

Benchmarking Training and Support

by Agent Network Management Model

Doreen Ahimbisibwe, Wanjiku Kiarie, and Vera Bersudskaya



This paper is part of a series of synthesis papers that summarise data on agent networks, collected over four and a half years from nine countries in Africa and Asia through the Agent Network Accelerator (ANA) project¹. *MicroSave's Helix* Institute of Digital Finance conducted the ANA project with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), Financial Sector Deepening – Uganda (FSDU), and Karandaz Pakistan. The paper draws on previous research by The *Helix*, particularly the [Framework for Understanding Agent Network Success](#), to look at provider onboarding and on-going support to their agents by different agent network management models.

Doing a good job requires knowledge, skills, and commitment. The job of a cash-in/cash-out agent might seem simple: just deposit and withdraw money into and from client accounts. In reality, agents have not only to deal with clients of all backgrounds but also have enough money on hand, and in the right form, to serve clients who seek either cash or e-money or both. Agents must also guard themselves against fraud and money laundering, explain digital finance to clients, comply with Know Your Customer (KYC) regulations, all the while making ends meet. Therefore, adequate training (induction and refreshers) and on-going support are crucial to the success of an agent network. This paper, therefore, seeks to analyse three Agent Network Management (ANM) models and their efficiency for agents' training and support.

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1. Experts' Insights on Agents Training and Support

1.1 Benefits of Agents' Induction Training

Literature on agent networks emphasises the [role of induction training](#) in ensuring error-free transactions, maintaining agent knowledge of DFS products, enabling agent profitability, ensuring a uniform customer experience and agent compliance, as well as proactive fraud mitigation.

Trained agents are expected to conduct transactions more accurately and avoid losing money – both their own or the customer's. The [GSM Association](#) (GSMA) suggests that well-trained agents are more likely to succeed in driving transaction volumes and to be able to [educate customers](#) on how the service works. Knowing products well enables agents to better serve clients by directing them to the right products and services, while boosting their own business. Training introduces agents to their business model, commission structures, and core operations – all fundamental for ensuring that they can run their [business profitably](#). Training on customer service standards is a prerequisite for uniformity and conformity across outlets.



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Training also imparts basic 'do's and don'ts'. It is the [first line of defence against various types of fraud or abuse](#). Effective [training on fraud](#) raises agent awareness of the different types of fraud to which they may be susceptible and offers pointers on how to prevent it. Training is also vital for adequate [customer acquisition levels and active usage](#). Overall, training is important to ensure compliance with regulations on levying extra fees, displaying tariffs, PIN sharing, money laundering, and fraudulent activities.

1. See Appendix A for further detail on the data and countries covered.

1.2 Importance of On-going Support (Visits and Refresher Training)

Once the agents start operations, it is vital to visit them to check compliance with standards, determine the training effectiveness, identify retraining needs, drive high-quality, uniform customer service, and motivate and build agents’ brand loyalty. Recurrent refresher training sessions further ensure that agents stay up to date with [new products](#) and resolve the challenges that they face.

Visits conducted by knowledgeable support personnel can identify non-compliance issues, ensure the application of principles conveyed during training, examine service uniformity and customer service, check for gaps in knowledge, and uncover challenges or misunderstandings. Often, such visits offer an opportunity for agents to voice concerns or get clarification and even re-training on the spot or have it arranged on a follow-up visit. On top of oversight and support, visits offer the agents validation of their own work and communicate that the provider cares for them. Cumulatively, these measures should translate into [higher quality and more uniform service that will enhance traffic to the agent outlet](#), and in the process reinforce agent loyalty to the brand.

