



**ASSILASSIME**  
Solidarité  
TOGO

# Making financial services accessible to low-income populations through financial education and social empowerment

Togo

July 2024



# List of acronyms

AGIR	Action et Gestion Des Insuffisances Et Initiatives Rurales
AMC	Aides Médicales et Charité
APSF	Association Professionnelle des Systèmes Financiers Décentralisés du Togo
AS	Assilassime Solidarité
Assilassime	Hand in hand
B2W/W2B	Bank-to-wallet/Wallet-to-bank
CRIPS TOGO	Centre de Recherches et d'Informations Pour la Santé au Togo
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DFS	Digital Financial Services
EdM	Entrepreneurs du monde
EVT	Espoir Vie - Togo
FSPs	Financial Service Providers
HVI/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IGAs	Income-generating activities
MFI	Microfinance Institution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
POS	Point of Sale
PASCI	Programme d'Appui aux organisations de la société civile de lutte contre le VIH
PLHVI	People Living with HVI/AIDS
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections

# Executive summary (1)



SCBF, the Swiss Capacity Building Facility, provides technical assistance to financial sector partners to enable them to build the expertise needed to develop client-centric financial products.

With the support of SCBF, the microfinance institution—ASSILASSIME Solidarité—developed their project on the up-scaling of their digital services (B2W/W2B and SMS banking) and credit process digitalization.

The project aims to expand ASSILASSIME’s services in the country and ease its clients’ access to their accounts, available services, and financial education.

The SCBF commissioned this study to understand how the project has impacted the target clients’ access and usage, their living conditions, and how the institutional objectives were met.

This study illustrates how digitalization can improve financial inclusion, customer experience, and operational efficiency for low-income populations and financial institutions. It also reveals the challenges and impacts of implementing B2W and W2B services, digitalizing saving and loan processes, and providing digital financial education. The study includes results, testimonials from women beneficiaries, and lessons learned from the project.

# Executive summary (2)



## KPI achievements

As of June 2023 at the end of the project, the key achievements were:

- **10 branches and 1 outlet** had been connected (6 with optic fiber and 5 with radio wireless) and allowed **16,565** transactions in rural and urban areas.
- **3,774 clients** were using B2W/W2B services.
- **39,020 SMS** had been sent to clients through the SMS Banking services.
- **1,659 customers** saved through W2B services and attended training on digital financial services.
- **49,913 loans** were requested through mobile agents for a total value of FCFA 9,879 billion.
- **1,806 deposits** were made for a total value of FCFA 110,16 million.



## Key lessons learned

- Market research, customer feedback, and product customization are essential steps before launching any digitalization or innovation project to ensure the target clients' needs are really and fully addressed.
- Planning the scalability of the services is important for developing digital financial services such as B2W/W2B, SMS Banking services, or digitalized loans and savings processes.
- Providing loans and financial services combined with financial education training increases the ability of low-income populations to improve their financial management and make better financial decisions.
- When engaged in digital transformation, staying updated with technological changes, industry developments, and customer needs is essential. Regular client feedback and data analysis can help improve and adjust strategies for long-term growth.
- Digital financial education can reach many people through digital platforms. Literacy and digital skills are crucial for using financial services.
- Group loans help to reduce the repayment default risk, as members motivate each other and foster discipline and timeliness in their payment schedules.

# Executive summary (3)



## Challenges

Three main areas of challenges were noted:

### Challenges linked to the project implementation:

- Delayed delivery of the B2W/W2B solution.
- Lack of qualified human resources.
- Difficulty in recruiting users for digitalized services.

### Challenges linked to the mobile agents' fieldwork:

- Network issues for mobile agents collecting groups' funds.
- Lengthy checking mobile deposits process.
- Increased risk of insecurity and fraud for mobile agents.

### Challenges related to the digital services adoption and use by clients:

- Digital illiteracy.
- Lack of communication on the services.
- Lack of trust in the digital system.
- Unacceptance of the service costs.



## Recommendations from MSC

- ASSILASSIME could leverage the historical data they possess on customers and develop digital loans accessible by self-service for the clients.
- ASSILASSIME needs to increase the promotion of these services in community groups and provide detailed explanations to the clients. Image-based communication materials during regular roadshows could also be used.
- ASSILASSIME should also enforce the mobile agents' work in the field by using occasional mystery shopping, impromptu field check-ins, etc. They should also address network issues that could prevent successful B2W/W2B transactions to avoid a breach of trust from the clients.
- It is important to continue communicating more on local radios and training more customers on digital financial services in group meetings to reinforce their capability to understand digital financial services, especially the B2W/W2B services that ASSILASSIME has developed.
- It is essential to plan and develop a liquidity management plan for mobile agents in the field to help increase their security and improve their productivity. Enabling mobile money services and super agent partners (liquidity cash points) is necessary.
- ASSILASSIME may avail receipt printing as a step of the funds' collection process in the field and replace physical booklet controls.

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# Introduction

Digital financial services positively impact low-income populations by providing them with accessible, convenient, and affordable financial services.

ASSILASSIME is a microfinance institution that serves low-income populations, especially women. The institution has implemented digital solutions to provide financial services to low-income populations, even in remote areas. Knowing the value of digitalization, ASSILASSIME wanted to expand the offer of accessible and flexible services to its clients, wherever they are in the country. ASSILASSIME's ambition was to expand its digital services to reach more people, improving their client experience and providing them with secure, accessible, and flexible financial services combined with financial education.

## SCBF - Swiss Capacity Building Facility

SCBF is an innovative public-private platform that enhances inclusive finance for low-income clients in emerging contexts, especially women, smallholder farmers, and MSMEs. SCBF helps financial sector partners access the expertise required to develop, tailor, and scale innovative solutions to address the challenges faced by these populations.

To achieve that goal, SCBF provides technical assistance to FSPs so that they can access the expertise needed to develop customer-centric financial products. This project aimed to improve the living conditions of low-income populations by scaling up digital financial services through mobile money and providing financial education.

## ASSILASSIME - Implementation partners

ASSILASSIME Solidarité is a social microfinance institution that aims to empower low-income populations, such as people with HIV, people with disabilities, and widows. It offers financial services like credit and savings to help them start or improve their income-generating activities.

