

Biometrics firm SmilePass partners with Nigeria's Kwara State to launch universal 'selfie'-driven healthcare

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Biometrics platform SmilePass have partnered with Kwara State in Nigeria to launch a Universal Health Insurance Program that will bring primary medical care to the rural state's 3 million citizens at the flash of a face.

Nigeria's population numbers 186 million citizens, many of whom live in rural environments and so access to quality primary healthcare can be challenging. But it is a challenge that is now being tackled in Kwara State with facial recognition "selfie" technology.

The objective of the program, launched today, is to provide Kwara State citizens with affordable primary healthcare: when citizens register, the state will cover 70% of the healthcare costs. Citizens simply have to take a selfie on their phone which will match their face to their registered medical record — proving their eligibility and opening up their access to healthcare.

Several trials of fingerprint recognition technology have been attempted however in rural areas the worn fingers of the largely agricultural population meant that the devices failed to accurately recognise people.

The state then turned to SmilePass for its reliable facial recognition technology.

SmilePass CEO Grant Crow, said: "It has been a fascinating and rewarding program to work on. When Kwara State realised that fingerprint reading technology was not effective — they approached us to help implement our facial recognition technology."

All 80,000 state employees are now registered and trained field workers are poised to register a further 500,000 citizens over the next 90 days in the scheme. Fieldworkers will capture citizens' biographical details as well as their facial recognition "selfies" which will be registered in the database.

"We were thrilled to learn that Kwara State wants every citizen to be covered by the healthcare program — I'm sure it will be life-changing for many families and it is also fantastic to see our biometric technology used for socially impactful schemes," Crow added.

The benefits for the state are clear: allowing citizens access to essential care to improve their health will help to reduce poverty and potentially increase productivity. Kwara State's economy is heavily reliant on agriculture and a healthier population could mean stronger economic benefits for all.

Kwara State has created a specific agency to manage the healthcare program — the Kwara Health Insurance Agency — as well as setting up an insurance fund for the program.

The project was launched with the Executive Governor of Kwara State, Dr Abdulfatah Ahmed, and is part-sponsored by the International Finance Corporation, part of the World Bank Group.

In 2016, Nigeria was ranked 187th out of 200 countries for healthcare quality as well as very low on a number of common health indicators such as expected lifespan and mortality rates at birth.

Healthcare funding by private out-of-pocket payments is unaffordable to many Nigerians, but biometric technology can now play a part in democratising the system and bring healthcare and hope to millions.

About SmilePass

SmilePass uses ground-breaking biometric solutions to manage identification and authentication across the customer journey – controlling the impact of fraud, social engineering and theft. Re-launched in 2018, SmilePass is based in London. The SmilePass flexible platform works with companies all over the world to build secure and trusted communities. For more information visit <https://smile-pass.com/> or contact info@smile-pass.com

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