

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Access Microfinance Holding AG (AccessHolding) is a private company, incorporated in Germany, that operates an international network of eight Network Financial Institutions (NFIs) in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Central Asia and South America, in the following countries: Madagascar- AccèsBanque Madagascar (ABM), Tanzania- AccessBank Tanzania (ABT); Georgia- Credo Bank; Liberia- AccessBank Liberia (ABL); Rwanda- AB Bank Rwanda (ABR); Brazil- AccessCrédito; Nigeria- AB Microfinance Bank Nigeria (ABN); and Zambia- AB Bank Zambia (ABZ). The mission of the financial institutions of AccessHolding is to be the preferred bank of choice for low- and middle-income families in their countries of operations. This mission is achieved through the provision of transparent, well-tailored products to ensure high quality financial services are delivered through these NFIs.

In a bid to strengthen the capacities of the NFIs to efficiently and profitably reach a wider share of their target market segments and achieve a wider geographical spread of customers, AccessHolding launched the Access2Access (A2A) programme in 2016. A partnership agreement was formed between AccessHolding and Mastercard Foundation (MCF), initially for a period of five years, which has since been extended to six years and will conclude in June 2022. The A2A programme is equally supported by AccessHolding's own contributions and an MCF grant. The partnership focuses on the three youngest institutions in Africa: ABL, ABZ and ABR. The partnership between MCF and AccessHolding was formed at a time when the Holding was developing its new strategy for the years 2017 to 2021, which reinforced AccessHolding's commitment to its mission statement to provide financial services to small entrepreneurs and their families while enabling the group and the Holding to accelerate their growth. Therefore, while the partnership between MCF and AccessHolding was focused on ABL, ABZ and ABR, all NFIs are implementing the A2A programme.

The goal of the A2A programme is that low- and middle-income businesses and households in urban and rural areas in the target countries in SSA have *increased* access to and use responsible financial services. The programme has two components: digitalisation and capacity building, each with their own activities and purpose:

- **Digitalisation:** The aim of the digitalisation component is to improve NFIs internal efficiency, and build a solid, scalable, flexible and secure IT architecture, as well as to broaden the range of channels, products and services that customers can access, and improve efficiency in service delivery; and,
- **Capacity building:** The capacity building component is built on a competency based human resources model, which takes a holistic approach to people development. It focuses not just on the tasks and outputs of a role but also on what behaviours need to be demonstrated when completing tasks. Skills development is conducted in three complementary areas: (a) AccessCampus: provides the necessary education for bank middle-managers to perform more senior managerial roles in their NFIs; (b) AccessFoundation: while not included in the initial proposal for the partnership, AccessFoundation was created in 2017 with the purpose of providing a foundation of knowledge and capacities to middle managers, thereby preparing them for AccessCampus; and (c) AccessMind: an internet-based platform was created to allow staff from NFIs to enrol and take fully customised eLearning courses on a wide variety of subjects relevant to their jobs and career paths.

Together, the two components of the A2A programme ensure that not only do NFIs have the hardware and software required for efficient and secure institutional process, but the intensive and diversified capacity building initiatives qualify staff to manage complex changes related to the introduction of digital products and services, and to put the customer in the centre of all developments.

In September 2019, mid-way through the partnership period, Genesis Analytics ('Genesis') was appointed by AccessHolding to conduct a mid-term evaluation of the A2A programme. The purpose of this evaluation is to understand the performance and outcomes of the programme till the mid-point of the programme (30 June 2019), in order to document key learnings arising from implementation, and to identify areas for improvement. However, given that a lot of progress in implementation was made in the subsequent months, the evaluation reports on findings that go beyond

June 2019. In doing so, it is hoped that this evaluation will inform the implementation and strategic direction of the programme for the remainder of the partnership period.

For the digitalisation component of the A2A programme, the evaluation focused on the implementation in ABL and ABZ, while for the capacity building component of the A2A programme, all African NFIs: ABM, ABT, ABL, ABR, ABN, and ABZ were included in the evaluation.

