ID4AFRICA
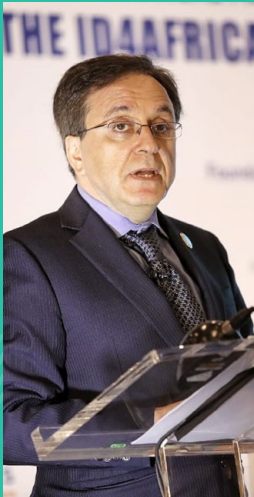
An ID4AFRICA Special Report

July 7, 2020

The Impact of COVID-19 on Identity Management: A Collective Perspective

By Dr. Joseph J. Atick
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Acknowledgement

The views in this blog were influenced by what I have learned from all the panelists who participated with me in the ID4Africa Webinar Series on the impact of COVID-19, as well as the active members of the ID4Africa Community whom I consulted. As such, what follows is an executive summary of the collective opinions of the Community. For deeper insights, I invite the reader to watch the replay of the webinars available on our YouTube Media Channel, as well as to browse content available on the ID4Africa Knowledge Hub, which is continually updated with featured articles and blogs. In addition, please be on the lookout for more thematic sessions which we will be producing over the months to come.

ID4AFRICA ADOPTS A HYBRID MODEL FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COVID has had an impact on all aspects of life globally, and identity management is no exception. Recently ID4Africa set out to discover, in detail, how its stakeholders have been affected by this pandemic. The objective was to learn what the path forward entails and how the identity community is adapting to continue to support the mission of identity-for-all, under the new context, and with a dramatically changed demand landscape.

We engaged with representatives of our 3 main stakeholder groups—*the African identity stakeholders, the international development agencies, and the industry*—through private consultations, as well as through a series of public webinars.

The webinars attracted immense interest, generated meaningful dialogue and raised even more questions, which made it clear that we will need to continue leveraging this medium throughout the year. This success has demonstrated the resilience of the ID4Africa Movement and its ability to adapt. The virtual meetings reunited hundreds of attendees (for example nearly 800 attendees for the first webinar with 48% coming from

the African Continent) from 92 countries around the world including from nearly every African country.

Despite this dazzling success, we continue to believe that online meetings cannot totally replace our in-person Annual General Meeting (AGM). The virtual meetings offer a new channel with a different value proposition for knowledge exchange and ongoing collaborations, but they still leave a lot to be desired for, such as networking and the collective sparks of inspiration which spontaneously emerge when like-minded people gather in the same place to discuss.

Going forward, our intention is to hold our AGM, when that is permitted by the host country, while at the same time supplement it with thematic engagements online throughout the year, an activity which we already have started. Furthermore, we intend to stream the sessions of our AGM in real-time, in order to broaden our reach and serve the community better, by giving our members the choice to be part of the conversation whether or not they choose to participate physically or virtually.

This is the *hybrid model* for community engagement that we are now committed to. We believe it is the right model for reinforcing our resilience against public health shocks and disruptions in international mobility. *It demonstrates how the ID4Africa Movement has adapted to the new realities and constraints brought about by COVID-19.*

COVID HAS HALTED IDENTITY ENROLLMENTS AND REGISTRATION

By far, this is the most visible impact of the pandemic on the progress of identity systems, especially in Africa. Confinement measures, closures of government enrollment bureaus and the public concerns about contagion from touching surfaces, have put the brakes on all programs that were underway, or about to be launched. While the delay is worrisome, the consensus is that this is a temporary speed bump and that the onboarding of the population will ramp up after the identity authorities have had the opportunity to adapt to the new normal.

In addition, it appears that COVID has totally disrupted birth and death registrations due to closure of civil registration bureaus and the confinement measures. The disruption of such fundamental function could have been less dramatic, had governments put in place digital declaration and registration protocols which leverage mobile platforms to perform civil registration functions. Unfortunately, none of the countries in Africa have already implemented a mobile-based remote civil registration platform that could have kept up with the registration flows.