ASSILASSIME Solidarité operates in both urban and rural areas in Togo, with more than ten branches nationwide. To access its services, the clients must undergo training and advisory sessions on managing their businesses effectively and sustainably.

*This project was co-funded by SCBF, ADA and the Grameen Credit Agricole Foundation*

# Why a study on ASSILASSIME's digital projects?

Digitalizing financial products and services for low-income populations can be a good way to provide them with secure and flexible access to financial services. Still, the lack of financial education remains a challenge.

How can digitalizing processes improve the efficiency, flexibility, convenience, security, and accessibility of services for low-income populations?

To answer the overarching question of the benefit of digitalizing processes, we formulate other intermediary questions as follows:



To achieve this task, MSC used qualitative research, including:

- Four focus discussion groups for a total of 31 respondents, including 71% women, from whom 42% were in rural areas
- Three Key Informant Interviews with women in retail trading and agriculture.
- One discussion group with four staff and an interview with the CEO.

This study is based on qualitative research and thus has a non-statistical approach. So, the above sample helps only to gain a deeper understanding of the digital services deployed during the project and to explore the experiences and perspectives of the stakeholders of this project.



# ASSILASSIME's Amenovi methodology

The Amenovi methodology is an approach enabling low-income populations in accessing formal financial services through four main principles:



## Group membership

Groups are part of the foundation of the mission of ASSILASSIME. Thus, membership in a group is mandatory for all new clients.

Inside groups, members are trained on the five pillars of the methodology. Each member is expected to comply with the following pillars:

- Mutual respect: maintaining respect towards every member of the group.
- Punctuality: being on time for the group meetings.
- Peer help: through experience, best business practices sharing, and advisory within the group.
- Regular repayment of loans: no default accepted.
- The gradual creation of a financial guarantee for future loans.



## Progressive savings for future collaterals

Progressively constituting provisions for future loans.

Clients are urged to put aside a small part of their earnings that will be used to guarantee their loan requests in the future, starting from the first loan received.



## Continuous capacity building through regular workshops

All group members are engaged in mastering the five pillars of the Amenovi methodology every day. This helps them develop the right skills to manage their loans and avoid getting into too much debt. They also learn to meet the financial collateral requirement to access credit without borrowing additional money from informal sources. This way, they can manage their loans more responsibly and safely.



## Individual responsibility in case of default

The Amenovi loan is granted through a group to a person, involving their responsibility. The loan is made available individually (according to an amount and duration specific to each member and adapted to the needs of their activity and repayment capacity).

In case of default, only the financial responsibility of the loan recipient is engaged. However, the other members are encouraged to put pressure on the defaulting member and monitor him until he fixes the situation.

# The foundation and partnerships of ASSILASSIME

Since its creation, ASSILASSIME Solidarité has developed 28 active partnerships with HIV-oriented associations and organizations committed to supporting the low-income populations in the country.

## ENTREPRENEURS DU MONDE

A French association created in 1998 to help low-income women and men improve their living conditions in developing countries, and active in 11 countries. Its support is provided for growing businesses and access to products with a strong health, economic, and ecological impact. The association tries to put each of its beneficiaries in a position of financial and social success and improvement through programs and local partnerships around three axes: social microfinance, social entrepreneurship, and support for creating very small businesses.

In Togo, Entrepreneurs du Monde founded the Microfinance institution ASSILASSIME Solidarité, initially using incubation, and continues supporting its growth.

## PACSI

A joint program for capacity building of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Togo was set up in September 2009 by the United Nations at the request of the Civil Society Organizations and the Government of Togo. It aims to help CSOs that work to fight HIV by enhancing their technical and operational skills and securing more funding for them. Its mission covers the following areas: (1) providing CSOs with training on advocacy, leadership, programmatic and financial management, and other skills related to the basic services they offer; (2) improving the access and quality of HIV prevention and care services for the low-income populations; (3) collecting and distributing funds to CSOs based on transparent and agreed criteria, and on the performance of each CSO in terms of resource management and service delivery in the context of the fight against HIV.

## The NGO AGIR

A Togolese organization specializing in development through social mobilization and community participation.

AGIR aims to promote health and education for all low-income populations and sustainable practices. AGIR uses training, technical support, and experience sharing to promote the well-being of children, women, and the environment.

## The NGO AMC

A non-profit and non-political NGO that works with low-income populations regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, etc.

It aims to contribute to the conditions of a healthy life, gender equity, and access to fundamental rights for the Togolese population.

Its activities include screening, group discussions, maternity, advocacy, and human rights, prevention & awareness, medical care, and psycho-social care.

## The Center for Research and Information for Health in Togo (CRIPS-TOGO)

Officially became an NGO in August 2013 (No.700/PR/MPDAT/2013), the center contributes to improving the health status of low-income populations through poverty reduction. It fights against STI/HIV/AIDS, opportunistic diseases, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

It also assists orphans, widows, and widowers affected and infected with HIV, ensures that basic populations have access to primary health care, promotes women's reproductive health, and identifies and acts on the determinants of health that are the source of health problems.

## The association EVT

An association of people living with HIV (PLHIV) was created in 1995 in the movement of the "Ambassadors of Hope" project during the mission of the Coordinator for West Africa of the RAP+ Network (African Network of People Living with HIV) and the Vice-President of RAP+, thanks to the support of the UNDP regional project based in Dakar. The association acquired its legal existence as a non-profit on 13th March 2000 and later became a non-governmental organization (NGO) of public utility and a medico-social center (CMS). This association was born to restore hope and support people living with HIV.

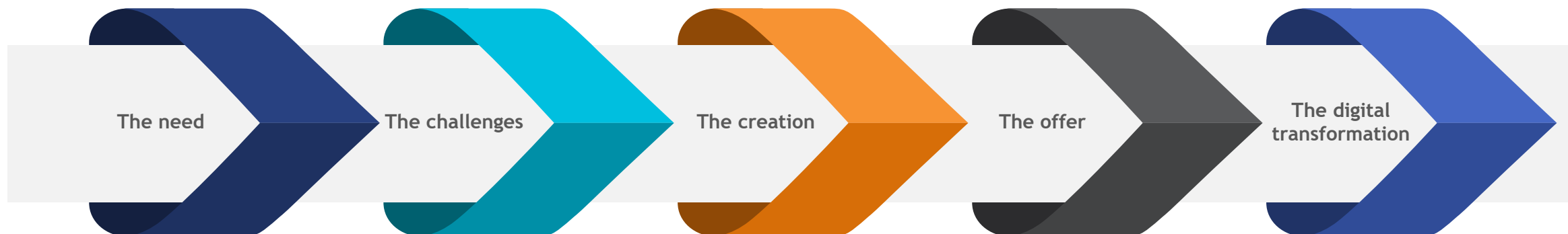
# The ASSILASSIME Solidarité's story

From the desire to be a supportive interface between PLHIV and Care associations, to creating an MFI.

