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National Identity Management in Nigeria: Policy Dimensions and Implementation

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Abstract

This paper examines some dimensions of the national identity management policy in Nigeria. It specifically highlights the economic and social benefits of the policy. It argues that there is the need to look beyond mere issuance of smart cards or identification cards as the goal of identity management. Rather, its ability to transform society socioeconomically should be explored taking into consideration the biometric and demographic environment already in place. Government's indifference and citizens' lack of trust in government and technology have been blamed for the current environment of identity management in Nigeria. The paper submits that since a sound national Identity management system is linked with and complements the development of the sociopolitical and socioeconomic processes, there is therefore the need for government to make the environment conducive and convenient for an effective national identity management; and the national identity management policy should be sustained irrespective of changes in government.

Key Words: Identity, Identity Management, Policy

Introduction: One of the unfortunate barriers to economic, social and political development in Nigeria is the shortage of data valuable for national planning. This is notwithstanding the unfortunate failure of a great country like Nigeria to build up a national system of identity management, which could serve its present needs and meet future desires.

A major concern of government has been the huge spending yearly by its numerous agencies in the repeated conduct of registration and, as of late, biometric enrollment exercises, when it can be adequately served by a unified framework. It was partly the requirement for the streamlining of such exercises, and the need to cultivate the orderly development of a foundation that would drive e-governance, that drove government recently to attempt significant reviews of its policy initiatives in specific areas, including the identity management sector.

Usually, when individuals think or discuss identity, which is a reference or designation used to recognize unique and specific individual, business or gadget, the impression is made that it is generally as simple as having another ID card or piece of paper on which a man's names are composed, and really there exists in the Nigeria today different sorts of representation of an individual's identity. Shockingly, the greater part of them can be copied/recreated and in this way inclined to a wide range of identity misrepresentation. At the moment, there is no specific or reliable national identification plan in Nigeria that is connected to a national identity database with suitable access and in the case of government agencies and parastatals, interoperability. However there is need for an identity management system, that is, the set of standards, practices, strategies, procedures and methodology that are utilized to realize the desired outcomes related to identity.

Thuan (2007) defines identity management as “the process, policies and technologies used to administer the complete lifecycle of user identities across a system and to control user access to the system resources by associating their rights and restrictions.” Identity management is a broad administrative area that bothers on distinguishing people in a system and controlling their access to resources in that system by associating user rights and limitations with the built up identity.

An identity Management (IDM) policy is, thus, an official articulation which delineates the destinations, objectives, standards, methodologies, and so on meant to manage and control the improvement, operation and application of identity management. Identity management policies must take into account other policies such as immigration policy, education policies, trade and investment policies, foreign policy, security policy, monetary policy, transport policy, etc.

Since 1960, Nigeria has constantly seen the need to create a framework of identity management for its citizens and legal residents utilizing demographic information. A noteworthy endeavour was started with the enactment of the law which brought into existence, in 1978, the Department of National Civic Registration (DNCR). The DNCR was assigned the duty of enrolling and issuing a National Identity Card to every citizen of Nigeria of 18 years and above. Government's main target then was to put in place a system of national identity card issuance believing this would deal with the nagging problem of the true identity of people, serve as a powerful means of controlling illegal immigration, give a premise to dependably authenticating other civic documents like driver's permit, travel passports, and so on (NIMC, 2013).

In 2005, government set up a Harmonization Committee to advise it on how different public and private sector activities on identification systems can be harmonized. The Committee, among other things, proposed a national policy and institutional framework for a national identity management system for the country. The strategy incorporated the formation of the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), as the primary legal, institutional, supervisory, and administrative structure to drive the reform initiative in the identity sector.

It is against this background that this paper sets out to review some of the economic and social benefits of the national identity management policy in Nigeria. It is structured in four sub-sections with the introduction proceeded by conceptual clarifications, theoretical orientation, closely followed by the identification and analysis of the issues under study while the rear bears the concluding remarks.

