



CERTIZENS Newsletter

Certifications of Citizenship in Africa



Photo: UNHCR/Hélène Caux

Welcome to the CERTIZENS Newsletter

We are delighted to present the first quarterly newsletter of the **CERTIZENS research project (Certifications of Citizenship in Africa)**, which is a joint collaboration between the University of Copenhagen, University of Ghana Legon, and Makerere University.

CERTIZENS is concerned with the ways in which both states and citizens, in their diverse formations, get made, remade or unmade through inter-related systems, policies and practices of citizen classification, identification and certification. Ghana and Uganda are our core empirical focus areas, with at least eight researchers so far undertaking in-depth, layered and historicized studies of key dimensions of these complex arenas at different spatial and social levels. However, the dynamics and questions at the heart of CERTIZENS are relevant for and within Africa more broadly, while at the same time being global in their moral, political and practical significance for state building and citizenship everywhere.

Among the more contemporary examples of these wider global-national linkages is the intense promotion and spread of digital and biometric identification systems, with their worryingly under-examined implications. Another is the question of what the uneven access to IDs means not only in times of Covid-19 but also in terms of access to health, property and public services more generally. There is also the more familiar and persistent set of questions about the relationship between IDs and human security and dignity within contexts of forced migration and statelessness.

Each newsletter will provide updates of CERTIZENS activities, links to interesting media articles, academic publications and reports, and announcements of relevant public events, resources and opportunities.

To keep the newsletter dynamic and informative, we encourage you to flag new publications or news items, and to submit announcements of relevant events and opportunities such as conference calls, calls for journal articles or book chapters, job openings, research funding, and so on. Please send details to certizens@teol.ku.dk

Through the CERTIZENS newsletter and our various activities, we are keen to share and connect with all those working in relevant areas of research, policy and practice. Together we hope to be part of generating spaces of critical dialogue about these very important issues.

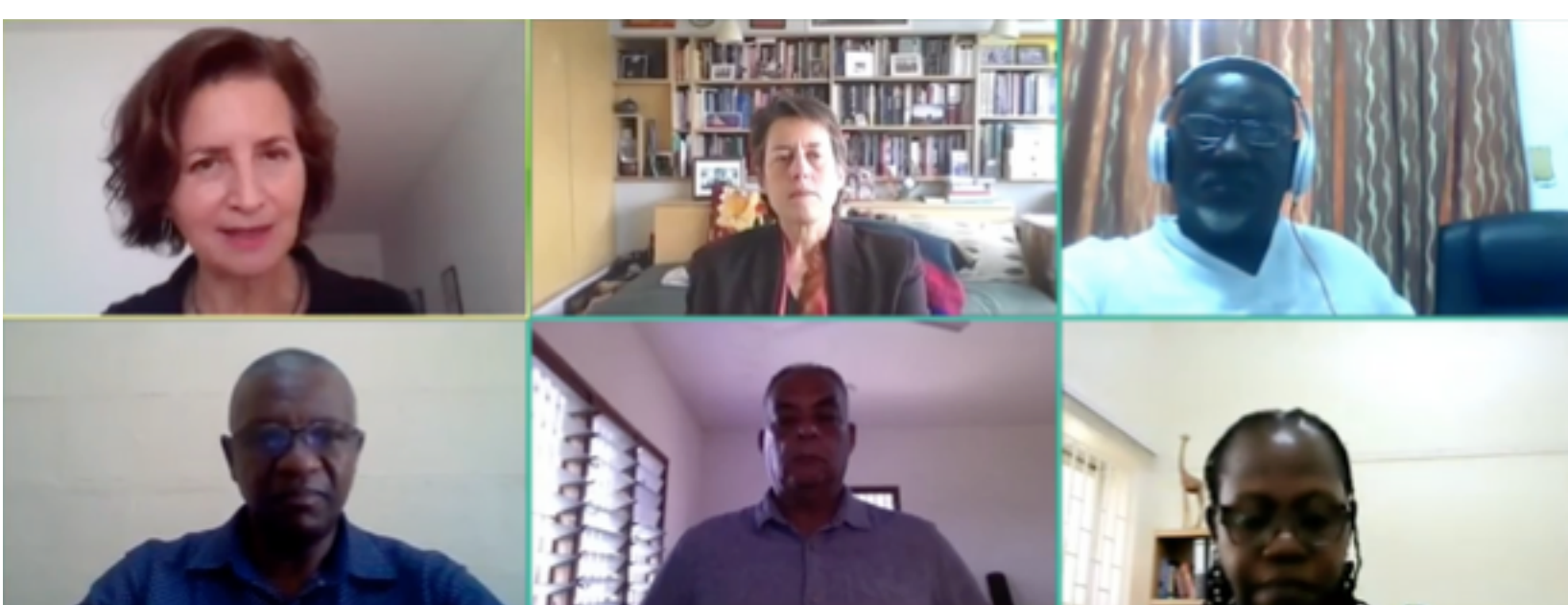
Amanda Hammar, CERTIZENS Project Leader
Copenhagen, June 2021

CERTIZENS Updates

On 5 March 2021 we held the **Public Launch of the CERTIZENS Project**, welcoming participants from across three continents, including interested scholars and researchers as well as practitioners and policy makers working in the field.

