Liberia's National Biometric Identification System: a Foundational Identity Platform

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Presentation Focus

1. Briefly Survey Liberia’s Identity Journey

2. Share Insights into our Current Solutions

3. Show why Functional ID Issuers Consider us a Partner

4. Suggest that a High-coverage Ratio Population Register is a Great Option for Harmonization
Who Needed ID’s in the Beginning?

- In the beginning there may have been little need to identify people.
- Did a world made up of only Adam, Eve, Abel and Cain need fingerprinting?
How Liberia’s ID Needs Evolved

• Descendants of freed American slaves led independence efforts
• May have had a population of less than 100,000 people at independence in 1847
• By 1980 we were approaching 2 million people and had challenges
• 1983: first national ID system established
How our System is Designed?

- Re-started national ID conversation in 2008, with card seen as a tool for filling nationalism deficit
- National ID required for several documents/services
- Our National Identification Registry is designed as a population registry
- We have an AFIS for ten fingers
- We are combining 11 permanent and at least 50 mobile enrollment teams to be able to reach 3,000 locations nationwide
Our Technical Partner

- We chose Techno Brain Global, FZE
- They have been a great partner
- Some twenty-one top-tier firms expressed interest in working with us.
A Push for 99% Coverage

- Enrollment is free and required by law, but ID card is for a fee of US$5 or US$10
- Want to register 99% of the population in two years
- We have commenced with enrollment of Government employees and pensioners
- We will then move to enroll those who use mobile phones, banking and other important services.
- Challenge with low-income earners and informal sector could be addressed with external assistance
We Support – not Compete with Functional ID’s

- We have by far the largest enrollment platform: more than 70 teams
- Development partners who support and operate biometric ID databases are finding that it is better to get the foundational information from us
- ICT firms are finding that we will spur growth in the industry in Liberia
- Other government agencies are realizing that it is cheaper to collect the information from us
National ID for Voting

- Our Government has decided against biometric registration that is only for voting purposes. Next is for stakeholders to accept use of the national registry data for creating a voter roll. The signs are encouraging.
- Biometric voter registration will have a lower data center management cost, but a higher enrollment cost.
- It requires nationwide enrollment for each electoral cycle.
- **Illustration:** registration at a 3,000 localities over 18 years.
  - elections registration will happen **8 more times**
  - national registration will happen **0 more time**
Liberia’s NBIS: A vehicle for Harmonization

• We find a high-coverage ratio population/civil register an optimal path to harmonization
• For us, functional biometric ID systems were created because of the absence of a central database
• Data quality and specificity discouraged us from using existing data
• Medium to long-term benefits of a national register far exceed the cost of establishing one
Conclusion

- Liberia’s ID ecosystem is evolving with population growth and service complexity.

- With a foundational/national register everyone wins.

- Consider the building of a population register as an option for harmonization.
Thank you.