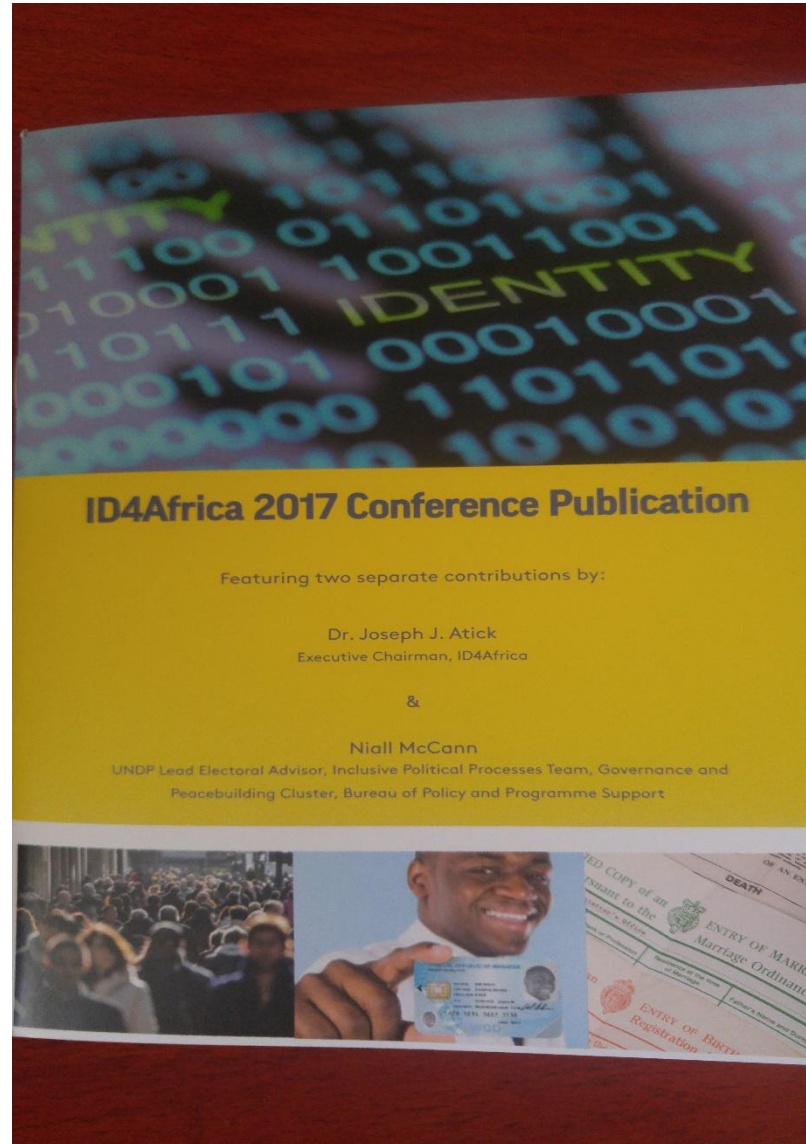# The expansion of digital identity systems – **What now for voter registration?**

Niall McCann
Lead Electoral Advisor
United Nations Development Programme

Summary points of...

ID4Africa 2017 Conference Publication

Featuring two separate contributions by:

Dr. Joseph J. Atick
Executive Chairman, ID4Africa

&

Niall McCann
UNDP Lead Electoral Advisor, Inclusive Political Processes Team, Governance and
Peacebuilding Cluster, Bureau of Policy and Programme Support

The move to BVR systems

- It is the **sovereign decision of UN Member States** how to register voters;

- No international commitments to guide a Member State on how to register voters;

- The move to BVR systems is reflective of a "digitization" of public administration, also evidenced by the embrace of digital identity;

- BVR has been **undoubtedly successful** in many countries in building/retaining public confidence in the accuracy of a voter register.

UNDP BVR support:

- Approximately 13 countries;

- In excess of $71m;

- Combined hardware and software systems;

- Capture of digital thumbprints for biometrics;

- Capture of digital photo for voter card, usually issued on the spot (no facial rec);

- No mobile, no smart device, no exclusively software or app-based.

UN Secretary-General concerns:

"*I remain concerned about the...**introduction of technologies...that may be too costly** for receiving countries to maintain in the long run...The success of an election and the use of technology is not...straightforward. Investments...need to be carefully considered. New technology may be best introduced as a solution to problems that might hinder the credibility of the process or the acceptance of results, **not as an end in itself**.*" (2013 report to the UN General Assembly on UN's work in support of elections).

12 years of BVR support – concerns

- Few feasibility studies;

- Under-budgeting of diffuse costs (transport, logistics, communications);

- Challenges of physical environment;

- Lack of national IT capacity, including field personnel;

- Proprietary software systems…

- …which contributes to significant foreign influence, and political sensitivities;

12 years of BVR support – concerns

- Less than universal success capturing biometrics;

- Single use systems, used once;

- Limited linkages with wider foundational population registration.

- **LOST OPPORTUNITY**.

Positive factors that will affect how states register voters

- The growth of digital services will continue to change the landscape of identity;

- Empowering individuals with more control of their identity data can expand coverage;

- The growth in digital transactions and e-commerce has enormous potential for financial inclusion growth;

- The international community's approach to digital identity growth has been historically uncoordinated but is catching up.

8

What now for voter registration? Six questions…

1. How will technology change impact voter registration (*e.g. digital ID not just for identity but for public/private service access*)?

2. Are we moving to a 'default' position of the voter register extracted from an ID register?

3. How can the complexity of national ID registration be rolled out with simpler VR?

4. How can the longer term timelines for national identity schemes address and accommodate shorter electoral timelines?

What now for voter registration?

5. How can the independence of a derived voter register be assured if its basis is a national population register (*e.g parliamentary oversight committees, voter audits?*)

6. How can accuracy of the voter register ultimately be consistently achieved *(e.g. rigorous exhibition period, online checking, and if needs be, tendered ballots?)*