



# EpiC catalyzes nationwide e-payment of health workers in COVID-19 vaccination campaigns



A data clerk in Jinja District getting her bio-data and thumbprint captured for the biometric payment app during field testing in September 2022.

**P**aying the allowances of health workers involved in COVID-19 vaccination campaigns has been an ongoing challenge in Uganda. Since the introduction of the COVID-19 Accelerated Mass Vaccination Campaign (AMVC) in 2021, the Ministry of Health has relied on about 60,000 health workers and over 83,000 village health teams (VHTs) to deliver vaccination services across the country, numbers which were overwhelming by existing payment mechanisms.

The first round of the AMVC was implemented in November-December 2021 and completed in January 2022. The second round of the AMVC was implemented in the period from April to June 2022. Frontline health workers have complained over delayed payment or partial payment of their allowances for the work done in the COVID-19 vaccination exercise.

Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) Uganda, a USAID-funded project, started implementation in May 2022 and supported the third round of the AMVC,

which was implemented in June-August 2022. EpiC supported the Ministry of Health to roll out the AMVC Round 3 to rapidly scale up nationwide coverage of COVID-19 vaccination to attain the COVAX target of 70 percent of the eligible population fully vaccinated by end of 2022.

EpiC worked with 13 regional implementing partners (IPs) of USAID, U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) in Uganda. EpiC committed to provide logistics and vaccination services for the AMVC Round 3 roll out across Uganda. EpiC funded various vaccination activities through the 13 IPs including:

- Payment of health workers' allowances
- Delivery of vaccines to districts and health facilities
- Micro planning
- Demand creation
- Vaccination data management

EpiC partnered with Beyonic, an omnichannel digital payments platform managed by MFS Africa, which enabled

the project to make real-time payments to health workers and other personnel via mobile money. EpiC piloted a nationwide electronic direct payment system and paid allowances for 58,653 frontline health workers, 83,355 VHTs (community mobilizers), 2,721 data officers, and 9,476 district and sub-county supervisors during AMVC Round 3. Altogether, EpiC paid out allowances to 154,205 beneficiaries via mobile money in the four months between June and September 2022.

EpiC faced a few challenges regarding payments. Some health workers provided mobile telephone numbers which were not registered in their names to receive mobile money payments. Some of the numbers were registered in the names of spouses, relatives, and friends, but the health

In response to the emerging challenges and issues regarding payments, EpiC established a centralized complaints desk for purposes of handling emerging issues and other communication gaps. The desk received complaints regarding payments directly from health workers and district health officials. These were channeled to the appropriate offices within EpiC for resolution and thereafter the complainants were given timely feedback.

In August 2022, EpiC supported the 15 districts across Uganda that implemented a mop-up campaign to utilize the Johnson and Johnson vaccines. Applying the lessons learned from the AMVC Round 3, EpiC sought to improve health worker payment processes. The project instituted a new payment method of uploading the first five days



**58,653** Frontline Health Workers



**86,807** VHTs Community Mobilizers



**2,721** Data Officers



**9,476** District & Sub-county Supervisors

Figure 1. The numbers of personnel paid in AMCV Round 3 in June-July 2022

worker had no signed consent to receive mobile money using them. In such instances, the Beyonic system would not pay because the names did not match. To overcome this problem, EpiC provided consent forms which the health workers signed to authorize payment.

A health worker at Kahondo Health Centre II in Bunyangabu District, is one of the health workers whose payment was delayed. He said: *"I worked as a recorder but when signing payment forms, I used names which were not corresponding with names on my mobile account. So, I was not paid with the others. I informed EpiC about it, and they sent me the consent forms. I signed the consent forms and thereafter, EpiC paid me."*