1.3 Design Factors for Appropriate Training to Agents

Attributes	Description
Training Participants	All staff involved in a DFS deployment should be provided with the knowledge and skills necessary to support reliable and high-quality service delivery. According to the GSMA , this includes DFS business owner, handlers/operators, foot-soldiers, agent network management teams, and master agents, aggregators or distributors . ² For banks, all customer-facing and agency back-office staff must be trained to ensure that all staff can support the agents and direct them to relevant resources, should the need arise.
Training Content	The IFC recommends that initial training be split between technical elements (performing transactions, registering customers, managing liquidity, recordkeeping) and theory (KYC regulations, fraud identification, and management, AML/CTF, customer service). However, crucially, providers should present agents with a compelling, easy-to-grasp business-case to prevent dormancy due to misunderstandings on how to make money. Briefing on provider products is an important step to ensuring agents can explain the service to customers . In addition, during the induction training, owners and handlers should get an opportunity to perform hands-on transactions before starting the business.
Location for Delivering Training	Training locations are generally picked based on who is being trained. Agents being on-boarded usually receive training at their outlets, while the refresher training that the business owners typically attend tend to be centralised. However, it is common that refresher training sessions are conducted on-site during support visits. Centralised, decentralised or on-site training models depend on the maturity of the mobile money deployment. Centralised training schemes tend to be more common prior to the launch of a mobile money scheme, while regional and onsite training schemes are more common once the mobile money deployments are live.
Facilitators for Agents’ Training and Support	The decision to conduct trainings in-house or outsource them to master agents or third-parties is conditioned by the ANM strategy (discussed below), which in turn depends on the providers’ internal capacity and resources to carry out the training and lend continuous support. Some providers have chosen a mix of both in-house and outsourced resources for different elements. The GSMA warns that master agents/distributors/aggregators and agent network management teams may not be adequately equipped to train agents, since their KPIs focus primarily on driving sales, growth, and transaction volumes . As such, they may overlook the theoretical aspects of the training, emphasising solely on the mechanics of how to perform transactions.

2. A handler or operator is a person employed to run the business on behalf of the owner. Foot-soldiers are the sales staff employed to market the mobile money services. Agent Network Management Teams are the professional personnel managing the agent network. Master agents/distributors/aggregators are the entities that the DFS provider employs to recruit agents and support them with liquidity management, among others.

2. ANA Data Insights on Agents’ Training and Support³

At the core of this paper is a recognition that the agent network management of providers determines both the method and effectiveness of onboarding agents and the provision of on-going support. This paper first classifies 27 leading providers from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia into three broad categories: direct, hybrid, and indirect agent management. It then proceeds to benchmark these models on key indicators of support. It further looks at evidence of training effectiveness along several parameters of agent performance. It concludes with reflections on the state of play when it comes to the support provided to the agent as they are on-boarded and start running their operations.

2.1 Agent Network Management (ANM) Approaches

This paper classifies ANM models into three broad categories: direct, hybrid, and indirect while recognising that there are important differences within each category.

Direct ANM Model entails recruiting and managing agents through providers’ own area managers or field representatives. [Hub-and-spoke models](#), which are popular among banks that entrust agent management to their existing regional branches, fit in this category. Third-parties with centralised agent network management are also included here. Direct ANM gives provider substantial control over the agent network.

Indirect ANM Model entails delegating agent recruitment and management to [master agents, aggregators, or distributor franchises](#). These entities must fulfil provider requirements, such as having a registered business, adequate capital, and adherence to provider standards in recruiting and managing agents.

Hybrid ANM Model is a combination of direct and indirect models. [Hybridisation](#) of ANM approaches is natural, as providers begin to divide their agent networks into segments and wish to maintain control over priority agents, delegating responsibility for the bulk of the network.



