

# Jamaica Joins Emerging Market Trend for Launching New E-Currency

By Jim Wyss

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The Bank of Jamaica minted \$1.5 million worth of a new e-currency this week, joining a growing list of emerging markets betting on digital money to cut transaction costs and boost participation in the formal financial system.

Eventually, any Jamaican with a mobile phone will be able to use the digital cash, Bank of Jamaica Deputy Governor Natalie Haynes said in a telephone interview Thursday.

The new currency also cuts costs for monetary authorities by reducing the printing, security and distribution costs associated with physical cash, Haynes said.

The bank spends about \$6.4 million a year acquiring bills and coins. And it usually takes nine months to order, print and deliver physical currency, she said. This week, the central bank minted \$230 million Jamaican digital dollars -- or about 1.5 million -- within minutes.

Central bank digital currencies, or CBDCs, are national currency -- unlike their crypto counterparts, such as Bitcoin and Ethereum, which are prized, in part, because they are not tied to fiat.

Jamaica will test its e-currency during a pilot period that runs through December. It hopes to drive adoption by using the technology to distribute national welfare payments. Ireland-based eCurrency Mint Inc. is the government's technology provider.

Jamaica joins the Bahamas and the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank in being among the first jurisdictions in the world to roll out national digital currencies. China launched its "digital renminbi" earlier this year.

While Bahamas has the "Sand Dollar" and the Eastern Caribbean has "DCash," Jamaica's digital currency has yet to be named.

"We are looking for a name that is authentically Jamaican," Haynes said. "We want people to identify with it."

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