We were delighted to bring together the whole CERTIZENS team and to hear Project Coordinators Godfrey Asimwe and Kojo Opoku Aidoo introducing the CERTIZENS Uganda and Ghana projects respectively. This was followed by keynote speeches by [Josephine Ahikire](#) (Makerere University) and [Kojo Amanor](#) (University of Ghana) situating CERTIZENS in their national and institutional contexts. We were also thrilled to hear a short lecture by [Bronwen Manby](#) (London School of Economics) providing an overview of the key challenges of identification and certification in Africa, and emphasising the relevance of CERTIZENS's anticipated work in this field.

The Public Launch was recorded and can be watched in [three parts on our webpage here](#).



In the News

Here we present a selection of CERTIZENS-relevant issues in the press. To suggest a news report or feature for the next newsletter, please email: certizens@teol.ku.dk

Activists sound alarm over African biometric ID projects

[This feature from Al Jazeera](#) takes a pan-African and global perspective on the biometric turn, outlining the data protection landscape in Africa, European aspirations and funding programmes focusing on ID for the continent, and – crucially – the risks posed by ID projects to vulnerable populations.

Financial exclusion in Ghana

[GhanaWeb reports](#) on an alarming development in limiting access to financial services for Ghanaians who do not possess particular kinds of ID document. Many are at risk of being blocked from vital financial services including bank accounts, due to banks not recognising the country's National Insurance Card as a valid form of identification.

"We're also Ghanaians": Fulanis fight back against discrimination

People of Fulani origin in Ghana have reported persistent discrimination by some national institutions. [Starr FM reports on a conference](#) organised to voice the community's concerns last year.

Ugandan Banyarwanda minority calls for access to ID documents

Representatives from the community say that they are being denied access to a number of vital rights and services – including National Identity Cards and passports, as well as bank accounts and SIM cards in some cases. [Read about the demands](#) they put to the Ugandan Authorities in March this year.

Maragoli community to be recognised as Ugandan

[The Daily Monitor reports](#) on a recent decision by the Ugandan government to accept the Maragoli community as one of the country's 65 indigenous communities. The group has been at risk of statelessness since 2015, when the government initiated a mass national registration programme for its citizens.

And more...

[Ghana to trial biometric solution from Simprints for vaccine delivery program](#), *Biometric Update*, 3 May 2021

[Senegal's biometric database easing deportation of its nationals from EU territory](#), *Biometric Update*, 27 April 2021

[South Africa to update ID document to reflect non-binary identities](#), *Quartz Africa*, 22 April 2021 [requires membership]

What We're Reading

This section presents a selection of recent journal articles, books, reports and blogs on CERTIZENS-relevant themes. To suggest an item for the next newsletter please send a link to the work and a brief description of its relevance to: certizens@teol.ku.dk

Journal articles

[Bronwen Manby, "The Sustainable Development Goals and 'legal identity for all': 'First, do no harm'"](#)
World Development Vol 139 (March 2021)

In brief: This article examines the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16.9: to 'provide legal identity for all, including birth registration'. It argues that new legal identity systems are being rolled out without sufficient attention being given to their potential negative impacts and suggests that independent oversight of these systems – as well as reduced state discretion – is critical to avoid causing harm.

[John Effah and Emmanuel Owusu-Oware, "From national to sector level biometric systems: the case of Ghana"](#)
Information Technology for Development Vol 27 (Issue 1 2021)

In brief: This study investigates a failed national biometric project in Ghana and its relationship with emergent sector level biometric systems. The findings show that lack of political consensus and conflicting laws can lead to national biometric system failure and multiple sector level systems. Based on the findings, the paper discusses implications for theory, research, and national development.

[Emrys Schoemaker et al, "Identity at the margins: data justice and refugee experiences with digital identity systems in Lebanon, Jordan, and Uganda"](#)
Information Technology for Development Vol 27 (Issue 1 2021)

In brief: This paper examines refugees' experiences with and perspectives on the digital identity systems used by humanitarian organizations to collect, manage, and share their personal data. Through a qualitative study with 198 refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Uganda, the authors show how existing humanitarian identity systems present numerous challenges for refugees.