Conceptual Clarification: It is necessary to attempt an explanation of some of the key terms used in this paper. This will facilitate communication and ease understanding. Thus the terms that need to be clarified include: identity, national identity and identity management.

Identity: A person's identity is viewed as a reflection of those things, which are generally thought about them by the general by the people with whom they interact (Mostov, 1994). Identity in information systems, therefore, comprises of attributes, traits, and preferences, in light of which an individual may get personalized benefits either on the web, on mobile devices, at work, or in many other places. According to Hogg and Abrams (1988), identity is "people's idea of who they are and how they identify with others." Identity describes "the way people and groups characterize themselves and are defined by others on the premise of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture" (Deng, 1995). In this manner, two objects having comparative attributes like shape, length or height, position in time and space, could be considered to have or share the relationship of identity

National Identity: According to Verba (1968), national identity is closely linked with people's conviction that they are truly members of a specific culture, that is, the degree to which they view themselves as individuals from the nation-state. National identity does not by any stretch of imagination deal only with the individual's physical location of himself in a specific place, but incorporates self-identity along with a mental connection. It is just when one lives inside a state and has the inclination or sense of belonging to it that one can appropriately say that one has a feeling of national identity. He distinguished between two kinds of identity in his examination of national identity:

- i.) Vertical identification which deals with the individual's feeling of connection to his political unit – the nation, the state, local government, the town/village, and the governments at these levels; and for the symbols of the government or the state.
- ii.) Horizontal identification which deals with the individual's feeling of integration and identification with other people who occupy the political system. It deals with the degree to which the individuals relate with each other as people from the same society; and also the degree to which they have confidence and trust in their compatriots.

Identity Management: The term 'Identity Management' (IDM) has become widely used, both in practice and in academia, yet an indisputable meaning for the term is lacking is yet to evolve owing to its relative conceptual and disciplinary infancy. A cursory look into available literature shows that the term 'Identity Management' is related to procedures in

emerging digital situations so far. In addition, current IDM ideas do not reflect, or relate to the special part government has in our society. IDM is by all accounts predominantly comprehended as a specialized means which fills numerous and varied needs, issues, and even organizations. These assumptions seem to be appropriate when looking at various working definitions being proposed for IDM, such as:

“the set of business processes, and a supporting infrastructure for the creation, maintenance, and use of digital identities” (Scorer, 2007, p.43) .

“a set of data management systems and practices to increase confidence in the identity of individuals where appropriate” (Crompton, 2004, p.1).

The narrow spotlight on digital IDM in these definitions appears to disregard the way that individuals keep on having an association with government in the real world, in which IDM as of now has, and will keep on having, a key role. For instance, the citizen will frequently have an Inland Revenue taxpayer's relationship, a Health Service patient relationship, a Border Control relationship as an international traveler, a Social Benefit relationship as a contributor and claimant within the system, a driver's relationship, and a resident relationship within a public housing scheme.

Theoretical Orientation: Social scientists have always devised theories in their attempts to understand and explain the nature, causes, and effects of events, issues and episodes in their societies. Each of the theories takes a specific perspective that differentiates it from the other, depending on the school of thought the theorist belongs. The theoretical orientation of this study therefore takes the Robert Merton's functionalist perspective (Elwell, 2009). From this theoretical perspective, Merton distinguished between the types of functions within each social structure- manifest functions and latent functions. He and other functionalists viewed society as an organism with various parts, and each part has a function to perform. He recognized that some functions were intentional and other functions were not. He also acknowledged that some functions actually disrupted society. These functions are known as the manifest and latent functions and dysfunctions.

The functionalist perspective states that society is a complex system whose parts work together to promote the stability and survival of society. The parts, or the structures, of society, such as the education system, criminal justice system, identity management system and economic system, all have a function, or a job, to perform. When all parts are performing their functions correctly, society as a whole runs smoothly. However, have one part not functioning correctly and there will be an adverse reaction to society. Robert Merton pointed out that all parts of society have various functions which they perform. Some of these functions are obvious and others are not-so-obvious. He distinguished between the two by stating that the recognized and intended functions were the manifest functions and the unrecognized and unintended functions were the latent functions.