COVID HAS PROFOUNDLY IMPACTED DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES OPERATIONS

To start with, it has forced the suspension of all field work and routine missions. It has shifted agencies' activities towards immediate COVID response, and it has forced a profound change in their concept of operations to adapt to the new normal of virtual work from a distance. The development agencies have even streamlined their administrative processes to make them more efficient and responsive to the new digital platforms used to conduct their operations.

At the same time, development personnel are reportedly busier than ever, their productivity is higher, and collaborations are on the rise, among actors not only from different services within the organizations themselves, but also from across the development community and civil society.

On the negative side, lack of operational experience with the new medium, lack of field access and the diversion of resources and attention from routine missions have emerged as factors that could be detrimental to agency missions' long terms.

COVID WAS A WAKE-UP CALL FOR MANY GOVERNMENTS

The pandemic has shocked many governments throughout the world. It has exposed inadequacies in their capacities to respond to their populations' social and emergency needs, including in public health management, benefits disbursement, unemployment assistance, poverty and hunger alleviation. Governments that did not have digital assets (like digital identity, eGov, etc) that they could leverage to know and deliver assistance to their people, were caught unprepared.

COVID demonstrated the need to reform government systems and population management tools urgently. It is expected that the economic woes in the aftermath of the pandemic will force the adoption of more dramatic digital governance platforms that integrate social safety nets and encourage digital economies, anchored on digital identity. We believe COVID is the event that will force those authorities who were skeptical about the necessity of *digital transformation*, to develop the political will to accelerate their adoption

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of totally digital governance. This will be demanded by their populations that may resort to taking things into their own hands, should their governments appear to be incapable or unwilling to provide them with the tools to restart their lives.

Another dimension to the needed reform in the short term, is the requirement for governments to make rapid decisions and not continue to work within the prior frameworks of large long-term projects. COVID response should be fast tracked so that immediate help can reach the people that need it most before their situation worsens.

COVID EXPOSED FAULT LINES

While the pandemic showed that many governments were unprepared to manage the emergency needs of their populations, it has also uncovered another disturbing defect—the fault line between those with and without access to the digital world. The reality is even more disturbing than that, since COVID has impacted population segments disproportionally, with the poorest being the hardest hit.

Those who have access to digital tools were able to shelter in place, conduct their lives from the safety of confinement, including engaging in online purchasing of essentials, and working from a distance. These groups have not suffered that much during this pandemic. On the other hand, those who lacked access—for example the poor or those without adequate infrastructure, digital credentials, digital education, or simply little to no opportunities because of the nature of how they earn a living—have suffered and will continue to suffer significantly going forward. Governments need to be able to identify and target their assistance, on a priority basis, to those who are on the other side of the digital divide (the digitally poor), along with the economically poor and vulnerable.

This is in addition to their responsibility of providing the total population with the tools they need to restart the economy and to live with the pandemic. Failing that responsibility will expose the country to deep structural problems that will arise with the swelling in the ranks of the poor and the digitally excluded.

IDENTITY PROJECT FUNDING REMAINS PROTECTED AND MAY RISE

While COVID has halted the execution of projects, it is not expected to impact the funding landscape, which will remain strong in view of the increased demand that COVID has generated for digital identity. That said, it is expected that there will be revisions in roadmaps for identity projects in order to respond faster to shifting priorities which privilege public health, social safety nets and digital service delivery.

" REVISIONS IN ROADMAPS ARE EXPECTED FOR FASTER RESPONSE TO SHIFTING PRIORITIES. "

# COVID IS LEADING TO CALLS FOR MORE PPP AND COLLABORATION

The scale of the challenge is making it clear that governments cannot meet it alone. They need to mobilize the private sector within *Public Private Partnership* frameworks, and they need to work collaboratively together with the global community. COVID is a global pandemic and requires internationally coordinated response. The private sector is calling on governments and development agencies to be more proactive in opening the doors for such collaborations. Special initiatives such as hackathons and development bootcamps should be encouraged. Industry associations also need to speak with a coherent voice in representing their sectors in order to ensure that their members are able to bring the value-add to the COVID response efforts at all levels.

