

Challenges of National Identification in Ghana

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Abstract

Ghana has grappled with its inability to have vital statistics or proper citizen identification system due to the absence of accurate and updated data. This issue has been the bane of governments since independence. Ghana noticing this started with an idea of identifying its citizens in 1973. This was not successful and several opportunities have been tried till in 2003, a national identification authority was established to resolve this issue. The exercise began in 2006 and was completed in 2011. Regrettably, the implementation phase of the national identification experiment is bogged down and it is being perceived as a white elephant programme. These came to light through interviews from officials with the National Identification Authority, press conferences and press releases all by the Authority. This paper looks at the challenges that have been encountered and are still being encountered.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this world, we all crave for attention and recognition. This can only happen if others are able to make us out from amongst the crowd. Others can relate to us if they are able to identify us out. One's identity makes the person stand out even though identification can take different forms. For some, they want to be identified with their tribe, alma mater, religion and a whole lot. In all these, it is important that the individual be identified.

Identification as stated by Thompson and Black (2006) is the act of establishing identity. An identity is whatever makes an entity definable and recognizable, in terms of possessing a set of qualities or characteristics that distinguish it from entities of a different type.

Individuals have been identified by legal names, locations, tokens, pseudonyms, and so on. Yet this system of identification is no longer adequate in identifying people as many people in the world bear the same name and might even be found in the same locality.

Subsequently, DNA and barcode systems were introduced as improvement to enhance the ability to define identity (Mordini and Massari, 2008; Thompson and Black, 2006). Jain et al, (2008) indicates that traditional methods of establishing a person's identity include knowledge based like passwords and token-based like ID cards mechanisms, but these surrogate representations of identity can easily be lost, shared, manipulated or stolen thereby compromising the intended security.

It was for purposes of identification and its management for the people of Ghana and non-citizens that a national identification authority was set up.

2.0 NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN GHANA

In 1973 national identity cards were issued to citizens in the border regions of Ghana including Volta, Northern, Upper (East and West), Brong Ahafo, and parts of the Western Region. The project was however discontinued three years later due to problems with logistics and lack of financial support. This was the first time the idea of national identification systems arose. (Allassani, 2013).

Again, in 1987, the Government of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) through the National Commission for Democracy (NCD) revisited the national identity card concept by establishing several committees including a Technical Implementation Committee (Allassani 2013). Due to economic difficulties, the issue was not pursued.

Once again, in 2001, when the National Economic Dialogue was convened, the National Identification System (NIS) was seen as a major policy concern (The Chronicle, 2011; Allassani, 2013). As a result, a multi-sectoral Technical Committee consisting of stakeholder organisations was established to:

1. Study and review the 1991 National Identification report;
2. Establish the main principles and the conceptual procedures for an integrated national identification system for Ghana;
3. Identify and recommend specific technologies for such a system; and
4. Develop a plan of action and a time frame for the implementation of the system

The Technical Committee completed its assignment in the year 2002 and submitted a report to Cabinet (<http://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Ghana%20Card>, <http://www.id-world-magazine.com/id-people/?p=1017>).

The report was accepted and formed a basis of decision and justification for the Government and State to:

1. Cover all citizens including legally resident non Ghanaians;
2. Help with crime prevention, healthcare, welfare services, disaster management;
4. Assist in the delivery of public services to targeted populations, banking services;
5. Create a credible voters register, social security;
6. Check the application and acquisition of passports and drivers' licences; and aid with increased revenue collection.

By 2003, the National identification Secretariat was set up by government to implement and manage the National Identification System (NIS). The Act establishing the National Identification Authority was passed in 2006 (Allassani 2013; NIA, 2014).

The Authority began the mass registration exercise in 2008, with equipments provided by Sagem Securite from France. Lots of temporary staff members were recruited for this exercise.

The registration was done at vantage areas in suburbs in the various districts, municipal and metropolitan assemblies designated as registration centres. Citizens went to these centres to register. The registration officials took data from the registrants as seen in the appendix 1. In addition, biometric information in the forms of four fingerprints was taken from each person. A chit (slip of paper) was then printed after the registration for the citizen to come back for the national ID card called the GhanaCard when ready. (NIA, 2014)

By the end of 2012, all the 10 regions in Ghana had been covered for data collection. The table in appendix 2 indicates the number of people who took part in the exercise.

Though this exercise has been completed, a lot of challenges were encountered in the course of implementation and so many challenges are still remaining to be surmounted. This paper looks at the major challenges that have affected the national identification exercise in Ghana.

3.0 CHALLENGES:

3.0.1 ADDRESS SYSTEM: The challenge in Ghana is the poor address system. This is so bad that citizens hardly can tell the names of streets that they live on. Again, most houses have more than one house number which makes it more confusing.

