



Thematic Track: Open Challenges

Session: Gender Equity in Identity Systems-InF6

CONCEPT NOTE

Synopsis:

The panel will explore the impact of ID system policy on women and ways to avoid exclusion risks. It will feature a lineup of experts from international organizations as well as government agencies that have first-hand experience with inclusion and exclusion issues within ID systems, specifically when dealing with women.

Background:

The impact of ID systems on women is a question of significant importance and yet it is one where the dialogue within the international community continues to be lagging. Generally speaking, there is the belief that Identification systems empower women but may result in the opposite outcome if not accompanied by explicitly pro-women policies. More specifically, societies that build ID systems as foundation for access and participation must do so with extreme care to ensure that the ID does not become an obstacle that could disenfranchise traditionally economically and socially disadvantaged groups such as women.



Generally speaking, women in many societies typically do not control resources in their households (i.e. access to mobile phones or bank accounts), that may allow them to assert their rights in full as their male counterparts. Identifying key digital gender gaps, with the aim of proposing sustainable solutions for the digital inclusion of women, may lead to the empowerment of this group, including a strengthened voice and participation at all socio-economic levels. In our digital age, it has become evident that digital inclusion allows women to overcome some of the specific restrictions that are imposed on them by traditional societies. Establishing a digital identity for women can be one way to make a meaningful contribution towards achieving several important SDG Targets. More specifically:

- Civil registration for women improves access to health services – which are critical for women with infants.
- Registration in identification systems and the possession of an identity credential or card empowers women to vote, maintain property or business, own a SIM card, have a bank account, claim inheritance, and be counted as ‘head of household’ eligible for assistance under social protection programs.
- Absence of ID and civil registration can lead to negative consequences for women, for example in cases of divorce related to custody and child support.



Issues for Dialogue:

While in general ID systems are positively viewed by women's rights advocates, there are some serious concerns related to the access and usage that could result in institutionalized discrimination against women if proper protection is not implemented. These lead to policy recommendations for identity systems to make them pro-women. For example:

- Ensure that enrollment centers are accessible to women, by having enough of them so that mothers do not have to travel significant distances. Or that the enrollment campaigns include the use of mobile registration, where registration officers are able to go house to house, or to local civic centers in each village, or commune in order to save mothers from the need to travel long distances to enroll.
- Work through advocacy to mitigate the impact of social norms that present obstacles to women registration.
- Work to eliminate laws for civil registration that have a negative impact on women participation (e.g. the need to declare the name of the father before a child is registered, or the need to present a marriage certificate).
- Ensure that ID systems are accompanied by pro-women education and sensitization campaigns that explain to women the procedures and the technologies involved and the rights that they acquire in the registration process.
- The cost of enrollment and credentials could have a bigger impact on women participation than men. Generally speaking, it is believed that if there is a significant cost, families may prioritize male members in getting the ID document since they could justify its need for employment, security and mobility more than a female member. Recommendations are made to make registration free of charge.
- In certain cultures, the need for women to be photographed without a head cover (or to provide biometric data) could represent an issue that prevents women from seeking to enroll and obtain an identity card which would have a photograph of their uncovered face printed on it for all to see.

Call to Action (CtA) and Participation:

ID4Africa is seeking submissions for papers that will be presented during this session at the ID4Africa 2020 Annual Meeting. Presentation should aim to illustrate, provide evidence and case studies and expand on the partial issues list above. The objective is to try to characterize the risk that inadequate implementation of ID systems pose to gender equity and to provide policy recommendations backed by evidence from the field as to best ways to mitigate those risks.

ID4Africa intends to add Gender Equity to its list of Calls to Action, which elevates this subject to a recurring issue that will be revisited from time to time with solicitations for input and best practices from the worldwide community. As a CtA, we call on donors to support the subject and to enable more qualified and scholarly research on the open challenges.