Table 1. Classification of 27 Leading Providers from ANA Research Countries

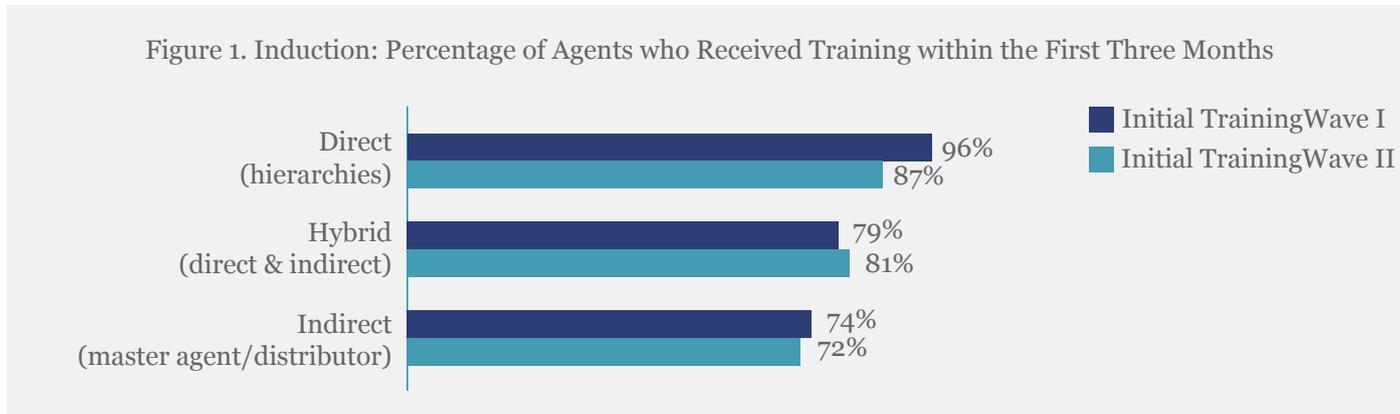
ANM Model	DFS Providers
Direct	Equity Bank-Kenya , KCB-Kenya , Co-op-Kenya, Zanaco-Zambia, Investrust-Zambia, Zoono-Zambia, W@ri-Senegal, Joni Joni-Senegal, BRI-Indonesia, BTPN-Indonesia
Hybrid	MTN Uganda-Kenya, Safaricom-Kenya, Vodacom-Tanzania, Tigo-Tanzania, bKash-Bangladesh, DBBL-Bangladesh, Orange-Senegal
Indirect	Airtel-Uganda, MTN-Zambia, Airtel-Zambia, Airtel-Kenya, Tigo-Senegal, Airtel-Tanzania, Telenor-Easy Paisa-Pakistan, Mobilink Jazzcash-Pakistan, UBL Omni-Pakistan, Ufone Upaisa-Pakistan

3. See Appendix A for a detailed description of ANA data.

2.2 Benchmarking Provider Support, by Agent Network Management Approach

Benchmarking involves comparing the key metrics of a business to industry standards or best-practices. This section draws on the rich data collected from over 30,000 agents since the launch of the ANA programme in 2013 to calculate the key agent support metrics that would serve as industry reference.

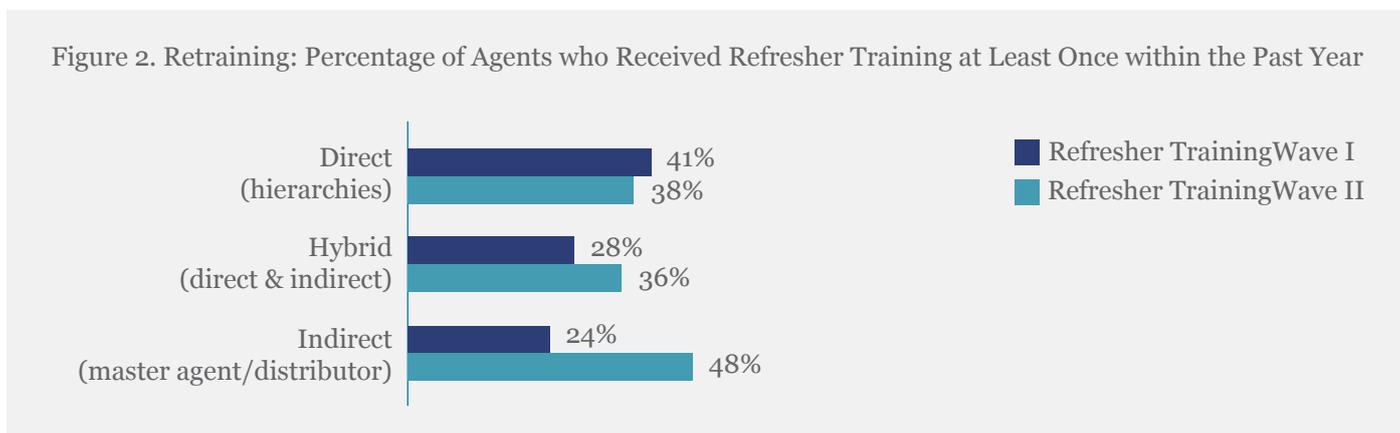
Figure 1. Induction: Percentage of Agents who Received Training within the First Three Months



Under direct ANM approach, comparatively more agents receive induction training

This is no surprise, as banks that figure prominently in this category, and are closely supervised, need to ensure their agents serve clients responsibly and in line with regulations. Hybrid approaches score second while indirect, master agent/distributor-based approaches induct the lowest portion of agents. As noted earlier, master agent/distributors may prioritise recruitment targets over delivering training to all newly on-boarded agents. Comparing trends between Wave I (data collected 2013-2014) and Wave II (data collected 2015-2017), there has been little evolution in the achievement of hybrid and indirect models.

