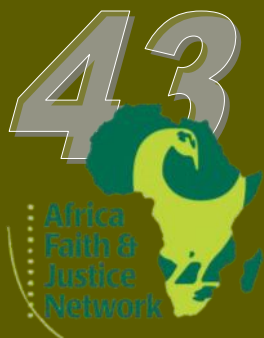


MISSION

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, seeks to educate and advocate for just relations with Africa and to work in partnership with African peoples as they engage in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.



CAMEROON: Birth Registration and Civil Status Regularization

A Project of the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in Partnership with Africa Faith and Justice Network Cameroon (AFJNC), the Diocese of Ngaoundéré and the Diocese of Yagoua

A BRIEF HISTORY

Moved to action by personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States (U.S.) policy towards Africa and her people. Since that time, membership has grown and remains committed in faith to advocate in Washington, DC for U.S. relations with Africa that foster justice and peace, and to educate the public across the U.S. on the truth about Africa.

Executive Summary



Ngaoundéré Diocese:
Identification visit of children without birth certificates in certain schools, September 2025

This country report presents a consolidated overview of ongoing efforts to facilitate birth registration and civil status regularization for vulnerable children in Cameroon, focusing on two principal areas of intervention: the Diocese of Ngaoundéré in the Adamaoua Region and the Diocese of Yagoua in the Far North Region. These interventions are part of a broader commitment by Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) and its local partners to ensure that every child has access to a legal identity, which is a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for accessing essential social services.

Across both regions, a total of 300 children have been identified and enrolled in the program. These children primarily come from highly vulnerable backgrounds, including orphaned children, those living in extreme poverty, and those who have been excluded from civil registration systems. While measurable progress has been achieved, particularly in the Far North Region, the pace and level of advancement vary significantly between intervention

zones due to contextual, institutional, and operational factors.

A major milestone strengthening this initiative was the organization of a **multi-faith and multi-stakeholder capacity-building workshop in February 2026**, which equipped key actors with the technical, legal, and community mobilization skills necessary to sustainably reduce the phenomenon of children without birth certificates. This capacity-building effort significantly reinforces the long-term impact and scalability of the program.

Program Context and Objectives



In Cameroon, the challenge of birth registration is deeply rooted in structural barriers that extend beyond administrative procedures. These include limited awareness among populations, financial constraints, geographical inaccessibility of services, and the complexity of legal requirements for late registration. As a result, many children remain without legal identity, exposing them to long-term risks such as exclusion from education, healthcare, corruption and formal economic participation.

The present initiative seeks to address these systemic challenges by facilitating access to birth certificates through a structured, multi-stage process that combines community outreach, institutional engagement, legal facilitation, and capacity strengthening of local actors. The overarching objective is to ensure that vulnerable children obtain legal recognition while simultaneously strengthening local systems and promoting inclusive access to civil status services.

Geographic Scope and Beneficiary Coverage

The program was implemented across two major regions with distinct socio-economic and administrative contexts. In the Adamaoua Region, activities are concentrated in the Department of Vina, specifically within the municipality of Ngaoundéré 1er, where 50

children were selected. In the Far North Region, interventions cover three departments—Logone et Chari, Mayo Kani, and Mayo Danay—under the Diocese of Yagoua, with a total of 250 children identified.

This distribution reflects both demographic realities and the severity of civil registration gaps in these regions. The Far North Region, characterized by higher levels of poverty and vulnerability, accounts for the majority of beneficiaries, while the Adamaoua intervention serves as a strategic entry point for strengthening institutional collaboration.

Implementation Approach



*Ngaoundéré Diocese:
Identification visit of children without birth certificates in certain schools, September 2025*

The implementation of the program follows a structured and sequential methodology designed to ensure both inclusivity and procedural compliance. The process began with the identification of target localities based on vulnerability indicators, followed by the selection of beneficiaries using clearly defined criteria. These criteria prioritized children from socio-economically disadvantaged households, including those living with single parents, orphans, and children of school-going age who lack official documentation.

