

# A K230 MILLION CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

## National Identity (NID) Card Project



### IDENTIFYING CITIZENS IS FUNDAMENTAL

National Planning and subsequently development requires the state to be able to identify and plan for citizens individually and collectively.

### THE CONCEPT OF THE NID PROJECT

The PNG National Identification (NID) card project was launched in November 2014 and slated to become a universal ID card for all Papua New Guinean citizens. The card would contain information on births, marriages, and deaths and become ID registers. It was a joint project with the Electoral Commission, Civil Registry and the National Statistical Office (NSO).

### INITIAL PROGRESS WITH THE NID

Minister for National Planning and Monitoring, Charles Abel, said K55 million had been allocated in the 2015 National Budget to fund the project. The new ID cards would enable its holders to open bank accounts and access small business loans, subsidized health care and school fees. In February 2016 Mr Abel announced that over 150,000 people registered with the NID with the office rolling out offices in various provinces including Morobe, Eastern Highlands and East New Britain.

### SUBSEQUENT ISSUES WITH THE NID

However in January 2016 it became clear that it was not possible to get all the NID cards issued before the start of the 2017 General Election.

This strengthened what was made clear in 2015 by then National Planning Minister, and present Deputy Prime Minister,

Charles Abel claimed that the National Statistical Office (NSO) had mismanaged the National Identification rollout project when he found out that unnecessary payments of workers and other “simple mistakes” had been made.

Upon discovering such mismanagement the minister decided to stop the NSO from managing the NID roll out project. Here he stated that although the NSO did some good work, the mistakes they made could not be ignored and therefore he had to transfer the project to the Civil Registry.

### CURRENT CAUSES FOR CONCERN

However in November 2017 the newly appointed minister for National Planning and Monitoring, Richard Maru, made remarks on the public record that the government had actually spent about K230 million on the NID project over the last five years when it had been under the supervision of Charles Abel.



Source: Post Courier 2018

These concerns are further exacerbated by allegations of misappropriation levelled against the head of the NSO Mr. Roko Koloma and further revelations of a syndicate operating within the Civil Registry office who have alleged to be selling NIDs.

### REQUEST FOR FURTHER ROLL OUT

The newly appointed chairman of the Constitutional Law Reform Commission in 2017, Robert Atiyafa, Member for Henganofi, made it clear that despite the cost of over K600 per National ID thus far, the government would aim to “visit every village and register every individual.”

This is concerning to say the least, given the acrimony since the launch of the NID Project.

## **STATE AGENCIES LACKING ACCOUNTABILITY**

The lack of accountability and transparency by State agencies in the implementation of government policies can have dire consequences on development indicators and the wellbeing of the society.

Bureaucrats should ensure that their actions and decisions in the various capacities that they serve in the government benefit the public and the wider community. The lack of accountability and transparency can undermine good governance and result in poor development indicators.

For NID It is not clear in public funding was expanded and if the failure of the project to register all eligible voters before the start of the 2017 General Election warrants further examination by oversight institutions. To date the project partners Electoral Commission, Civil Registry and the NSO are yet to release public documents showing how the funding was expanded.

## **TIPNG IS DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY**

Transparency International PNG (TIPNG) is a community based organisation whose mission it is to inform, educate and empower Papua New Guineans to take action against corruption and to work together to ensure demonstrated high standards of accountability at all levels of society.

## **NID INTEGRITY MUST BE STRENGTHENED**

TIPNG agrees that an NID is essential for National Development however, Deputy Prime Minister Charles Abel, who was the minister responsible for the NID Project when all these funds were misused, should take responsibility and make sure that the funds that were used are properly accounted for so that the people of PNG know how their money was used.

The initial statements made by DPM Abel must be looked into regarding the mismanagement of the NID project by the NSO under the National Statistician Mr Koloma. Mr Koloma must therefore be side-lined and investigated immediately.



Finally, Papua New Guineans need to know whether the K230 million spent was cost-effective before any further funding is allocated to the nationwide rollout of this project. No further funding should be released until a report from the Auditor General's Office is furnished for the people of Papua New Guinea.