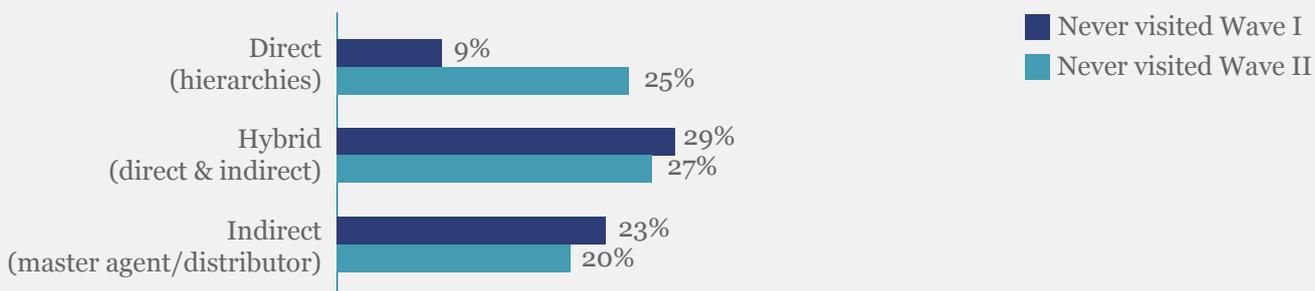
Figure 2. Retraining: Percentage of Agents who Received Refresher Training at Least Once within the Past Year



Less than Half the Agents Receive Refresher Training, Regardless of How They are Managed.

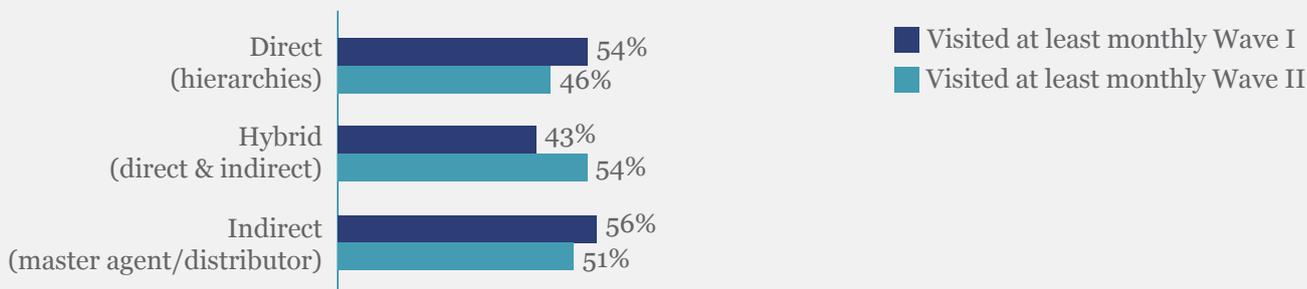
Between the two waves of data collection, the levels of refresher training remained similar among directly managed agents, while there were substantial gains for agents under hybrid and indirect management. The [GSMA](#) recommends that new products and services be introduced to agents through refresher training. The recommendations go on to suggest that where possible, a technical simulation of using the new service should be done so agents can become familiar with the new features. Also, it is through the refresher training that agents receive the opportunity to seek answers to any challenges they might face – as well understand emerging trends in fraud. It is therefore important that refresher training sessions are scheduled.

Figure 3. No Support Visits: Percentage of Agents Who have Never been Visited when They have a Question or Need Support



Many agents never receive support visits once they are on-boarded – though they may receive support remotely, for instance, through call centres or via WhatsApp messages. Ideally, this figure should be zero for all deployments. As experts note, support visits are a great avenue for ensuring smooth operations, for retraining agents, for resolving their problems, to manage fraud, and to build rapport. Almost one in four agents are left to fend for themselves, which affects their quality of service and consequently the providers’ image. Providers outside Kenya, who are less strict about agent visitation, have driven the rise in ‘un-visited’ agents. Addressing this issue requires having key performance indicators (KPIs) for the teams that are involved in agent network management. For hybrid models, there is a need for a clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities.

