

Talking Points – World Bank

Regional Ministerial-level Meeting for the Validation and Adoption of the Regional Plan of Action to Eradicate Statelessness in West Africa, Banjul, May 9 2017

STATEMENTS FROM INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN SUPPORT OF THE ACTION PLAN

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the World Bank Group, and to acknowledge the progress of ECOWAS Member States in implementing the *Abidjan Declaration* of 2015. I confirm the World Bank Group's support for the *Regional Plan of Action to Eradicate Statelessness in West Africa*.

Stateless people face major barriers to participating actively in economic and social life. Without nationality they are also often denied proof of their legal identity, which prevents them from realizing their full potential and positively contributing to their local communities. Enabling every individual to realize their potential is at the heart of the two goals to which the World Bank Group is committed, those of ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity by 2030. So we share others' sense of urgency in confronting the challenge of statelessness.

As recognized in Strategic Objective 5 of the *Action Plan*, two critical tools for preventing and reducing statelessness are birth registration and national ID systems. These tools are also more broadly relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 16, on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, which amongst other things targets "legal identity for all, including birth registration".

To this end, in 2014, the World Bank Group launched its Identification for Development (ID4D) initiative, which is supporting countries to develop robust, inclusive and responsible ID systems, so as to enable rights and services for all.

We estimate there are 1.1 billion people around the world without proof of their legal identity, including 500 million in Africa. Nearly 200 million of these live in ECOWAS, which is one third of the population of the 15 Member States.

Through ID4D, the World Bank Group has so far supported assessments of national ID systems in 20 African countries, including 8 in ECOWAS¹. These assessments have shown three challenges that countries commonly face:

1. Inadequate legal and regulatory frameworks, especially in terms of non-discrimination, privacy and data protection.
2. High costs and limited accessibility for the population.
3. Paper-based and fragmented systems, that do not promote accessibility or consistency.

Such assessments also offer some lessons from countries both inside and outside of the region. For example:

1. **In Côte d'Ivoire** civil registration and national ID systems have been rationalized under one agency. Removing duplication will improve data quality and provide incentives for widening coverage of both birth registration and national ID.
2. **Thailand** has made significant reforms to its civil registration and nationality laws and practices in order to remove barriers to birth registration and national ID documentation, including for refugees and stateless persons.
3. **India** has taken a layered approach to ID and nationality. The foundational layer provides every resident – regardless of nationality or legal status – with a unique and digitally verifiable identity that is not linked to citizenship. This allows all residents, regardless of nationality or legal status, to access basic services.

The World Bank Group is already actively supporting West African countries to strengthen their ID systems. Two examples are: First, we are providing technical assistance to **Nigeria** as it develops a business plan for a harmonized ID system and strengthens the accompanying legal and regulatory framework to ensure privacy and data protection; and, second, we are preparing a project to help all ECOWAS Member States develop their national ID systems and achieve mutual recognition of national IDs across borders. **Côte d'Ivoire** and **Guinea** will be the first two countries who will benefit from this project by the end of 2017.

¹ Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone

Our work is guided by the 10 *Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development*, including universal coverage of ID systems, which some 18 international organizations, donors and private sector associations have endorsed by now, including UNHCR, UNICEF and UNECA.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Improving national ID and birth registration systems will be essential for preventing and reducing statelessness in West Africa. As ECOWAS Member States move forward with implementing the *Action Plan*, the World Bank Group and its ID4D initiative can be an effective partner to accelerate progress.

We look forward to working with you as you take this journey.

Thank you.