THE DIGITAL PAYMENTS PROJECT LAUNCH

Digital Health Innovations: The Pathway to a Resilient, Efficient, Interactive and Inter-Connected Health System

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DATE: 9TH MARCH 2022

LOCATION: SERENA CONFERENCE CENTRE, KAMPALA, UGANDA

ONLINE: ZOOM, YOUTUBE & TWITTER

/ At A Glance

Project Summary

Makerere University School of Public Health MUSPH) with support from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) established the Digital Health Payments Initiatives and Research in Africa (DHPI-R). The project aims to (a) identify how, and under what circumstances digital payments can support effective mass campaign delivery and (b) enhance efforts to digitize payments for health workers by fostering and supporting evidence-based and evidence-driven decision making in Africa. The insights will inform operationalization of and movement towards digital payments.

The DHPI-R project is conducted in Anglophone countries (implemented by Makerere University in Uganda) and Francophone countries (implemented by Dakar University in Senegal).

5 Objectives

1. Lead the process of development of contextualised research agenda of digitalisation of payments of health workers in the region and within countries.

2. Support the generation of high-quality and relevant evidence around the value of digital payments of health workers in Africa.

3. Establish a community of practice of researchers, users, collaborators who focus on this subject across Africa.

4. We want to garner local and international partnerships to support this endeavour beyond the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

5. Establish an African centre of excellence - already establishing it at Makerere University and University of Senegal to study these issues of digital payments and innovations in Africa.

EVENT OVERVIEW

The launch of the Digital Payments Project ceremony was held on 9th March 2022, simultaneously in the two hosting countries physically (at the Kampala Serena Hotel, Kampala, and Salle de visioconférence UCAD 2, Dakar Senegal) and online on Zoom. The launch ceremony marked the commencement of the three-year project activities.

The launch provided a platform for project partners (public health professionals, academia, media, as well as public, private, and not-for-profit actors to understand the context of digital payments in Sub-Saharan Africa and to appreciate the goals, scope, and expected outcomes of the project.

DIGITAL HEALTH PAYMENT INITIATIVES & RESEARCH IN AFRICA (DHPI-R) PROJECT EVENT LAUNCH

Moderators:	Max Webber Asiimwe and Harriet Adong
Key Note Address:	Associate Professor Margaret Ann McConnel - Harvard School of Public Health
Entertainment:	Makerere University Community Choir

Participants:	Physically (80 in Uganda, 53 in Senegal and408 online) – comprising of: Ministry of Health, Academia (Humanities and Health Sciences), Ministry of Health, Civil Society, Development partners (the US Mission, USAID, WHO and UNICEF), Civil Society and the media.
Media:	Live-streamed on Twitter (**#digitalpayments**) and the Makerere University YouTube Channel
Partners:	A collaborative research initiative made up of:

- **Research and Innovation:**
  - → Makerere University School of Public Health, Uganda (Anglophone)
  - → Cheikh Anta Dioup University of Dakar, Senegal (Francophone)
- **Digital Payments (Activity Implementers):**
  - → Ministries of Health
  - → World Health Organisation
  - → Health Partners

Funders:	Bill and Melinda Gates and SOLINA Group (Nigeria)
Technical Partners:	The University of Harvard and the World Health Organisation
Project Period:	Three (3) years - 2021 to 2023

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

Speakers appreciated the donors for investing in this area; which neatly fits into the implementers' goal of promoting research-led learning and innovation to inform improvements in the health sector. Project partners were applauded for their efforts and important collaboration between Anglophone and Francophone Africa.

→ Prof. Elizeus Rutebemberwa who represented Professor Rhoda Wanyenze the Dean, of Makerere University School of Public Health, opened the launch event and welcomed the initiative - one that is in line with the university's strategic goal of becoming a research-led institution; providing transformative education and innovations to inform health policy and programs.

→ Dr. Peter Waiswa, Associate Professor at Makerere University School of Public Health presented the overview of the project; and emphasized the importance of efficient payment modalities in enhancing health worker outputs during campaigns as well as in their routine services.

→ Dr. Andrew Bakainaga, World Health Organisation, noted that digitizing health payments is a strategic move to optimize the benefits of timely and efficient payments for human resources, particularly those involved in health campaigns.

→ Professor Adama Faye, Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar – highlighted the opportunity to improve cooperation between Anglophone and Francophone institutions not only in providing evidence to inform digitizing health worker payments but also in addressing other needs in health worker recruitment, deployment, and motivation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

→ Ms. Kendall Krauss, Senior programs officer, global delivery, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation presented the case for digital payments in the health sector. She highlighted the benefit of digital payments in improving the motivation of health workers and generally supporting a functioning health care system. Ms. Krauss highlighted the need for context-specific evidence to inform the adaptation of digital payment systems in Africa.