In 2012, the NGO Entrepreneurs du Monde wanted to establish in Togo and started to study the market. The main needs registered were all related to the economic empowerment of People Living with HIV (PLHIV). Given its social nature, EdM needed a partnership with a financial institution to support creating or developing income-generating activities for PLHIV.

A first partnership with an existing MFI failed due to EdM's strong social roots. EdM decided to launch its proper initiative and piloted a project of granting small loans and training PLHIV on economic and social matters in June 2012, and then extended its services to other people with disabilities and widowed women in Togo in 2013 - 2014. In 2015, they obtained the formal agreement to operate as a social microfinance institution called ASSILASSIME Solidarité, meaning "Hand-in-Hand" Help, followed by a Savings Collection Authorization in 2019. The Amenovi methodology supports the foundation of the services.

In 2020, ASSILASSIME Solidarité launched an ambitious digitalization project that includes the interconnection of all the branches, the loan process digitalization, SMS banking and B2W/W2B services, and financial education on digital products and services.



To be a relevant supportive interface for the PLHIV and help them be financially empowered, EdM needed to tackle key challenges such as the :

- Lack of dedicated financial services to support PLHIV's businesses.
- Scarcity of potential financial partners among existing financial institutions to support PLHIV's financial needs.
- Low financial literacy among PLHIV.
- Lack of social assistance to low-income persons and social reinsertion for single mothers with children.

ASSILASSIME Solidarité's :

- **Purpose:** To provide adequate social microfinance services to help improve low-income populations' living conditions, access to finance and income-generating activities.
- **Target:** Low-income populations such as people living with HIV/AIDS, disabled people, mainly women, single mothers, sex workers and other low-income people.
- **Services:** Financial services, including grants of microloans and non-financial services, mainly training on economic, social, health, environmental, and agricultural topics to beneficiaries organized in groups of 25 to 40 in the same neighborhood or within a 2 km radius.
- **Main focus:** Social microfinance, support to micro and small businesses, access to energy with environmentally-friendly products and services, agri entrepreneurship.

# ASSILASSIME Solidarité, a digital social microfinance in Togo

As of June 30, 2023



## SNAPSHOT PROFILE

Created in 2012 and licensed in 2015

**Clients:** 105,458 (90% women)

**Points of sale:** 11 branches

**Network Areas:** 3 branches in rural areas (Amlamé, Anié, Atakpamé) and 9 in urban areas, including Lomé

**Loan products:** Group and individual loans

**Savings products:** term deposits, daily savings

**Outstanding deposits:** FCFA 4,013 billion

**Outstanding loans:** FCFA 2,371 billion

**PAR 30:** 5.93

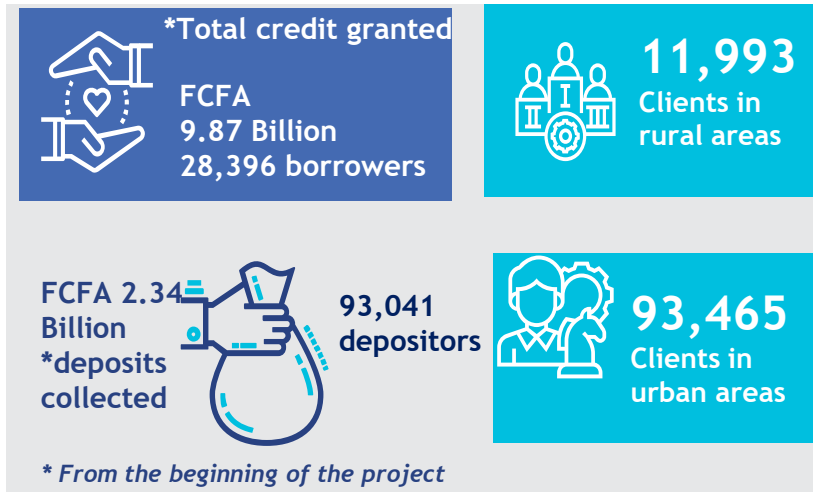
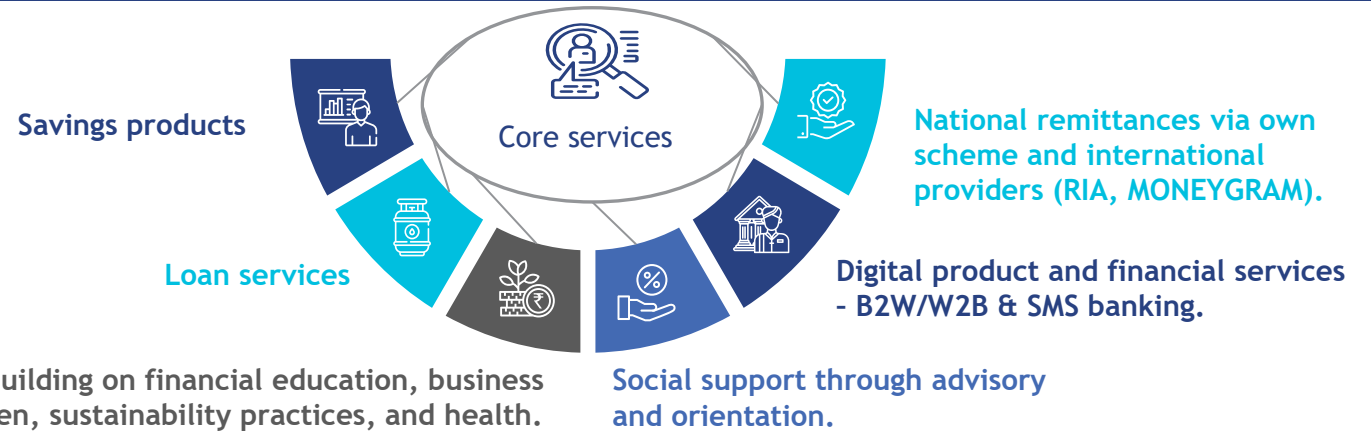
**Women with active loan:** 90%

**Active loan in rural areas:** 24%

**Agribusiness loans:** 10% of the portfolio



**ASSILASSIME Solidarité head office:** Located in Lomé. The management team includes 1 management committee (accounting, HR, and internal audit) and 1 coordination committee (branch management and other operational staff).