These postulates can now be related to this work by identifying some of the manifest and latent functions that apply to the identity management in Nigeria. Many people enroll for National Identification Number (NIN) because 1) they need the NIN for identification; and 2) to be able to pick up their national identity card from the national identity management commission (NIMC) when ready. So when asked what is the function or purpose of NIN, one may automatically think 'to get an identity or identification.'

This is true, but the identification is the result of going to enroll, not the function of NIMC. The function of NIMC is to serve as the primary legal, institutional, supervisory and regulatory framework to help organize the identity sector in Nigeria. So a manifest function, an intended or obvious job of NIMC, is to manage the identity database in Nigeria.

There are many other functions of a national identity management system – like facilitation of law enforcement or bringing about interoperability in data silos in public and private institutions. So if asked why get NIN, how many can say 'to facilitate law enforcement' and 'to bring about interoperability in data silos in public and private institutions'? Not many, if any. These are, however, latent functions - the unintended or not-so-obvious functions - of a national identity management system.

Role of Identity Management Policy in Socioeconomic Development: Identity management is very key to the economic success of developing countries. For developing countries to make good progress in the global space, they must be able to orderly develop a national identity management system and also ensure the proper execution of such policies (Adjei, 2013). However, extant studies have indicated that most developing countries are yet to fully embrace the application of identity management policy to the socio-economic and political life of their citizens (Olesen, 2011). The major impediment with regard to the adoption and implementation of identity management policy in Nigeria is the government's indifference towards adequate investment on identity management technologies. Al-khouri (2012) opined that the greatest obstacle to identity management improvement has been the disposition of the government and the longing to control the populace. Most times, it is only the enormous cost that is looked at oblivious of the myriad advantages to a developing country from setting up an effective identity management infrastructure. A good number of seminars, workshops and conferences have been organized by the Nigerian government, yet there is no significant achievement.

Though, some developing countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, Ghana, Cameroun and Egypt have been making some progress in national identity card production and issuance to their citizens, this does not bring the full benefits that an effective national identity management system, which goes beyond mere card issuance, brings. Countries such as USA, UK, Germany, Sweden, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and several others have all adopted a strategy which aims at promotion of an enabling legal, operational, infrastructural and technological environment for sustainable development, that uses a biometric-linked identification code to create a single, uniform, standard process for personal information, interoperability in data management, as well as a common gateway

for verification and authentication, towards efficient deployment of resources and service delivery across the economy through applications of services in management, health care, microelectronics, manufacturing, computer products, education, distribution, as well as finance.

The advent of new information technologies has opened numerous opportunities for socio-economic development in many nations. Trevidic (1983) asserts that it clearly "conveys to the forefront domestic conflicts inside every nation, between labour and capital forces and among capital forces themselves, and additionally external conflicts between nations and their respective economies". The point must be made that identity management does not develop in isolation; rather it develops according to the demographic and biometric environment it experiences. If not, the effect of identity management will be insignificant to the country's economy.

Economic Benefits of Identity Management Policy: The economic benefits of identity management both as a policy and in terms of its influence on economic development cannot be overemphasized. Effective identity management makes the world a safer place and creates new information pathways of high speed electronic citizens' data exchange. The economic implications of identity management are extensive: fraud reduction, e-transactions are just a few instances of the way in which identity management is changing how people communicate, become informed or do business.

The relation between identity management policy and economic development and benefit has been a subject of numerous studies, and all agree that there is a close link between identity management and economic development. In different researches by Birrell & Shneider, (2013) and Pang & Lips (2008) on economic development implications of identity management, the studies found an interdependent relationship between economic activity and identity management infrastructure investment at country levels.

