

The importance of ‘identity for all’ for the development of nations

Nation building begins with registering births to provide a foundational ID to all citizens. Without a foundational ID, it is almost impossible for citizens to claim fundamental rights such as healthcare, social protection, and education.

IDENTITY

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To combat global challenges including poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation, the United Nations has set 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The basis of these goals is inclusion, which starts by providing each person with a legal identity¹. Without a legal ID, it is almost impossible for citizens to claim fundamental rights such as healthcare, social protection, and education.

We caught up with Keoagile Magasa, Regional Sales Manager for southern Africa to find out more about how IDEMIA, thanks to its comprehensive identity expertise, is helping countries across Africa implement nation-building infrastructures to ensure inclusion for all citizens.

Could you explain what nation building is?

In layman’s terms, nation building is the process of bringing people together from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and religions to construct or structure a nation-state for long-term stability. IDEMIA supports this process by assisting governments in providing a foundational identity to its people—and it starts with birth registration. A birth certificate allows citizens to obtain an ID document, passport or driver’s license. However, I would like to emphasize that a foundational ID is so much more than an ID document: it gives citizens a nationality, and more importantly, a sense of belonging. This is crucial to their growth in society. It also gives people the ability to exercise their rights in their birth country and access fundamental services and political privileges. These services are essential to a citizen’s wellbeing and include education, healthcare, social protection, the right to vote, and also private sector services such as banking and credit facilities.

From a government’s perspective, nation building allows governments to have a record of occurrences and characteristics of vital events of the local population. Understanding birth rates, death rates, and even marriage rates helps governments with policy formation and planning. Using population-forecasting statistics enables policy makers to ensure that their country is well equipped for the future. Spatial development, infrastructure planning, and even water and sanitation needs, all stem from understanding the national statistics of a country. Governments need to use statistical analysis to ensure better and safer lives for their citizens.

How can nation building help African countries?

Africa is the world's second largest and second most populous continent after Asia, with approximately 1.3 billion people. This equates to 16% of the world's population. According to the African Development Bank, Africa is the second most inequitable region in the world. Six out of ten of the most unequal countries worldwide are in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in southern Africa.

The pain point of Africa is the socio-economic disparity between different countries, and even within each country. Difference in income, education, employment, and social standing has led to national unrest and conflict. Nation building, through the use of an identity infrastructure, is about helping governments bridge the gap and understand the population distribution per region – this will enable them to create a plan to better equip local communities.

The nation-building platform looks at critical elements such as infrastructure, having enough education and healthcare facilities, sanitation and water systems, housing, transportation etc. The United Nation's Agenda 2030 consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals; the top six goals include no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education and clean water and sanitation. This Agenda stems from the provision of a foundational identity. Without an identity, citizens are unaccounted and unplanned for by the local government, preventing them from claiming their rights or participating in government processes.

In the current global economy, citizen identification has changed rapidly, which is why some African Governments have implemented cutting-edge technologies to help securely identify their citizens. Biometric systems are being widely used to ensure that identity theft is limited. While the base of identity has been established, developing nations need assistance to keep up with the ever-changing digital ecosystem. The digital age has made it easier for citizens to use smart technologies as an everyday tool, and it makes sense for African Governments to put digitalization at the center of nation building. Just as the private sector has made online application a common usage for their customers, governments should do the same for their citizens.

How does IDEMIA help governments with nation building?

I see IDEMIA as an enabler to the Governments of Africa. Its fundamental role is to make citizens lives safer and easier. How does IDEMIA do that? I think it is by simplifying government processes and services by bringing registration or reporting of life events closer to the people.

As an African citizen, I would be thrilled to be able to register a baby's birth at the hospital digitally using smart technology. Decentralized registration offices should be made available to those who do not have access to smart technologies. Comprehensive assessments conducted by the United Nation echo this sentiment, stating that nation-building reforms largely recommend decentralization to increase the supply of registration services. These assessments revealed that the long distances people often need to travel to reach registration centers, and the number of visits they need to make in order to complete the registration process, create a significant financial burden.

IDEMIA's role is to bring efficiency to government operations and services by developing cost-effective technologies that can address the physical or digital needs of communities.

What are the specific technologies needed to start the nation-building process?

A robust, modular, interoperable, integrated civil registration and vital statistic system. It needs to be able to record occurrences and characteristics of life events pertaining to the local population. This means recording vital events such as birth, deaths, marriages, and divorces, to give governments statistics they can use to anticipate the future needs of a country.

Integration is vital, as it will assist authorities with their eGovernment strategy – this is the foundation of services being accessed by other government departments, businesses, and citizens.

Lastly, to provide real-time information for policymaking, the statistics must be processed by a great analytical engine.

Digitalization of processes is vital; however, technologies should incorporate both digital and physical processes.

How does IDEMIA's technology differ from what is already available on the market?

IDEMIA has a comprehensive end-to-end system that includes both the physical and digital ecosystem. IDEMIA's IDway is at the heart of the nation-building program, it provides each individual with a secure and unique legal ID that is valid from birth and throughout the citizen's life. We have extended identity to a digital platform that allows citizens to prove their identity using smart technologies. Physical documentation has been securely transformed into digital documentation that can be stored on a smartphone or tablet.

Our solutions are about breaking down governmental bureaucratic processes, which can be cumbersome and frustrating. Our role is to help governments implement modern infrastructures in order to offer services to all citizens. Our focus is and always will be to make citizens lives safer and easier.

We want to assist governments in building nations where inclusion is the foundation, and where each citizen is considered important and is therefore given access to their fundamental human rights.