

CASE STUDY 5: PAYWAST

Background

Launched in 2011, Paywast (meaning “to connect” in Dari), is Afghanistan’s largest social network with more than 1.5 million users. The platform, which stands at the forefront of SMS-based social networking technology in the country – processing roughly 30 percent of all SMS messages – also assists government departments, NGOs, and other enterprises to customize mobile solutions for Afghan citizens.

With support from the Afghan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and in partnership with Care of Afghan Families (CAF), Paywast began technical implementation of an mHealth call center for maternal health in 2013. Responding to a low rate of facility-based deliveries and limited referrals, the call center aims to ensure that all women have the opportunity to deliver at health centers with qualified medical professionals by managing customer relationships between patients and community health workers (CHWs), and facilitating access to emergency medical transportation when necessary. While Paywast is responsible for the implementation and operations of the mobile money application and the call center, CAF is the primary MoPH partner, and is responsible for training of staff, CHWs, drivers, clinics and health facilities.

Type of program: SMS based cash voucher system for reimbursement of transportation costs

Health focus: Maternal health

Date launched: 2013

Stage: Scale up

Size: Pilot program available in 3 districts in the north of Afghanistan

Countries: Afghanistan

Key partners: Afghan MoPH, WHO, CAF

Mobile providers: Mobile vouchers delivered on major Afghan mobile operators who are all integrated directly with Paywast

Funding: Afghan Ministry of Public Health. The project received a special mention award from mBillionth

Mobile Money

Health workers contact the mHealth call center in Kabul to ask for medical information to help them manage cases of obstetric emergencies. For low-risk cases, call center staff provide instructions and suggestions to health workers concerning safe maternal health practices. In high-risk cases, the call center encourages the health worker to refer the patient to a health facility and will provide emergency transport through informal transportation partners (local car or motorcycle owners) to ensure patients go to clinics that provide the appropriate medical services to address their needs.

Results

During its first year of operation, the Paywast/CAF mHealth call center enrolled more than 2,000 citizens into the program, of which approximately 65 percent were women. The call center made transportation referrals to more than 1,800 women and their families – all facilitated by mobile money transactions. The center also observed an improvement in the ratio of childbirths that took place in a clinic versus at home in affected areas. With the opening of a second call center in late 2014, Paywast hopes that the number of citizens they are able to serve will continue to grow exponentially.

In these high risk cases or in the event of an emergency, the call center utilizes an SMS-based cash voucher reimbursement system to pay drivers for emergency transportation. When an emergency



arises, the health workers contact the call center, and the center identifies an available driver and makes travel arrangements for the patient to go to an appropriate health facility. After the driver has brought the patient to the health facility, the call center sends a voucher directly to the driver to cover the costs of his or her services via a proprietary mobile money system built by Paywast specifically for this purpose. The mobile money vouchers can be sent through any of the mobile operators integrated with the Paywast platform. The driver, in turn, shows the SMS voucher to a local Paywast mobile money dealer, who verifies it by contacting the call center, and then pays out the driver in cash. The mobile money dealers are typically trustworthy small businesses operating in the covered districts.

Lessons Learned

- *One size does not fit all* – While the project achieved its targets and the outcome was decidedly positive, an SMS wallet based mobile money model may not be the best solution for digital reimbursements in Afghanistan, particularly considering the country's current mobile and financial services environment. While beneficiaries tended to embrace the mobile-based reimbursements because of the rapid payments and conversion to cash, experience from other mobile money initiatives in Afghanistan shows that there is little motivation or incentive for consumers to keep their money inside the mobile money ecosystem by depositing it in a virtual wallet or account.

Mobile Money Payment Process

1. Health worker contacts Paywast mHealth call center to arrange emergency transportation for patient
2. Call center makes emergency transport arrangements with a local driver
3. After transportation has been completed, call center sends voucher directly to driver to their mobile money account
4. Driver shows voucher to Paywast mobile money dealer
5. Dealers verify voucher by contacting call center
6. Transportation service is confirmed and driver is paid in cash

Challenges

- *Lack of citizen trust in non-cash payments* – Given that mobile money is still a new concept in Afghanistan, there is skepticism from drivers who fear that they will not receive their money. This skepticism reflects a wider sentiment expressed by many mobile money users throughout the country. Convincing potential users that mobile money is a viable – and safer – alternative to cash payments is imperative to the success of such projects, and requires intensive training, a well-planned communications strategy, establishment of a reliable network of trusted mobile money agents, and a responsive user support/customer service mechanism.
- *Operating mobile money in a niche environment* – Due to the extremely limited traction mobile money has in Afghanistan, there is virtually no knowledge of mobile financial services among citizens or established ecosystem to leverage. While this project is in early stages, only available in three districts in the Northern Province of Badakhshan, a national scale-up would require significant investment in building out the stakeholder ecosystem, to increase citizen awareness of mobile money.

Looking Forward

Building on experiences from this and other projects, Paywast developed a new voucher-based mobile payment network, independent of mobile operators, which will work as a hybrid between mobile and cash payments and is intended to empower programs such as the one covered here. With this, any merchant or service provider will be able to accept digital remote payments using a smartphone, and

consumers will be able to pay using vouchers from their basic phones or smartphones. The service will launch later in 2015.

Sources

- Inputs from Jes Kaliebe Petersen, Paywast co-founder
- <http://paywast.af/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0tgAdtdjXg>
- <http://paywast.af/blog/2014/07/24/paywast-wins-innovation-award-in-new-delhi/>
- <http://mbillionth.in/mobile-based-services-solutions-for-health/>