The mid-term evaluation used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, where the evaluation team undertook country visits to Liberia and Zambia, and primary data collection was predominantly qualitative, but was triangulated against secondary quantitative data collected as part of the A2A programme. The following data collection methods were used:

- Document and data review
- Key informant interviews with AccessHolding, MCF staff, and staff of ABL and ABZ
- Focus group discussions with staff and clients
- Online survey with staff who have received training from the capacity building component of the programme
- A total of 119 participants were involved during the evaluation process.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Since its inception, the A2A programme has made significant progress towards achieving the programme objectives. The programme's strengths have been AccessHolding's learning culture and its ability to adapt programme activities to address macro-level and contextual challenges in countries of implementation, and to cater to emerging needs of NFIs. The programme has also invested in maintaining the quality of both digitalisation and capacity building components of the programme, and given external or internal factors affecting the programme any delays in the programme's implementation would be necessary to ensure that the quality of the programme is not compromised.

Each of the NFIs under the partnership of the A2A programme have faced a number of changes in their external operating context:

- In Zambia, though copper prices have improved since the beginning of 2016, Zambia's economy which has a narrow export base largely composed of copper, has not yet recovered from the copper price slump in 2015. Economic growth has remained at about half of what it was before 2013. Full economic recovery has partly been hindered by the subdued rainfall the country has had since 2018. This led to a contraction in agricultural output by 14 % in 2018. Electricity supply has also been severely affected by the subdued rainfall, as 96% of the country's electricity generation capacity is from hydropower. The country has therefore experienced electricity rationing affecting households, Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), mechanised farms as well as mining plants. The effect of this has not only been a reduction in output amongst businesses and manufacturers, but also an increase in the cost of inputs. This has likely led to strained cash flows amongst businesses, reflected in the rising NPL ratios for Zambia's banking sector. The other factor that has contributed to the relative decline in lending to the private sector by commercial banks is the government's appetite for debt that has ballooned, which has had a significant negative impact on liquidity levels in Zambia's economy.
- In Liberia, ABL operates in a strenuous political, economic and social context. Liberia's history of civil war left many institutions, including education, in dilapidated state, which has resulted in low qualification and inadequate people to employ to key positions in institutions. Strained economic and political times over the past decades have resulted in decreased capacity of human capital, and potentially affected people's desire for learning. The country's economy is yet to fully recover from the Ebola crisis the country faced in 2014 and 2015, as well as the collapse of commodity prices in 2015. In the first year of the Ebola crisis, economic growth fell to 0.7%, from 8.7% in 2014. Following the end of the crisis and the rise in commodity prices in 2016/2017, economic growth picked up, rising to 2.5% in 2017, from -1.6% in 2016. However, with commodity prices, more so iron ore and rubber prices, remaining rather low, the completion of the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia in 2018 and declining aid inflows after the Ebola crisis, economic growth remained low at 1.2% in 2018.

- Rwanda's economy has been one of the fastest growing economies in SSA with largely sound macroeconomic fundamentals. The financial sector has been a key contributor to the economic growth the country has experienced, growing at an average of 7.4% p.a. in the last five years with a slightly volatile but low inflation rate averaging 4% in the same time period. The banking sector's assets, deposits and loans in recent years have grown largely at par with the economy, while the sector's NPL ratios have dropped. In November 2018, the central bank, the National Bank of Rwanda, presented a new draft licensing regulation requiring all banks to raise their minimum capital (Tier I capital) to RWF (Rwandan franc) 20 billion from RWF 5 billion. The draft regulation which has already passed through the necessary steps and stages for its gazettment will likely come into effect in 2020. Banks in Rwanda will have five years to raise the required capital and banks with less than RWF 15 billion, will be required to increase their Tier I capital to this amount within three years' time.

As a result, in the midst of a turbulent economic environment, the operating context of ABL, ABR and ABZ has absorbed the attention of management, thereby reducing their ability to implement specific programme activities. Despite this, all delays were productive and located the implementation and design on good foundations for future successes. Such foundations have resulted in momentum being built in the last six months of 2019, and all indications point to successful delivery as per the objectives by the end of the partnership period.