COVID HAS CREATED DEMAND FOR TOUCHLESS BIOMETRICS

The concerns around touching surfaces, during the enrollment process or use, is putting into question the long-term viability of contact fingerprint technologies. This creates an opportunity for touchless biometrics, which are now being considered more seriously by the identity authorities. These include contactless fingerprints, face and iris recognition solutions. The impact on the workflow, deduplication processes, interoperability with contact legacy data, plus usability for deduplication and authentication, needs to be explored by the Community in the months to come to develop good practice recommendations for touchless biometrics.

It is important to note that the interoperability of touchless and touch fingerprints is not evident *a priori*. Touchless fingerprints work by capturing images of a curved finger, while touch fingerprints capture the image of a flattened finger through internal refraction on a platen or through electrical variations on a TFT surface. International and independent testing bodies, such as NIST will have a very important role to play in setting expectations for the levels of achievable interoperability.
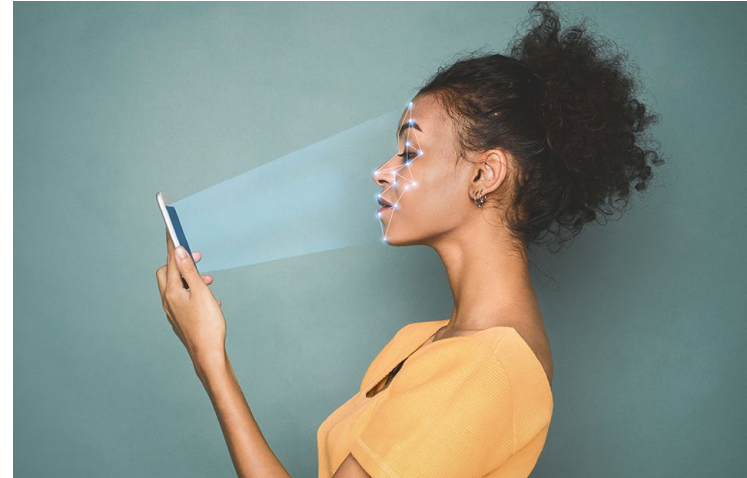
# LIVING WITH CONTACT FINGERPRINTS IN THE MEANTIME

While the future favors touchless, today's reality demands that identity authorities adopt pragmatic measures to allow them to continue to work with touch fingerprints, which dominate the landscape of biometrics in Africa, until a touchless alternative is validated on large scale.

Identity authorities are now putting in place measures for disinfecting publicly shared fingerprint terminals, before and after each use, they are enforcing social distancing and the use of masks by the staff and the enrollees in their enrollment centers and other points of contact with the populations. Other measures include the deployment of pre-enrollment portals to allow applicants to provide biographic data online and to schedule appointments at their nearest enrollment bureau. These help minimize the time applicants need to spend at bureaus and can allow for better crowd management by limiting the number of applicants physically present at a time.

In this regard we also see some interesting avenues for industry innovation in the development of a new class of sensors that self-disinfect. These include sensors with anti-microbial coating, or that use electroluminescence and UV light to kill pathogens automatically. Explorations of such innovations have already started.
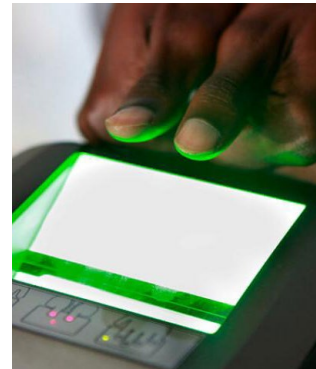
COVID HAS CREATED UNPRECEDENTED DEMAND FOR END-TO-END DIGITAL
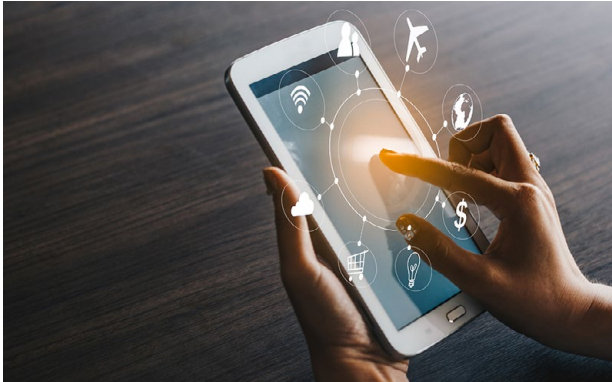
While the interest in digital identity existed already for many years prior to COVID, the pandemic has created a sense of urgency. It has created a clear and present need for remote access to services or assets, in support of working from home, or in order to receive government assistance, or to affect online cashless payments. It has also gone beyond creating an urgency, by demanding an identity that is more