In Togo, ASSILASSIME has positioned itself as one of the leading institutions in the microfinance sector thanks to the combined effect of the framework put in place for its customers (Amenovi methodology), its diversified range of credit and savings products tailored to the needs of its target clientele, and its digitalization efforts to modernize its services and make them more accessible to its customers (B2W/W2B services, SMS Banking, digitalized savings and credit processes, digitalization of the customer's social assessment). Its main competitors, such as COFINA, WAGES, and Millenium, also have a digitized service offering that revolves essentially around B2W/W2B and SMS Banking services.

Sources: data collected on the field, [Assilassime](#)



# Financial services offerings

The offer is a combination of credit and savings products delivered through digital channels



## Savings products and services

### Savings accounts

- Remuneration: 3.5% of interest per year
- Minimum balance: FCFA 1,000

### Term deposits accounts

- Remuneration: 3.5% to 5% of interest per year, depending on the amount and duration.
- Minimum capital: FCFA 100,000

	6 - 12 months	1 - 3 years
100,000-500,000	3.5%	4.5%
Over 500,000	4.5%	5%

### Digital financial services

- SMS Banking, B2W/W2B services, daily savings via mobile agents.
- B2W/W2B services support the cost of SMS Banking, and both are accessible through mobile agents.
- Mobile agents also collect daily savings that cost FCFA 200 per month.
- Fees go from FCFA 25 to 300 per transaction, depending on the amount for B2W and double for W2B.

Sources: data collected on the field, [Assilassime report](#).



## Credit products

### Loan conditions

- Loan management fees: 1.45% of the requested amount.
- Security deposit: FCFA 0 for the 1st loan and then 20% of the requested amount for the next loans. This deposit should be built up progressively during the repayment of the previous loan.
- No group collateral is required.
- Co-borrower required for individual loan and young entrepreneur credit.
- No life insurance is paid for group loans; insurance is required for individual and young entrepreneur loans.

	Interest	Duration	Amounts (FCFA)	Other details
Crédit coup de pouce	0% interest	Min: 3 months Max: 6 months	Min: 5,000 Max: 20,000	Exceptional loan only for the poorest to prepare them for the Amenovi loans.
Amenovi & Miwoe loans	Amenovi & Agri : 18%	Min: 3 months Max: 18 months	Min: 25,000 Max: 3,000,000	Miwoe loans are related to the energy (solar panels for instance).
Agri stock loan & Agri invest loans	Miwoe: 12% All decreasing interest	Min: 3 months Max: 24 months		An agri expert is committed to assisting the beneficiaries of agri-invest loans.
Credit Mavo (individual loan)	18% decreasing interest			For people who have benefited from at least 5 group loans. Intended for growth management. Guarantor and death and disability insurance required.
Young Entrepreneurs loan	16% decreasing interest	Min: 3 months Max: 18 months	Min: 500,000 Max: 5,000,000	For MSMEs in sustainable activities. It can also be referred to as an incubator. Guarantor and death and disability insurance are required.



## ASSILASSIME's access conditions

### At the group level

- Join a group in the neighborhood and committing to its rules.
- Buy a savings booklet (FCFA 2,000).

### At an individual level

- Provide 2 ID photos and an identification document.
- Have an opening deposit of a minimum of FCFA 5,000 in the account.

# Non-financial services offerings

Financial education and social assistance are the main complementary services delivered to credit and savings clients

ASSILASSIME Solidarité's vision is based on two major socio-economic services, enabling it to provide long-term, appropriate support to its beneficiaries and thus fulfill its social mission:

- Training services tailored to the needs and requests of the beneficiaries on financial education, business acumen, social, environmental, and health training
- Social support for low-income populations.



Capacity building



## Financial education

### The ASSILASSIME core modules

As part of the Amenovi methodology, a first training set is delivered to every new group member for 3 months at a branch. It contains the five pillars each member should master and comply with:

- Module 1: The Amenovi methodology

Five other modules are delivered throughout the year based on the needs of members:

- Regularity of savings.
- Role and responsibility of group members.
- Access and management of a loan fund.
- Loan contract repayment schedule.
- Rights and duties of the beneficiary.

With the digitalization, new modules were added:

- B2W and W2B management.
- Electronic wallet management.
- Savings management .



## Business acumen training

- Inventory management.
- Purchase and selling price estimation.
- Cash management.
- Customer relationship.
- Increasing profits; understanding the competition.
- Diversifying products and distribution channels.
- Preventing over-indebtedness.
- Anticipating risk and managing default repayment, etc.



## Social, environmental, and health training

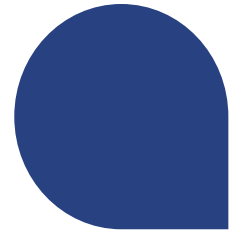
Some examples of modules are as follows:

- Malaria prevention.
- Child labor.
- HIV and STIs.
- Importance of civil status documents.

# What problem was the project solving?

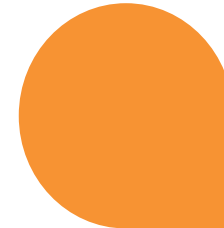
To stick to its mission and continue providing financial services to its clients, ASSILASSIME Solidarité opted to transform digitally and readjust its overall approach to access and usage.

The project mainly addressed the following key issues:



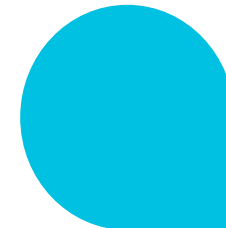
## Business expansion challenges

The portfolio growth and diversification prompted the need to optimize the ways of working in the institution. Alternative channels seemed the best solution to serving clients with diverse solutions. The digital transformation of the institution seemed the suitable solution.