The findings of the various research endeavours including this study align with the conclusion that identity management investments affect economic activity and that economic activity affects identity management investments, and there is a serious cut in Nigerian business costs resulting from a system of identification. Moreover, identity management creates new vistas: openness, connectivity, interoperability, decentralization, accessibility and effective service delivery. It unites individuals, joins like-minded groups, reduces cost of transportation, allows business exchanges to occur without crossing borders, promotes self-employment, and caters for identity needs of government and the private sector. It enables a single access point to, and common platform for using, identity information in order to guarantee true identity across different segments of the economy. It additionally makes possible the implementation of legal and business rules governing the use of biometrics data in the country. Identity management policy is the basic facility through which information needs of agriculture, commerce and industry can be satisfied. Industrial development requires the coordination of a series of operations, including labour recruitment, stock control, the acquisition of supplies, processing of materials, delivery of

goods to buyers, as well as record keeping and billing. Credit providers, for instance, have often expressed the view that the inadequate identity management system and in particular, absence of a reliable identity verification process have contributed significantly to the distorted growth and development of the consumer credit market in Nigeria. Identity management is vital to the effective coordination and control of many of these operations (LBS Breakfast Club Meeting, 2015).

Thus, in the light of the myriads of challenges that Nigerians encounter in their dealings with the international community, coupled with the suspicion that greets anything Nigerian, it is expedient that government strengthens the identity management system so that Nigerians can easily carry on with their legitimate activities like credit, visa, passport issuance, etc.

Social Benefits of Identity Management Policy: The social benefit of identity management is very significant and cannot easily be listed. In any case, a good number of the social benefits can still be discussed. The point must be made that the national identity management policy established the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) which was set up by Act No. 23 of 2007 with a mandate to issue National Identification Number (NIN) to all citizens and legal residents in Nigeria and also act as the custodian of the national identity database. A key requirement of the NIN is to minimize or possibly eliminate multiple/ghost identity to improve the efficacy of the service delivery systems across the economy. Biometric features are selected to be the primary mechanism for ensuring this uniqueness and through this unambiguous identification of individuals who are then assigned a NIN, a unique database is created which, with a verification and authentication infrastructure, is an important social infrastructure that will address a couple of societal vices and unleash significant economic opportunities in the economy.

Nigeria's past experience at building an ID card system was based largely on vendor dominated arrangements culminating in the turnkey contract with SAGEM SA in 2001. The current national identity management policy is the fulcrum of the paradigm shift from ID card issuance to Identity Management. As a major instrument of the policy, the National Identification Number (NIN) offers a wide range of social benefits, some of which are: maintenance of Law and Order through the security of lives and properties. Most criminal cases never get resolved due to multiple/duplicate/ghost identities. The increasing use of the NIN in transactions (which means repudiation is no longer possible) means it will be easier to identify the criminal. Deception and identity misrepresentation/theft- the basis of advance fee fraud and so on will no longer be easy. This will facilitate the job of law enforcement organizations. It will facilitate the timely management of criminality. Also, governance will be enhanced through the proper identification of individuals so that for example, the taxable adults are known, social welfare programmes can be better planned, managed and the poor to whom subsidies are targeted can be reached, planning with statistics is further enhanced, etc.

Lastly, the political process will be further supported. The requirement for a time frame for registration and or enrollment of eligible voters will become easier to manage with the institution of the NIN. Since the NIN will cover those who are also not eligible to vote, the requirement of a NIN for registration as a voter and or a candidate for an election will positively impact on the political process. It will provide an authentic basis for the review of Voters Register.

Conclusion: From the context of this study, some conclusion can be drawn with accentuation that identity management policy in its economic and social development role, is an impetus intended to facilitate national development. The advantages of identity management policy to a national economy ought to be measured as a contribution to other economic activities. More importantly, it ought to be considered as complementary to different segments of the economy. A sound national identity management policy is connected with and complements the development of the industry, agriculture, education, trade, the political process, housing, financial institutions and health. It is this complementary role of identity management that makes it appropriate to link proper planning and adequate investment in identity management to national economic and social planning and development. Therefore, government should make the environment conducive and convenient for an effective national identity management system. Also, the national identity management policy needs to be sustained irrespective of changes in government.

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