digital by design and from the start—a*n identity that is end-to-end digital* that is better adapted to support national digital transformation strategies, being accelerated by COVID.

Being end-to-end digital requires digital onboarding (see below), screening, service delivery, payment, and access backed by authentication. The consensus is that the transition to a totally digital experience has been accelerated by at least a decade by this pandemic.

COVID CALLS FOR ALTERNATIVE IDENTITY SCHEMES

The situation has also opened the doors to the acceptance of alternative types of identity systems, whose importance is measured by their utility and the speed of deployment, even if they do not meet the same level of trust as that for government ID systems. It is clear what the world needs now is not legal identity by 2030, but a useful and safe identity-for-all, NOW. There is a myriad of possible identities that could compliment and even coexist with official national identity systems. These include community identity, self-sovereign identity, commercial identity schemes and social media identity. While before, governments were reticent to explore partnerships with non-official identity schemes, the need for immediate identification means and platforms to reach the population is leading to fundamental changes in their view of the potential of non-official identity schemes in enriching the identification ecosystems in their country.

> **" IT IS CLEAR WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW IS NOT LEGAL IDENTITY BY 2030, BUT A USEFUL AND SAFE IDENTITY-FOR-ALL, NOW. "**

DEMAND FOR SELF-ENROLLMENT AND ONBOARDING SURGES

As stated previously, COVID has made the enrollment process, which was already challenged, significantly more difficult, and we expect this to persist even in a post COVID era.

The situation calls for alternative pathways to in-person onboarding and for screening. One promising avenue to explore is self-enrollment, where applicants can use an official mobile app to capture biographic data, scan supporting documents and include biometric data in the form of a selfie image and a photo of their fingerprints. The data package would be encrypted and submitted to the national authority's central database, where it would undergo remote vetting and biometric deduplication, and if all is well, a unique digital identity number would be issued and communicated securely to the applicant almost in real time. This number could be kept valid within a limited period of time, during which the applicant is expected to present him or herself in-person to an authorized enrollment center, in order to validate their enrollment.

The understanding is that the digital identity number, can be used to demand services from other agencies, or relying parties such as banks and insurance companies, or to conduct limited value transactions. The challenge with this type of unattended onboarding process is the vetting and screening of individuals to make sure that no robots, synthetic or stolen identities are allowed to penetrate the national identity registers, by submitting fraudulent data. The use of social media footprints along with video conferencing-based interviews with the applicants could help combat identity fraud and maintain the needed trust in the identity systems.

This is a paradigm shift for the identity authorities, who are used to the classic in-person models, where applicants are received, interviewed, and vetted by a trained agent and only then subsequently issued a digital identity which can include physical and dematerialized credentials. In addition, no best practices, within the government as opposed to commercial sector, exist that identity authorities can follow for a totally digital and risk-free onboarding process. We expect this to be a hot area for innovation,

" EMPHASIS ON INCLUSION SHOULD REMAIN HIGH ON THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA. "

and many of the development agencies –e.g. the World Bank through their 2nd Mission Billion Challenge— are looking to motivate the industry to advance in this regard. We see the private sector providing significant leadership in this area since commercial digital identity, including digital onboarding, has been in place even prior to COVID.

