



SPOTLIGHT ON LIBERIA: INTERVIEW WITH MR. J. TIAH NAGBE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION REGISTRY OF LIBERIA



We are happy to have with us Mr. J. Tiah Nagbe, Executive Director of the National Identification Registry who will answer a few questions about Liberia's recently launched National Identity Card System.

Q: what would you say are the benefits you see in store for Liberia now that the National Biometric ID system has been implemented?

There are of course enormous benefits, all of which may not be realized at once but will fully develop over time as the system becomes upgraded and as facilities and technologies evolve. Being in the inception stage, there are systems we have observed in other countries that we will not be able to implement right now, but will look forward to doing so as we gather strength. The critical benefits will show up over time as the functionalities of our system evolves and as we begin to reap the positive results that other countries are already experiencing.

Through this system we look forward to offering a variety of benefits in terms of service delivery both within the private and public sectors. In the public sector for instance, government transactions such as the issuance of passports, drivers' licenses, registration with various government institutions and so on, can be processed more easily. Within the private sector we can adequately verify people's identities and avoid cases of fraud, particularly those that tend to occur within the financial sector. We look forward to seeing significant improvements in these and other areas under the new identity system.

One of the key benefits of our national identity system is to maintain the uniqueness of our citizens and show our appreciation for their being a part of Liberia. We are proud that one thing everyone will have in common is their national ID card which stands as evidence that they belong to the same country.

Q: What were the challenges you faced in preparing the nation for this new system?

The most critical challenge to-date has been financing the project. We however had good support from the President of our Republic, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who allocated funds towards developing the project.

Another challenge we faced was in finding the right technical partner that would be able to handle the planning and supervision of the project. We also had setbacks with our procurement processes which created delays. But we are pleased that we are gradually overcoming many of these challenges and moving forward with the project.



Q: You mentioned financial challenges. Were there any organizations that helped to provide financial assistance?

We did not have financial support from other organizations. In the past we had discussions with the World Bank but we can understand where they are being sought after by several other African nations seeking financial support to build their identity ecosystems. For sure the World Bank would not be able to fund all these projects and must measure the critical needs.

In moving forward with a solution, we adopted a business model whereby each person will be charged a minimal fee for the card. The government does subsidize the cost but essentially we are able to alleviate the full financial strain of the project by charging an initial fee to users of the card.

Q: Liberia has been journeying with ID4Africa since inception and has increasingly become more active in the Movement with higher levels of attendance each year. Can you tell us the ways in which ID4Africa has helped shape the National ID project and system in Liberia?

ID4Africa has been of tremendous benefit to us. Before we attended our first event, we knew we were embarking on a journey to which we had limited knowledge. ID4Africa gave us an opportunity to bring ourselves up to speed with countries that have already implemented similar projects. At the time of ID4Africa, we were already compiling a list of countries that we would need to visit, one of which included Rwanda. Through ID4Africa, not only did we have the opportunity to visit Rwanda and witness their achievements first-hand, but we were able to significantly benefit from a Forum that built our knowledge and put us in contact with hundreds of other players in the identity ecosystem.

This unique advantage ID4Africa presented helped open our eyes to a vast range of possibilities we could not have achieved on our own. Without this platform we would have needed to face the challenge of visiting several countries at a great expense. But here we were privy to an environment that brought us more insight and experience than we could ever have expected. It allowed us to establish useful connections and carry out one-on-one dialogues with key representatives from organizations such as the World Bank, renown suppliers and other groups that have since played a pivotal role in guiding our project forward. We could not have achieved this at such magnitude through our own effort and resources.

Since ID4Africa, we have been involved in on-going discussions and visits with other governments who have advanced 2, 3 and 5 years ahead of us. Through them we continue to carve out our own concrete development plans. We can examine where we are today and the direction we wish to take based on advancements others have already made. We have established good relationships with our peers from other African and international nations, tapping into their history and experiences to learn from them and create a vision for ourselves that is grounded in the evidence of their achievements.

ID4Africa also helped us bridge discussion between ourselves and other government agencies in Liberia. Prior to attending ID4Africa, dialogues between our different agencies on the topic of common systems were not going as smooth as we would have preferred. This was understandable as we all had limited familiarity with how these systems operated in other countries. However, after the 3rd event in Namibia where we had wider representation, our discussions began to change simply because perspectives changed. In returning to Liberia, we were able to present vivid insight on how the industry really works and how harmonized systems can drive the industry forward. Our experience was just phenomenal, both in terms of building networks internationally and supporting our own local effort.



Q: What would be your message to other government officials focused on enhancing their national ID infrastructure/systems, or who have not yet begun but are planning to? What would be your message to them in terms of attending ID4Africa?

I don't see why they shouldn't attend. They have every reason to attend! ID4Africa helped give us confidence and access to vital resources we can tap into. Outside of the conference itself you have full-on access to a growing network. We have contacts, we have phone numbers, we have relationships with many counterparts from other countries who are always ready and willing to assist with our questions when we're seeking direction.

Our experience has been nothing but positive. We believe ID4Africa should be attended by just about every relevant government ministry, particularly those that have common systems. Their questions and concerns can be addressed, they will realize the importance of collaboration and how to go about establishing it. They will see trust develop among other entities as they begin to understand that the solutions being introduced are not being used for the selfish interest of one agency at the expense of another. They will learn to unite and agree on the best ways to approach present development plans as relative to the nation's future.

The reason we were able to come together with other agencies in our country was because of ID4Africa. We can bring the experiences and consensus from an international Forum such as this and use it as a language or tool to build internal discussions that will facilitate progress in our countries. I would encourage all government authorities in Africa to join this network.

Thank you Mr. Nagbe for your time and for sharing your experience with us. We applaud the Government of Liberia for this magnificent undertaking. We are proud to see the changes taking place and wish you, your team and your nation a very successful outcome to the National Biometric ID Card project. We will certainly look forward to hearing more about Liberia's project during your keynote address at ID4Africa 2018 in Abuja.