

The Price of Giving

What it costs to move money for good into Africa,
and a commitment to change it

An Agridex Foundation paper

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Free settlement for
those *doing good.*

Foreword

For as long as money has crossed borders to do good, a share of it has been lost along the way to fees, delays, and sometimes to hands it was never meant for. The sector has largely treated these losses as bad weather: regrettable, unavoidable, priced in.

This paper makes the case that these losses are not weather. They are instead poor plumbing, and plumbing can be fixed.

The evidence assembled here will be uncomfortable reading for anyone who funds, runs or audits work in Africa. The world's poorest region pays the world's most punitive prices to receive money, the organisations doing the most difficult work face the highest barriers to a bank account, and the burden of proving that funds arrived intact has itself become one of the sector's most significant costs.

What makes this moment in time different is set out in the second half of the paper. The infrastructure required to move money instantly, cheaply and verifiably is now regulated, proven, and in daily use at some of the most scrutinised humanitarian institutions in the world. At a time when development budgets are contracting faster than at any point in modern history, the sector must consider modernising how money moves.

The commitment made in the final section of this paper deserves to be tested, scrutinised, and, if it delivers what it promises, copied.

Dr. Edem Adzogenu,
Agridex advisory board

In brief

Every year, well over 100 billion USD flows into Africa through charitable, development, and diaspora channels.[1] It travels through the most expensive payment corridors in the world. This paper examines what that journey costs. Not only the fees on the invoice, but the delays, the exclusions, the trapped capital, the leakage, and the growing burden of proving where money went. Four findings emerge:

First, Africa is the most expensive place on earth to send money, and the visible fee is the smaller half of what senders pay.

Second, the organisations doing the most good face the worst of it. Two-thirds of internationally active nonprofits report difficulty accessing basic banking services, and the resulting delays push charitable money toward cash: the least safe, least traceable channel there is.

Third, money leaks. Peer-reviewed research puts the leakage rate from aid flows at 7.5 per cent at minimum, and the systems built to detect leakage have become a substantial cost in their own right.

Fourth, the moment has changed. The sector has just absorbed the largest contraction in the history of development assistance, at precisely the moment the infrastructure needed to eliminate these costs has become regulated, proven, and adopted by the world's most scrutinised humanitarian institutions.

Our response is set out in the final section. **From today, qualifying charitable and development organisations can move money into Africa on our platform with zero platform fees or added costs.**

If even a conservative 5% of the \$100 billion entering Africa each year for good is consumed by the mechanics of moving it, more than \$5 billion annually is being spent on pipes rather than programmes.[1]

1 · The most expensive place on earth to send money

Sending money into Sub-Saharan Africa costs roughly a third more than the global average.

The World Bank has tracked the price of cross-border payments for fifteen years. Its finding is consistent: Sub-Saharan Africa is the most expensive region in the world to send money to. In the first quarter of 2025, sending \$200 into the region cost an average of 8.78 per cent of the amount sent, against a global average of 6.49 per cent.[2] The global average itself is more than double the UN Sustainable Development Goal of 3 per cent.[3] Of all the payment routes into Sub-Saharan Africa that the World Bank measures, just two price below that target.[2] South Africa, a hub through which much of the region's commerce and philanthropy is routed, is the most expensive G20 country in the world to send money from, at 15.65 per cent.[3]

Those are just the visible numbers. The second cost rarely appears on any invoice: the exchange-rate margin. A transfer advertised as “fee-free” can still surrender several percentage points in the gap between the rate applied and the interbank rate, and for organisations converting into volatile or thinly traded currencies the gap widens further. The charity sector has documented this quietly for a decade. A UK review found a sample of large international charities lost a net £14.8 million to currency costs in a single reporting period. Sector research identified £20–50 million in potential annual savings for UK international NGOs from more competitive currency purchasing alone.[4]

The costs of moving money are not confined to money. They are also paid in time. Drawing on a decade of first-hand experience trading Nigerian cocoa, our founder's records for a standard shipment from Akure, Nigeria to Rotterdam show payment and currency friction alone accounting for \$193 of \$869 per tonne in transaction costs - 22 per cent of the total - and 12 of 65 elapsed days before a single physical step in the supply chain.[5] Nothing about that friction touches ships, warehouses or inspection. It is purely the price of moving value between two banking systems.

A \$1 MILLION GRANT IS NOT A MILLION DOLLARS

Figure 1 Where a \$1 million grant goes

Traditional route into Kenya, all-in cost of around 5 per cent, \$



Source: endnotes 2, 5. Arrival in two to three days if nothing is queried, weeks if it is.