It is important to emphasize that the need for digital onboarding is not just a matter of convenience, it is an urgent necessity in order to avoid exclusion in digital service delivery. Countries have to identify their populations and their needs so they can deliver aid to them in a timely manner. The fact that a digital identity could be obtained in a very short time, almost real-time, adds an important value as it allows quick access to the world of benefits that digital identity is designed to unlock. But if access is limited to those who do not need it, this would be a recipe for failure from the start—*that is why emphasis on inclusion should remain high on the development agenda.*

MOBILE IS SURGING AS PLATFORM FOR DIGITAL ACCESS

While mobile ID (mID) was under development prior to COVID, the demand for mobile ID has seen a significant surge since. While before mID was viewed as a convenient add-on option to a physical ID (even a smart ID), it is now viewed by many as the primary ID of choice. This is understandable given that the use of one's own device can alleviate health concerns, while providing a fully enriched access experience. We see the use of mobile devices in airports for travel as well as for cashless payments, in addition to access to government services (*see "Cashless payment platforms surge", below*).

The mobile platform is also attractive for onboarding people, since it has been adapted by the telcos, to perform such function. The telcos have become adept at identity management of people and at the management of their financial assets attached to their mobile accounts. This is why mobile money has seen significant growth in places where traditional infrastructure was not in place. Now it is boosted by the fact that traditional infrastructure, even when present, is no longer preferred due to health concerns. This is a powerful convergence of two drivers—absence of infrastructure in some places, and unusable infrastructure in other places.

Extrapolating the role of mobile in development to its logical conclusion, one could argue that governments and telcos should consider providing the poor and the digitally excluded with mobile phones to help bridge the digital divide and to be in position to reach out to these people to deliver information and aid.

CASHLESS PAYMENT PLATFORMS SURGE

It is not surprising to see the surge in interest in digital payments. Here we expect innovations to continue, especially when adapted to social safety nets and humanitarian assistance. Examples such as eVouchers and other forms of restricted money, which can ensure that the provided aid is used for what it is intended for in the first place, will continue to grow. The question of interoperability of these platforms and their openness have been thrust to the forefront as more programs are quickly looking for platforms to reach their beneficiaries, without being locked by proprietary solutions.

COVID IMPACT ON SDG 16.9

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) were formulated pre COVID. Today the pandemic has called into question the SDGs as a guide to the development agenda's priorities. In particular, SDG 16.9, which calls for legal identity for all including birth registration by 2030, feels out of touch with the current realities. *The target deadline is way too far, and legal identity is not what is immediately needed*. The priority should be to provide the population with digital identity that they can use to receive services and to participate in the economy, and to do it very quickly (by 2022 as suggested by some of the panelists). It is also clear that the pathway to legal identity needs to be different. For the newly born, it can be legal identity first, through birth registration, followed by digital identity which is derived from legal identity. On the other hand for those who have never been registered at birth, the pathway to legal identity needs to start with digital identity, which should be accepted as a proxy to legal identity if issued by a government body with recognized authority in identity management. That means SDG 16.9 can stay, although accelerated, but the measurement for the indicator (percentage of children under the age of 5 that have a birth certificate) needs to be altered dramatically to count digital identity in the total percentage of individuals that possess legal identity.

This is the view that was expressed very clearly during the 2019 Annual Meeting of ID4Africa and which is summarized in the blog entitled "What kind of identity does Africa need?" https://www.id4africakhub.org/post/what-kind-of-identity-does-africa-need

COVID simply reinforced the views about the priorities of the continent, expressed in that article.

DIGITAL VS LEGAL IDENTITY

COVID REAFFIRMS THE PRINCIPLES ON IDENTIFICATION

Principles on Identification were formulated collaboratively by the majority of the organizations involved in identity for development today. They were published before the COVID pandemic and were undergoing the periodic refinement when the pandemic hit.
They can be accessed here:
https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/213581486378184357/principles-on-identification-for-sustainable-development-toward-the-digital-age

They represent a set of common principles fundamental to maximizing the benefits of identification systems for sustainable development while mitigating their risks. The principles are anchored on three pillars: *Inclusion, good design and governance*.

There is a consensus by the Community that COVID does not alter the principles, it simply reaffirms them. Each of the three pillars has become even more important than ever in view of the demand and the risks that the new environment is creating.

