

CASE STUDY 13: L'UNION TECHNIQUE DE LA MUTUALITE MALIENNE

Background

As part of a national commitment to work towards achieving universal health coverage, Mali is scaling-up a network of community based health insurance schemes, otherwise referred to as mutuelles. The mutuelles currently cover 4% of the population. Efforts are underway to scale the mutuelles with the aim of covering 40% of the population by 2023. Membership in the mutuelles is voluntary, and members largely consist of low-income populations residing in rural areas of the country.

A major challenge faced by the mutuelles is collection and management of membership contributions (CFA 6,000, equivalent to 12.70USD, per year). The Government of Mali subsidizes 50% of the membership contribution for many members, but even the subsidized premium is expensive for Mali's poorest. Traveling to a mutuelle facility to pay membership fees can pose a burden and create additional costs for members, particularly those residing in remote rural areas. For the mutuelles, it is administratively complicated and costly to collect membership contributions in-person, particularly in hard-to-reach rural areas of the country.

Use of mobile money: Health insurance premium payments

Date launched: September 2013

Stage: Scale up

Size: 500+ mobile money transactions among 30 mutuelles

Country: Mali

Area of the country: Country-wide

Funding: Self-funded

Key partners: Orange

Mobile Money

In June 2011, shortly after the launch of several mutuelle pilots in Mali, managers of Union Technique de la Mutualité Malienne (UTM) attended a workshop in Mombasa, Kenya, organized by the [Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage \(JLN\)](#), where they learned about the Kenya National Hospital Insurance Fund's (NHIF) use of M-Pesa, the well-known payment platform, to collect health insurance premiums from informal sector populations. Union Technique de la Mutualité Malienne (UTM) is one of the largest associations of Mutuelle Health Organizations in Mali. It plays an important role in providing political, technical, and administrative support to all of Mali's mutuelles.

Upon returning to Mali, UTM managers were inspired to explore as a potential tool to collect health insurance premiums in Mali. They began exploratory conversations with Orange Telecommunications, the mobile network provider in Mali with the most extensive coverage across the country. Over the next 2 years, UTM managers worked in partnership with Orange-Cash program to design a mobile money payment system for collecting mutuelle membership contributions. UTM launched the mobile money application within all of Mali's mutuelles in September 2013. One of the key features of this program is a customized IT platform developed jointly by Orange and UTM to enable secure file transfer between the two institutions to ensure that both parties can access updated and accurate mobile payment records for mutuelle members. This IT platform also allows UTM administrator to register mutuelle members with Orange mobile accounts to the Orange-Cash program directly from the UTM office.



Results

As of June 2014, 300+ mutuelle members from across the country had paid premiums via mobile money, resulting in 500+ mobile money transactions. This number continues to grow.

Lessons Learned

- *Establishing an agreement with a network service provider* – When UTM first approached Orange, the Orange-Cash program had been in operation for less than one year in Mali. The program was in high-demand in Mali, but only among private sector firms. UTM was the first organization in the public sector – and in the health sector – to work with the Orange Cash program. A business agreement was signed between UTM and Orange after one year of negotiations.
- *Adapting a mobile money application to meet program needs* – UTM asked Orange to make several changes to its Orange-Cash program in Mali to make it user-friendly for mutuelle members, many of whom are poor and have limited financial literacy. Initially, the Orange Cash program didn't allow users to make incremental payments, which is an important feature for mutuelle members. Upon request, Orange adapted the program to enable “flexible payments,” which allow members to submit premium contributions – of any size - at their convenience. UTM also asked Orange-Cash to display fees associated with each transaction before a payment is sent. As transaction fees can be prohibitive costs for mutuelle members, UTM managers wanted to ensure transparency about all fees incurred in the payment process.
- *Educating program users about mobile money* – In order to inform and educate existing mutuelle members about paying premium payments via Orange-Cash, UTM staff diligently reached out to all mutuelle members by sending text messages and conducting phone calls. For existing members already subscribed to Orange, UTM members offered to register them for Orange Cash and would do so upon request. UTM offers to register all new mutuelle members to the Orange Cash program.

Mobile Money Payment Process

1. *Mutuelle members visits Orange Cash agent to add money to account*
2. *Member submits partial or full contribution amount to mutuelles via mobile money, and receives notification of transaction cost prior to sending payment*
3. *Data on member contribution automatically updated in Orange Cash and UTM databases*

Challenges

- *Resistance among users to pay transaction fees* – During the pilot phase of the program, UTM learned that mutuelle members were strongly opposed to paying transaction fees, particularly as hidden costs. UTM worked with the telecom provider to ensure that mobile money users would receive a notification message about all transaction fees, but members continue to be concerned about transaction fees. In response to this, UTM staff explains that transaction fees are lower than the travel and opportunity costs associated with paying premiums in-person.
- *Providing customer-service to mutuelle members* – When Mutuelle members have questions about the Orange-cash program or encounter difficulties, UTM managers and staff respond to address their needs because Orange staff are unfamiliar with the mutuelles payment system and therefore lack knowledge to adequately support mutuelle members when needed.

Looking Forward

UTM and Mali's mutuelles aim to increasingly use mobile money to collect and manage premium payments, particularly as the mobile money ecosystem continues to develop in Mali and membership in mutuelles expands. UTM is also exploring a mobile-based payment mechanism to send claims payments to health providers.

Sources

- <http://jointlearningnetwork.org/>
- Interview in December 2013 with Cheickna Toure, UTM Deputy Director General.