## Remote clients service requests

The COVID-19 crisis prevented clients from accessing and using financial services properly due to health instructions and led to multiple challenges, such as revenue drop. In addition, frequent and growing requests from clients to avail remote use and access to financial services urged the institution to look for flexible solutions.



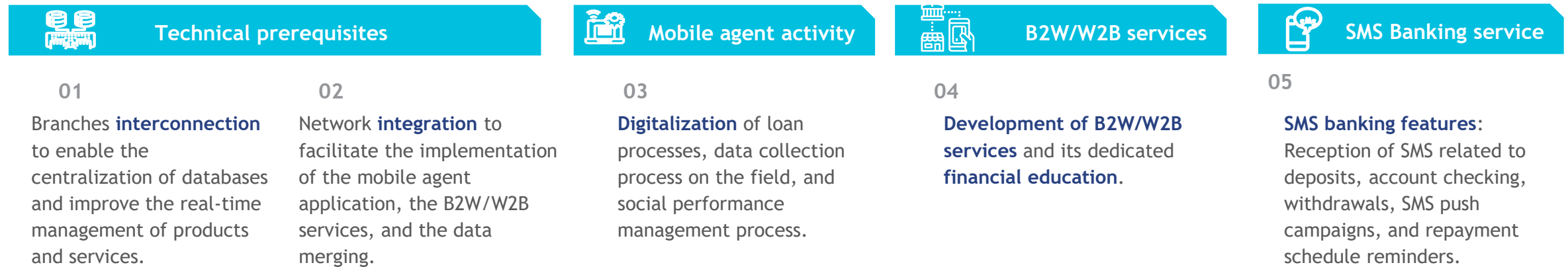
## Competition needs

The institution needed to modernize its approach and offer by availing its services remotely to remain competitive and respond to its clients' requests for flexibility.

# The project key goals

The project aimed at digitalizing the credit and savings processes, implementing mobile money services, and enabling clients' management and service in the field through mobile agents

The project ran for two years with five key milestones:



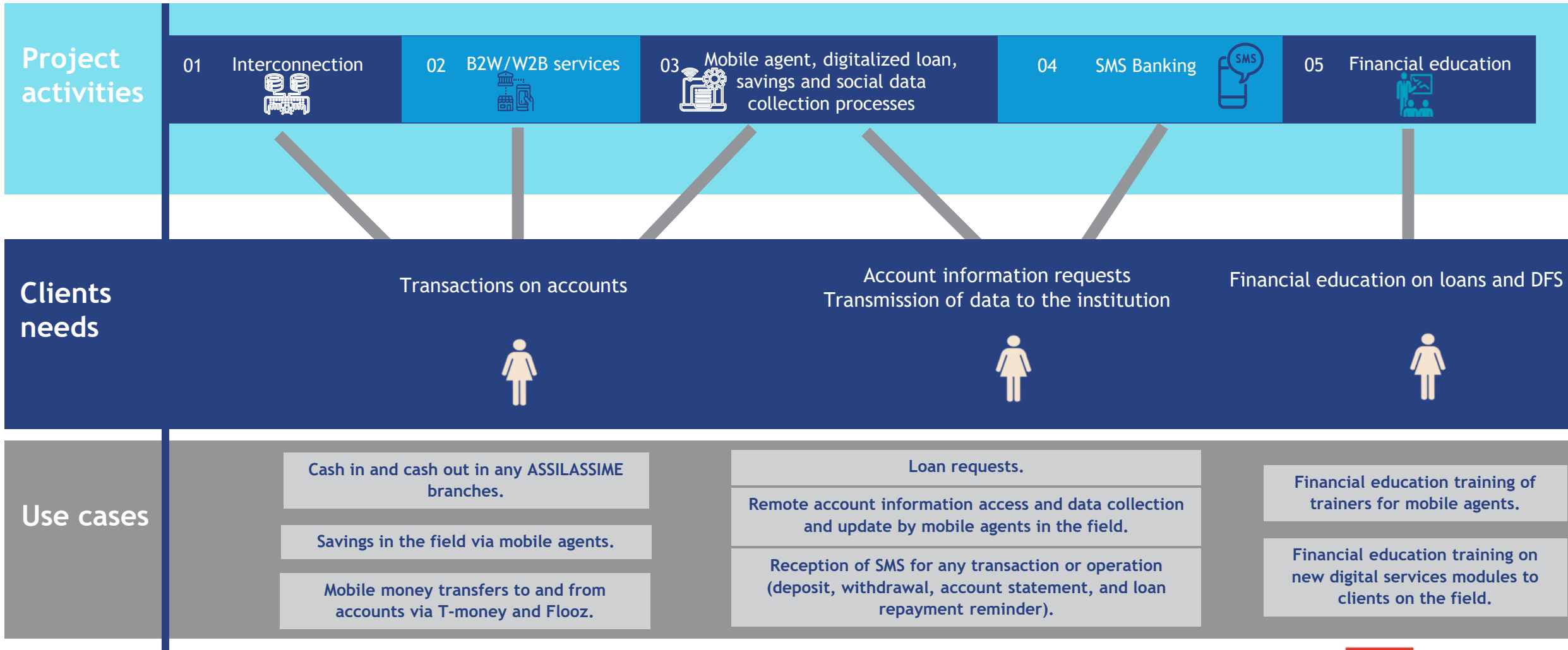
The following targets were assigned to the project:



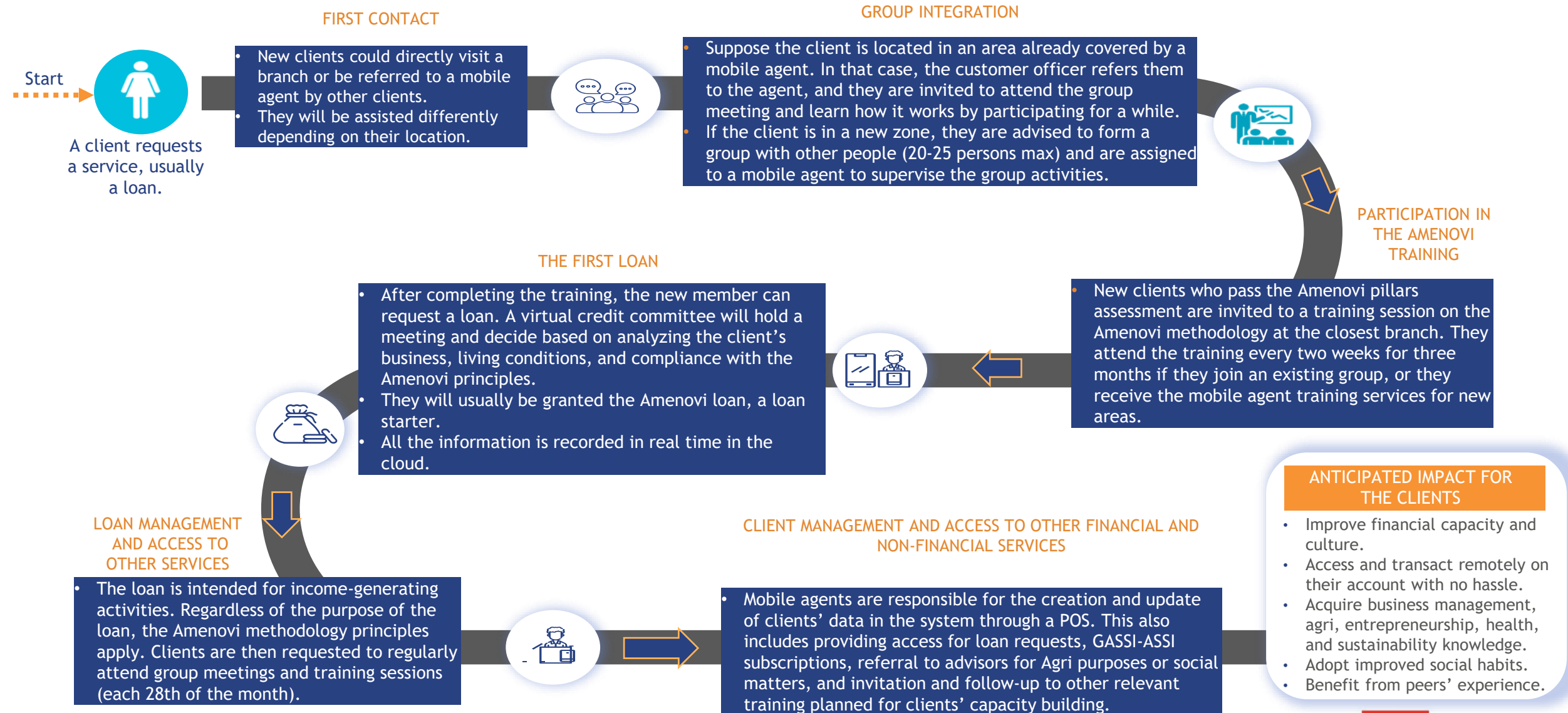


# Use cases enabled by the project

The project aimed to help clients remotely access their accounts and the products and services of the institution.



# Client experience with digitalized processes and mobile agents



# Four of the main goals of the project were achieved

The level of the activity on the GASSI-ASSI platform was lower than expected

**110%**

branches interconnected

ASSILASSIME has successfully interconnected 11 branches including 3 in rural areas using optic fiber for six and radio waves for five.

**533%**

achievement rate for interconnected transactions

After the end of the project in June 2023, 16,565 transactions had been logged through interconnected branches, including 448 in rural areas (224% achievement rate).

**195%**

SMS Banking subscribers via mobile agents achieved

Interconnected with SMS banking, mobile agents enabled the transmission of 39,020 SMS to customers by the end of May 2023. In addition, more than 49,913 loans have been requested through mobile agents for an estimated value of FCFA 9.879 billion. 1,806 deposits have also been made for a total FCFA 110.16 million.

**146%**

Attendance at digital financial education sessions achieved

The institution has developed five modules in two local languages (Ewe et Kabyè), and in French, and shared them via digital channels like TV, radio, and mobile agents. However, most participants received the training at branches instead of in the field due to the lack of communication among mobile agents. As of May 2023, 70,765 customers had attended digital financial education training, and there were 443,715 participants in the regular monthly session on general financial education.

**37.7%**

B2W/W2B users subscribed and are active on the platform

This objective was unmet due to miscommunication between mobile agents and clients. The B2W/W2B platform does not automatically prevent customers from withdrawing all their money anytime at once, if they want. This situation led to several clients missing their repayment schedules, resulting in losses of commissions for their assigned mobile agents, who started avoiding promoting the service. Consequently, instead of being advised and trained on the services by mobile agents, some clients were usually onboarded by branch tellers who sometimes failed to explain to clients the necessity of keeping enough money in their accounts to ease the monthly repayment of their loans.

# Impact of the project for the institution

Digitalization has positioned Assilassime as a leader and helped improve its performance.

ASSILASSIME's enhanced services have increased its clients' savings and loan services. More than 91,000 clients (+283.5% from 2020) used mobile agents to deposit, and about 29% received loans through mobile agents. Most of the new and renewed loans are now granted through mobile agents. The project also recorded 443,715 participants in financial education sessions, including 70,765 in sessions on digital modules. Below are the key aspects impacted by the project:

## Improved customer experience and risk reduction

Digitalization has made the processes more transparent and helped clients to manage their accounts better. Mobile agents' activities are more secure as digital tools help prevent fraud and **embezzlement**. The clients' confidence has also grown due to the real-time transactions.



## Increased outreach and targets of clients

With digitalization, especially enabling B2W/W2B services, ASSILASSIME expanded its national coverage (from 9 to 11 branches). In addition, new untapped targets were reached, especially in rural areas, due to the dematerialization of access to the services.



## Increased services availability

Through B2W/W2B services, customers can access their accounts 24 hours / 7 days. Customers can transact in any Assilassime branch, regardless of location (rural or urban) and parent branch.



## Improved operational efficiency

ASSILASSIME has experienced fewer duplications and errors in collecting financial information in the field. In addition, processes have been simplified and made easy to transmit, apply, and follow up. Finally, the interaction time with clients has also decreased from at least 40%, especially for the following: customer registration, account opening, loan application, disbursement, or repayment.



# Clients' benefits from the digitalization scaling-up project (1)

Availing transactions and access to account information remotely brought real value to clients.

