Paper

# Supporting a continuous journey of learning and improvement

Insights and recommendations from the Government of Ethiopia's use of DIAL's Digital ID Assessment

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digital impact alliance

# INTRODUCTION

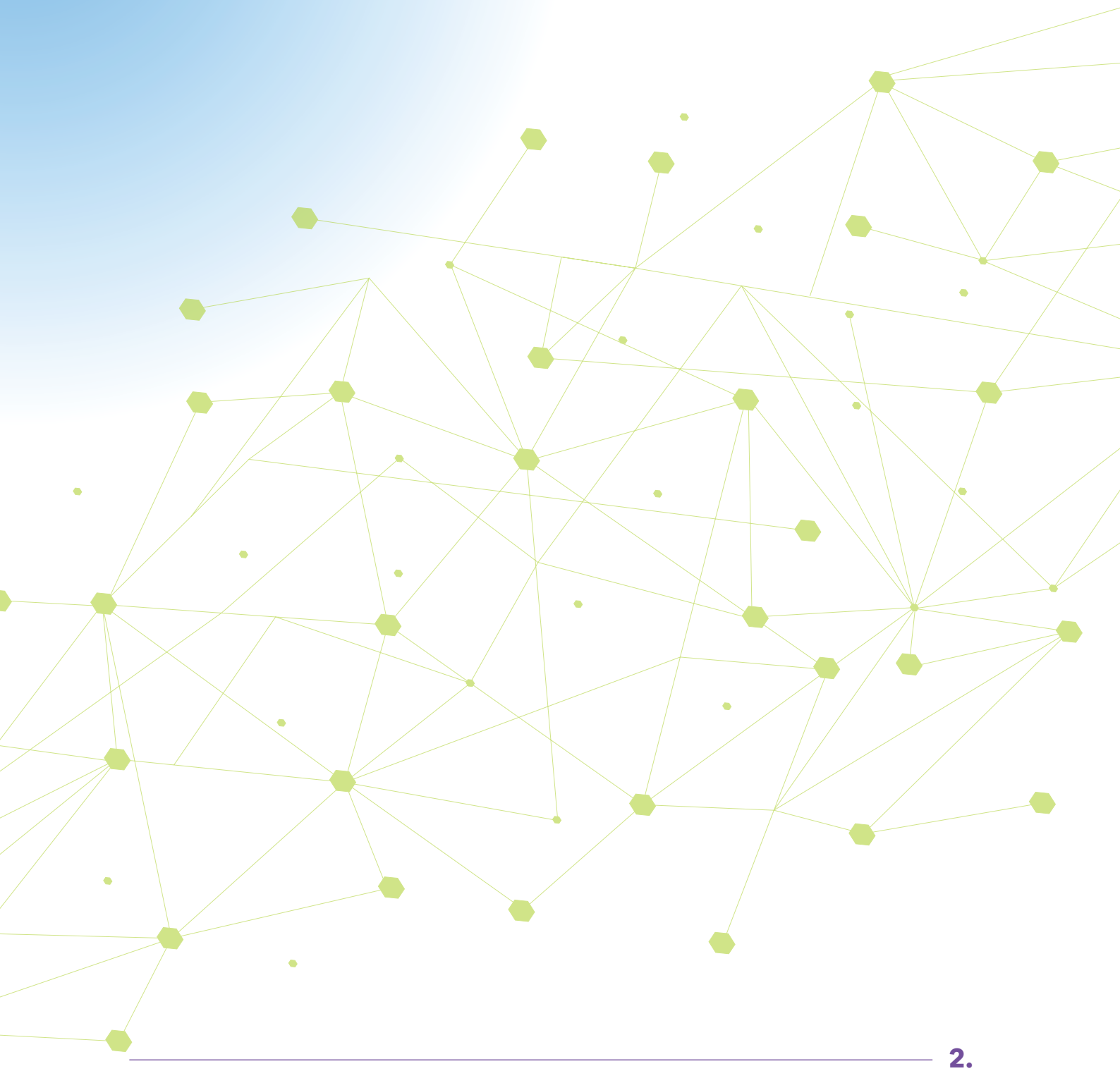
Digital ID is a foundational layer of a digital public infrastructure (DPI) approach, enabling trusted data exchange and transactions between parties. It can be a powerful tool for driving social and economic development by streamlining the delivery of – and promoting equitable access to – essential public and private services, including health care, education, and financial inclusion.

However, there is no such thing as the perfect digital ID system, nor is one technical approach – or solution – universally appropriate for all use cases and contexts. Today, countries across the world are implementing different models, each with their own set of benefits, drawbacks, and tradeoffs.