Improper street naming as well as poor house address system is very prevalent in Ghana. Most houses in old vicinities or suburbs have had two residential addresses. As such, any tenant of the house can choose to state which ever address is suitable for him or her in registering for the national identification exercise. This does not bring uniformity and creates a lot of chaos. The poor address system affects the ability of the Ghana National Fire Service to fight fires when they break out. (Amoako, 2014) The President in 2013 gave ultimatum to all Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives to complete the street naming and house numbering exercises in their areas by September, 2014. (Myjoyonline, 2013). This has not been wholly adhered to as some of the streets in the nation have not been named. (Citifmonline, 2014). For those named too, citizens on the streets have not been apprised with their new residential address. It is important that steps are taken to address this anomaly and help all citizens.

3.0.2 DATA: The first exercise done nationwide and data was collected using appendix 1. Firstly, the same form should not be filled by a citizen and a legal resident. This is due to the fact that more data is needed from the resident who has come to stay in Ghana than the Ghanaian citizen. A resident might have his family in his home country and there is the need to take that data and even the data of his or spouse in situations where he/she is married or an individual who can be contacted in case of emergency when the person is unmarried. Another data that is of necessity that must be obtained is the last address that the resident stays before coming to Ghana. These details are essential though the NIA is not the first point of call for the foreigners, its mandate makes a lot of institutions dependant on them for that hence the need to get all these.

Identifying an individual and in the light of national security, it is very imperative that we are able to identify an individual and even trace him or her to their place of abode.

All these data are missing from the form that is used for data collection for first issuance.

Again, the same form should not be used for first issuance of the national identification, update of information, replacement and renewal of the card. All these requests are different and needs to have forms that meet that purpose. An update form will primarily look at name change, and if name change which court attested to that etc. An update form can also caretaker for change in work or residential address of the individual or even his/her marital status.

3.0.3 CARD PRINTING / DISTRIBUTION: Total Cards printed Is 2,719,416 representing 17.87% of those who registered. The printing of cards was for only the Greater Accra and Ashanti regions. This number is woefully inadequate for the cards to be used. Only 900,000 of the printed cards have been distributed – distribution only in the Greater Accra Region. The whole essence of the exercise is defeated here as less than a million cards are in the system. This has been attributed squarely to financial difficulties but this cannot be the sole reason (Myjoyonline, 2014). The system or database to house the information was not ready when the

collection of people's data was not ready. The way it was handled also has contributed to the difficulty in distributing cards. People were made to go and come for their cards later after registrying in the Greater Accra Region..

Card distribution now will even be a problem due to migration. Over the 4 years, many people have moved houses, towns etc, so distributing the cards is problematic.

3.0.4 PLANNING: Planning and implementation are very crucial to the success of every project as well as financing. Information gathered from the NIA through interview indicates that the biometric exercise comprised of collecting people's or registrant's information. System for deployment became ready 5 years after Authority was set up. Ideally, the system should have been set up awaiting data to be captured or inputted into the database. the database of the NIA has only 9 million records of those 15 million who registered meaning 6 million registrants do not have their names in the database.. This means that about 6 million of Ghanaians still do not have their data in the database

4.0 CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION:

The challenges presented above are all surmountable and steps must be taken to address them. Currently, due to these challenges, there is low trust and usage for the National Identification Card. It is recommended that those cards that have been printed but not distributed should be distributed. A lot of those printed have not been distributed. People will gradually start using them which will build confidence. Additionally, resolution of the rest of the issues will depend on the distribution of the cards as that will enhance the usage of those cards.

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Appendices 1 and 2 are below.