KEY FINDINGS

Digitalisation

Relevance

The diversification of products and delivery channels and outreach beyond the urban areas through the A2A programme was seen as necessary in order for the NFIs to maintain their existing customers, to grow and attract new customers, and overall to become more profitable. The rising penetration of mobile money in Zambia moved ABZ to implement direct integration with MTN Money and indirect integration with Airtel Money, as part of its the digitalisation initiatives under the A2A programme. ABZ is taking advantage of the enhanced digital capacity to integrate with mobile agent chain network providers.

The activities anticipated and delivered to date as part of the digitalisation component of the A2A programme are highly relevant in addressing access challenges for customers within the markets the NFIs operate in. Brick-and-mortar branch infrastructure meant that customers only have access to their bank accounts through the branch network and only during working hours. This leaves customers with limited flexibility to access the banks' services when and where they need them which can lead to disgruntlement among clients. Additionally, this means that clients have to travel significant distances and incur large costs to transact at a branch of the bank

Each of the NFIs has put in place responsive mechanisms for inquiry, complaints and problem resolution for their clients, through their Customer Care Centres, where clients can call-in to report any issues or complaints and seek information such as commission structure and product features. Additionally, all customer care centres also dispose of call-out functions which ensure tasks such as enquiring customer satisfaction after having executed transactions such as loan disbursement, and retaining clients through direct promotion via phone. Through these mechanisms, the NFIs are able to resolve client problems, as well as improve their products and services.

Through the customer needs analysis (CNA), AccessHolding gained deep insight into the needs of their clients. Understanding client needs is important in ensuring that activities and delivery are responsive to the needs of targeted clients. As part of the A2A programme, CNA and customer satisfaction surveys (CSS) were undertaken in Liberia, Rwanda, and Zambia to understand client's satisfaction with the current offerings of the banks, as well as to gain an understanding of how the banks can further improve their service towards clients. There has been evidence of use of the findings from this research to better respond to customers' needs. For instance, a key finding from the CNA was that MSME clients would like relationship managers to ease their communication and engagement with the bank. As a direct result of this client feedback, ABZ will be introducing relationship managers in 2020 to meet this need.

AccessHolding has considered the risks of digital financial services and saw the need for a solution to enable NFIs to screen customers during the on-boarding process and on an on-going basis and created the “Sanction Screening in African Network Banks” (AML) project. Although the access to digital banking products and channels brings convenience, cost and time saving to both customers and the NFIs; it bears a risk of non-compliance with regulatory Know Your Client (KYC) processes. This exposes the NFIs to additional sanction risks, which can be very substantial. The AML project is therefore an additional project as part of the digitalisation component of the A2A programme that will enable the NFIs to screen customers on all sanctions, customs lists, and any other lists and negative news required by local authorities.

The relevance of the digitalisation component can be improved through:

- In line with best practice, the timing of the CNA should be conducted to inform the design of new digital products and how NFI products will meet customer needs in each market. An undertaking of a CNA can be conducted at multiple stages of a product lifecycle, specifically: prior to product creation to inform its design; after product launch to gather user experiences; and throughout the product use life cycle to determine alterations and if customers’ needs are being met.
- There is a need for NFIs to achieve better transparency, and offer customers communication and education on products and pricing. Findings from the evaluation reflect that NFIs need to communicate clear, sufficient and timely information in a manner that clients understand.

Achievements

During the proposal stage, it was anticipated that the digitalisation component activities of the programme will mainly be conducted in the first half of the programme duration, and upon conclusion of the first half, the innovations will be rolled out in the NFIs and the capacity building programme activities will progress. However, AccessHolding was cautious of expanding Alternative Delivery Channels (ADCs) without having the necessary IT infrastructure and fundamentals in place. Additionally, several adjustments have been made to the programme which has meant that the implementation timeline has changed. As a result, the programme has been extended by one year and will conclude in June 2022.