Consider a funder sending a \$1 million grant to an implementing partner in Kenya. On the traditional route, an all-in cost of around 5 per cent (bank charges, plus the exchange-rate margin consistent with real observed flows on this corridor[5] and conservative against the World Bank's 8.78 per cent regional average)[2], means roughly **\$950,000 arrives**, in two to three days if nothing is queried, and in weeks if it is.

The difference of \$50,000 on a single grant is a clinic's annual drug supply, or a village school's entire teaching staff of 15-20 teachers for a year.

Multiply that across a portfolio. A funder disbursing \$20 million a year into the region on traditional rails is surrendering somewhere between half a million dollars and one million dollars annually to the mechanics of

moving it, enough to fund an entire additional programme. And the wire fee is the only line the sender ever sees.

2 · Blocked accounts and delayed transfers

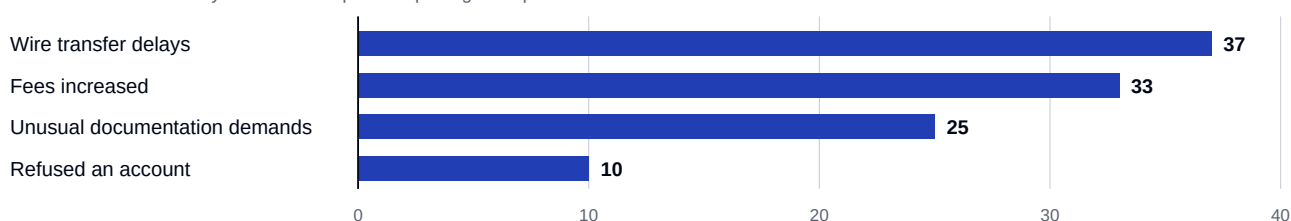
Two-thirds of internationally active nonprofits struggle to access basic banking, and delays push charitable money out of the formal system altogether.

Cross-border payments travel through chains of “correspondent” banking relationships. That is, relationships where one financial institution provides international services, foreign currency access, and payment processing on behalf of another bank. These relationship networks have contracted by roughly a quarter since 2011, with the steepest declines in developing economies, and Africa prominent among them.[6] Payment volumes rose over the same period, which means the surviving relationships carry more traffic through fewer, longer, more expensive chains.[6] The withdrawal is visible on the ground: Standard Chartered announced its exit from seven markets including Zimbabwe, Angola, Cameroon, Gambia and Sierra Leone in 2022, completing the last of those sales in December 2025; Barclays completed the sell-down of its African banking stake in 2022, ending more than a century of direct presence.[7]

Charitable organisations sit at the sharpest end of this contraction, because compliance frameworks treat them as categorically high-risk while their accounts generate little revenue. The first empirical study of the phenomenon found that two-thirds of US nonprofits working internationally experience financial access problems: 37 per cent face wire transfer delays, some lasting months; a third have seen fees rise; a quarter face unusual documentation demands; and a tenth have been refused accounts outright.[8]

Figure 2 Financial access problems reported by US nonprofits working internationally

Per cent of internationally active US nonprofits reporting each problem



Source: endnote 8. Reported fractions of a third, a quarter and a tenth shown as 33, 25 and 10.

European data tells the same story: in one survey of internationally active NGOs, 70 per cent had experienced delayed transfers and 45 per cent had transfers refused altogether.[9] In the UK, 92 per cent of voluntary organisations reported at least one banking problem within two years; one in nine lost access to their own funds through account freezes; and the sector's most recent review estimates UK charities now spend twelve million hours a year on banking administration.[10] The same review notes that losing an account entirely is a particular hazard for charities operating overseas, precisely the organisations this paper concerns.

The bitter irony is what happens next. When transfers stall, organisations still have staff to pay and programmes to run, so 42% report resorting to physically carrying cash.[8] Rules written to make money traceable are pushing charitable money into the one channel with no trace at all: hand luggage.

MONEY THAT CAN'T GET OUT

Delay has a mirror image: capital that arrives but cannot leave, or cannot move onward. One pre-2023 study estimated that bank de-risking had reduced available humanitarian cash for Syria by **35 per cent**. The UN's humanitarian coordination office reported **\$1 million** of funding for Libya immobilised for months by compliance friction.[12]

An organisation whose funds are frozen has no treaty to invoke and no leverage to apply. The programme simply waits.

Every week of delay is a week of programme not delivered, a supplier not paid, a payroll bridged from reserves. None of it appears on any invoice, but all of it is real cost.

3 · The money that goes missing

Peer-reviewed research puts leakage from aid flows at 7.5 per cent at minimum.