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AUTHENTICATION STANDARDS RELAXED BUT NOT CYBERSECURITY INVESTMENTS

The immediate priority right now is total inclusion and leaving no one behind in this new digital world. As a result, many government programs (even private sector such as telcos and banks) have relaxed their authentication standards for access to services. Some are even accepting verification without biometric or other strong authentication measures. Governments are cognizant that this has the potential to bring fraud levels and leakages back up, a risk they are willing to take in the short term to ensure no one who needs help is excluded.

That said, they are still cognizant of the need to invest in cybersecurity measures in order to defend these systems, which will eventually begin to attract organized and systematic attacks, as hackers begin to sense the level of vulnerabilities of government information systems.

This is an opportunity for the private sector to play a key role in securing these information systems. One key immediate concern beyond fraud that can result from insufficiently protected systems is data breaches, which compromise identifiers of vulnerable people and which could add complications to their lives. It is therefore imperative to implement strict data security measures even while agencies operate under relaxed authentication standards.

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COVID MAGNIFIES THE THREAT TO DATA PROTECTION AND PRIVACY

In an end-to-end digital world, the information systems consume and generate unprecedented amounts of data, which can accumulate in massive databases and which could be used to invade privacy. While identity systems prior to COVID by in large sought consent before data collection, this type of consent has been rendered unfair by the current reality. People do give consent more freely and without thinking about consequences when they are in need of assistance and

when their choices have been narrowed down. In other words, COVID, because of fear and need, is forcing people to give up personal data more than they would have under normal circumstances. It is therefore imperative that digital identity systems be anchored on fair privacy and data protection frameworks that protects individuals from their own laxed standards of data disclosure during the pandemic, which could lead to abuse afterwards. Measures being considered include committing to automatically purging the collected data after a certain period of time once it is no longer of relevance, and stricter standards for aggregation and anonymization. But ultimately,

the pandemic highlights the importance of Data Sovereignty as a central tenet of data governance that should be put in place even in the short term, in order to avoid a data crisis in the aftermath of COVID.

COVID has also made face recognition, a touchless biometric, even more desirable in identity systems. This modality comes with its own unique set of threats to privacy. It can be captured at a distance, even without the consent or knowledge of the individual. It has the potential to lead to a surveillance state, whereby individuals are tracked, and their actions logged no matter where they may be. Coupled with location services which have been used by governments within their track and trace apps for combating the spread of the pandemic, this creates an exceedingly dangerous threat to individual liberties in the name of public health. It raises the question as to who should be in control of the data—the health authorities or law enforcement agencies, and how should the individual be allowed to determine the disposition of their data while balancing the needs of public health.

Data protection in identity systems was already an important topic of deliberation within the identity Community prior to the pandemic. It has led to the integration of the Data Protection Authorities into the ID4Africa Community starting in 2019, where we held the first summit of the African Data Protection Authorities focused on protection issues in ID systems,

on the margins of our AGM. The response to COVID which is necessarily data rich, makes the issue of privacy even more critical as the scale and the opportunity for misuse has increased many folds.

Another concern that is emerging relates to the use of unique identity numbers. At ID4Africa, the theme for the 2020 AGM was Digital Multiplicity of Unique Identity. In it we emphasized the need to allow people to have multiple digital identities derived from a unique identity. This could be achieved through tokenization, which helps realize the benefits of unique identity without exposing the individual to data surveillance, which becomes possible when their unique digital identity number is used across all sectors. The pandemic has created a multiplicity of identities that now pose a harmonization challenge to identity authorities, that have to work to bring these together without creating the tools that enable use data aggregation and profiling.

Tools such as tokenization, the right to be forgotten, data minimization, data purpose and duration limitation, and informed consent that provides realistic alternatives, are all measures that need to be operationalized within the digital identity systems that are being launched in the near future. We see the question of privacy and data protection as an important domain for innovation and differentiation among the suppliers of solutions and services.

