

# NID cards for all by September 2025 – Marape’s latest empty promise

by Andrew Anton Mako

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Photo Credit: *Papua New Guinea Civil and Identity Registry*

In January 2025, Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape directed that **all PNG citizens be registered** with a PNG National Identity (NID) by 16 September 2025 to coincide with the country’s 50th Independence Anniversary celebrations.

The PNG government initiated the NID project in November 2014 with the aim of registering and issuing national identification cards to all citizens of the country.

In 2023, the then minister responsible announced the goal of **registering 95%** of the country’s population by 16 September 2025. Now the Prime Minister has gone a step further by issuing a directive to register 100% of PNG citizens.

However, this is another meaningless commitment.

So far, according to the **head of the NID office**, since 2014, about 3.3 million people have been registered. And just 36% of these, or 1.2 million people, have actually been issued NID cards (including duplicate cards).

To register the rest of the country’s population in eight months, the NID office would have to process the applications of 1.1 million people each month to September 2025. Further, the backlog of an estimated 2.1 million registrations would still need to be processed and NID cards issued.

Logistically, it is simply not possible to cover the entire country in eight months given the country’s challenging geography and isolated rural populations. In fact, the NID project does not have a presence across the country and the printing of NID cards is mostly done in Port Moresby.

The adoption of technology, including mobile devices, by the **NID office in 2018** to register everyone (by the original target date of 2021) has failed miserably. The recent controversy on the use of **tablet devices** during the 2024 PNG national census further erodes confidence in the government’s use of technology, especially mobile devices, to roll out significant national development projects such as the NID

project, the national census and the national elections.

Governance problems have also tarnished the reputation of the NID project. Like many large publicly funded projects in the country over the years, the NID project has faced controversies, including the [alleged misuse of funds by senior bureaucrats](#) entrusted with the task of implementing it.

Not only is the 50<sup>th</sup> Independence Day goal logistically impossible, but not enough funding has been allocated. The government has so far spent more than [K460 million](#) on this project in the last 10 years. But only [K60 million has been allocated for the NID in the 2025 national budget](#) (page 74). If it has taken more than K40 million per year on average in 10 years to register just 3.3 million Papua New Guineans, a mere K60 million is a pittance to fund the registration of the rest of the population, which is now estimated to be over 10 million people, in eight months.

The intent of the NID project is noble. If implemented well, it could have helped address numerous administrative and governance issues such as those associated with the national elections. It would also have facilitated everyday activities including travel, private sector activities and the pursuit of employment and study opportunities in PNG and abroad. But it has not been implemented at all well. Many people vent their discontentment on the [Facebook page](#) of the PNG Civil & Identity Registry regarding the long delays — sometimes even years — in processing their registrations and issuing their NID cards.

It has become a habit for the Prime Minister to make ambitious but empty promises. He promised in 2019 that PNG would be the [richest black Christian nation by 2030](#). That is not going to happen. He has promised that PNG would be safe for women and girls by 2027. That is not going to happen. The PM has also promised that PNG will [stop imports of food](#), especially agricultural products including rice, by 2025, which has come to be just an illusion. Now he has promised a full NID roll-out this year, and that is not going to happen either.

In other countries, broken promises can force politicians out of office. The public feels betrayed, and the politician who makes but fails to keep a promise is in real trouble. In PNG, it doesn't seem to have any effect.

Until politicians are held accountable, they will continue to promise what they can't deliver and will continue to get carried away by their rhetoric. In PNG's political culture, the ability to be a great orator, and to make people feel good by promising that the future will be better than the past, seems to matter more than the ability to actually make a difference on the ground.

Given that more than half a billion kina will have been spent on the project by 2025, the NID project needs a thorough review of its operations and a serious strategy to get it back on track (or to cease it if it is just too hard). And PNG's voting public needs to demand not rhetoric but results from their politicians, and their resignation if they cannot keep the promises they make.

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