National Identity Management System

The Problem

Many Nigerians as far back as 1999 had recognised the need for the creation of an integrated national database that features information about all Nigerian citizens. Such a database is central to an effective management of citizen-related issues in the socio-economic and political spheres of governance. Furthermore, it would enable the government and other organisations (both public and private) access and be able to pull information with needed data to tackle issues bordering on security such as terrorism and criminality. Specifically, it would protect Nigerians from identity theft, fraud, and criminal activities by providing easy means of identification. Unfortunately, government efforts in this direction did not yield the desired results. Instead it resorted to putting in place short-term crash programmes on such issues as printing of national identity cards, registration of voters' cards during elections, and conducting of population census. For example, government first mooted the idea of a national identity card in 1978. In 2001, government awarded a contract to a consortium led by French firm, Sagem, for the production of identity cards for all Nigerian citizens. However, the identity card scheme was marred in 2003 by corrupt practices and only a few Nigerians received identity cards under the scheme.

Meanwhile, government agencies such as the defunct Directorate of National Civil Registration (DNCR), Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), National Population Commission (NPC) that were saddled with the responsibilities of collecting citizen-relevant information created different databases in the course of achieving their goals. This would have been unnecessary if only a national database had existed. Some data, such as name, date of birth, place of birth, local government area, state of origin, occupation, etc. are repeatedly being sourced from individual citizens during the course of his or her lifetime. The same goes for educational background, employment, and competency profile. The stress that Nigerians are exposed to, especially during national elections and population census etc. to ensure that they are captured would have been avoided. The bane of these programmes is that not all citizens are captured but only interested citizens who care to enlist. Even the so-called data generated are not reliable and not easily accessible.

Reform Actions

In order to reform and sanitise the national identity sector, the federal government in 2007, established the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) as the only recognised regulatory and institutional mechanism for implementing identity management reform. The NIMC therefore replaced the Directorate of National Civic Registration (DNCR). In actualisation of the National Identity Management System (NIMS), government approved ₦30.066 billion for the implementation of a unified identity Management System (NIMS). The first phase of the identity scheme ran from 2011 to 2013.

The objectives of NIMC as regards the National Identity Management Systems (NIMS) are to:

1. Carry out the registration of citizens and legal residents as provided for in the Act

2. Create and operate a national identity database

3. Issue unique National Identification Numbers (NIN) to qualified citizens and legal residents

4. Issue a multi-purpose (smart) card to every registered person who is 16 years of age and above

5. Provide a secured means to access the national identity database so that an individual can irrefutably assert his/her identity

6. Harmonise and integrate the identity databases in government agencies to achieve resource optimisation and shared service facilities

7. Collaborate with private sector and/or public sector institutions to deliver on the NIMS and register births and deaths in collaboration with the National Population Commission (NPC)

Main Achievements

1. The NIMC initiated the National Identity Management System (NIMS) programme in 2009. The NIMS comprises of a national identity database also known as a Central Identity Repository or Register (CIDR), a chip-based, secure identity card and a network of access and means to irrefutably prove or assert the identity of an individual. The enrollment exercise for the issuance of the National Identification Number (NIN) started as a pilot scheme in February 2012 and was extended to cover all states of the Federation on 17 October 2013.

2. ISO 27001 Certification for information security management system was secured.

3. A User Acceptance Test was carried out on the National Identity Smart Card facility to ensure that it conforms to international standards and best global practices in tune with the defined objective of the NIMS project. The User Acceptance Testing was aimed at meeting the complete requirements, while demonstrating the comprehensive functionality of the system, which includes communication with other sub-systems in NIMC and identifying each citizen by installing personal data and applications on the chip and physical customisation of the card to suit each individual. It also includes complete delivery of the validated system.