NEED FOR DATA ANALYTICS IS SURGING

Data protection concerns aside, COVID recovery is expected to require leveraging of data analytics in several domains, including:

1. Health
2. Travel
3. Location services
4. Consumer spending

Governments will need to deploy these tools to plan, and take actions to help restart their economies and reopen their skies, without triggering new waves of the pandemic. This calls for the use of anonymized public data, that is subject to well establish data governance frameworks to make sure that data can be used for public good without compromising the privacy of individuals. The era post COVID will usher the arrival of a new type of economy where data has national value and will play a more important role in public health and economic survival of many sectors. These include the retail, airlines, travel and transport industry, tourism, entertainment, and restaurants, etc.

COVID CALLS FOR DATA GOVERNANCE

The crisis is a perfect storm that makes it clear why data governance needs to be the avenue by which the issues of privacy and data analytics are addressed. It is a different mindset. Instead of looking at laws and regulations, it starts by defining the stakeholder in the dialogue, builds the framework for trust and promotes the emergence of a body of principles that guide and regulate data generation and use in a context-specific fashion. We believe the pandemic will result in a deeper appreciation of this domain by governments, development agencies, civil society and even the data subjects themselves. Given that identifiers are a sensitive and important types of data, we see an important role for the identity community to play in national level data governance discussions. ID4Africa will continue to promote the development of this thematic, which was scheduled to be addressed in one of our tracks in the 2020 AGM.

> " THERE IS AN IMPORTANT ROLE FOR THE IDENTITY COMMUNITY TO PLAY IN NATIONAL LEVEL DATA GOVERNANCE. "

COVID ALTERS THE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE, EMPHASIZES ROLE OF IDENTITY

The COVID crisis has hit at a time when the travel industry (especially air travel) was putting the finishing touches on their redesign of the travel process to emphasize self-service. Unfortunately, their self-service model relied too heavily on kiosks and publicly shared terminals, which require physical contact, and which now solicit public concerns. In addition, crowded airports were designed to process long lines and to entice travelers to spend more time shopping. Industry executives and associations now recognize the need to redesign that travel process, which they have already begun doing, as they usher a new era in travel.

Core to that redesign is the use of digital identity and leveraging mobile devices to minimize the use of shared terminals. The emphasis is also on beginning the travel approval and processing procedures several days in advance, in order to minimize the time any individual is required to spend in public lines, which helps with the application of social distancing measures and frees the individuals to contribute to airport economies by spending time in the airport shopping stalls instead.
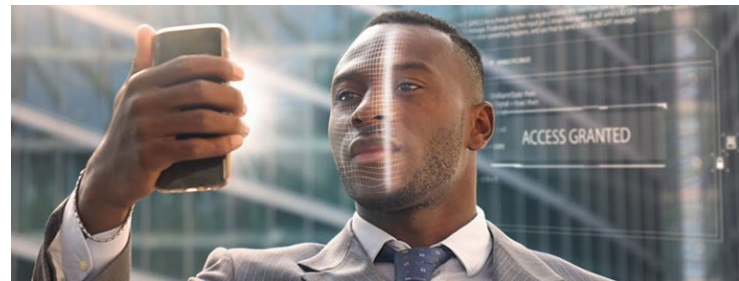
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It is also recognized that the travel documentation needs to incorporate health data, such as COVID test results on the spot, or immunity health certificates issued in advance—linked to a strong identity. This is an emerging area of development and it will be challenged by lack of standardization and lack of validation of the health status of individuals exposed to COVID. Nevertheless, it is an area where digital identity will play a critical role in achieving the objective of creating a safe travel experience that does not become a vector for further expansion of the pandemic across international borders.

THE NEW IDENTITY-ENABLED APPS FOR CONTAINING COVID

While the travel experience will be radically altered to ensure a touchless experience that leverages travel mobile apps, a new class of apps is emerging which has potential impact on limiting the pandemic.

Notable among them are quarantine applications, where individuals entering a country would be required to use a mobile app with an activated location services to verify that they continue to be present at the confinement locations, at random times demanded by the control procedure. In this regard, a face verification through a selfie could work very well. This can also be coupled with contact tracing capability to make sure that the confinement during the period of quarantine is respected and that no other individual has been exposed. These are promising but also frightening applications, they point to a future where control is institutionalized, and individuals have no choice but to comply voluntarily in the name of public good.