The banks have achieved different levels of progress in implementing the digitalisation projects. The IT departments have been undergoing training to ensure that the staff capacities are improved to manage the new products. ABL has revamped and upgraded the Data Warehouse (DWH) centre, the servers have been upgraded and have high durability, and has also added another layer to the core banking system through the installation of the Enterprise Service Bus (ESB) to ensure integration with third party applications. The digital scoring tool, MyAB stream, has been implemented and rolled out in ABZ which has seen 25% of loan numbers being analysed, accounting for 19% of loan values in its first month being live. The Business Intelligence tool, ESB, as well as the DWH were fully installed at ABZ, equipping the NFI with the tools necessary for diversifying their service and product offer also by integrating with external service providers. ABZ is also at the final stages of developing a digital financial product known as the “e-wallet”, which is a fully integrated platform independent from ABZ’s core banking system and will allow 24/7 payment services, access to account information and funds, referrals as well as self-onboarding for non-account holders.¹

External factors described above have affected the achievement of objectives in each network bank in varied ways:

- Driven largely by a large increase in interest on external borrowing, ABZ’s cost of funds increased by 33% in 2017, but stabilised in 2018.
- Low liquidity levels in the Liberian economy, may also be a contributing factor to the rising share on non-performing loans (NPLs) in ABL, as clients struggle to keep up with their loan repayment schedules due to poor economic conditions.

¹ The e-wallet went live at ABZ in December 2019 and has over 700 users during the first quarter of 2020.

- In Rwanda, the new license regulation which raised the minimum requirement for a bank's capital to RWF 20 billion affected the implementation of A2A digitalisation activities in ABR to allow the bank's leadership to regroup and strategise the way forward.

Additionally, a number of internal factors affected the implementation of the A2A programme. However, in most instances, the programme staff were able to deal with these factors and put in place adequate solutions:

- Progress in implementing the digitalisation component of the A2A programme was negatively impacted by a low level of IT readiness among the NFIs' at the initial phases. According to a number of interviewed staff, the level of effort required to bridge the existing IT gaps was also greater than initially anticipated.
- NFIs lacked the IT staff capabilities required to implement the digitalisation activities of the programme. The delay in hiring adequately skilled IT professionals also caused delays in the implementation.
- The lack of adequate vendor selection procedures and/or criteria may have led to a poorer selection of vendors for supply of products and services related to the A2A programme implementation.
- AccessHolding staff interviewed during the evaluation stated that AccessHolding could have made off-the-shelf purchases of software, rather than developing digital products and channels from scratch.
- The programme's waterfall approach was a major contributor to the delays in the digitalisation component of the programme's implementation and scope creep and scope change for some digitalisation projects. Recognising the drawbacks of the waterfall approach to project implementation, AccessHolding has since adopted the 'agile' approach.

Capacity building

Relevance

In-house capacity building has always been a strong priority for AccessHolding and the NFIs, in May 2014, AccessCampus was opened as a training centre for employees. However, capacity building became increasingly relevant as the banks were transforming and digitalising and becoming more customer centric. There was a need to train all levels of staff on how to deliver client centric services with high levels of professionalism, efficiency and effectiveness. Intense human capacity building will prepare the staff of the institutions for the upcoming challenges and improve the management of the institutions, especially in times of complex, potentially disruptive changes. This will be achieved by a competency based human resources approach, which takes a holistic approach to people development. It focuses not just on the tasks and outputs of a role but also on what behaviours need to be demonstrated when completing tasks. This holistic approach allows for both technical and non-technical skills development.

Each of the NFIs face different external challenges that have made capacity building necessary within network banks. For instance, the underlying history in the political and educational sectors make the capacity building component of the programme important for staff at ABL. Employees hired at an entry level lack basic professional and soft skills necessary for them to efficiently carry out their roles while those at higher levels need training away from the local institutions. Intense human capacity building will therefore prepare the staff of the institutions for the upcoming challenges and improve the management of the banks, especially in times of complex, potentially disruptive changes in the financial sector.

AccessHolding has demonstrated continuous learning and adaptability in the implementation and delivery of the capacity building component and processes of the A2A programme. When the Peoples Partnerships Department (PPD) team realised that they didn't experience a positive transfer of knowledge application from classroom to institutions four years ago, they redesigned the training to incorporate learning transfer and practical application of knowledge for workplace behavioural change. Additionally, whereas first cohorts of middle level staff and managers trained via AccessCampus had high competency and proficiency levels and were able to grasp content without the need for preparation, the 'quality' and pre-existing knowledge of staff attending AccessCampus as of 2017 was not the same as these early generation participants. The PPD team therefore saw the need for the provision of foundational courses with the intention of preparing staff for their participation in AccessCampus.² As a result, AccessHolding launched

² At the same time, this ensured that the high standard of AccessCampus curriculum was maintained.

