MicroSave Briefing Note # 138
Implementing Training for E/M-Banking Agents

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Introduction

Several years ago, an electronic/mobile-banking (e/m-banking) initiative in Bangladesh planned a detailed training programme for all their newly recruited agents. The programme required a two-three day commitment from these agents at a well-equipped training facility an hour outside Dhaka. The plan went wrong.

Most agents were unwilling to leave their shops, even with partial remuneration for the travel and training time. One important reason was the lack of public transportation to the facility and insufficient alternatives provided by the training sponsors. The ultimate disincentive, however, was a beautifully designed three-ring binder notebook full of splendid training materials...in English.

The above example highlights, perhaps more dramatically than most such training efforts, the need to tailor professional instruction to all the audience requirements—not simply the classroom objectives. There cannot be a *"one size fits all"* approach. Agents need to appear well-informed and confident if they are to inspire their customers' trust and encourage adoption of this new, unfamiliar technology.

Training strategy and implementation vary. Briefing Note #135 covers most of the training needs of e/m-banking agents in detail.[1] In this Note, we recommend action points for designing and implementing courses with these needs in mind; and also ways the service providers (banks, mobile network operators, standalone mobile money operators)—who if not running the training themselves, are actively involved—can help ensure better results.

The Training Task Force

A diverse training task force, set up by the principal service provider, should outline the course or update the curriculum. The task force should include experts in retail banking for low-income customers; authentication; security; fraud; branch infrastructure and processes; cash management; regulatory compliance and accounting; mobile networks and electronic funds transfer (EFT) technology; sales and marketing for banking services; and overall instructional design.

Each group is responsible for prioritising and simplifying the information they need to impart (remembering that most agents cannot afford, and have no wish, to leave their businesses for even a day). Agents can also be forgiven for finding all this material less riveting than the experts do. Nevertheless, accuracy and details matter, particularly for regulatory constraints, fraud, accounting, and EFT technology.

Training Needs Assessment (TNA)

A comprehensive review of the agents' training needs is essential. These will depend on the agent's geographic and personal profile; the products and services he will be offering his clients; and the technical, accounting, and other processes involved in both his transactions and sales. The training assessment needs to focus first on agents (please see box below), and also include feedback from their prospective customers, supervisors, internal audit staff, and anyone else from banks, mobile networks and technology service providers involved in the agent's tasks and responsibilities. Based on these results and their own training priorities, the task force can then begin designing the curriculum, methodology, and expected outcomes.[2]

Training Needs Assessment

In Bihar (India), *MicroSave* worked with a local agent network manager to assess how much agents already understood about mobile banking and to identify their training needs. The field questionnaire addressed agent awareness regarding:

- Overall financial inclusion strategy in India;
- Specific banking products and processes, plus government and other pay-outs;
- Effective client communication about the banking services and the benefits thereof;
- Technology (how it works, what to do when it doesn't work);
- Effective communication with banks and ANMs; and
- Daily operations and accounting, including cash management.

Based on these inputs, we developed different training modules (in the local language) to focus on the areas that needed the most attention.

Training Curriculum Development

In the interest of respecting their time and income (and in the pedagogical interest of optimal results), agents only need training in the areas most relevant to the work they are required to do. "Transaction" agents generally deal in relatively simple cash-in or cash-out transactions. Their training needs differ significantly from full-service agents who have more substantive sales and account-management responsibilities.[3] Transaction agents often become full-service agents, but their first training priority is not the arcane distinctions, fees, and regulatory constraints

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[1] Briefing Note # 135 "Training E/M-Banking Agents—What is Missing?"

[2] For more on conducting training needs assessments, refer *MicroSave*'s Training of Trainers Toolkit

[3] These agents provide all services including enrolment / account opening. They usually offer two or more products rather than a single product. For example, at Equity Bank, agents perform both account opening and servicing of accounts and handle more than five products.

pertaining to each account, but rather cash management, security (for cash-in agents in particular), simple process regulations, grievance resolution, and technology troubleshooting.

