

NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Kper, Bartholomew Torkuma¹, Achimba, Terfa², Akaangbough, Terkuma Solomon² Orngudwem, Terfa Iyorshe³

¹ICT Directorate, Akperan Orshi College of Agriculture, Yandev, Benue State-Nigeria

²Department of Maths/Computer Science, University of Mkar, Mkar, Benue State-Nigeria

³Department of Basic Sciences, Akperan Orshi College of Agriculture, Yandev. Benue State-Nigeria

Email: agriculture4truelife@gmail.com

Corresponding author: Kper, Bartholomew Torkuma

ABSTRACT

The National Identification Number (NIN) policy recently embarked upon by the federal government of Nigeria has both merits and demerits. This paper has x-rayed the challenges and the prospects of the policy in an attempt to educating Nigerians on the need for the exercise. Notwithstanding, the paper has identified the deployment of biometric modalities like iris scan, palm prints, facial recognition, fingerprints and voice recognition etc as a means of fighting terrorism, corruption, crime and other forms of criminality. The registration exercise is however marred with corruption by enrolment officials through extortion and the siphoning of budgetary allocations meant for the process by the Commission. The paper recommends among others, the strengthening of institutions charged with the responsibility of fighting corruption and the need for Nigerians to embrace the NIN policy in order to enjoy the benefits of the scheme. The paper conclude that there exists a need for Nigeria to invest substantial economic and human resources in the e-ID policy and to genuinely embrace the use of modern technologies in adequately identifying and authenticating people within her borders.

Keywords: *Electronic Identity (e-ID), National Identification Number (NIN), Biometric modalities, National Identity Management Commission (NIMC)*

INTRODUCTION

For anyone to be identified distinctively there must be something that makes him or her to be different from the other person. Traditionally, an individual can either be identified by name, gender, age, etc. As population or the size of the people in a given locality increases, it becomes very difficult to identify individuals based on traditional methods. This scenario calls for a unique system of identification whereby the biometrics, fingerprint, iris, blood or DNA of a person can be captured and authenticated electronically via a database if the need arises. The uniqueness of this form of identification will eliminate the possibilities of mistaken identity and other means by which government, organisations and societies can use in resource allocation and other services for the benefit of her people. It is against this backdrop that the federal government of Nigeria through the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) has device a means of identifying Nigerians and other legal

residents within its territory; hence the birth of a National Identification Number (NIN) policy in 2010.

The introduction of a National Identification Number (NIN) policy by the Federal Government of Nigeria cannot come at a better time than now when the country is engulfed with a plethora of both security challenges and gross economic and financial fraud. The policy is intended to create a National Identity Database and eliminate multiple identity and identity fraud. The adoption and use of the NIN would also foster financial inclusion if properly implemented (CBN, 2016).

Identification for Development (ID4D, 2016), a policy for strategic framework also made the following presumptions regarding identification systems from a development perspective:

- i. Inclusion and access to essential services such as healthcare and education, electoral rights, financial services, and social safety net programs
- ii. Effective and efficient administration of public services, transparent policy decisions and improved governance—particularly to reduce duplication and waste
- iii. More accurate measure of development progress in areas such as reduction in maternal and infant mortality In a bid to tackle some of these problems, the Federal Government in 2007 demonstrated a political will by establishing a National Identity Management Commission whose statutory mandate is to operate the country's national identity management systems, card database, integrate the existing identity database in government institutions, register individuals and legal residents, assign a unique national identification number and introduce general multi-purpose cards (Wikipedia, 2018).

According to Gelb and Diofasi (2015), an official identity is essential for any person to participate in a modern economy and to access basic rights and services. It empowers people to vote, register assets, own bank accounts and travel. The authors also affirmed the need for countries to work towards a strategic approach at ensuring that systems are cost-effective, inclusive, and ready to provide a foundation for e-government and e-economy. Also contributing, Onyemenam (2012) disclosed that the National Identity Management Systems (NIMS) as an essential transformation tool would link the biometrics of individuals with their NINs in order to foster socioeconomic development; maintain law and order and further enhance security of lives and properties in Nigeria.