→ Professor Margaret McConnel, Harvard School of Public Health gave the keynote address. Based on research in the middle- and low-income countries, she highlighted key conceptual issues to build on and priority research questions regarding practical aspects of digital payments, experiences of health workers, and the effect of digital payments on performance.

→ Ms. Leah Wanjeri, World Health Organisation-Afro, shared the WHO-Afro's experience using mobile money to pay campaign workers in 11 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. She underscored challenges related to lack of accountability and bureaucratic systems that have resulted in delayed or lost payments. With regard to progress, she highlighted the creation of databases of more than 50,000 workers as well as successful payments to over 150,000 workers in the last year and a half. Ms. Wanjeri invited participants to consider the modifications required in the context of limited resources that can be applied to or leveraged to improve health worker payments even prior to the scale-up of digital payment systems.

→ Hon. Ibrahima Khaliloulah, Ministry of Health, Senegal - welcomed the initiative and pledged the Ministry of Health's support. He called for the education of citizens to embrace digital payments and the use of technology.

→ Prof. Umar Kakumba, the first deputy vice-chancellor of Makerere University closed the launch. He noted the opportunity the project presents for Africa to focus on digitizing the health care system and pledged the full support of Makerere University to the project.

Key messages:

1. Digital payment of health workers is an innovation that can help address challenges associated with cash payments; including incomplete and untraceable transactions which affect the motivation of health workers and affect the quality and effectiveness of health mass campaigns.

2. There is need for context-specific evidence around opportunities and challenges of digitizing health worker payments in Sub-Saharan Africa to inform policy, adaptation, and scale-up.

3. The project will provide the much-needed evidence to inform this initiative and opportunities for continued collaboration, innovation, and learning about digitizing health campaigns and the health sector in general.

4. The project presents a stellar opportunity to test and expand opportunities for research, knowledge and cross learning across Anglophone and Francophone and other parts of Africa.

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REMARKS BY THE CENTER DIRECTOR

Professor Peter Waisswa (Associate Professor at Makerere University School of Public Health and Leader Makerere University Maternal and New born Center of Excellence) in his opening remarks provided the project overview and progress so far, appreciated donor and partner commitments.

Highlights

- Health workers' payment modalities matter particularly because it has a direct relationship with the effectiveness and quality of health campaigns and the health services in general.

> *"We know that health workers form the largest input in many campaigns, but how we pay health workers matters. If you pay them well, it can improve the performance of the campaign."*

- Digital payments are feasible (based on available evidence) and can mitigate the negative consequences associated with cash payments, while at the same time, motivating health workers to perform better.

- The project will generate the much-needed context-specific evidence about the value addition of digital payments in improving health worker performance and health outcomes.

OPENING REMARKS

Professor Elzeus Rutebemberwa (Deputy Dean, Makerere University School of Public Health) delivered remarks on behalf of **Professor Rhonda Wanyenze (Dean, Makerere University School of Public Health).**

Professor Wanyenze thanked Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for funding the project as well as other endeavours within the school of public health; including assessment of COVID-19 response, mortality assessment and strengthening health sector leadership/management and regional collaborations; all of which are critical in generating relevant innovations in the health sector in Africa. She also appreciated the University of Dakar, Senegal for co-implementing this initiative; all partners and stakeholders for opening doors for a noble collaboration; and the project secretariat for organising the launch ceremony.

Highlights

- The project presents a great opportunity to expand the boundaries of knowledge, research and innovation in public health. It aligns perfectly with the Makerere University's strategic goal of becoming a research-led university, in its quest to provide transformative education.

- Makerere University School of Public Health is committed to the project's efforts to harness the benefits of an ever-expanding digital space to strengthen digital health payments and create useful, context-specific innovations for the health, not only for Uganda but for Africa as a whole.

INVESTING IN AFRICA DIGITAL HEALTH

Dr. Andrew Bakainaga (World Health Organisation) thanked the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for making the investment in Africa and congratulated the teams at Makerere University and University of Dakar for leading the Digital Payments Project, which he described as innovative. He reassured the commitment of WHO to support the initiative.

Highlights

- Digitising health payments is a strategic move to optimise the benefits of timely and efficient payments for human resources, particularly those involved in health campaigns. This initiative will leverage existing collaborations between the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Makerere University School of Public Health such as the recent health worker database update, which was conducted in preparation for implementing digital payments. WHO maintains keen interest in learning from the project and future partnerships in this regard at national and regional level.

Professor Adama Faye (Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar) added his appreciation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for their valued collaboration and their investment in this area. He appreciated the confidence in the University of Dakar to implement this initiative in Francophone Africa.