And more...

[Silvia Masiero and Savita Bailur, "Digital identity for development: The quest for justice and a research agenda"](#), *Information Technology for Development* Vol 27 (Issue 1 2021)

Books

[Identification and Citizenship in Africa: Biometrics, The Documentary State and Bureaucratic Writings of the Self](#), edited by Séverine Awenengo Dalbert and Richard Banégas, Oxford: Routledge 2021

In brief: In the context of a global biometric turn, this book investigates processes of legal identification in Africa 'from below', asking what this means for the relationship between citizens and the state. Drawing on empirical research conducted across 14 countries, the book documents the processes, practices, and meanings of legal identification in Africa from the 1950s right up to the biometric boom.

Reports and Analysis

The **Ugandan Institute for Social and Economic Rights** [reports on](#) why the Ministry of Health's requirement to have a National ID in order to access the Covid-19 vaccine is a huge public health concern.

The UK-based **Alan Turing Institute** has initiated a four-year project, *Trustworthy Digital Infrastructure for Identity Systems*, to advance knowledge for countries around the world who are turning to digital identity and verification technologies. [This report introduces the project](#) and you can read about the [Institute's overall work here](#).

Human Rights Watch made a submission to the South African Department of Home Affairs draft Identity Management Policy, highlighting how the policy should adequately recognise transgender, non-binary and intersex persons in official identity documents.

The **Africa Digital Rights Hub** produced [this report](#) last year on identification systems in Ghana, considering the role not only of government but the private sector, legislation and civil society in the country's identity ecosystem.

Alan Gelb and Anna Diofasi's article *ID for Development: Opportunities and Challenges for Africa* offers a technocratic perspective on the potentials and policy challenges of ID systems.

Upcoming

To suggest an entry for the next newsletter's Upcoming section, please send details of the conference, seminar or other relevant event to: certizens@teol.ku.dk

ID4Africa Annual General Meeting

Postponed to 2022

The ID4Africa Annual General Meeting (AGM) brings together over 1,000 stakeholders working in the global identity ecosystem. To find out more about the AGM or to sign up to the ID4Africa newsletter for updates on the event, [visit their website here](#).

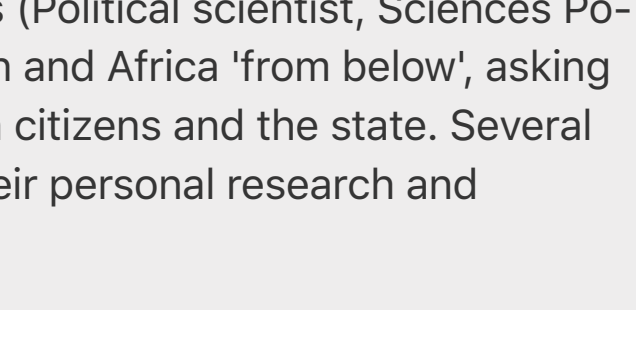
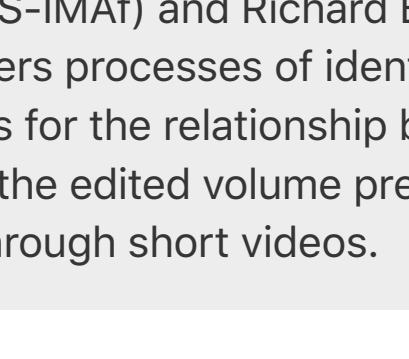
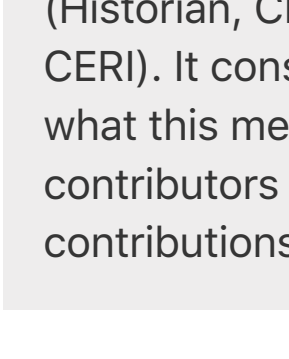
Resources and Opportunities

We encourage you to submit announcements of relevant opportunities for the next CERTIZENS newsletter, including conference calls, calls for journal articles or book chapters, job openings, research funding, or other opportunities. Please email: certizens@teol.ku.dk

Web Series: Identification and Citizenship in Africa

Published alongside their book *Identification and Citizenship in Africa*, this [web series](#) is produced by the collective research programme *The Social and Political Life of Identity Documents in Africa*, coordinated by Séverine Awenengo Dalbert (Historian, CNRS-IMAF) and Richard Banégas (Political scientist, Sciences Po-CERI). It considers processes of identification and Africa 'from below', asking what this means for the relationship between citizens and the state. Several contributors to the edited volume present their personal research and contributions through short videos.

Do you know someone who would enjoy this newsletter? Please forward it on



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[Read more about the CERTIZENS project.](#)

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