Relatedly, Onakoya et al (2013) affirmed that the rising insecurity in the country ranging from the deadly Islamic Sect, Boko Haram in the Northeast,

rampant armed robbery in the South-West and notorious kidnapping in the South-South and South-East is as a result of people not been uniquely identified and tagged among others. Onakoya further stressed that, these social vices can be curtailed if a central national database can be created towards solving identity challenge, loose neighbouring borders, sectional terrorist, corruption, crime and criminalities, unemployment, poverty and leadership distrust. In Nigeria, the target population of the policy is for both citizens and legal residents. For Nigerian minors, the registrable age is between zero to fifteen years of age (NIMC, 2018). However, minors to be registered must be accompanied by either their parent(s)/guardian with relevant supporting documents before such a minor can be captured in NIMS Database. Once a minor is successfully enrolled, only the National Identification Number (NIN) is issued to this category of applicant while the General Multipurpose Identity Card (GMPC) will not be issued until they turn sixteen years of age and above. For adults, however, this is different as upon successful enrolment, both the NIN and GMPC are issued. It is believed that children and adult who have successfully enrolled in the NIMS and obtained a NIN are expected to own and use this National Identification Number (NIN) till death.

As at January 2018, the National Identity Management Commission has recorded a successful enrolment of about 28 million Nigerian citizens and legal residents (NIMC, 2018). Based on available statistics from the National Population Commission's official website, Nigeria had a population figure of about 182 million as at May, 2017 (NPC, 2018). This means that the NIN coverage rate among the target population in Nigeria is about 15.4% since the launch of the National Identification Number in 2007. Whereas, in other African countries like Tanzania (24%), Mali (28%), Ghana (59%), Cote d'Ivoire (59%), Democratic Republic of Congo (91%), Burkina Faso (58%) and Angola (25%) (ITU, 2016). It is on record that these African countries launched their National Identification Schemes after that of Nigeria. Pakistan, an Asian country which launched its National Database Registration in the year 2000, has a coverage rate among target population at 98%. It is therefore hoped that, the implementation of the National Identification Number (NIN) policy in Nigeria would capture significant population of both Nigerian citizens and legal residents in order to help in the planning and execution of government policies, be it economic, social, or otherwise. Also, the deployment of the NIN in the country would reduce the ravaging security challenges in the country to its barest minimum if not completely eliminated. The federal government of Nigeria also stated that after the 2015 general elections, the 2019 general elections will require the use of the National e-ID Card issued by NIMC to vote (NIMC, 2018). It is further hoped that if properly executed, the NIN would provide useful, timely, secured and intelligent information

to other critical stakeholders like telecommunications providers, financial institutions, law enforcement agencies, Pension Administrators, Health Sector and other relevant agencies of government in driving the Sustainable Development Goals.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD IN NIGERIA

In 1977, a National Identity Card system was conceived but was not successfully implemented. The unsuccessful implementation could be linked to perceived issues of privacy infringement of individuals, surveillance and monitoring of citizens, lack of relevant legislative framework, inadequate robust network infrastructure and a host of others. In 2003, however, a new scheme managed by the Directorate of National Civic Registration (DNCR) was initiated and about 54 million Nigerians were registered. However, the scheme failed to meet official expectations and was also hampered by allegations of corruption and embezzlement of funds (Wikipedia, 2018). The National Identity Management Commission was subsequently enacted by the National Assembly Act No. 23 of 2007 and came into effect in 2010 and an initial budget of about N300 Naira was appropriated in the 2011 federal budget (Wikipedia, 2018). The National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) of Pakistan was subsequently engaged to develop a computerised national identity card for Nigerians and legal residents. According to Wikipedia 2018, the National Identity Management Commission also partnered with two other consortiums, Chams Nigeria and, One Secure Card consortium composed of Interswitch, Secure ID, and Iris Technologies to provide data capture services. With the collaboration of these consortiums, the new National Identity Card (i.e GMPC) if obtained can effectively be used in carrying out banking services and other varied online services within and outside the country.

