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Rwanda Leaps Ahead With Single Digital ID System

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Rwanda is poised to vault into the digital future with its new Single Digital ID system (SDID). The SDID, launched in early 2023, aims to provide every Rwandan citizen with a single digital identity that can be used to access government services, open bank accounts, register SIM cards, apply for loans, and much more. With over 90% of Rwandans already enrolled, the SDID promises to revolutionize the way Rwanda delivers services and manages programs for its 12 million citizens.

According to the World Bank, the SDID will help "consolidate and synchronize existing identity databases" and provide Rwandans with "a single digital identification and authentication credential." The Bank estimates that this unified system will reduce costs and leakage for government-to-person (G2P) payments by 3-5%.

The SDID system is also expected to facilitate financial inclusion, expanding access to banking and credit services using the unique digital ID. Researchers at the UN Capital Development Fund believe around one million previously "unbanked" Rwandans will open financial accounts using the SDID. By enabling more efficient delivery of government aid, the new digital IDs are projected to help reduce extreme poverty in Rwanda by 6% over the next five years.

With a secure biometric database at its core, the SDID system aims to tackle fraud, duplication and waste that have plagued many of Rwanda's social programs. According to Anita Nanziri of the Rwanda Governance Board, "The single digital identity will be important for easy identification of eligible beneficiaries of government programs and ensure accountable service delivery."

Many analysts see Rwanda's digital ID system as a test case for Sub-Saharan Africa, where hundreds of millions still lack official identification. If successful, it could provide a blueprint for neighboring countries to follow suit. As Vivian Derrick of the World Bank notes, "Rwanda is taking a leap into the digital sphere. If they can make it work, it'll be a model for regional integration and digitally-enabled growth."

By merging fragmented IT systems and providing a unique identifier to all citizens, Rwanda aims to not only reduce administration costs but also expand financial access and reduce poverty. If all goes according to plan, Rwanda's SDID could revolutionize how governments provide services and manage programs for generations to come.

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