Challenges and Solutions for the Development of an ID System in Post-Conflict Areas: Somalia as a Case Study

Presented

By
Hassan Omar Mahadallah, PhD
Senior Advisor of Somali National ID Program
Member of Somali Constitution Review Commission

INTRODUCTION

- An irresistible wave of globalization is sweeping the world. Modern technology is hemming countries together extensively, deeply and intensely.

- The gulf between nations (i.e., social, political, economic, etc.) is fast shrinking. No country is capable of escaping the trend.

- Within the gulf, there is a sort of "a tale of two cities"—i.e., one with the ID system fully integrated into the national development plan and one with an ID system almost non-existent, which we refer to as *ID Dark Zones*.

- The extent, depth, and the intensity of the intra- and inter-state interactions necessitate proactive, creative and effective programs to manage the system.

- The establishment of the ID4D Movement is a global attempt to reign on the fast evolving development. Hence the universal call for a legal, secure, reliable, and verifiable Identification System (ID System).
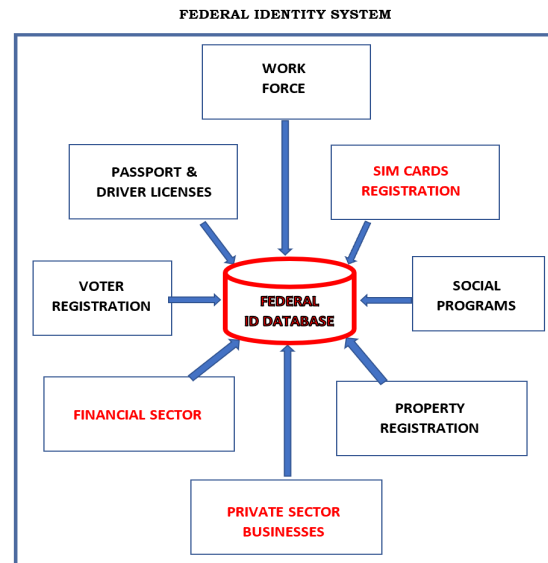
OUR RESEARCH

- The ID4Africa Movement is the Continental variant of the global movement.
- Our research is motivated by a national attempt to align our ID policy, principles, and technical specifications with the African movement.
- As such, it is less theoretical than practical in its approach.
- It stems from a practical experience we, the authors, have gained during our attempts to establish a national identification (ID) system and its implementing institution in Somalia.

IMMEDIATE MOTIVE FOR THE ID PROGRAM

- Somalia's economy is heavily dependent on financial remittances—from inside and outside the country.

- The remittance companies need to know who is patronizing them at any given time, i.e., the sender and receiver. They are nationally and internationally bound by the principle of Know Your Customer (*KYC*).

- During business transactions, customers are required to prove their identity by presenting a legal, secure and verifiable personal ID.

- Unfortunately, in Somalia customers are not able to meet the *KYC* requirement since the country does not issue these documents. In essence, Somalia is a quintessential an "*ID Dark Zone.*"

WHAT THE ID PROGRAM OFFERS

- The ID Program offers only foundational numbers and ID Card.

- These are breeding documents for all functional documents, such as drivers license, life events documents, tax IDs, occupancy license, passports, voter registration cards, etc., as shown in the figure given below:

FEDERAL IDENTITY SYSTEM

WORK FORCE

PASSPORT & DRIVER LICENSES

SIM CARDS REGISTRATION

VOTER REGISTRATION

FEDERAL ID DATABASE

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

FINANCIAL SECTOR

PROPERTY REGISTRATION

PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESSES

- The foundational number carries no semantics, such as age, gender, place of birth, religion, social origin, etc., but just a unique identifier

GUIDING QUERIES OF THE STUDY

Too many questions can be raised regarding the *"ID Dark Zones".* However, we chose to limit ourselves to the following four queries:

1. What are the factors inhibiting the institutionalization of a national ID systems and its implementing institutions in the *ID Dark Zones*?;

2. What are the implications of this *"ID-lessness"* for the national development plan in these areas?;

3. How can one navigate through the myriad of interests and conflicting views at different levels of Government to establish an ID system?; and

4. How can an *ID Dark Zone* state overcome the financial, social, legal, and political resistance against the establishment of a National ID system?

ID DARK ZONE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- The term "*ID Dark Zones*" refers to areas of the world, where there is no formally established, legal, secure, reliable, inclusive, and verifiable identification system.

- We include in this description countries where more than half of the population are unregistered and do not carry some form of legal identification document.

- The World Bank's ID4D Dataset Dashboard reveals the countries that fall within this category.

- These countries are in transition between tradition and modernity.

- They are essentially what Fred Riggs refers to as a "prismatic society."