CHALLENGES OF NIN IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA

Identification for Development (ID4D, 2016), a World Bank Strategic Framework document identified the following as challenges to the implementation of e-ID programs:

Political Economy Risks

Privacy Risk: Key risks may stem from a failure to secure data about persons, the inappropriate sharing or use of data, discriminatory use of data against certain individuals or groups, and the failure to ensure long-term integrity and durability of the data. Privacy risks can include (a) incorrect or inaccurate data, leading to mistaken identity or unjust treatment; (b) “function creep,” whereby data collected for one purpose are used for others to which the individual concerned has not consented; (c)

profiling, through linking data registers in unauthorized or inappropriate ways, including for surveillance purposes; (d) unauthorized or inappropriate access, use or disclosure of information including, intra- agency, inter-governmental, and third party and public disclosure. Biometrics raises some particular privacy issues—e.g., through the remote acquisition of facial prints without the knowledge of the subject and through the recording of fingerprints and DNA, which may be used for other collateral purposes without the consent of the individual. In order to stem this risk factor, a robust legal and regulatory enabling environment (supported by appropriate technical ICT systems and capacity) is critical to providing a transparent and cohesive framework for the collection, management, and use of personal data. Legislation that provides for the protection of personal information and privacy, including data security and data use, is therefore essential, not only for system integrity but also to promote trust and confidence in the system so that it will be widely used. To further give confidence to millions of Nigerians, NIMC (2018) said “The Department of State Security (DSS) has scrutinised NIMC and can attest that the Commission has put all kinds of processes and security measures in place to avoid such breaches of National Security”

Social Exclusion: Although the development purpose of issuing National Identification Number is inclusive in nature, an ill-designed approach or lack of a robust legal enabling environment (e.g. cost, distance and time to register, discriminatory practices including variable impacts on different sections of the population) can lead to exclusion. This can be seen where the country has only 900 enrolment centres to cover over 774 local government areas with a projected population of over 182 million people. This has already caused an exclusion problem for most Nigerians especially the rural poor.

Technology Risks

Complex IT systems, vendor lock-in risks: These can result in substantial costs increases, reduced flexibility and sustainability, a system design which is neither fit for purpose nor suitable to meet policy and development objectives. Detailed appraisal of local context and capacity is essential including prior experiences with implementing IT systems. It is important to focus on design and implementation of sustainable digital infrastructure that can reach remote areas; ensure interoperability and trusted authentication protocols for data exchange among different services and solution providers; and ensure data security and personal privacy, particularly in the use of biometrics, as well as the long-term accessibility and security of identity records. These issues can be mitigated by developing and implementing a robust IT procurement guideline, open standards (where appropriate) and common technology

standards and frameworks to ensure that the unique NIN system is built as a solid foundation upon which an array of actors (government agencies, businesses, and citizens) can participate—each bringing a building block to a scalable platform for improving service delivery.

Cyber security risks

In addition to the data protection measures addressed above, reliance on digital, Internet-based systems expose those systems and underlying infrastructure (both the hardware and software) and the data that reside and travel over them to potential misuse and destruction through data theft, fraud, manipulation or hacking, lack of capacity in understanding, using or maintaining systems and data, and even acts of war or nature. Vulnerable infrastructure, systems and data will erode user confidence making use of the systems less attractive. To avert the spate of these cyber risks, one must start with pro-security policies covering prevention, resilience and restoration and ensuring that the proper incentives are in place for the various stakeholders to appreciate and manage these risks.

Inadequate Enrolment Centres in the country

The National Identity Management Commission has about 900 enrolment centres across the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (NIMC, 2018). Based on this information provided by the Commission, it is therefore, difficult to capture registrable Nigerians and legal residents within a reasonable time frame. The total number of Local Government Areas in the country stands at 744 and if we can assume that we will distribute these enrolment centres equitably, we will have less than two (2) registration centres per local government area. This is grossly insignificant as compared to the population size of the country. This may be one of the factors why the coverage rate of the target population is still low (15.4%) considering the time in which the scheme was launched.