Research published in the Journal of Political Economy, conducted with the World Bank, matched aid disbursements to the most aid-dependent countries against deposit flows into offshore financial centres known for banking secrecy. Disbursements coincide with sharp, statistically robust increases in offshore deposits, indicating a leakage rate of around 7.5 per cent at the sample mean, rising toward 15 per cent in the most aid-dependent countries. The authors note their estimate is most likely a lower bound: it captures only money that reached offshore accounts, not funds diverted into property, goods or domestic patronage.[13]

The most notorious individual case illustrates the upper reaches of the risk. In 2010, a UN Monitoring Group report alleged that as much as half of food aid to Somalia was being diverted to a web of contractors, armed groups and local staff before reaching intended recipients. The World Food Programme contested the scale of the claim, and independent analysts noted the figure was an approximation rather than a calculation. Still, the report's substance was serious enough to prompt calls for independent investigation, and diversion in Somalia has been documented as a persistent, structural phenomenon across decades since.[14] The lesson is that in opaque systems, nobody can say with confidence where the money went.

Leakage also takes a quieter, legal form: intermediation. In 2016, the world's major donors pledged to channel 25 per cent of humanitarian funding "as directly as possible" to local and national responders. The actual share reaching local organisations directly has never exceeded a few per cent, and by recent counts sits between 1 and 3 per cent.[15] Each intermediary layer between donor and frontline absorbs administration, takes time, and blurs the trail.

And then there is the cost of proving a negative. Counter-terrorism and anti-money-laundering obligations now cascade through every grant agreement. In one survey, 71 per cent of humanitarian organisations reported increased compliance and administrative burdens from donor requirements, with vetting and due diligence delaying delivery and raising costs; a UN study recorded enhanced transaction screening described by one humanitarian organisation as prohibitively expensive.[16] The compliance is necessary. The question is why proving where money went should be labour-intensive at all. Research suggests the efficiency prize is large: a four-country study by the Overseas Development Institute found humanitarian budgets could have reached 18 per cent more people had assistance been delivered as cash rather than in kind, a gap driven overwhelmingly by the mechanics of delivery, not the substance of programmes.[17]

WHAT FULL TRACEABILITY SAVES

The World Food Programme's Building Blocks system, a shared digital ledger for delivering assistance, cut money-transfer fees by roughly **98 per cent** in its Jordan operations, has saved **over \$3.5 million** in bank charges, and has delivered more than **\$760 million** to some six million people, every dollar individually traceable. In Ukraine, the same shared ledger allowed agencies to detect overlap between their programmes, preventing an estimated **\$270 million** of unintended duplicate assistance.[18]

Figure 3 World Food Programme Building Blocks, key results

Jordan operations and Ukraine deployment

~98%

reduction in
money-transfer fees

\$3.5m+

saved in
bank charges

\$760m+

delivered, every dollar
individually traceable

\$270m

duplicate assistance
prevented in Ukraine

Source: endnote 18, WFP Building Blocks programme data.

4 · Why now

The sector has just absorbed the largest aid contraction in its history at precisely the moment the infrastructure to eliminate these costs became regulated, proven, and mainstream.

Funding has fallen off a cliff. In 2025, official development assistance fell by 23.1 per cent, the largest annual contraction ever recorded, returning global aid to where it stood a decade ago, with a further decline projected for 2026.[19] The dismantling of USAID, which had supplied roughly two-fifths of global humanitarian funding, saw over four-fifths of its programmes cancelled, and several other major donors announced reductions of their own; Sub-Saharan Africa faced projected declines in bilateral assistance of 16-28 per cent in a single year.[20] Modelling published in The Lancet projects that, if sustained, the withdrawal could result in millions of additional deaths by 2030.[21] Whatever position one takes on the policy, the arithmetic it leaves behind is not contested: there is materially less money, and rising demands on every dollar that remains, including, pointedly, demands to prove where it went. When budgets cannot grow, efficiency is the only lever left that does not cut programmes. Every percentage point lost to the pipes is now measured in clinics and classrooms.

The infrastructure has quietly matured. Over the past decade, the tools to remove most of these costs stopped being experimental. Regulated digital dollars now exist as a supervised financial product. In July 2025, the United States enacted the first comprehensive federal framework for payment stablecoins. That is, digital dollars that must be backed one-for-one by cash and short-term US Treasury bills, issued only by licensed institutions, and supervised by federal banking regulators.[22] In plain terms: a payment stablecoin is a dollar that moves at the speed of the internet, holds its value because the law requires the reserves to exist, and leaves a permanent public record of every transfer.

The world's most scrutinised institutions already use these rails. The UN Refugee Agency distributes humanitarian cash to displaced people using regulated digital dollars on a public payment network, with full end-to-end traceability and cash-out at thousands of ordinary money-transfer locations.[23] The World Food Programme's shared-ledger system, described above, is the largest deployment of this class of technology in the humanitarian sector.[18] As one of its designers has noted, donor dollars are among the most scrutinised in the world, and these systems were adopted precisely because they withstand that scrutiny.