In Ngaoundéré, the identification and enrollment phase was conducted between August and September 2025, with particular attention to inclusivity across gender, religion, ethnicity, and disability status. Community-based mechanisms were used to collect data and ensure that the most vulnerable populations were reached effectively.

Following identification, the program engages key institutional actors, including the National Civil Status Office (BUNEC), municipal civil status services, healthcare facilities, and judicial authorities. These partnerships are essential for facilitating each stage of the process, from the issuance of certificates of apparent age to the final judicial validation required for late birth registration.

A critical and complementary component of the implementation approach was the ***capacity***

strengthening of community and institutional stakeholders, ensuring that the intervention is not limited to service delivery but contributes to systemic change.

Capacity Building and Stakeholder Strengthening



Participants to the Ecumenical Leaders Capacity Building Workshop led by Ms. Massa Ferrancide, AFJN Cameroon Coordinator

The February 2026 capacity-building workshop for leaders was ecumenical by design, bringing together five representatives from the Catholic dioceses of Yagoua and Ngaoundéré, a Protestant pastor, and a representative from the Muslim community, reflecting the predominantly Muslim context of the project area. They were equipped with a structured understanding of the legal and procedural pathways for birth registration in Cameroon. This included normal registration within the legally prescribed timeframe, administrative and prosecutorial remedies for delayed declarations, and judicial procedures such as the judgement supplétif required after statutory deadlines.

Participants were further trained on the preparation of complete dossiers, the required supporting documents, and the full administrative and judicial process from civil status centers to the competent courts. The training also highlighted recent legal reforms, including Law No. 2024/016, and facilitated a shared analysis of persistent barriers, notably socio-economic constraints, administrative bottlenecks, and institutional limitations affecting both families and implementing organizations.

The workshop aimed to deepen participants' further understanding of civil status systems and the importance of birth registration, while equipping them with practical tools to support families and navigate administrative and judicial procedures. Participants developed a shared understanding of civil registration concepts and the critical role of birth certificates in protecting children's rights and enabling access to services.

The training also focused on practical competencies, including the constitution of complete dossiers for children without birth certificates, strategies for accompanying families through administrative and judicial processes, and methods for mobilizing local resources to reduce financial barriers. Particular emphasis was placed on understanding judicial procedures for late registration and the reconstitution of birth records where original documentation is missing.

Importantly, the workshop culminated in the development of concrete community-level action plans, positioning faith communities and traditional leaders as frontline actors in preventing and reducing the incidence of children without legal identity. This approach ensures that the program extends beyond direct intervention to foster community ownership and sustainability.

Progress and Achievements



Beneficiary of Birth Certificates Project in the Diocese of Yagoua

Progress across the two regions reflects both the strengths of the program's methodology and the challenges inherent in the operating environment. In the Diocese of Ngaoundéré, all 50 targeted children have been successfully identified and enrolled. Institutional contacts have been established with relevant authorities, including BUNEC, municipal officials, and judicial representatives. At the time of the reporting, the dossiers were at the birth identification stage in health centers in order to obtain certificates of apparent age (a medical document used to estimate age for children without official records), which constitutes a prerequisite for further administrative and judicial procedures.

In contrast, the Diocese of Yagoua has achieved more advanced progress, particularly in the Department of Mayo Danay. Out of the 250 children identified across the three departments, 150 children in Mayo Danay have completed the medical certification stage, and their dossiers have been submitted to civil status services for verification of the non-existence of prior birth records. These cases are now pending transmission to the tribunal for judicial validation. Meanwhile, the 100 children in Logone et Chari and Mayo Kani are currently in the medical certification phase, with their dossiers being processed through local health facilities.

This differential progression highlights the varying levels of institutional efficiency and coordination across regions. The Yagoua intervention demonstrates a well-established procedural pipeline, enabling smoother transitions between stages, while Ngaoundéré remains in the earlier phases of implementation.