Corruption

The registration of Nigerians and legal residents into the NIMS database has brought about some cases of corrupt tendencies by enrolment officials across the country. There were cases where these officials demanded for between two hundred (N200.00) Naira to five hundred (N500.00) from each unsuspecting public before carrying out the registration process. According to them, the alleged money is for the purchase of petrol in order to power their equipment as well as other logistics support.

Furthermore, there have been reported cases of official corruption by the NIMC officials in the recent past. Many Nigerians have been left wondering if not perplexed on what the Commission is mandated by law to do. Udofia (2017) states:

“...official corruption orchestrated by political influence coupled with misplaced priorities and outright ineptitude has stifled the hands of the commission in meeting its goals and turned it into a mere centre of waste”

The above statement indicates strongly that most Nigerians are not confident in the system itself since official corruption has taken centre stage at the Commission. Year in year out, monies allocated to the Commission went down drainpipes without adequate work being done to show for it. The breakdown of the budgetary allocation to the NIMC by the Federal Government for some selected years is as presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Budgetary allocation to NIMC since 2010

Year	2010	2011	2012	2014	2015	2017
Allocation (Billion N)	30	17.9	12.35	7.19	6.276	6.535

Source: Vanguard Newspaper, 16th December, 2017.

The above table shows the huge amount of money the federal government of Nigeria has been spending on the project without a corresponding positive effect in terms of the capturing, production and distribution of the National Identity Card to millions of Nigerians and legal residents. It is estimated that over N80.25b naira has been spent on the project over a period of seven years as seen in Table 1 above.

The source further averred that NIMC appears to be fast on cash liquidation but sluggish on project implementation (Udofia, 2017). The report of Transparency International 2017, confirms this as Nigeria was ranked 148 out of 180 countries among other Sub-Saharan African countries (TI, 2018).

Table 2 indicates that, among the ten (10) selected Sub Saharan African countries, Nigeria is the highest most corrupt nation with a rank of 148 out of 180 countries sampled while South Africa is the least corrupt nations among those sampled in this study. The perception index is based on a scale of 0 to 100 otherwise the score. A zero (0) score indicates the highly corrupt region/nation while one hundred (100) shows that the region/nation is very clean of corruption.

Table 2: Corruption Perception Index of some selected Sub Saharan African Countries, 2017

2017 Rank	Country	2017 Score	2016 Score	2015 Score	2014 Score	Region
148	Nigeria	27	28	26	27	Sub Saharan Africa
130	Gambia	30	29	27	29	Sub Saharan Africa
130	Sierra Leone	30	30	29	31	Sub Saharan Africa
122	Liberia	31	37	37	37	Sub Saharan Africa
122	Malawi	31	31	31	33	Sub Saharan Africa
122	Mali	31	32	35	32	Sub Saharan Africa
117	Togo	32	32	32	29	Sub Saharan Africa
117	Gabon	32	35	34	37	Sub Saharan Africa
81	Ghana	40	43	47	48	Sub Saharan Africa
71	South Africa	43	45	44	44	Sub Saharan Africa

Source: Transparency International, 2018

The worst performed regions of the world according to this report, is the Sub-Saharan Africa with the least scores. These figures show that despite the anti-corruption crusade of the President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, corruption is still entrenched in both the public and private sectors of the Nigerian economy as compared to other Sub-Saharan African countries listed in the report. The only way to curb this trend according to Onakoya et al (2013) is by creating a holistic mechanism for anticorruption which is the adoption of a central database system and by extension the National Identification Number (NIN).

Insecurity/Insurgency activities

The insurgency and insecurity issues in the Northeast may have posed a security challenge to the effective registration of Nigerians and legal residents in that part of the country. Also the recent attacks of the Fulani Herdsmen in certain parts of Taraba, Yobe, Plateau, Ondo, Kogi and Benue State have posed a challenge to the effective registration of Nigerians in the NIMS database. The activities of these unscrupulous elements may likely affect the overall implementation of the exercise.