The last mile is ready. Sub-Saharan Africa holds 1.1 billion of the world's 2.1 billion mobile money accounts; more than a trillion dollars a year now moves through the region's mobile wallets, including nearly \$100 billion globally in bulk disbursements such as salaries and social transfers.[24] The infrastructure for a digital

dollar to become groceries in a rural district has been operating at national scale for years.

ALREADY IN USE

UN Refugee Agency: humanitarian cash delivered as regulated digital dollars on a public payment network, fully traceable, cashed out at 4,500+ money-transfer locations in-country.[23]

World Food Programme: \$760M+ delivered to ~6M people on a shared digital ledger; ~98% reduction in transfer fees; \$270M of duplicate assistance prevented.[18]

Sub-Saharan Africa: 1.1bn mobile money accounts; \$1.1–1.4tn moving annually; the last-mile network already exists.[24]

5 · Our response

From today, qualifying charitable and development organisations move money into Africa on our platform with zero platform fees or added costs.

The evidence in this paper describes a system that taxes generosity at every stage: at the point of sending, in transit, at the border of the banking system, and in the audit that follows. We operate payment infrastructure across African markets. We can remove most of that tax, for the organisations that deserve it most. So we will.

The commitment. The Agridex Foundation will provide payments into Africa for qualifying charitable and development organisations with **zero platform and transaction fees**. There is no cap on the volume an eligible organisation can move, and no time limit on the offer.

Currency conversion has a real cost, and a paper about hidden charges will not contain one. Where conversion is required, our pricing is: **never more than 1 per cent over the interbank spot rate, and typically 0.2 to 0.5 per cent**. We will publish the live interbank benchmark alongside every transaction in our product, so that every organisation can verify, on every payment, exactly what it paid. Set against the 8.78 per cent regional average, this represents a reduction of roughly 90 per cent in the cost of moving money.[2] Payments settle in hours, not days.[5]

Who qualifies. Registered charities, non-governmental organisations, and not-for-profit development organisations sending funds into African markets we serve. Eligibility is verified at onboarding through constitutional documents, a charity registration number where one exists, or governing documents demonstrating not-for-profit purpose where it does not, so that legitimate implementing organisations in Africa are not excluded merely because they are unregistered in a donor jurisdiction.

What eligible organisations receive. Same-day settlement into local currency, mobile money or bank account. A complete, independently verifiable record of every transfer from source to endpoint. That is, the reconciliation dividend of Section 3, available to any auditor or donor an organisation chooses to share it with. Optionally, card-controlled last-mile disbursement, so that funds released for fuel are spent on fuel. And full institutional onboarding: every participant on our platform is screened for sanctions and money-laundering risk, and funds leave the platform only to verified accounts.[5]

The structure. The Agridex Foundation is run on a not-for-profit basis. Any surplus is applied to its purpose: free payments for charitable and development organisations in Africa. Further details are available at agridex.com/foundation.

How to begin. Eligible organisations can begin at agridex.com/foundation or by writing to contact@agridex.com. Onboarding requires your constitutional documents and standard compliance checks, and typically completes within days. There is nothing further to negotiate: the terms in this paper are the terms.

Endnotes

1. Scale framing (illustrative): remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa ~\$56bn (World Bank, Migration and Development Brief 41, Dec 2024); total ODA to Sub-Saharan Africa \$66.5bn in 2024 (OECD, final 2024 statistics); global humanitarian assistance \$24–29.5bn (OECD/ONE, 2024). The 5% friction figure is an assumption for illustration, below the World Bank's measured average transfer cost for the region.
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3. World Bank, Remittance Prices Worldwide, Issue 54 (Q3 2025); UN SDG 10.c.
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5. Agridex transaction and pricing data, July 2026: corridor pricing table; GrainTrade South Africa case study (volumes confirmed with client); Akure–Rotterdam cocoa trade-flow analysis drawn from the founder's trading records.
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10. Charity Finance Group / NCVO / Civil Society Group, Charity Banking Challenges (2024); CFG follow-up report (2026).
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19. OECD DAC, preliminary 2025 ODA statistics (April 2026).
20. OECD; Lancet Global Health (2026) on projected regional ODA declines.
21. Cavalcanti, Rasella et al., The Lancet (2025). Cited as a modelled projection.
22. GENIUS Act (US, July 2025); OCC and FDIC implementing rulemaking (2025–26).
23. UNHCR and the Stellar Development Foundation, joint announcement (December 2022): cash assistance distributed in Circle's USDC on the Stellar network, with cash-out via MoneyGram.
24. GSMA, State of the Industry Report on Mobile Money (2025; 2026).