CITIZEN <input type="checkbox"/> RESIDENT <input type="checkbox"/> RESIDENT <input type="checkbox"/>		APPLICATION FORM		
TYPE OF REQUEST*: First Issuance <input type="checkbox"/> Update <input type="checkbox"/> Replacement <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>		MRW Number*: M <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		
Date of Application (DD/MM/YYYY)*: <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/>		Registration Officer No*: <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>		
EXISTING CARD NUMBER (If Update or Renewal): <input type="text"/> - <input type="text"/> - <input type="text"/>		Registration Centre Number*: <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>		
SURNAME*: <input type="text"/>		SEX*: Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>		
FORENAMES*: <input type="text"/>		(Tick as applicable) Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Separated <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed <input type="checkbox"/>		
PREVIOUS OR MAIDEN NAMES: <input type="text"/>				
DATE OF BIRTH*: (DD/MM/YYYY) <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/>		If Estimate Date of Birth: <input type="checkbox"/> Current Nationality*: <input type="text"/>		
PLACE OF BIRTH		Nationality at Birth*: <input type="text"/>		
Village: <input type="text"/>		District: <input type="text"/>		Region: <input type="text"/>
Town: <input type="text"/>		State: <input type="text"/>		Country: <input type="text"/>
HOMETOWN* or FOREIGN ADDRESS FOR RESIDENT:				
Village: <input type="text"/>		District: <input type="text"/>		Region: <input type="text"/>
Town: <input type="text"/>		State: <input type="text"/>		Country: <input type="text"/>
NATURALIZATION / REGISTRATION CERT. NO.: <input type="text"/>				
Level of Education*: None <input type="checkbox"/> Basic <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary <input type="checkbox"/> Tertiary <input type="checkbox"/> Higher <input type="checkbox"/>				
Height* (cm): <input type="text"/>	OCCUPATION*: Main Catag.: <input type="text"/> Precise Catag.: <input type="text"/>		Student <input type="checkbox"/> Unempl. <input type="checkbox"/> Retired <input type="checkbox"/> Phys. Challenged <input type="checkbox"/>	
RESIDENCE ADDRESS IN GHANA or FOREIGN ADDRESS FOR GHANAIAN LIVING ABROAD*:				
Village: <input type="text"/>		District: <input type="text"/>		Region: <input type="text"/>
Town: <input type="text"/>		State: <input type="text"/>		Country: <input type="text"/>
RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS:				
House No: <input type="text"/>		Street Name: <input type="text"/>		
Community Area Name*: <input type="text"/>				ZIP/Postal Code: <input type="text"/>
POSTAL ADDRESS: <input type="text"/>				
Full Name & No of Spouse(s): <input type="text"/>				Nationality at Birth: <input type="text"/>
FULL NAME OF FATHER: <input type="text"/>				
PLACE OF BIRTH:		NATIONALITY: <input type="text"/> Is Father alive? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
Village: <input type="text"/>		District: <input type="text"/>		Region: <input type="text"/>
Town: <input type="text"/>		State: <input type="text"/>		Country: <input type="text"/>
FULL NAME OF MOTHER: <input type="text"/>				
MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME: <input type="text"/>		NATIONALITY: <input type="text"/> Is Mother alive? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
PLACE OF BIRTH:		NATIONALITY: <input type="text"/>		
Village: <input type="text"/>		District: <input type="text"/>		Region: <input type="text"/>
Town: <input type="text"/>		State: <input type="text"/>		Country: <input type="text"/>
Next of Kin in Ghana: <input type="text"/>				
Residential Address: <input type="text"/>				
VERIFICATION DOCUMENT (TYPE): <input type="checkbox"/> Refugee <input type="checkbox"/> Document NO.: <input type="text"/>				
DATE ISSUED: DD/MM/YYYY <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/>				
DUAL CITIZENSHIP ONLY: Other Country of Nationality: <input type="text"/> Dual Nationality Certificate No: <input type="text"/>				
SSNIT No: <input type="text"/>		IT IS AN OFFENCE TO KNOWINGLY GIVE INCORRECT INFORMATION APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE OR THUMBPRINT*		
Voter ID No: <input type="text"/>				
Passp. No: <input type="text"/>				
NHIS No: <input type="text"/>				
D/L No: <input type="text"/>				
No: <input type="text"/>		A <input type="text"/> 1709828		
*: Mandatory to fill SK0000064015-14				

Appendix 2
Percentage of Population Registered with NIA by Region

Region	Estimated Population	Number of People Registered	Percentage (%) Turnout
Central	1,561,937 [^]	1,232,671	78.24 (63.68*)
Western	2,036,468 [^]	1,586,581	75.57
Eastern	2,055,038 [^]	1,582,886	77.46 (67.96*)
Volta	1,606,889 [^]	1,344,104	84.50 (72.06*)
Greater Accra	3,469,983 [^]	3,205,611	87.50
Ashanti	3,485,906 [^]	3,026,474	86.82 (71.38*)
Brong Ahafo	1,744,722 [*]	1,063,378	60.94
Northern	2,223,236 [*]	1,088,194	48.95
Upper West	631,900 [*]	424,801	67.23
Upper East	941,890 [*]	661,750	70.26
Totals	18,257,969	15,216,450	

Note:

[^] Estimates based on year 2007 projections: * Estimates based on 2010 Population Census Results.

- Total cards printed is 2,719,416 (2,145,479 for Greater Accra Region and 573,919 for Ashanti Region);
 - Over 900,000 cards had been distributed in Greater Accra Region by the close of 2013.
- **Source: NIA, Ghana.**

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