Production and Distribution of eID cards

Another major setback encountered by NIMC is the production and distribution of eID cards after data capture (registration) process is through. After six

years of enrolment of citizens for the National Identification Number (NIN), the Commission started the distribution of the cards in April 2018 as captured by several media houses including the Punch Newspaper, (Nnodim O., 2018). The reporter quoted the DG of the commission as saying that

“... National identity cards that are ready are mainly for people who enrolled in 2012 and 2013, noting that it was adopting a first-come, first-served approach.”

The reporter averred that the Commission attributed the delay in distribution of the identity cards to logistical issues involving a private organisation. Since it has taken the Commission six years to produce and distribute cards to enrollees of 2012 and 2013, one wonders how long it will take NIMC to produce the eID cards for the entire population.

PROSPECTS OF NIN IMPLEMENTATION

Financial Inclusiveness by the rural poor

Since the availability of Network for Data transmission is a dependent of the NIN implementation, though the teledensity (number of active telephone connections per one hundred (100) inhabitants living within an area and is expressed as a percentage figure) in Nigeria has declined between January, 2017 to December, 2017 from 110.8% to 103.61% based on the 2006 population census, the Internet Subscriber Data (GSM) has steadily increased from 91,274,466 to 98,391,456 (NCC, 2017) with an attendant decrease in financial cost. This means that even the rural poor who can get themselves registered on the NIMC can adequately and securely perform financial transactions in real-time with little data bundle purchases thereby increasing the financial inclusion index of the country.

Enabler to Economic Growth

In Nigeria, both individuals and corporate organisation are always reluctant in paying taxes to the government. The implementation of the NIN would boost the capacity of government to effectively collect taxes from both individuals and cooperate organisations hence increasing the tax base of the nation and further boost the economic sustainability of the country. Planning and budgeting by the federal government would also be made much easier as employees of MDAs and other agencies of government would be properly captured using biometric modalities and resources of government properly channelled to eliminate wastage.

Fight against Corruption

Anticorruption agencies like the ICPC, EFCC and other critical stakeholders both in the private and public sectors of the economy would find it easier in detecting

and tracking quickly those persons who may be involved in economic and financial crimes and other related offences with a more vivid proof regarding crime and criminality. This can be done through collaboration with the NIMC and other law enforcement agencies who may by law be vested with the responsibility of manning the data collected about Nigerians and other legal residents.

Surveillance/security monitoring

With the implementation of the National Identification Number (NIN) system, biometric modalities in use like iris scan, palm prints, voice recognition, fingerprints, facial recognition and DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) would help in fishing out people who might have committed one crime or another by the measure of their biological (anatomical and physiological) or behavioral characteristics and matching same with those in the NIMC database to ascertain their involvement in the alleged crime or offence. This will further strengthen the fight against terrorism and insurgency in the country as illegal nationals could be checked using biometric and modern forensic technology tools (IT & Telecom Digest, 2016).

Identification of vulnerable groups/refugees

With the present-day insurgency and insecurity in the North-eastern part of the country, the deployment of NIN would help in capturing the near exact number of persons displaced as a result of the crises and help in providing medical, material and food aid for the displaced persons. If children and women are adequately captured in the NIN exercise, it would help the government in planning for social services and other developmental projects for these groups of vulnerable people. Forensic technologies also help in times of famine and war by ascertaining actual figures of people displaced and who are in dire need of supplies. In any case, one is not praying for famine and war to occur in Nigeria.

Citizens' Multi-purpose Identification and Authentication System

Most often, citizens are inundated with requirements for prove of their citizenship when they want to acquire driver's license, open an account, pay taxes, travel, conduct financial transactions, access healthcare, pension schemes, and other avalanche confrontations that demand identity proof. This will eradicate the duplicity of identity as presently practised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations/suggestions are made:

- i. For a proper and accurate identification of Nigerian citizens, identity card should be issued at birth as is the case in other climes like Denmark, etc.