Over the past several years, different organizations have developed principles and normative standards for evaluating what constitutes a good digital ID system. While these efforts are valuable, they often set up a binary notion of what "good" is. The reality, however, is far more nuanced. The context in which a system is implemented is incredibly important. What might be considered a "good ID" in one context might be ineffective or exclusionary – even harmful – in another.

At its core, an ID solution must be built for those it serves, prioritizing their needs and aspirations, as noted in the UN's Universal DPI Safeguards Framework. This requires more than just good technology – it demands a thoughtful, multi-faceted approach to design, implementation, and governance that recognizes the diverse realities of everyone who relies on the digital ID system. This is made up of four critical enablers: technology, policies and regulation, oversight and accountability, and human capacity. Together, these enablers form the foundations of a people-centered digital ID system, as well as help build and sustain trust – a cornerstone of long-term success.

Trust, inclusion, and transparency are the core of  Ethiopia's approach to its digital ID system – FAYDA. Ethiopia's National ID Program (NIDP), in charge of deploying FAYDA, has been exploring ways to better evaluate its design – understanding where the system is strong and where improvements are needed to support future growth and ensure positive outcomes for people. In early 2025, NIDP leveraged the Digital ID Assessment, developed by the Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL), as part of its commitment to continuous learning and improvement. This paper explores how the tool was effectively deployed and highlights good practices that support its use within a broader approach to learning and development.



# DIGITAL ID ASSESSMENT

To help governments evaluate their current and future digital ID systems – whether newly deployed or well-established – DIAL created the Digital ID Assessment. Developed in collaboration with academic, industry, and multilateral identity experts, it encourages users to examine progress against objectives and aspirations of their digital ID system, including maturity, and provides crucial learnings as part of the process.

Twelve key categories, grounded in the four critical enablers of people-centered digital ID, form the foundation of the Digital ID Assessment and serve to evaluate the design, implementation, and deployment of a system.

1. Data Control
2. Data Policies
3. Equity
4. Guardianship
5. Information Security
6. Interoperability
7. Management
8. Organizational Security
9. Personnel
10. Privacy
11. Transparency
12. Usability

Designed as a self-assessment, the Digital ID Assessment outlines evaluation criteria for each category that have been refined over multiple years by industry specialists. The self-assessment consists of a series of multiple choice and closed-ended questions to help determine adherence to each of the criteria – to which scores are calculated reflecting the current state of a digital ID system's design, implementation, and deployment. This approach allows countries to determine how best to apply these results to future improvement plans.

The Digital ID Assessment fits well into any continuous learning and development approach, as it was intentionally developed for reuse. From the first use, a country is in complete control of the information and the process. While initial data gathering may take some time, the self-assessment is designed to be informative, while remaining lightweight.

As the focus is on design, implementation, and deployment, outcomes and impacts are outside the scope of the Digital ID Assessment. However, there are many tools and approaches, such as personal and group interviews and other interventions, which can help capture and elevate the lived experience of those who are using the system. Combining self-assessment results with other qualitative and ethnographic research can – and will – enable the development of digital ID systems that are inclusive, trusted, and meaningfully improve people's lives.

# INSIGHTS AND TAKEAWAYS

In early 2025, the National ID Program (NIDP) in Ethiopia undertook a self-evaluation of their digital ID system – FAYDA – using the Digital ID Assessment. With an ambitious goal of issuing unique digital IDs to more than 90 million citizens and residents by 2028, NIDP is constantly looking for ways that it can improve and strengthen the FAYDA ID system, while continuously uplifting their core values of trust, inclusion, transparency, and good governance.

As this was the first time NIDP had conducted a self-assessment of FAYDA using the Digital ID Assessment, a team of technology and policy experts from DIAL provided strategic guidance. Support included facilitating a clear understanding of the process and providing direction on how to maximize the learning outcomes – as part of a wider effort to strengthen Ethiopia's data ecosystem.

As to be expected in any rapidly maturing system, many of the insights from NIDP's use of the Digital ID Assessment were related to improvements in documentation, training, processes, and procedures. In almost no case were these elements missing entirely. Instead, the self-assessment found that existing approaches could benefit from specific plans for improvements and enhancements. To further build on these insights and ensure a full picture of the state and outcomes of FAYDA, other feedback and evaluation exercises are needed, which NIDP has begun or will be pursuing.

As part of their commitment to continuous learning and improvement, NIDP has detailed key learnings in their report, "From insight to impact: Ethiopia's National ID Program's Self-Assessment of FAYDA". This paper outlines some complementary insights stemming from NIDP's use of the Digital ID Assessment and highlights good practices and proposed actions.

