ECOSYSTEM: The Positive Impact On Digital Identity Management

An "ecosystem", typically, is any structured, interconnected system or community of inter-dependent parts, organisms, players or entities who have to collaborate and compete amongst themselves within that system or community while all being governed by common general rules.

A "digital ecosystem" is just an adaption of the natural ecosystem described above for use by the Information Technology and computer industries and others.

The Digital Identity Ecosystem is a sustainable system where any of the data collecting Government agencies or licensed private agencies can enroll and capture data from Citizens and legal residents and send to the National Identity Management Commission's backend. Making NIMC the sole depository and regulator of all Identity data in Nigeria.

The Ecosystem approach to capturing, securing, managing and utilizing (legally) the data of citizens and legal residents in Nigeria by the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) should come into full swing in 2019. This approach by the Commission will be backed and funded by foreign partners.

Currently, NIMC has had to strenuously engage limited resources in the pursuit of its mandate to establish, own, operate, maintain and manage the National Identity Database in Nigeria, register persons covered by the NIMC Act of 2007, as well as assign a Unique National Identification Number (NIN) and issue a General Multi-Purpose Card (GMPC) to each and every legal citizen of Nigeria as well as others legally residing within the country. Wilt a current total of about 33 million records in its database as at November, 2018.

The Commission's enrolment efforts are further complicated by diverse set of databases around the country owned by other ministries, agencies and government parastatals, all engaged in the capturing of biometric data from the population, leading to duplication of identity data and its many problems (such as conflicting in-formation and identities being attached to one set of a person's biometrics data captured on different databases) and wastage of resources, all of which the Digital Identity Ecosystem seeks to address.

The Ecosystem will make it easy for all parties involved to enroll, access, verify and utilize National identity data from one common source safely and effectively. For instance, when you walk into the Immigrations office to apply for a passport, ideally you should just provide them your National Identification Number (NIN) and they instantly access and verify your required details via a secured connection to NIMC's database.

The digital ecosystem aims to sanitize the state of identity management and utilization in Nigeria by adopting a two-tier solution where Foundational Identity and Functional Identity data come into play.

The Foundational Identity provides basic, common core data which all participants of the ecosystem require in order to operate. This is much like the earth, environment and resources providing the foundation with a natural ecosystem upon which other organisms grow, thrive and survive. Foundational Identity data includes everything captured from a person – biometrics, demographics, etc.

The Functional Identity refers to the particular identity data required by one of the ecosystem participants while executing its operations. This may be all or only a portion of the Foundational Identity data. One participant might require extra data not required by other participants and therefore not part of the common Foundational Identity they all use.

The Police might require all of the biometric and demographic data from the Foundational Identity linked to a suspect for their investigations. On the other hand, a private recruitment agency might only need the biometrics to verify an applicant's identity while the agency itself captures additional performance evaluation data from the applicant's references.

The benefits of the digital ecosystem approach to NIMC are, thus, apparent:

- Efficiency and production are boosted for NIMC as tasks become diversified within the ecosystem with partner agencies such as the Central Bank (CBN), Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), Federal Inland Revenue (FIRS) and others along with licensed private companies all helping to collect data from their customers for NIMC, pass on or generate NINs and even print the National e-ID cards

- By providing the Foundational Identity data, NIMC is able to take up a regulatory role in all identity matters in Nigeria

- Burdened with such an important regulatory role with national and international security ramifications, NIMC will have to be entitled to more Federal Government funding for high standard quality operations, adequate resources as well as staff training, empowerment and remuneration

- NIMC will be able to generate important revenue via regulatory activities, identity verification and authentication (for identity matters of national and international interests), licensing, training staff of public and private agencies on identity matters, etc.- all easing the burdens of funding on the Federal Government

- NIMC becomes a major influence in hurling Nigeria into the modern identity scene affecting global financial transactions, travel and international government cooperation.

The Digital Identity Ecosystem will broaden NIMC's reach in the enrolment of Citizens and Legal residents into the National Identity database at the same time solve the issue of duplication of functions of other data collecting agencies.