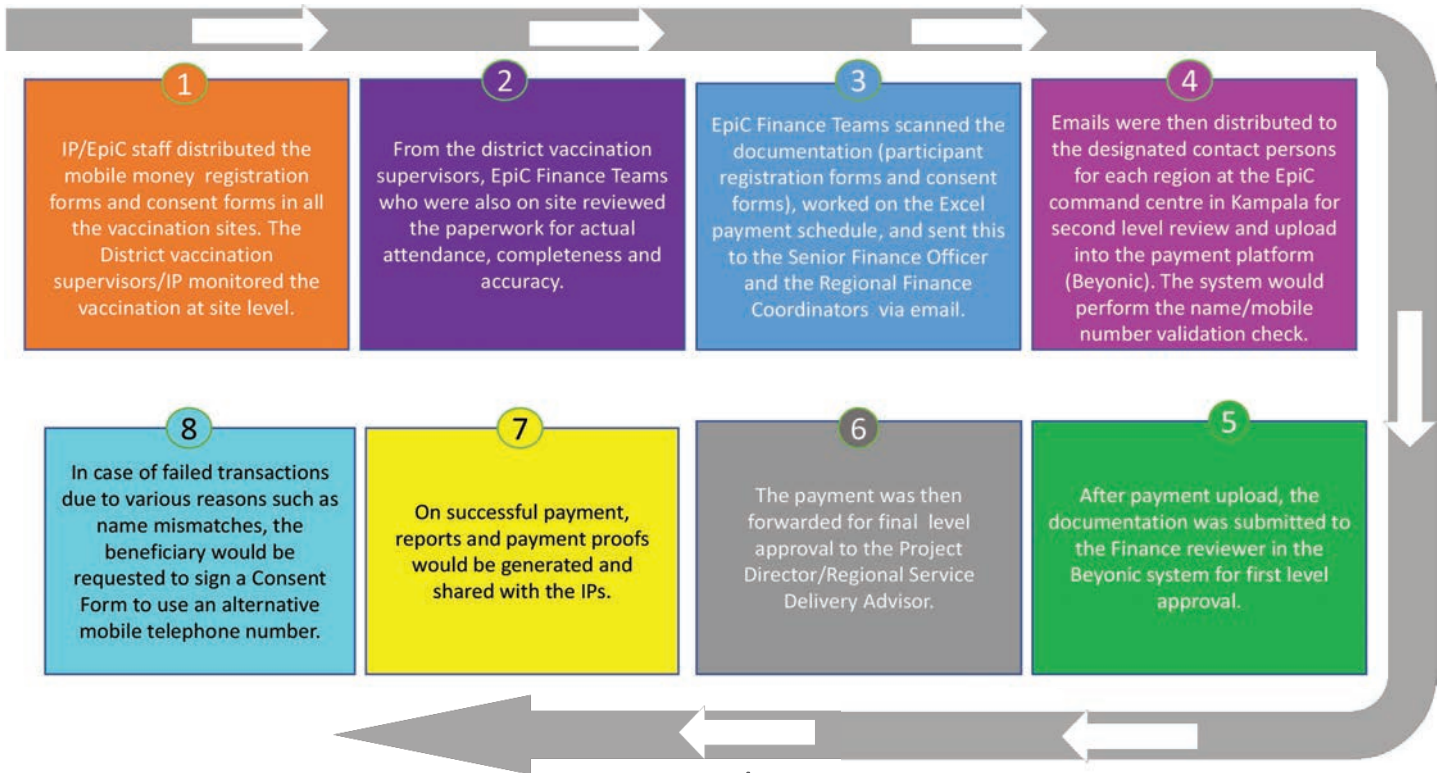
worked for payment, rather than collecting daily records, and ensuring payments through mobile money. Health workers were happy with this as they were paid to 100 percent.

The Johnson and Johnson vaccine mop-up activity was completed in the first week of September. EpiC made real-time payments for health workers and VHTs who participated in the activity. The exercise salvaged 173,656 Johnson and Johnson vaccine doses from expiring.

Despite some challenges in implementing payments, EpiC met its agreed financial obligations to districts and implementing partners for AMVC Round 3, the Johnson and Johnson vaccine mop-up campaign, and the data backlog



## Payment Process During AMVC 3



clearance activities. EpiC continued to engage the IPs in September and October to ensure that all pending payments were cleared. EpiC also instituted a practice of sharing proofs of payment with the District Health Officers and regional implementing partners.

Looking to the future, in September 2022, EpiC successfully field-tested a biometric registration app that has been working in other FHI 360 offices i.e., Nigeria under HIV/AIDS programs. The field testing was performed in Jinja

District with data entrants involved in data backlog clearance as the end-users. The names, mobile telephone numbers, and biometrics of the data clerks were captured as well as the details of their health facilities.

The data was successfully uploaded on the Beyonic payment system. When fully implemented, the biometric registration app will enable EpiC to cut out the daily use of paper form registration for health workers and instead use their fingerprints for real-time payments.

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