# Insight 1

## Continuous evaluation and learning help shine a light on what's missing today and in the future.

In a rapidly shifting digital landscape, continuous learning is essential to ensure digital systems and tools remain effective, trusted, and relevant across users and use cases. The Digital ID Assessment supports this by providing clear criteria for countries to track progress, evaluate performance, and drive improvements over time to realize a people-centered digital ID system.

For Ethiopia, continuous learning and improvement are critical, as FAYDA plays a fundamental role in building the country's digital ecosystem – both today and in the future. In fact, Digital Ethiopia 2025, the government's strategy for inclusive prosperity, outlines a broad vision and strategy for building their digital ecosystem, with ID as a key enabling system. Accordingly, the number of potential use cases is projected to grow in parallel with system adoption. This evolution will be propelled by innovation across public and private stakeholders, driving demand for broader functionality and the expansion of benefits.

Looking ahead, current operational approaches and safeguards may not meet future demands. Proactive planning is essential to anticipate and address emerging gaps, ensuring a resilient and sustainable growth trajectory for FAYDA.

### Key takeaway:

As opportunities for digital ID expand, sustained improvement is key to ensuring systems evolve in ways that are sustainable and scalable, while serving diverse populations and promoting equitable access.

### Proposed actions for implementors:

1. Develop a formal, written, continuous learning and improvement plan for the digital ID system to set agreed upon goals and expectations.
2. Determine a specific cadence for reassessment of the system, ideally within the range of every 6–12 months, to track incremental changes and improvements.

# Insight 2 Setting a baseline is essential for tracking future progress.

A core strength of the Digital ID Assessment lies in its ability to track progress over time – enabling implementers to demonstrate impact, identify areas for course correction, and plan effectively for future growth.

Establishing a strong baseline is critical to this process, and NIDP has now achieved that milestone. Throughout their use of the Digital ID Assessment, NIDP required open, transparent answers to all evaluation questions to establish a reality-based baseline. In parallel, they made the strategic decision to collect and document the underlying evidence supporting their responses. This evidence not only strengthens the results of the self-assessment but helps establish an informed baseline for ongoing learning and improvement. Over time, this evidence base will deepen, reinforcing accountability and impact.

Through regular reassessment, integrated with broader metrics and continuous improvement efforts, NIDP is now positioned to understand and monitor how FAYDA is evolving within a dynamic digital ecosystem.

## Key takeaway:

Establishing baselines is essential to identify and track meaningful changes with the digital ID system, such as evolving needs and clear improvements, which is a crucial component of any continuous improvement process.

## Proposed actions for implementors:

1. Run an initial assessment to establish a baseline set of results, including both qualitative and quantitative data.
2. Identify the highest priority areas for improvement to help ensure users' needs and aspirations are met.

# Insight 3

## Cross-team representation and engagement, with support from external, independent experts, can drive deeper learnings.

For digital systems and tools to be thoughtfully designed, implemented, and governed, they must take into consideration diverse viewpoints, needs, and interests. This is why, to ensure a comprehensive evaluation process, the Digital ID assessment includes 12 different categories with 170 individual criteria. These criteria cover a wide range of subjects, which represent the cross-functional nature of operating an effective digital ID system.

Given the complexity involved, it is unlikely that any one person or team will have all the necessary insights to respond to, and complete, a self-assessment. Delegating the work to multiple parties can help ensure the assessment process is robust and well-rounded. This is especially true when evaluating both the underlying technical system development and the operational considerations, which may be handled by separate departments.

NIDP's successful completion of the self-assessment required engagement across multiple functional teams, including at on-site meetings, both at the beginning of the project and later to review the results. And, equally important, NIDP had an assigned team to manage and run the self-assessment. While DIAL provided some guidance as to which groups might be best suited to answer the questions related to each criterion, this coordinating activity was key to gathering and consolidating the results.

Additionally, NIDP committed to setting aside the time and resources to repeat the self-evaluation as part of their continuous improvement process. While this assessment provided valuable point-in-time insights, future applications present an opportunity to track how the system is maturing to address the country's evolving needs. Deepening engagement with cross-functional teams during the next self-assessment will be key to understanding and tracking holistic progress. In addition, incorporating perspectives from external stakeholders – such as civil society and the private sector – will enrich the assessment process and strengthen the system's continuous learning and adaptation over time.