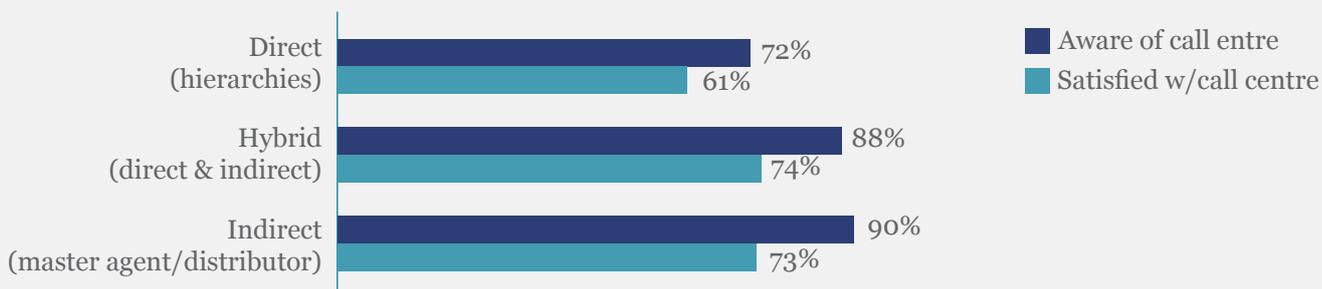
Figure 4. Regular support visits: % agents who receive support visits regularly - at least monthly



Roughly half of the agents receive visits on a regular basis and at least once a month under all management approaches. It is encouraging to see that at least half of the agents receive monthly visits, as agents need continuous support to operate their agencies smoothly. Mild declines in the proportion of directly and indirectly managed agents who are visited at least once a month may be cause for alarm. As noted above, frequent visits can be included as a KPI for agent network managers to reverse this trend.

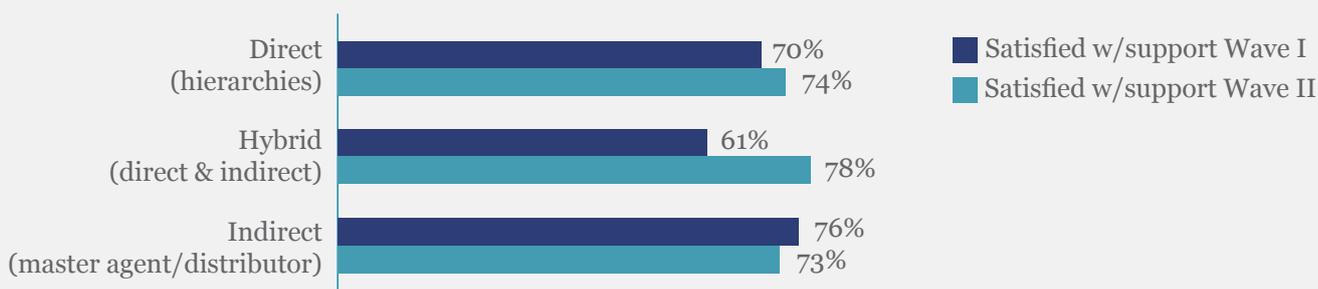


Figure 5. Call Centre Awareness and Satisfaction: Percentage of Agents Who are Aware and Percentage of Agents Who are Satisfied with the Call Centre (Wave II)



The latest data shows that agents are generally aware of and are satisfied with providers’ call centres, though the rates among directly managed agents are slightly lower. Considering that directly managed agents were also least likely to receive regular visits at least monthly in the latest data collection wave, these agents may not be getting their problems resolved as efficiently as their indirectly or hybrid-managed counterparts.

Figure 6. Overall Support Satisfaction: Percentage of Agents Who are at least Somewhat Satisfied with Providers’ Support Services



Three-quarters of agents are satisfied with the support provided regardless of the management models, according to the latest data. This suggests that agents can easily log their complaints and are satisfied with the overall support received. However, satisfaction levels improved significantly only among agents who were managed through a hybrid of direct and indirect approaches. If an agent feels adequately supported by the provider, it contributes to the agents’ brand loyalty and leads to better service for the customers.