COVID ADDED A NEW MAJOR DRIVER FOR DIGITAL IDENTITY

Over the years, the demand for identity systems was fueled successively by major worldwide events, where identity was seen as necessary to respond to the new threats or realities exposed by such events. In hindsight, we can now say that identity was driven by the following drivers over the past few decades:

Decade	Value Proposition	Driver
1990s	Facilitation	ePassports and the need to make travel frictionless and more efficient, in order to respond to the growing volume of travelers.
2000s	National Security	In the aftermath of Sept 11, 2001, identity systems became an important tool in the fight against terrorism and crime.
2010s	Socio-economic development	Aadhaar demonstrated the value of identity for development and created a new driver. WB-ID4D and ID4Africa were founded.
2020s	Public Health	COVID demonstrated that digital identity was essential for populations management during public health crisis and for supporting digital economies.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: COVID HAS PROVIDED OUR COMMUNITY ITS RALLYING CRY

COVID has disrupted our lives and is forcing a major adaptation in our behavior. Some are responding through fear, others are seeing the historical context of what this pandemic is doing to our societies, our civilization, and human relations—there is enough to see from this distance of hindsight, good and bad.

The new normal is already becoming entrenched and we now accept that COVID is the kind of once in a lifetime event that leaves its mark on the course of history, where there will always be the before and the after COVID on our human timeline.

Yes, there is no return to life as we knew it before. While this is painful on personal and professional levels for everyone, we as the Identity Community are fortunate to have an important mission to accomplish in these difficult times, and we cannot afford to be nostalgic or indecisive—for time is not on our side. COVID has thrust upon us the responsibility of *making the invisibles visible quickly*, so that they can be counted and helped by their governments as the economic woes deepen and the need for public assistance makes the difference between life and death. Never before have the words *leaving no one behind*, resonated more gravity than in our current time. And this is the rallying cry that is keeping our Community united in the face of this devastating menace.

Throughout my consultations of dozens of our active members, I was heartened to see the spirit of determination and solidarity that dominates our Community. Many have told me they have never

worked harder in their lives since the beginning of their careers, dozens of years ago. They have all responded to the call for action as individuals. The time is now to respond as institutions, able to move quickly to leverage the individual flames instead of extinguishing them through outdated institutional norms.

This is the time to reflect, adapt and regenerate. This is also the time to open up towards others, to share, cooperate and collaborate as people and institutions.

I call upon every stakeholder in our community not to hold back on knowledge or privilege but to make their findings and resources available for the public good. Let us create the opportunities, where others can add and build upon what we built to help communities survive and individuals flourish again. I call upon institutions to collaborate within and across sectors and stakeholders. Let no conversation take place without the presence of a multi-stakeholder engagement.

ID4Africa as an institution, is adapting and is committed to keeping its family together in these uncertain times. We will be sharing knowledge and facilitating exchange of information through a myriad of innovative engagement platforms. We will be giving voice and more access across all our stakeholders. We will be embracing new partners and alliances, and welcoming new members to our family. We will also continue to develop our plans for bringing the AGM to

its host country in very timely manner. We will do this under safety and health protocols akin to those that are helping reopen the skies.

We believe, while the Coronavirus continues to threaten people's lives, so does hunger, sickness, confinement and solitude. We as social animals have a fundamental need for human interactions and while

> " THIS IS THE TIME TO REFLECT, ADAPT AND REGENERATE. "

the conveniences of the virtual world can be seductive, let us not succumb to short term temptation that can weaken the fabric of our society. Let us fight to bring human interaction safely back, without becoming a vector for the pandemic.

I look forward to the day when I will be able to shake your hands and welcome you in person into your family. In the meantime, it is my honor and privilege to have your confidence to lead this Movement through this moment of crisis. I thank you for your solidarity and for your support.

Warm Regards
Dr. Joseph J. Atick
Executive Chairman