Highlights

- The initiative builds on the foundational research that the University conducted with the Ministry of Health in Senegal where the needs and gaps in the health personnel structure were identified.

- The project will help identify the challenges and opportunities associated with digital health in the African context and also identify innovative solutions to address some of the needs in health worker recruitment, deployment and motivation.

- In addition, the project will contribute to improvement in health services and health outcomes especially for vulnerable people. The project should identify innovative solutions to limited technology use in remote contexts that are likely to limit the use of digital payment systems.

- The partnership between the two universities will further strengthen inter-institutional and cross-country cooperation between Anglophone and Francophone countries; which is key in transforming health systems in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Kendall Krauss (Senior Programme Officer, Global Deliver Programs at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) discussed the case for investing digital payments in the health sector.

Highlights

- Many programmes (including nutrition, polio, malaria and now COVID-19) rely on mass campaigns to support large scale health impact. However, the performance of health campaigns is quite low, partly due to delayed, insecure and inconsistent payment of health workers. In addition, innovations to improve performance of health campaigns are rarely systematically evaluated or disseminated.

- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation supports development of innovations, research, implementation and scale up of interventions with the goal to accelerate coverage, reach, efficiency and effectiveness of health campaigns and improve health outcomes in general. The focus is on building communities of practice to spur conversations, disseminate research and reflect on innovations; and supporting the digitisation of payments for health campaigns workers to increase personnel performance and ultimately effectiveness of mass campaigns.

- Whereas digitisation of health worker payments has been found to improve health workers' motivation and performance in other settings, there is little evidence to conclude that it is true for Sub-Sahara Africa, hence the project.

- This project is expected to generate evidence of digitising health worker payments in the African context to directly inform operations, policy, collaborations and future campaigns. In the long-term, the initiative will be to establish a sustainable and influential centre of excellence that provides useful insights into digital payments in health campaigns in Africa and eventually in health systems.

Key Note Addresses

WHAT IS THE LANDSCAPE FOR DIGITAL PAYMENT IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA?

Associate Professor Margaret McConnel (Harvard School of Public Health) expressed great anticipation for the answers the project will provide on digitisation of health worker payments especially in the African context.
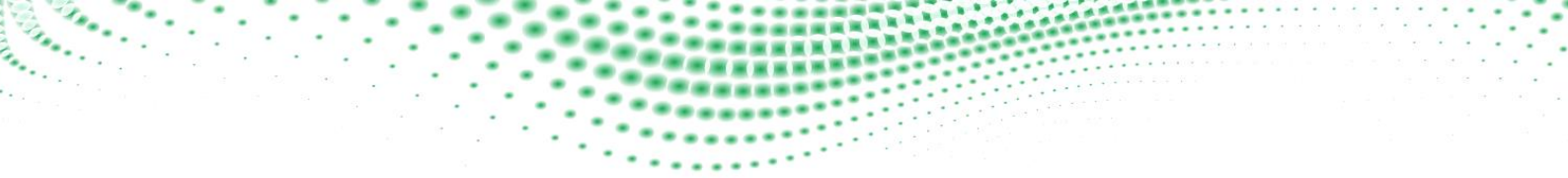
"Getting health workers paid is a key function of the health system and having happy, motivated, hardworking health workers, is a key element of making health systems work to deliver high quality health care services."

Highlights

Referencing her previous work on digital payments in the health sector in low- and middle-income countries. She was positive that the project will uncover and document the practical challenges and opportunities in the African context to inform policy, plans, and interventions in this area. Professor McConnel highlighted the following:

- Analysing health worker payment processes is critical. Understanding how digital payments work can improve these processes eliminates a lot of barriers and questions about how to support health workers and how to create a functioning health system.

- The Harvard School of Public health developed a conceptual model that details key mechanisms of impact which could be useful in thinking through how digitizing health worker payments could lead to health systems performance by asking micro and macro questions such as:
  → How much money is the health system spending?
  → How do digital payment processes work?
  → What is the experience of a health worker interfacing with the digitised system?
  → What effect does that have on his/her performance?
  → What are the implications of payment delays in individual health worker performance and on health system functioning?
  → What do we know about different payment processes? (how payments are made, how they are documented in different countries/settings)

- The conceptual mapping/scoping revealed several gaps and research priorities that are relevant to the digital payments project. They include:
  → **The scope and pattern of payment processes and what they mean:** How common are payment delays/underpayments? What kind of health workers/facilities/levels experience payment delays? and what do they mean for effectiveness and quality of health care?
  → **Systematic cross-country data to describe intricate layers of the process of payments:** What do we know about different payment processes? How are digital payments typically made? What are the logistical and practical details of digital payments? How is documentation done? How do approval processes work? What is the recourse for non-payment?