AccessFoundation in 2017, where courses are delivered online and through trainers who participate in a ToT event. AccessMind promotes the transfer of knowledge from AccessHolding to NFIs to reach scale for junior level employees and improve their capacity to not only deliver good services to clients but also to communicate effectively with clients to understand and service their needs. AccessMind is designed to be central to the change management process since, for example, the introduction of the e-wallet will see operational staff undergo training on product and sales, policies and procedures, processes and instructions based on the eLearning platform.

Achievements

As of June 2019, 126 senior and middle level management staff have been trained and graduated from AccessCampus, while another two cohorts of 20 participants (8 in the first cohort and 12 in the second cohort) commenced the training in 2019. Therefore, an additional 84 middle managers are required to participate in AccessCampus before the end of the programme.

AccessFoundation intends to train 264 learners by the end of the programme by training appointed staff to replicate the training they receive which is referred to as 'training of trainers' (ToT). As at June 2019, a total of 154 participants have taken part in classroom trainings as part of AccessFoundation.

The programme's eLearning platform, AccessMinds, has facilitated the remote and online training needs of over 4,000 employees. To date, approximately 10,000³ courses in 30 subjects have been assigned to learners, with an average network-wide completion rate in excess of 79%.

Lack of technological infrastructure in a number of NFIs reduced the reach and level of engagement with the e-learning platform during the initial phases of the programme. In a number of NFIs, the roll out of the e-learning platform was faced with challenges of insufficient numbers of computers with respect to the number of employees, and insufficient internet bandwidth to support the transmission of content to the intended end users. However, these basic infrastructural requirements for participation on the e-learning platform, such as computers and email addresses, have since been met by most NFIs. Furthermore, the PPD department in HQ regularly runs tests on internet bandwidth to ensure user experience on the e-learning platform is acceptable at the NFIs.

Success Drivers

Set up of the project management office (PMO) – To address the complexity of running the A2A programme, including the programme's composition of multiple projects, with varying technical requirements, a Project Management office was established at the Group level in 2018. The department's main role is to coordinate the various activities of implementing the A2A programme and build up local project management structures and capacities in the network banks to support the local project implementation.

The programme is facilitating mechanisms such as an online intranet platform, called Confluence, to promote internal learning – The programme supports internal knowledge sharing in order to develop a learning culture, build institutional memory for quality continuity, and build on successes and avoid mistakes.

INDICATION OF IMPACT

The A2A programme targets to create impact at the individual, institutional, and ecosystem levels. The following are the emerging outcomes of the programme:

Digitalisation is expected to improve NFI speed and efficiency, and the new IT infrastructure has increased the speed in which new projects are implemented, thus allowing the NFI staff to focus their energy on being more customer centric. The digital loan cycle solutions are starting to improve processing times. According to interviews with staff at holding level and at the NFIs, there has been some improvement in processing time and improvement in loan portfolio quality following the introduction of the scoring tool. The full impact of the digitalisation activities under the A2A programme will

³ These are not unique course numbers.

become evident as more internal data is collected as new ADCs, products and tools are rolled out and implemented in NFIs over the remainder of the partnership.

Due to the capacity building initiatives, there is evidence to support that NFIs have become client-centric in their thinking and understand how to offer their clients better services. For example, in Zambia, the NFI undertook research to understand the channels that are used by existing customers, and formed a partnership with MTN based on the information gathered through the research. The evaluation found that the most beneficial elements of the training and capacity building are the attitude and behaviour changes and the confidence and self-confidence that staff have developed.

At a client level, the impact of the programme will become evident as more data is collected over the remainder of the partnership period, as well as through the diverse evaluation and research studies. Clients have so far reported being happy with the services of the NFI, especially with the shift to customer centricity. This is also evident in the NPS scores from the CSS conducted with clients from both Zambia (+21) and Liberia (+36) which compare favourably with the NPS of the financial services industry.