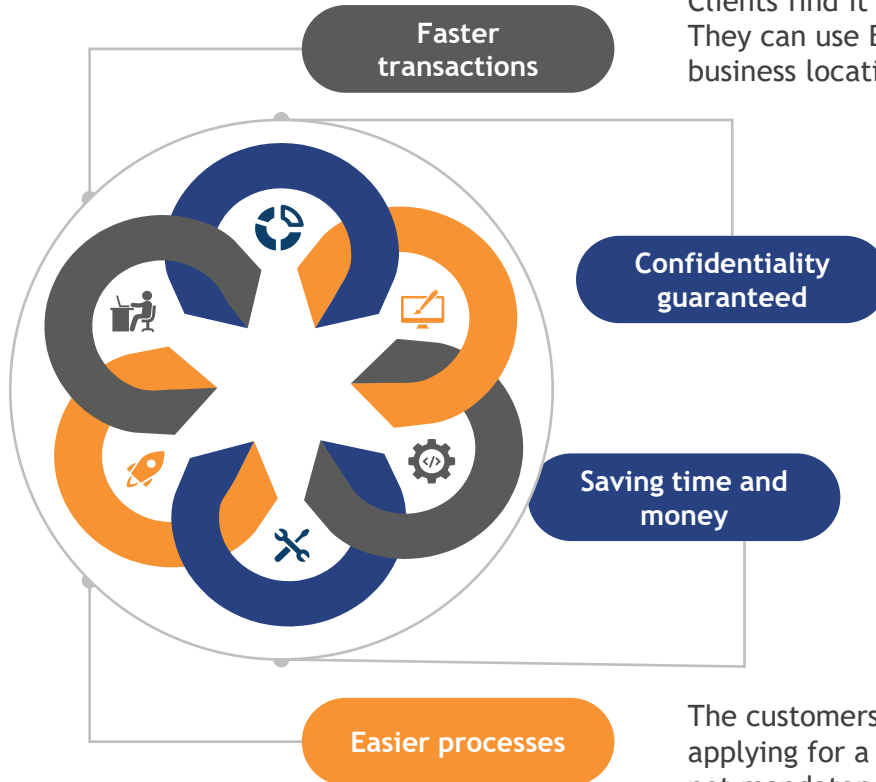
“ With the B2W/W2B services, I can secure my money right after my sales from my mobile wallet to my ASSILASSIME's account before going home. That way, I can limit assaults and potential losses.

Dominique in Zanguéra.



“ Only with my subscription to B2W/W2B services, I get SMS notifications for every transaction I make on my account, whether at a branch or via the mobile agent. The messages give details about the transaction and the account status, except for loan repayment. However, I very much appreciate having all that information without needing to go to a branch.

Kokou, a clothes seller in Agoe.



Clients find it easier to save more as they do not need to go to a branch. They can use B2W/W2B transfers or wait for the mobile agent at their business location or group meeting.

The customers appreciate the privacy and security of their interactions with the institution at the mobile agents. The mobile agents meet the customers at their preferred places, such as group meetings, where no one else can see them. The same applies to the B2W/W2B services, allowing customers to transfer money between their bank accounts and mobile wallets.

By working with mobile agents, the customers can reduce the cost of transacting with the institution, as they do not have to visit a branch every time. They can receive the services at their convenient locations. This also helps them save time and focus more on their businesses.

The customers interviewed appreciated the flexibility of saving and applying for a loan through the mobile agent. They appreciate that it is not mandatory to visit a branch to get a loan or make a deposit, saving them time and hassle (including potential insecurity).



I learned about the B2W/W2B services (GASSI-ASSI) from an ASSILASSIME agent at the branch. I went to the branch to withdraw money from my last loan, and the agent asked me if I knew about the services. I said no. Then he made me subscribe and trained me through a video serie on TV at the branch. Since then, I have been able to use the services and make my deposits without hassle.

Dede, a tailor in Agoe.



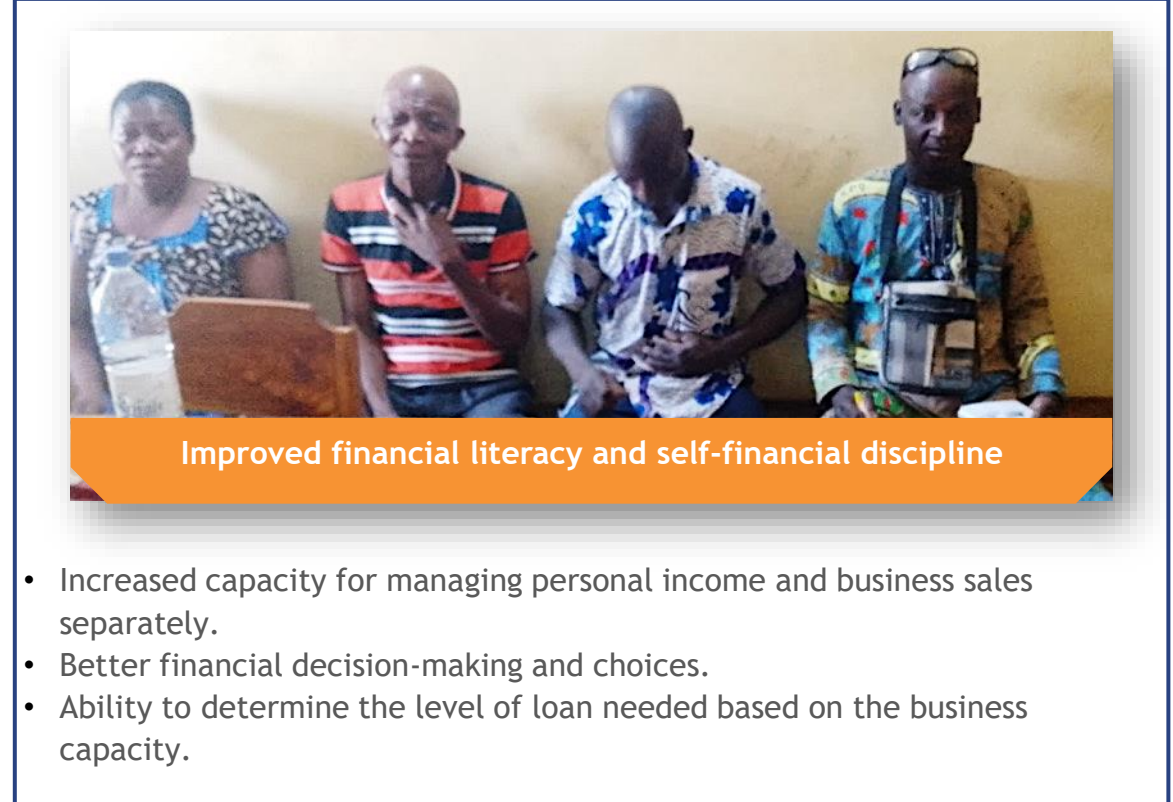
# Clients' benefits from the digitalization scaling-up project (2)

The fieldwork of mobile agents and the training support impacted positively the clients' lives.