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Digital Health Payment Initiatives and Research in Africa (DHPI-R)

→ **Operational details of how payments processes work and their challenges:** There is need to understand the challenges and opportunities in the entire process of payment of health workers; the variations between public and community workers; the process of documentation, and transparency of the process.

→ **The impact of digitising payments on health system outcomes:** There is need to establish causal evidence of the impact of digital payments on payment experiences and health system performance.

Digital Health
Payment Initiatives
and Research in
Africa (DHPI-R)

IMPLEMENTATION OF MOBILE MONEY TO PAY CAMPAIGN HEALTH WORKERS IN AFRICA

Ms. Leah Wanjeri, (Digital Finance officer - WHO AFRO, Pretoria, South Africa) shared the experience of WHO AFRO using mobile money to pay campaign workers, launched in 15 countries in sub–Saharan Africa (Mali, Ghana, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Liberia, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Malawi, Kenya, Nigeria).

Highlights

The mobile money payments project that started in September 2020 was launched in 15 countries and has been fully/partially implemented in 11 countries with great achievements.

- Initial challenges experienced in these projects were:
  → Delays in the disbursement of funds and as a result campaign delays or postponements to future dates.
  → Lack of transparency - with it was difficult to establish who had received money disbursed by the project, how much health workers received, and whether the amount was what was owed to the recipient.
  → Bureaucratic systems that led to multi-layered and delayed processes between disbursement and receipt. This not only resulted in delays but also caused duplication in payments.
  → Most payments were cash-based and with restrictions in movements due to COVID-19, payment of health workers became even more difficult to accomplish. This pointed to the need to transition to digital payments.

- Transitioning to digital payments
  → For the past one and a half years of the project, databases of more than 50,000 workers have been created and payments to more than 150,000 workers have been made through mobile money.
  → In some countries, it has been done in phases and in others it is complete and WHO-AFRO is in the process of handing over the project to the Ministry of Health – as is the case for Ivory coast, which was a pilot country in 2020.
  → The project is ongoing in other countries including Mali, Ghana, and Gambia, with good progress registered. In Burkina Faso for example, the project established a database of 84,000 health workers, which will be used in making payments in the next campaigns. Starting in 2022, more countries have been included in the project, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Uganda, Malawi, Kenya, and Nigeria.

Ms. Wanjeri urged participants to consider the modifications required in the context of limited resources that can be applied to or leveraged to improve health worker payments even prior to the scale-up of digital payment systems.

Hon. Ibrahima Khaliloulah (Digital Health Unit (Ministry of Health in Senegal) remarks from the Ministry of Health, Senegal) stated that Senegal had been utilizing digital health since 2007 with commendable progress.

Highlights

- The Ministry of Health worked with the Ministry of Finance to make the case for and fund digitizing health worker payment processes. Through these initiatives (Telehealth and M-Health) the ministry realized several benefits including easier payment traceability, and greater accountability and reach (especially to rural remote areas) which provided further justification to digitize payments.

- Hon. Khaliloulah applauded the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for providing the financial resources and congratulated the University of Dakar and its partners upon the launch of the project. He noted the need for the project team to expand collaborations with other actors and to

educate citizens to embrace digital payments and use of technology in general so that it is easy for them to engage with such systems.

/ Closing Remarks & Official Launch

Professor Umar Kakumba (the First Deputy Vice Chancellor, Makerere University) gave the closing remarks and officially launched the project. He congratulated the project implementers and appreciated the funders (the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and SOLINA Group of Nigeria) for a great and welcome collaboration.
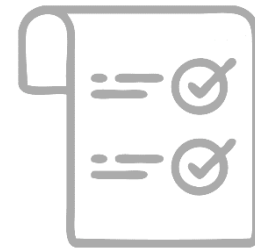
Highlights

In his speech, he noted the following:

- Digital payments are very useful in the African context, where campaigns are a big part of health care in addressing health challenges such as malaria, polio, tuberculosis and most recently COVID-19. This project presents a great opportunity for Uganda and Africa as a whole to focus on digitising the health system.

- The project aligns perfectly with Makerere University's strategic focus on research to create services, products and tools to solve societal challenges. With the able leadership at the Makerere University School of Public Health and at the University of Dakar Senegal and the support of partners, this initiative will succeed in establishing a centre of excellence (a hub for research and knowledge transfer) and enhancing digital systems in different sectors beyond health.

- Professor Kakumba pledged the unwavering support of Makerere University to the implementation of the project and to future engagements in the area of digitisation for health.

/ Photo Gallery

UGANDA

Event Video: https://youtu.be/ZvVvWauqxo8

PHOTO GALLERY SENEGAL

Digital Health
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Africa (DHPI-R)

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