FEATURES OF PRISMATIC SOCIETIES

Prismatic societies share the following social, economic and political features:

- 1. Low trust in the the modern state institutions;
- 2. The "sala bureaucracy," where the social pie is divided, is invariably dominated by one ethnic group, who gets a lion's share;
- 3. Rampant corruption;
- 4. Enduring social cleavages and structural violence; and
- 5. Suspicion of all new public policies and programs—for the reasons cited above.
- This is even more so, when the new initiative intimately touches one's identity, property or service delivery.
- Taken together, these issues seriously undermine the establishment of the national ID system and its implementing institution.
- We contend that the challenges against the establishment of an ID system and its implementing institution stem from these features.

SOMALIA: A CASE STUDY

- Somalia, where 77% of its population have no identification documents, tops the list of the World Bank.

- More than 2/3 of the population is unregistered, and do not possess legal, secure and verifiable ID.

- It is an archetypal *ID Dark Zone*.

- This is why we took it as a case study.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN SOMALIA

- It is hard to list in this short paper all the challenges we have encountered in the process of establishing the national ID system and its implementing institution.

- For this reason, we will limit ourselves to the main challenges we have faced in the creation of Somalia's ID system.

- We hold that these challenges are commonly found in all the countries we collective refer to as the *ID Dark Zones.*

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN SOMALIA

Divided Loyalty: Primordial Public V. Civic Public

- Somalia is essentially what Peter Ekeh refers to as a "primordial public."

- A primordial public is one moored in old tradition.

- Public loyalty is to the organic community.

- Opposite of this is a "civic public," which is beholden to the modern state.

- The ID system belongs to the civic sphere.

- This is one of the main reasons for the social opposition to the national ID system in Somalia.

CHALLENGES IN SOMALIA (Cont.)

Lack of ID Culture and Awareness

- Most Somalis today never had a national foundational ID number or card.
- Instead, they are used to functional IDs, which are issued for specific purpose:
  - Drivers Licenses
  - Birth certificates
  - Authentication Papers
  - Police IDs
  - Military IDs, etc.

CHALLENGES IN SOMALIA (Cont.)

Corruption and Competition for Scarce Resources

- Somalia is one of the poorest nations in the world. On top of that, it is also one of the most corrupt, according to Transparency Interntional.

- Civic leaders (especially those who lead the sala bureaucracy) viciously compete for any valuable public program that comes to their attention, such as the national ID system.

- This political competition compounds the difficulties associated with the establishment of the Program in Somalia.

CHALLENGES IN SOMALIA (Cont.)

Fear of the Unknown

- The new crop of Somali leaders seem afraid of the new national ID numbers and cards.

- They cannot fathom what it purports for them, their communities and nations.

- The prevailing mistrust in the post-conflict state adds to their unjustifiable fear.

CHALLENGES IN SOMALIA (Cont.)

Turf Wars.

- Due to institutional weakness in Somalia, the terms of references (ToR) of most public institutions are not well defined.

- Therefore, in some cases, issues of competences between institutions are settled by a turf of war.

- The Ministry of Interior insists that the national ID system should be housed in, and be managed by, the Ministry.

- The ID Team operating from the Office of the President, the remittance companies, banks, civil society, and the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are of the opinion that the ID Program should be independent, and be responsive only to an independent Board of Directors.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Political Support from Top Government Leadership.

- It is essential to harmonize the competing interests and loyalties in the country.

- Only a skillful leader--perhaps with a touch of charisma—can weave together these competing loyalties and interests to advance the common national interest.

PROPOSED SOLUTION (Cont.)

Initiating Local ID Movement

- The ID Program needs grassroot support.

- The remittance companies, banks, civil society, and INGOs are ready for mobilization.

- A campaign must be waged to coalesce the top leadership in the sala bureaucracy.

- The message must be circulated that simply states, "What is good for the civic public is also good for the primordial public"—i.e., your constituents.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS (Cont.)

Input and Consultation with Local ID Stakeholders.

- Building or starting a new public institution, such as the ID system, requires sufficient consultations with stakeholders and a vast civic education.

- The local input and consultation communicate sense of community ownership.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS (Cont.)

Support from the International Community

- The support of international community (whether bilateral or multi-lateral) is extremely important.

- Their help comes in three ways, i.e., as material resources, as a technical know-how, and as a political support.

- All three are indispensable for the successful execution of the ID Program.

PROPOSED SOLUTION (Cont.)

Strategic Implementation

- The ID Program is essentially a technical matter.

- It should be shielded, as much as possible, from politics.

- Wide public consultation and civic education must run along with it.

- Public ownership must be secured for the Program.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- This paper outlines the challenges and potential solutions associated with the establishment of an ID system and its implementing institution in the *ID Dark Zones*.

- We took Somalia as a case study

- The paper is based on our empirical observation from early attempts to establish the ID Program.

- Therefore, the paper is more practical than theoretical.

- We hope many countries in the ID4Africa Movement will benefit from it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS (Cont.)

- From the onset, the ID Team must make it clear to the public that what they offer are foundational numbers and IDs, not functional ones.

- The Team must explain that these are breading numbers and documents that facilitate the production and issuance of functional numbers and documents.

- Finally, they must ensure that the foundational numbers and ID cards have no cost or other precondition.

- All residents in the country must be enrolled once their personal identity is verified.