2.3 Assessing the Effectiveness of Induction, Refresher Training, and Support Visits

Practitioners and researchers alike highlight the importance of induction training, regular re-training, and on-site visits for support or monitoring. After demonstrating how different models benchmark on indicators of provider support, this section of the paper compares agents who received these services with those who did not, using a set of agent performance indicators. Indicators measured include branding (displaying either provider colours or provider sign, or both) and professionalism (displaying outlet business hours and details of grievance mechanisms or customer care phone number). They also cover compliance (displaying either agent ID or tariff sheets, or both), as well as daily transaction volumes, satisfaction with profit, and self-reported intention to remain as an agent for another year (retention).

The evidence suggests that some positive relationships do exist between provider support services and agent performance indicators. However, these are not always consistent across models and data collection waves, as depicted in the table

below. Directly managed agents who receive either training or visits, or both, are on an average more professional, as defined above. Better branding, professionalism, transaction volumes, profit satisfaction, and projected retention are associated with training and visits of agents managed through a hybrid approach. When it comes to indirectly managed agents, provider-support is associated with better branding, professionalism, and compliance.

Relationship between Provider Support & Agent Performance Metrics

The data in the table indicates if the bulk of providers belonging to a particular model showed statistically significant differences.

Agents Performance Indicators	Types of Support		
	Initial Training	Refresher	Support Visits
Branding (provider sign and/or colours)	Indirect	Indirect Hybrid	
Professionalism (business hours, call centre number)	Direct Indirect	Indirect Hybrid	Hybrid
Compliance (tariff sheet and agent ID)	Indirect	Direct Indirect Hybrid	
Transactions Denied due to Lack of Liquidity	Hybrid		
Transaction Volume		Hybrid	
Profit Satisfaction/Retention			Hybrid

Table 2: Relationship between Provider Support and Performance

* We collected Wave II data between 2014 to 2017

* The information in the table is based on statistical tests of groups who either receive or lack support (initial, refresher training, and support visits) from the provider. We examined the results using the ANM model.

There are a few differences between directly managed agents who receive training and visits, and those who do not. This may be a consequence of more careful agent recruitment according to stricter criteria, along with the existence of a very small proportion of agents that operate without any support. It could also be the makeup of this group: banks and third-party OTC providers, with the former ensuring that very few agents go unaccompanied and the latter not needing to accompany or provide much training to get similar results.

Higher compliance, branding, and professionalism among indirectly managed agent make sense: when master agents/distributors train and visit agents, they pay more attention to things they can easily observe rather than on things that could help them substantially improve their operations. Agent support through the hybrid model, on the other hand, is associated with differences in viability, attitude, as well as appearances. In these models, providers would seem more successful at supporting core agent operations as well as building agent loyalty by training and visiting agents.



3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper presents the three Agent Network Management models (hybrid, direct, and indirect models) with regards to agents' training and support. There are various levels of support, including induction training, on-going refresher training, and continuous support to ensure consistent stability of the network. These engagements have an impact on an agents' branding (displaying either provider sign or colour, or both), professionalism (displaying business hours and call centre numbers), compliance (displaying tariff sheets and agent ID), liquidity management, transaction volumes, and retention rate.

Though the direct model inducts and trains most agents, the efficiency of this support only reflects in professionalism and compliance. Indirectly managed agents are least likely to have been inducted, but most likely to receive refresher training. They are most aware of call centres and are generally satisfied with the overall support from master agents/aggregators/distributors. There is some evidence of better 'hygiene' (branding, professionalism, and compliance) among agents that are trained and visited: they are better branded, more professional, and compliant compared to their untrained and unvisited counterparts.

Agents who providers manage under the hybrid model are least likely to be visited and provided with refresher training, which may be due to coordination challenges. At the same time, on-going support in the form of support visits and refresher training is associated with better 'hygiene' as well as performance factors, such as transaction volumes and profitability. While providers largely focus on induction training, all three models could step up the intensity and quality of on-going support – with refresher training and regular support visits – particularly as networks continue to mature.