## Key takeaway:

An effective self-assessment of a digital ID system requires coordinated input from multiple teams over time, guided by a dedicated lead. Involving diverse stakeholders – including the private sector, civil society, and communities – not only strengthens the process but also enhances the quality and relevance of the outcomes.

## Proposed actions for implementors:

1. Identify teams and individuals that have responsibility for the different aspects of the system, including identifying any gaps.
2. Review mechanisms by which all stakeholders are consulted and included in the process of improving the system to ensure diverse voices and viewpoints are uplifted.

# Insight 4

## Transparency and trust in processes and practices can reinforce trust in the system.

Trust is a foundational underpinning of any digital ID system. All stakeholders need to have trust not only in the identity data shared through such a system, but in the system itself. Without trust, people will actively or constructively quit using the system as intended. In other words, the system will fail. Transparency in internal practices and processes can reinforce public trust in the system. And, when a digital ID system is trusted, its use and benefits increase.

Transparency stands as one of NIDP's core principles, which was clearly exemplified throughout their use of the Digital ID Assessment. Internally, NIDP fostered a transparent process by engaging cross-functional teams and building a collective body of information and inputs. Externally, they established an open and collaborative relationship with DIAL, including sharing much of the evidence used to support their responses. This transparency enabled DIAL to offer more targeted, actionable recommendations to help maximize the learnings from, and value, of the self-assessment and to support a clearer path forward for continuous improvement. Moreover, as part of NIDP's broader commitment to building public trust in the FAYDA, they made the key findings and insights publicly available in the report, "From insight to impact: Ethiopia's National ID Program's Self-Assessment of FAYDA".

In addition, NIDP's commitment to implementing targeted actions in response to identified gaps, reapplying the self-assessment, and publishing the resulting outcomes demonstrates a sustained dedication to both transparency and trust. By recognizing that these two principles are mutually reinforcing, NIDP is not only fostering accountability but also reinforcing public confidence in FAYDA's continuous improvement.

## Key takeaway:

Transparent processes and practices around self-evaluation, paired with a clear commitment to targeted actions, follow-up, and periodic reassessment, can strengthen both trust and accountability in the system.

## Proposed actions for implementors:

1. Seek support from a trusted third-party to help facilitate a transparent evaluation process.
2. Consider different ways that open communication can be used to build transparency, both internally and externally.

# Insight 5

## Shared learnings and community exchange provide an avenue for shared solutions.

When it comes to the development and deployment of digital ID systems, many countries face similar challenges. Because these struggles appear to be at least somewhat endemic, continuous community exchange, enabled by the Digital ID Assessment, is crucial. This process allows countries and communities to learn from the experiences of others at different points along the digital ID journey.

The same is true for NIDP, as many of the issues it has experienced with the development and implementation of FAYDA are also faced by other governments. For example, the difficulties of remote and rugged conditions, insufficient power and networking infrastructure, multiple languages, and cultural considerations are felt by many countries – regardless of where they are in their digital transformation journey.

The Digital ID Assessment identified several areas where NIDP could enhance the documentation and practices that support the system. Sharing insights gained from self-assessment processes and engaging in shared dialogue with peers could help identify potential approaches to addressing them. Such exchange at the country level can be a powerful tool for tackling common challenges and identifying context-specific, targeted best practices.

### Key takeaway:

Ongoing sharing of a country's experiences and lessons learned throughout the development and implementation of a digital ID system can provide valuable insights for peers.

### Proposed actions for implementors:

1. Identify the top priority "pain points" that could be addressed through collaboration and shared learning.
2. Reach out to organizations who lead communities of practice around topics such as digital ID, data governance, and good practices in country-led digital transformation.

# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As a key catalyst for social and economic progress, digital identity holds ever-growing promise. Its potential continues to expand, opening new opportunities for innovation, inclusion, and empowerment. To fully harness this momentum, ongoing reflection, evaluation, and enhancement are essential — not only to maintain today's systems, but to adapt to tomorrow's needs.

As part of their commitment to continuous learning and improvement, NIDP's self-assessment proved to be a valuable exercise, highlighting both strengths of FAYDA as well as several areas that would benefit from improvements. These learnings, when paired with other qualitative and ethnographic research, can help advance a stronger, people-centered digital ID system that meets the needs and aspirations of its users.

Additionally, NIDP's use of the Digital ID Assessment surfaced a number of good practices that can strengthen a forward-looking approach to learning and development. From establishing clear baselines, to fostering cross-team engagement, and building trust and transparency in processes and systems, these practices help lay the foundations for sustained growth and improvement. And, most importantly, they ensure that digital ID systems are not only responsive to change, but also resilient, inclusive, and accessible to all those who rely on them.

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