Full-service agents need to know all the above, plus:
- Who their customers are and how to authenticate them (KYC);
- Customers' needs, in order to sell them the right account(s) and encourage their use;
- What the competition is offering and how to sell against them;
- How to facilitate problem-solving (agents cannot actually resolve customer-service disputes, but they can expedite and help explain the process to their unhappy clients);
- How to foster better customer protection (again, agents can do little more than promote, but advocacy is an important part of sales);
- How the bank (and/or MNO) interact with the ANM and vice-versa; and
- Which bank and telecom regulations require full compliance and why.

A concise manual should be prepared for ready reference post-training, preferably in plastic file pockets (to allow rapid updating), preferably in pictograms as well as the local language. No one remembers every detail from every training session. The most important points need to be available for both types of agents and their supervisors.

Training Methodology
It is essential to create the best learning environment possible. Adults learn differently from children (and most of us are markedly less patient and cooperative). Relevance, teamwork, differing needs and learning styles, plus

> At Celpay Zambia, *"sales generators"* from the Mobile Transactions team stay at each of the new agent locations for two weeks for general training—and to help manage cash-out liquidity problems in particular.

(subtle) repetition and reinforcement all contribute to trainees learning material quickly and thoroughly. If the sessions offer a positive experience, they may readily sign up for refresher courses—and encourage other agents.[4]

Based on the type of agents, their business demands, age of the deployment, and their training needs, classes can be on-site, in small groups nearby, or in a more formal setting for large numbers. Service providers can conduct on-the-job training for one/few agents at a time, or classroom training for a bigger group.

On-site training usually suffices and proves more effective for transaction agents since the training can focus directly on specific issues relevant to the agent. Most of the transaction agents also prefer not to leave their businesses to attend training. The alternative of compensating agents for revenue loss may prove too costly for the service provider. One exception would be transaction agents who have been recruited prior to/in the immediate period after the launch of the service. In this case, classroom training would be preferable to adequately communicate what is, in essence, a completely new concept.

Classroom training, works better for full-service or dedicated agents since they have a more complex curriculum to cover. Planning for these more formal sessions can be complicated, however, since agents are often recruited singly, not in batches. One option offered by Equity Bank in Kenya and others is to run weekly, standard introductory classes to new recruits, (irrespective of whether there are few or many), and then follow up with periodic refresher and more in-depth training for larger groups.

Who Implements the Training?
The two most common training-implementation options are a dedicated in-house department or third-party professionals. The former allows the ANM and others involved in the training task force to have direct control over content and instruction. This is particularly useful with multiple accounts, complex regulatory changes, security issues, updates and refresher courses, or regional/product expansions. Equity Bank in Kenya, MTN Uganda (a mobile money service provider) and Eko(a leading ANM in India)all have in-house training.

The alternative is outsourcing. A notable example is M-PESA agent training in Kenya, which is managed by Top Image on the basis of curricula developed by Safaricom.[5] Service providers monitor training closely in these cases to ensure training objectives are fulfilled and agents are well prepared for their new work.

Monitoring Conduct and Impact of Training
Finally, it is also essential to assess training results. (Did everyone learn what they were supposed to? If not, why? And how should we do it better next time?) Feedback from agents and trainers immediately following the sessions regarding content, methodology, and general efficacy is a good first step. Follow-up testing to measure how much information agents retain and what material they are missing is equally important. Service providers often collect feedback immediately after the training. Some service providers like Oxigen (an ANM in India) also use outbound calls to agents to obtain feedback on training. Feedback can help improve design and delivery to improve the efficiency of training initiatives in the future.

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[4]For more on designing training programmes in accordance with the adult learning principles, refer *MicroSave*'s Training of the Trainers Toolkit

[5]Top Image is an advertising and field force management agency in Kenya. See CGAP Blog: How agent network managers have helped fuel M-PESA's success