

## **ECCB Governor backs development of digital ID system**

■ BASSETTERRE

THE Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) has backed suggestions for the development of a comprehensive digital identification system that would streamline banking services and reduce barriers across the currency union.

Speaking at a Financial Inclusion Town Hall in St Kitts and Nevis earlier this week, ECCB Governor Timothy Antoine endorsed suggestions from the public for digitised government ID systems that banks could automatically verify, similar to models used in India and Estonia.

'A lot of the trouble we have now with getting the financial system working more pain-free, less frictions, is because we do not have a unique digital identifier,' Antoine said during the interactive session. Jamaica has been removed from the European Union's list of high-risk third countries for anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing. The governor explained that the absence of such a system has created challenges in implementing various financial initiatives, including the recently launched Credit Bureau and government payment systems.

Under the proposed digital ID framework, citizens would possess a single digitized identifier that could serve multiple functions including identification, address verification, and income proof.

This would eliminate the need for banks to request multiple paper-based documents when customers attempt to open accounts or access services.

'When you look at what Estonia has done, for example, and other parts of the world where the thing really works like clockwork. This is where we have to go if we're going to build out the digital economy and really make it easier for people to do business, not just with banks, but with governments and with each other,' Antoine stated.

He characterised the digital ID initiative as a 'medium-term' rather than long-term goal, encouraging governments across the currency union to accelerate efforts in this direction.

Assistant general manager, First Citizens Investment Services and chairman of Ease of Account Working Group, Nolan Gabrielle Boyer, also noted that such technological improvements would feed into the longer-term objectives of the ease of account opening roadmap, particularly in standardising simplified due diligence procedures across financial institutions.

In the interim, the Central Bank is implementing transitional measures including the Credit Bureau, which Rolph Phillips President of the ECCU Bankers' Association indicated has some capacity to provide single-source identification for banks before a full-scale digital ID system is developed.

'The Credit Bureau has the capacity to provide a single-source identification of customers on behalf of banks, where you pretty much go to the Credit Bureau, they access the systems of governments around the region and they provide banks with a source of identification,' he explained.

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