Appendix A: Agent Network Accelerator (ANA) Studies

The [Agent Network Accelerator \(ANA\)](#) project is managed by [MicroSave](#), with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), Financial Sector Deepening – Uganda (FSDU), and Karandaaz Pakistan. It is the largest research project on agent networks in the world that aims to increase the global understanding of how to build and manage sustainable cash-in/cash-out (CICO) networks in poor communities and identify factors that drive their success or failure. The research is designed to distil the most salient aspects of strategic operations in agent network management for the DFS industry, including agent network structure, agent operations, agent viability, liquidity management, quality of provider-support, and agent compliance.

[MicroSave’s Helix Institute of Digital Finance](#) launched the project in 2013. Since then, The *Helix* has conducted over 38,700 agent interviews in 11 countries, providing assessments to over 40 leading agent networks around the world.

We carried out quantitative assessments in countries where the population of active agents exceeded 10,000 according to recent and reliable data. Where networks were nascent, the team carried out qualitative strategic assessments, interviewing providers, agents, and other DFS stakeholders (See Table A).

Table A. Study type and sample size, by country and year of data collection

Country	Year				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Bangladesh		Quantitative (2841)*		Quantitative (2309)*	
Benin			Qualitative		
India ¹			Quantitative (4437)*		Quantitative (3199)*
Indonesia		Qualitative			Quantitative (1383)*
Kenya	Quantitative (3220)*	Quantitative (4126)*			
Nigeria		Qualitative		Qualitative	
Pakistan		Quantitative (3151)*			Quantitative (2563)*
Senegal			Quantitative (1639)*		
Tanzania	Quantitative (2052)		Quantitative (2066)		
Uganda	Quantitative (2028)		Quantitative (2288)		
Zambia			Quantitative (1350)*		

*Includes booster sample for key providers. Outside Tanzania and Uganda, core random samples were ‘boosted’ with additional interviews for specific providers in order to obtain statistically relevant sample size.

1. Second wave India data was being finalised at the time of paper writing. Because the Indian market underwent a dramatic transition following the demonetization of INR 500 and INR 1,000 denomination banknotes, papers do not present data from 2015 as it has lost relevance.

While *MicroSave's Helix* Institute of Digital Finance directly conducted the qualitative agent network strategic assessments, The *Helix* managed the quantitative studies with data collection outsourced to local data collection and management firms.

Between 2013 and mid-2015, data collection, quality control, data cleaning and analysis were outsourced to the local survey firms. The *Helix* provided the survey teams with the core ANA questionnaire which was administered using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI)². From September 2015, the survey was streamlined to reduce the number of questions and in-house most of data quality control, data cleaning procedures, as well as all data analysis.

Across all countries, we designed the ANA surveys to be nationally representative at the country, rural/urban, and provider levels. The study methodology varied slightly from country to country depending on the agent population data available and which The *Helix* and the local survey firms were able to obtain. In Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, we used agent censuses conducted by [BrandFusion](#) as sample frames for the studies. In other countries, The *Helix* compiled publicly available data on agent locations and solicited agent lists from the countries' leading providers.

The sampling strategy in all countries was two-stage stratified cluster random sampling, with administrative units being stratified by region and rural/urban classification³, then drawn at random. Agents are subsequently sampled from the randomly chosen administrative units in proportion to the agent population. In markets where agents serve multiple providers, agents were interviewed about their operations for a provider, randomly selected from the list of all providers for whom the agent has conducted at least one transaction in the preceding 30 days.

Each study was analysed to produce publicly available [country reports](#)⁴, which contain essential information about the performance of agents and providers who manage them. Leading DFS providers also received confidential reports with business intelligence comparing their network to competitors. In addition to country and provider reports, *MicroSave's Helix* Institute of Digital Finance has synthesised ANA data to enhance industry understanding of best-practices and benchmarks for building and managing agent networks across the globe in [blogs](#) as well as the following publications⁵:

- [Designing Successful Distribution Strategies for Digital Money](#) helps providers understand their goals for building an agent network. It subsequently helps them think through the model of building an agent network that best fits their needs.
- [Successful Agent Networks](#) builds on the understanding that networks are the channel providers used to deliver distinct value propositions to different customer target groups. It lays out a comprehensive analytical framework for analysing agent network success along several key dimensions.
- [Agents Count: The True Size of Agent Networks in Leading Digital Finance Countries](#) lays out a framework for understanding agent network size, drawing the distinction between agent tills and agent outlets. It also discusses agent activity rates and calculates customer to agent outlet ratios, providing updated benchmarks for the industry.