Ecosystem impact can be achieved in different ways: the first being how AccessHolding's strategic and operational decisions and activities, through the A2A programme, have demonstrated success and resulted in crowding in of competitors, and/or have influenced changes in rules and regulations, in the markets of the respective countries of implementation. Secondly, the consolidation and dissemination of learnings from the A2A programme to a broad audience (beyond the partnership countries) can influence changes in the incentives, attitudes and behaviour of other market players to support the development of customer centricity, for example.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We present the recommendations for the A2A programme in two categories: (i) Programme activities and components that are **strengths** and should be **maintained** or **amplified**; and, (ii) **Gaps** in, or **opportunities** for, the programme's activities and components and therefore need to be **reconsidered**.

Programme strengths

Digitalisation

- AccessHolding should maintain its approach to programme flexibility to respond to changes in the external environments of the NFI countries. This will enable the programme to achieve higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency during the programme lifetime and ultimately achieve its objectives.
- The partnerships approach, where NFIs leverage partnerships with institutions such as Mobile Money Operators (MMOs) has shown to benefit the clients of NFIs through the provision of ADCs and other financial products. The approach to partnerships in each country should vary to consider internal and external factors that affect the delivery of financial services within that country.
- NFIs have taken the right initiative to create a call centre that would address queries and understand customer satisfaction from the bank's products and services. The NFIs should therefore leverage the call centres to continue conducting CSS regularly to inform management of drivers of customer satisfaction, and potential avenues to improve service provision.
- NFIs and their clients are anticipating for the launch of the e-wallet and other financial products which competitor banks are already offering. Given the delays in the implementation of the e-wallet at the product development stage, AccessHolding decision to adopt the agile method of implementation will facilitate the gradual release of the digital product functionalities to the customers. The agile approach will also promote client satisfaction since clients will be able to access the digital products sooner.

Capacity building

- NFIs are recognised for their outstanding customer service and ability to understand and respond to client needs by friendly staff. The banks need to continue to uphold the high client service standards which sets them apart the NFI from other financial providers.

Programme gaps and opportunities

Digitalisation

- With the setting up of the call centre in ABZ and ABL, communication with clients, from the bank, has certainly improved. This has facilitated better publicity of new products and channels among bank clients. However, with the launch of the e-wallet, NFIs will need to increase on a wider range of issues touching on the new product. These include value proposition to clients, modalities of using the products and all the fees or the fee structure associated with the functions in the e-wallet.
- In line with best practice, customer research should become integral part of product development. This will promote the customer's voice and needs to be incorporated into the design and development of a products, as a proactive rather than a reactive measure.
- The NFIs should broaden the scope of products targeting customer segments such as women in business or sectors such as the agricultural sector. Accordingly, products such as the leasing of agricultural equipment or loan products with alternative collateral requirements for women, mentioned in client FGDs, should be considered.
- Because some of the clientele of AccessHolding's NFIs do not have a proper understanding of the pricing in terms of interest rates or fees of some of the financial products and services offered by the NFIs there is a need for the NFIs to improve both marketing and communication of their products and services. This will ensure transparency and communicate clear, sufficient and timely information (including on fees, interest and how it is calculated) in a manner and language clients can understand, and ultimately can make informed decisions. Additionally, given clients are unaware of the procedures carried out by the NFIs during cash withdrawal process, to protect against fraud, specifically client verification being made through confirming both the picture of the client and a scanned signature stored in the NFIs system, this needs to be communicated to the clients.