4. Establishment of permanent enrolment centres/locations across Nigeria.

5. Provision of a universal identification infrastructure for the country.

6. Issuance and use of the national identification number (NIN) and the national identity (smart) card.

7. Protection from identity theft and fraud by providing a simple, reliable, sustainable, and universally acceptable means of confirming one's identity at all times.

8. Provision of an easy and convenient means of proving one's identity anywhere in Nigeria and beyond and helping reform Nigeria's political process by facilitating the electoral process.

9. Difficult for criminals to use false, multiple, or ghost identities through the enhanced performance of the law enforcement agencies protecting people from crime, especially advance fee fraud and terrorism.

10. Optimisation of government resources, enhanced service delivery, ease in tax and revenue generation processes and the improvement of Nigeria's image.

11. Fibre optic connectivity to 14 agencies that are engaged in biometric identity related activities in the country.

Key Challenges

Although the NIMS has recorded some successes, it still faces some key challenges:

1. Instituting necessary security controls and protocols as well as ensuring necessary technology transfer

2. Delays in issuing national identity smartcards to people who have registered

3. Failure of concessionaires to fulfil their obligations, including setting up and running the enrolment centres because they have not been able to secure the financial resources to invest in the NIMS and deliver on their obligations

4. Difficulty experienced by the Commission to get Nigerians to enrol for the national ID system as it expected that by now, private sector involvement would have become significant to enable Nigerians from all walks of life and locations to participate

5. Poor citizen turnout as a result of the misunderstanding of the Commission activities and comparing it with the past

6. High cost of running the enrolment centres because of the needed stable power supply

7. Dearth of requisite human resource

8. Public cynicism and unfavourable perception of the identity sector, stemming from the wasted efforts of the past

9. Marketing the NIMS/mass appeal

10. Political support and supervision

11. Dealing with vested interests

12. Slow capacity building

13. Private sector ambivalence and 'fence sitting'

Assessment of Reform Initiative

Against the 10 criteria for assessing the National Identity Management System, a lot still needs to be done to meet government deadline of December 2014 for all citizens to be enrolled by the NIMS.

S/No.	Assessment Criteria	Result of Assessment
1.	Has the NMIS reform improved the quality and quantity of public services?	Not yet as it is still work in progress. However, the NMIS project will improve the quality and quantity of public services when fully implemented.
2.	Do more people now have access to services, including disadvantaged groups such as women, young persons, and people with disabilities?	Not Yet.
3.	Has the NMIS reduced the cost of governance?	Not yet as it is still work in progress, but will surely reduce the cost of governance when fully implemented.

S/No.	Assessment Criteria	Result of Assessment
4.	Has the NMIS made services more affordable for citizens?	Not yet.
5.	Has the NMIS reduced corruption?	Not yet, but it has the potential to do so. It will reduce corrupt significantly when fully implemented.
6.	Has the NIMS reduced unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape?	Not yet, but it will reduce unnecessary and red tape when fully implemented.
7.	Has the NMIS led to improved development outcomes?	Not yet, but it will surely lead to greater financial inclusion and deepening of the consumer credit system in Nigeria, hence improve development outcomes.
8.	Are things improving, staying the same, or getting worse?	Only very marginal improvements have been recorded thus far.
9.	Where things are improving, will those improvements endure?	Improvements, when consolidated, are likely to endure in the NIMS. When its systems and processes are fully in place things are likely to improve, especially as there is strong political will by government to succeed in this area.
10.	Where things are not improving, what should be done?	There should be more robust enlightenment about the gains of identity management (IDM) to erode public cynicism and unfavourable perception of the identity sector, stemming from the wasted efforts of the past.

Proposed Next Steps

1. There should be more robust enlightenment about the gains of IDM to erode public cynicism and unfavourable perception of the identity sector, stemming from the wasted efforts of the past.

2. There is an urgent need to put in place an interoperability platform to avoid high incidence of multiple identities.

3. Persons that have enrolled on the NINs should be issued with their national identity smartcards immediately they enrol on the system.