Challenges and Constraints



The Diocese of Ngaoundéré: Consultation Session with Civil Authorities

Despite the progress achieved, the program continues to face significant challenges that affect both operational efficiency and scalability. In Ngaoundéré, administrative processes were substantially delayed due to the 2025 national electoral cycle, during which many public officials were unavailable or focused on campaign activities. Post-election disruptions, including periods of civil unrest and “ville morte” operations, further hindered access to administrative services.

Institutional instability has also posed a challenge, particularly within the judicial system, where newly appointed personnel have demonstrated limited familiarity with socially driven civil registration initiatives. This has resulted in delays and the need for additional advocacy to facilitate understanding and cooperation.

Across both regions, financial constraints remain a persistent barrier. The costs associated with judicial procedures, in particular, are often prohibitive for vulnerable families. Furthermore, the presence of externally funded programs has introduced disparities in administrative engagement, sometimes complicating access for smaller, community and charity-driven initiatives.

Operational challenges also include procedural rigidity, such as requirements for the physical presence of parents, children, and witnesses during judicial hearings, which can be difficult to meet in remote or economically constrained contexts.

Lessons Learned



Application Verification before Submission to Government

The integration of capacity building into the program has emerged as a critical success factor. The February 2026 workshop demonstrates that strengthening local actors—particularly Christian and Muslim leaders—significantly enhances the program’s reach, legitimacy, and sustainability.

The comparative analysis of the two intervention zones further highlights that strong institutional coordination, combined with empowered community actors, leads to more efficient implementation. While Yagoua benefits from more advanced procedural progress, the investments in capacity building are expected to accelerate outcomes in both regions moving forward.

These experiences confirm that effective civil registration interventions must combine service delivery, institutional engagement, and community empowerment within a unified strategy.

Strategic Outlook and Recommendations

Moving forward, it is essential to accelerate the completion of the medical certification stage in Ngaoundéré and ensure timely transition to administrative and judicial phases. Continued investment in capacity building should be prioritized to consolidate gains and expand community-level engagement.

Strengthening partnerships with BUNEC (National Civil Status Office), judicial authorities, and local administrations will be critical for improving efficiency and reducing procedural bottlenecks. At the same time, advocacy efforts should focus on reducing financial barriers and simplifying legal requirements for late registration.

In the long term, the program should build on the momentum generated by the capacity-building initiative to institutionalize community-based mechanisms, including Strategic Monitoring Committees, and to promote policy reforms that make birth registration more accessible and less dependent on costly and time-consuming judicial processes.

Conclusion

The birth registration initiative implemented by AFJN and its partners represents a comprehensive and forward-looking response to one of Cameroon's most pressing governance and human rights challenges. By combining direct service delivery with strategic capacity building and institutional engagement, the program not only addresses immediate needs but also lays the foundation for sustainable, systemic change.

The integration of trained community and faith leaders into the intervention model significantly strengthens its long-term impact and scalability. With continued coordination, strengthened partnerships, and sustained investment, the initiative holds strong potential for national replication and for ensuring that every child in Cameroon has access to a legal identity.

Project Implemented by

AFJN USA

Mr. Steven Nabieu Rogers, PhD, Executive Director , AFJN USA

Mr. Ntama Bahati, Policy Analyst, AFJN USA

CAMEROON

Rene Fouka Bouba, Justice and Peace Commission Coordinator Yagoua Diocese

Baima Bernard, Justice and Peace Coordinator Ngaoundéré Diocese

Yinnyang Agamba Pascal, Field Coordinator, Diocese Yagoua

Passacwone Augustin, Field Coordinator, Diocese Yagoua

Damna Prospere, Field coordinator, Diocese-Yagoua

Ms. Massa Ferrancide, AFJN-Cameroon Coordinator

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To Support our Mission contact:

Mr. Steven Nabieu Rogers, PhD , Executive Director, Email director@afjn.org

Mr. Ntama Bahati, Policy Analyst, Email: bahati@afjn.org

Website: www.afjn.org and Tel 202-817-3670