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EPWP Hosts Virtual Community of Practice Session to Strengthen Payment Systems and Address Control Gaps

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The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI), through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), hosted a virtual Community of Practice (COP) session on 23 April 2026. The session focused on strengthening payment systems and addressing control weaknesses affecting the accuracy, transparency, and timeliness of payments to participants.

In her opening remarks, the Deputy Director-General of EPWP, Carmen-Joy Abrahams, welcomed delegates and emphasised the importance of efficient payment systems in ensuring the success of the EPWP. She highlighted that timely payments of income are critical in improving the socio-economic conditions of participants. Ms Abrahams indicated that when payments are delayed or incorrect, trust in the system is affected and the programme's impact on job creation and poverty reduction is weakened.

The engagement focused on strengthening the integration between attendance records and payment processes, improving identity verification and data sharing across systems, reducing payment delays, and enhancing transparency, accountability, and the timely payment of EPWP participants.

An international perspective was presented by a representative from the Ministry of Rural Development in India, Shri Gupta. He highlighted that large-scale public employment programmes can achieve near-universal payment integrity through fully integrated digital systems that link attendance, wage calculation, and direct payments to beneficiaries through a centralised payment architecture. The Indian model also demonstrated that enforcing clear payment timelines, supported by automated systems and penalties for delays, significantly improves reliability and accountability in wage payments.

Ms Abrahams further highlighted that the EPWP uses different payment methods, with some projects paying workers through government payroll systems, while others use stipends or task-based payments. In some cases, NGOs or implementing agents handle payments, and these variations can contribute to delays and make controls more complex. The engagement explored practical approaches to strengthening the credibility of payment systems, improving coordination across stakeholders, and addressing persistent payment challenges.

South African Reserve Bank senior analyst Peter Makgetsi emphasised that all payment system reforms must operate within the National Payment System, which is designed to ensure the safety, efficiency, and integrity of payments across the economy. Mr Makgetsi cautioned that "if we cannot pay participants correctly and on time, we undermine the purpose of the EPWP." It was further noted that challenges such as limited interoperability, infrastructure constraints, and high levels of cash usage continue to influence the feasibility and design of digital payment solutions in the South African context.

The Community of Practice session was positioned as a structured intervention aimed at strengthening the credibility, accountability, efficiency, and auditability of EPWP payment systems. The success of the engagement is expected to be measured by the clarity of problem definition, the level of disciplined engagement, the ability to generate practical insights into solutions, the identification of reform

priorities, and the establishment of a strong foundation for follow-up action.

These perspectives reinforced the importance of aligning EPWP payment reforms with national financial infrastructure while strengthening internal controls, particularly the link between verified attendance and payment, which remains a critical gap in the current system.

The COP represents a critical step towards ensuring a safe, fair, and transparent environment for EPWP participants, while also strengthening governance, accountability, and enabling credible, scalable payment systems.

Chief Director: Operations, Pearl Lukwago-Mugerwa, summarised the key discussions and highlighted that the COP created a valuable platform to identify control gaps, operational inefficiencies, and system integration challenges affecting the credibility and performance of payment processes. She emphasised the importance of improving alignment between attendance data and payment systems, strengthening identity verification, and enhancing coordination across implementing agents to reduce delays and improve accuracy. Ms Lukwago-Mugerwa further noted that sustained collaboration, disciplined implementation of agreed reforms, and continuous monitoring will be critical to ensuring meaningful progress. She stressed the need to consolidate key issues into an actionable plan and maintain ongoing knowledge-sharing and follow-up engagements.

The Deputy Director-General of EPWP, Ms Carmen-Joy Abrahams, officially concluded the session by reaffirming the department's commitment to strengthening payment systems and addressing control gaps. She emphasised that improving the efficiency, transparency, and reliability of payment processes remains central to the success of the EPWP and its role in creating job opportunities and reducing poverty. Ms Abrahams encouraged continued collaboration among stakeholders to ensure that the outcomes of the Community of Practice translate into practical improvements that benefit all EPWP participants.

