

## REACTION TO THE NIA'S SUSPENSION OF NEW REGISTRATION

The Ghana Growth and Development Platform (GGDP) notes with satisfaction the decision of the National Identification Authority (NIA) to suspend its re-registration of Ghanaians for the issuance of new national identification cards (GhanaCards)<sup>1</sup>

The GGDP believes that the decision taken by the NIA will go a long way to smoothen out the rough edges of public opinion on the matter. It will no doubt open up the space for more inclusive and extensive consultations on the way forward.

But before any consultations are held, the GGDP wants to restate some of the recommendations it stated in its paper on the matter<sup>2</sup> for the consideration of the NIA:

- b. "That the ongoing streets naming and property addressing exercise must be completed before any attempt is made to undertake a new registration exercise. Indeed, no national database would be credible if it does not contain a proper residential and commercial address system where citizens can be located."

As stated in our paper, we believe that a credible national identification system can only be built on the backbone of a reliable database of street names and property addresses. Indeed, as the Authority itself recently admitted, one of the reasons why they were unable to distribute the over two million cards in their possession was the fact that they were unable to trace the people. What the GGDP is saying, therefore, is that the Authority should exercise patience and ensure that the ongoing street naming and property addressing exercise will be duly completed and found to be reliable before going ahead to re-register Ghanaians.

- c. "That instead of the NIA putting up new structures, the capacity of district assemblies should be built to undertake the exercise on a continuous basis in their respective districts. This would ensure that the usual panic and chaos associated with mass registrations would be avoided. Besides, local governance would also be enhanced if district assemblies are empowered to create and manage their own databases."

We also believe that the capacity of metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs) should be built to enable them play very important roles in the management of the national ID system. It should be possible for every MMDA to maintain its own database of residents or inhabitants for the purposes of local governance. So, while we refrain from proposing technical solutions to the Authority, we believe that a system whereby the MMDAs take full ownership of district databases will be helpful.

- d. "That instead of registering different groups of people at the same time, the process should be divided into phases and implemented by age cohorts. For example, we propose:

Phase one: ages 0 – 15

Phase two: ages 16 – 30

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<sup>1</sup>"NIA suspends expanded registration project," Daily Graphic, Wednesday, December 10, 2014, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>"The National Identity Management Crisis in Ghana," GGDP Current Issue Note 3, October 14, 2014, pp. 2-3.

Phase three: ages 31 – 45

Phase four: ages 46 – 60

Phase five: ages 61 and above”

Moreover, our position is that the new system should be able to allot permanent citizenship identification numbers to all Ghanaian children right at birth. This, we believe, will significantly minimize the high incidence of identity fraud, especially when it comes to the acquisition of statutory documents such as passports and drivers’ licenses, as well as the payment of taxes.

- e. “That the NIA must ensure transparency and accountability by making public the details of the agreement it has signed or intends to sign with IMS Ghana. Most particularly, we believe Ghanaians would want to know exactly how much is involved in the registration exercise.”

It would certainly be in the best interest of the Authority and, of course, the entire country if the agreement is made public (even if it’s been abrogated).

- g. “That the NIA must ensure that the new GhanaCards would be implemented in compliance with the decision of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS to introduce a common sub-region-wide ID card system for all ECOWAS citizens.”

Ghana now holds the chairmanship of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It is therefore incumbent upon us to ensure that whatever new card we issue to our citizens would not be out of sync with the proposed ECOWAS Biometric Cards approved by the 45th Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government meeting held in Accra in July 2014.

The GGDP commits and fully supports all efforts that are geared towards the building of a credible national identification system in Ghana.

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