Identity Verification and Societal Challenges: Explaining the Gap Between Service Provision and Development Outcomes

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Abstract

The capability to produce a secure, reliable form of identification on request is taken for granted by many citizens, especially those living in countries with advanced economies. This capability provides numerous development benefits for individuals, from accessing government and business services to establishing their right of residence and employment in a region. Furthermore, nationwide use of reliable means of identification can help to combat crime and illegal immigration. Efforts to introduce identity verification services in Nigeria have been presented by policymakers as an intervention that would lead to a wide range of such development outcomes. However, these benefits are proving difficult to realize. The use of identity smart cards aims to improve the current situation in which most Nigerian citizens do not possess reliable means of identifying themselves by, say, an international passport or driving licence. Although IS research is well aware that the provision of a service does not of itself deliver development outcomes, the nature and role of ICT-based services in development is not well understood. Therefore, this research contributes in two ways. First, it directly addresses the relationship between ICTs and development policies and outcomes, with which much IS research engages minimally or not at all. Second, it explains citizens’ suspicion of the intervention in Nigeria and then uses secondary data from more successful cases to address the question of why some countries achieve desired development outcomes from the provision of identity verification services while others do not.

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