2. ANA questionnaires were adjusted to capture market specificities, while preserving the core of the survey.

3. National census rural and urban classifications were used in Pakistan and Indonesia. In Africa, larger and densely populated regional, provincial and district centres are classified as "urban" whereas sub-districts or locations outside major districts are classified as "rural". Similarly, in Bangladesh, Thana and Village Headquarters are classified as "rural" with eight divisional headquarters and districts classified as "urban".

4. Tanzania Country Report based on 2015 data remained unpublished due to the Tanzanian government's restrictions on conducting nationally representative surveys.

5. *MicroSave's Helix* Institute of Digital Finance has also authored the following landmark pieces on DFS product and business model evolution:

- [Finclusion to Fintech: Fintech Product Development for Low-Income Markets](#) This paper is designed to help fintech innovators understand the unique money management strategies used by low-income people in the developing world. It summarises insights from 15 years of financial inclusion research and suggests how cutting-edge technological innovation in the fintech industry could better serve developing world markets.
- [Redesigning Big Data for Digital Finance](#) This paper proposes important strategies that digital finance providers (mobile network operators [MNOs], banks and third parties) should adopt to manage the influx of fintech (technology firms) players into the developing world. It argues that to compete or collaborate with fintech players, providers need to augment their customer data.
- [OTC: A Digital Stepping Stone or a Dead-end Path?](#) discusses the pros and cons of Over the Counter (OTC) transactions and argues that they should be seen as a stepping stone to mobile money account adoption and use.

This compilation of papers draws on the rich ANA data, with the exception of India, to benchmark agent training and support, liquidity management strategies, as well as risk levels across agent networks. The compilation also takes into account the framework presented in the [Successful Agent Networks](#) paper. Each paper uses a distinct analytical approach:

- **Benchmarking Agent Support** classifies 27 leading providers into three groups, according to the providers' agent network management approach: direct, indirect, or hybrid. It further analyses trends between Wave I data collection (conducted 2013–2014)⁶ and Wave II data collection (conducted 2015–2017). Slight variations in data collection approaches across markets as well as differences in levels of market maturity constitute the methodological limitations of this analytic approach. Nonetheless, we believe that the data offers interesting, even if indicative, evidence on the levels of training and support each agent network management models can achieve as well as the effectiveness of agent training and support.
- **Fitting Pieces of the Liquidity Management Puzzle** relies primarily on the latest wave of data collection for each country and country-level analysis, supplementing it with trend-related data as well as provider-level nuance.
- **Measuring Risks in Agent Networks** draws on both supply-side (ANA) and demand-side (Financial Inclusion Insights, FII) data to propose indicators for different types of risks. Both datasets are analysed at the country-level to offer country-wide benchmarks for providers to use.

Appendix B: Relationship Between Provider Support and Agent Performance Metrics

	Initial Training	Refresher	Support Visits
Branding (provider sign and/or colours)	Indirect Waves I & II Hybrid Wave I	Indirect Waves I & II Hybrid Wave II	Indirect Wave I Hybrid Wave I
Professionalism (business hours, call centre number)	Direct Wave II Indirect Waves I & II	Indirect Waves I & II Hybrid Wave II	Hybrid Wave II
Compliance (tariff sheet & agent ID)	Indirect Waves I & II	Direct Wave II Indirect Waves I & II Hybrid Wave II	
Transactions denied due to lack of liquidity	Hybrid Wave II		
Transactions volume		Indirect Wave I Hybrid Wave II	
Profit satisfaction / Retention		Hybrid Wave I	Hybrid Waves I & II

Information in the table is based on statistical tests of groups who receive vs. do not receive various support services (induction, refresher training and support visits) from the provider. Tests were conducted for each of the 27 leading providers in ANA research countries. Results were examined by agent network management model and presented in the table if the bulk of providers belonging to a particular model showed statistically significant differences.

6. Note that we have included the 2014 Kenya data collection, carried out in December 2014, in Wave II.