- ii. NIMC Act should be repealed and the task of identity management handed over to National Population Commission after amending its Establishment Act in order to accommodate identity management. This is against the backdrop of NIMC's poor performance and moreover a developing economy like ours does not need this kind of duplicity where NPC staff remains redundant until a population census' year comes.
- iii. There should be financial sustainability in the process of ID programs. This means that government should continually commit resources for updating the database of his people in order to leave up to the trends in technology;
- iv. Government should be resolute in NIN implementation and should not abandon the scheme for another one;
- v. Data protection and privacy issues should be effectively addressed and resolved when such issues of infringement and misuse of individual data arises. This calls for effective legislative framework to deter misapplication of such data and information.
- vi. Government should strengthen institutions charged with the responsibility of fighting corruption and economic crimes. Also, Nigerians should embrace NIN policy as a panacea to security, economic, social and underdevelopment problems.

CONCLUSION

Due to the increase in population, influx of illegal immigrant due mostly to protracted civil war especially in Syria and other African countries coupled with security challenges experienced the world over, especially in the African continent, there exists a need for Nigeria to invest substantial economic and human resources in the e-ID policy and to genuinely embrace the use of modern technologies in adequately identifying and authenticating people within her borders. This therefore, calls for the government to fast track the implementation of the National Identification Number (NIN) policy for the country to benefit from the numerous opportunities inherent therein.

REFERENCES

- Alan Gelb and Anna Diofasi(2015). ID for Development: Opportunities and Challenges for Africa. Retrieved March 11, 2018 from <http://africapolicyreview.com/id-for-development-opportunities-and-challenges-for-africa>.

CBN (2016). 2015 Annual Report: National Financial Inclusion Strategy. Retrieved March 15, 2018 from www.cbn.gov.ng/out/2016/ccd/2015_annual%20report%20_NFIS.final.pdf

Identification for Development (ID4D, 2016). Identification for Development: A strategic Framework. Retrieved March 26, 2018 from pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/.../Jan-2016-ID4D-Strategic-Roadmap.pdf

International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2016). Review of National Identity Programs: ITU-T Focus Group on Digital Financial Services. Retrieved March 10, 2018 from: <https://www.itu.int/en/.../Review%20of%20National%20Identity%20Programs.pdf>.

IT & Telecom Digest (2016). Identity As National Asset: Will Nigeria Unlock the Goldmine? IT & Telecom Digest, November 2016, No. 179 Retrieved March 22, 2018 from www.ittelecomdigest.com

NCC (2017). Subscriber/Teledensity: Subscriber/Teledensity data (Jan-December, 2017) Retrieved March 11, 2018 from www.ncc.gov.ng/stakeholder/statistics_report/industry-overview

NIMC(2018). Enrolling Minors. Retrieved March 12, 2018 from www.nimc.gov.ng/how-to-enrol-minors/

Nnodim O. (2018). We can't produce national identity card for everyone – NIMC. The Punch. Retrieved April 24 from <http://punchng.com/we-cant-produce-national-identity-cards-for-everyone-nimc/>

NPC (2018). Nigeria's Population Now 182 million. Retrieved March 11, 2018 from population.gov.ng

Onakoya, J. R.; Adebayo, F. O. And Owolabi, O. O. (2013). Creation of Central National Database in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects in *Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Vol. 3(12)* Retrieved March 12, 2018 from www.iiste.org.

Onyemenam, E. C. (2012). CLE & e-ID Management Issues, Prospects and Opportunities. Retrieved March 11, 2018 from www.cpn.gov.ng/download/NCS.../NIMC-presentation-NCS-Uyo.pdf

Transparency International (TI, 2018). Corruption Perceptions Index, 2017. Retrieved February 27, 2018 from www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perception_index

Udofia, G. (2017). NIMC: Fast on Cash Liquidation, Slow on ID Production and Delivery. Vanguard Newspaper, 16th December, 2017.

Wikipedia (2018). National Identity Management Commission. Retrieved March 17, 2018 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Identity_Management_Commission