Capacity building

- AccessHolding together with the respective NFIs should work towards streamlining the initiatives/activities under the capacity building component of the A2A program. As such, the following adjustments should be made to the implementation of the capacity building activities in the NFIs:
 - Standardise the selection criteria for participation in the capacity building components of the programme, which will enable staff to have a greater sense of awareness of their potential of participation.
 - Making clear the eligibility criteria and application process to the AccessCampus and/or AccessFoundation programme.
 - Enabling more involvement of staff in the selection of courses on the AccessMind platform. This involves either enabling them to choose from a library of courses or stating their preferences or needs as relates to training.
 - Improving publicity of courses on the AccessMind platform, including making staff at NFIs aware that they can retake previous courses in order to refresh their knowledge of content they have covered.
- AccessHolding should consider aligning expected training outcomes to staff KPIs as a means of gathering evidence of behaviour change post the completion of eLearning courses, classroom training or participation at

AccessCampus. This will also ensure the sustainability of the capacity building initiatives within the NFIs, as management is able to see the business impact that results out of the training.

- The NFIs continue to experience high levels of staff turnover, for reasons such as poaching from other banks, unsatisfactory monetary compensation and poor staff morale due to high inflation rates and high depreciation of local currencies. Given that the NFIs already update employee compensation in light of inflation rates and currency depreciation, and because increasing salaries of staff may not always be an option, there is a need for the Human Resource (HR) departments of the NFIs to understand how to improve staff moral and increase staff motivation. This will involve:
 - Better communication to all levels of staff to inform them of their salary adjustments and how this compares to the current inflation trends in the country;
 - HR departments will need to make use of market data to benchmark their compensation against Banks of similar sizes for employees at all levels. Based on the results and outcome of this study, the NFIs may need to update their employee compensation in order to promote staff satisfaction and retention.
 - HR departments have one on one discussions with a randomly selected sample of their staff members in order to understand what non-monetary benefits their employee's value, such as staff loans, transport allowance, and mortgages, as well as develop an understanding of what staff will value other than salary increases. Such an exercises in which employees can offer ideas and ask questions will help employees feel they are valued and that their input will be heard;
 - During exit interviews with staff, it is also important to give employees an opportunity to provide their opinions and share what led to their decision to leave. The information gathered by the HR departments should provide constructive feedback that can be used by the NFIs to move the company, employees and processes forward.
- NFIs should consider illuminating how increased efficiency will enable them to cost effectively expand into new locations, ultimately retaining and creating new jobs, while at the same time, there is a need to provide information to staff on how NFIs are looking at ways to transition staff into different roles as a result of changes brought about by digitalisation.
- To improve the sustainability of the capacity building and learning process for NFI management, it is important that AccessHolding considers creating an African-based training location. This would bring capacity building closer to the business environment, and thereby ensure a closer link between business and learning, while also increasing accessibility.
- Trainers (who participated in the ToTs as part of AccessFoundation) are not evaluated based on how effective their trainings are, which may lead to overall reduction in morale of the staff, and the quality of their training may deteriorate over time. A key factor to consider in order to promote higher quality learning between trainers and NFI staff is to create an incentive for them, through linking their KPIs to the trainings they conduct.

Programme

- There is need to create an overall project manager in the Liberian bank as has been done in Zambia. Such a project manager would bring coherence to the programme activities and enable to track the different initiatives within the NFI and promote greater awareness of projects under the A2A programme within the bank.
- There is a need for the Foundation and for AccessHolding to revisit the knowledge dissemination strategy of the project in order to determine the objective of information sharing and identify key interventions that need to take place to share knowledge.

POST MID-TERM EVALUATION: TAKING THE LESSONS FORWARD

Upon the submission of the draft evaluation report, the evaluation team, together with AccessHolding participated in a learning workshop on 17 January 2020, at AccessHolding's head office in Berlin. During the workshop, where a total of 13 AccessHolding staff were present, the evaluation team presented the findings in order to validate, debate and provide feedback.

Upon conclusion of the presentation, a plenary discussion on the A2A programme's concept and design was held, with the purpose of recalling the programme's objectives, theory of change, as well as the intended approach to reach those objectives. The participants were then divided in to working groups where each group was assigned two topics based on the findings of the evaluation. These included: client targeting; linking Learning and Development (L&D) and Business, prioritization of banks and products within A2A, and creating better buy-in from staff for capacity building.

Together, the good foundations that have been built by the programme at the mid-point (June 2019), the momentum built in the past six months since then, and the outputs of the learning workshop are indicative that the A2A programme should deliver on its objectives as expected at the end of the programme.

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