## Improved living standards

- Wealth creation through the expansion of income-generating activities.
- Improved agricultural yields and productivity thanks to loans obtained.
- Reduced uncertainty due to daily savings.
- Improved purchasing power regarding the capacity to contribute to family expenses, such as paying school fees and household food.



## Improved financial literacy and self-financial discipline

- Increased capacity for managing personal income and business sales separately.
- Better financial decision-making and choices.
- Ability to determine the level of loan needed based on the business capacity.

“ My dream was to start a pig farming business and breed pigs. Thanks to the loan I received from ASSILASSIME, the monthly training, and the advice from other women from my group who were already in this activity, I could secure my life. I went from being a struggling housewife to becoming a respected, supportive wife. I can also contribute to the expenses and support my husband. Moreover, I don't have to go to the branch every time to make my deposits and prepare for my next loan. The agent regularly comes to our group meetings to collect our money. I trust him. ASSILASSIME found me and changed my life.

Ablavi, from Anie (a rural area in Togo)

## Akouvi, the digital-savvy charcoal seller



Akouvi grew up in a farming family in Togo, where she had to quit school early and sell food products to help her family survive. As an adult, she ventured into the wood charcoal business and became a customer of ASSILASSIME five years ago. With their assistance, she expanded her business and became a wholesaler of wood charcoal. She also started another business and built a new house for her family. She continued supporting her children's education and became a role model and mentor for other women in her community. Her hard work and perseverance paid off, and she achieved financial independence and social recognition.

She has taken five loans from ASSILASSIME. The first loan was FCFA 150,000, and her current loan that she must repay in 1 year reached 1 million. She uses mobile money services (T-money and Flooz). She attends group meetings every 28th of the month, where she makes regular savings and can send and withdraw money easily through ASSILASSIME's Bank-to-Wallet and Wallet-to-Bank services. She can also check her account balance in real time. She has a personal customer network and good cash management and marketing skills. She does not need to close her business to go to the branch for transactions, as she can do them through Gassi-Assi (B2W/W2B).

However, she also faces challenges such as difficulty accessing digital loans through her mobile wallet and experiencing network instability, sometimes leading to some B2W/W2B transaction failures.

*"I acquired skills in stock management, product promotion, and customer retention. I made saving a habit and a priority for my business, and despite the rising costs of products, my business has evolved. I started from nothing and became successful in my community."*

## Yawavi, the committed ambitious farmer



Yawavi joined ASSILASSIME after hearing her neighbor's testimonial. She needed a loan to start a new business because she had housing challenges, and her husband's businesses struggled. After reaching out to ASSILASSIME, she and a group of other women were trained on ASSILASSIME's five pillars for three months. After the training, she was granted a loan of FCFA 50,000, repayable in six months, which she invested in the soybean business. The training she had received helped her manage the risks of her activity.

*"I decided to invest all the money in the soybean business. I divided the FCFA 50,000 among five soybean farmers to reduce the risk of them not delivering the goods."*

During the loan period, she continued to benefit from ASSILASSIME's advice and training and applied what she was learning. She was lucky to receive all the soybean bags she ordered from the farmers and sold them for FCFA 30,000 each.

*"I remained focused and earned FCFA 150,000 from FCFA 50,000. That helped me to repay the entire loan after only four months. I was committed to succeed."*

She obtained a new loan and was able to save money more regularly using the Gassi-Assi service. She could expand her business and increase her stocks. Today, she can provide for her children's needs, such as paying their school fees and medical expenses and supporting her husband.

*"Assilassime is a real-life partner. They support you in your challenging moments. They provide training and guidance to help you overcome your hardships. But that is not all. You understand that you can go from nothing to greatness. You must believe in yourself and your abilities."*



# Main challenges (1)

## Highlighting the project implementation issues

Challenges

### Delayed delivery of the B2W/W2B solution.

ASSILASSIME hired a technical vendor to develop a module for the core banking system that would enable B2W/W2B services. However, the vendor failed to deliver the solution effectively, even after six months of working on the contract.

### Lack of qualified human resources.

When the project started, ASSILASSIME did not have adequate and strong technical human resources to execute it efficiently (in terms of project management, quality control, risk management, etc.).

### Difficulty in recruiting users for digitalized services.

ASSILASSIME failed to conduct proper market research to understand the needs of its clients before starting the digitalization and innovation process. They faced strong challenges to make clients understand the service and accept to use it in the beginning due to their weak sales argument.

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Solutions

To solve this problem and continue its digitalization journey, ASSILASSIME hired another developer. The former, who happened to be their core banking system's provider too, availed an API to facilitate the development of the new solution and communication with the institution's bank core system.

ASSILASSIME recruited external consultants to manage the project.

To attract more users to its services, ASSILASSIME used digital channels to conduct financial education sessions, and explain the benefits and features of its products. Promotion was carried out by ASSILASSIME employees, whose task was to inform and encourage customers to use the services. Similar communication was also provided to customers visiting the institution's branches.

# Main challenges (2)

## Highlighting the issues of mobile agents in the field

Challenges

### Network issues for mobile agents collecting groups funds.

In some parts of the country, especially in rural areas, the network and electricity infrastructure were so bad that they disturbed the collection of funds at group meetings, slowing the mobile agents' work in the field.

### Lengthy checking mobile deposits process.

The mobile agents had to verify the group savings register before entering the group deposit in the mobile application. They had to ensure the amount matched what the group members had written in their book. This process was time-consuming and inefficient for the mobile agents.

### Increased risk of insecurity and fraud for mobile agents.

Mobile agents carry a lot of cash while working in the field. The risk of loss due to theft or assault, or even embezzlement by the agent, is high.

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Solutions

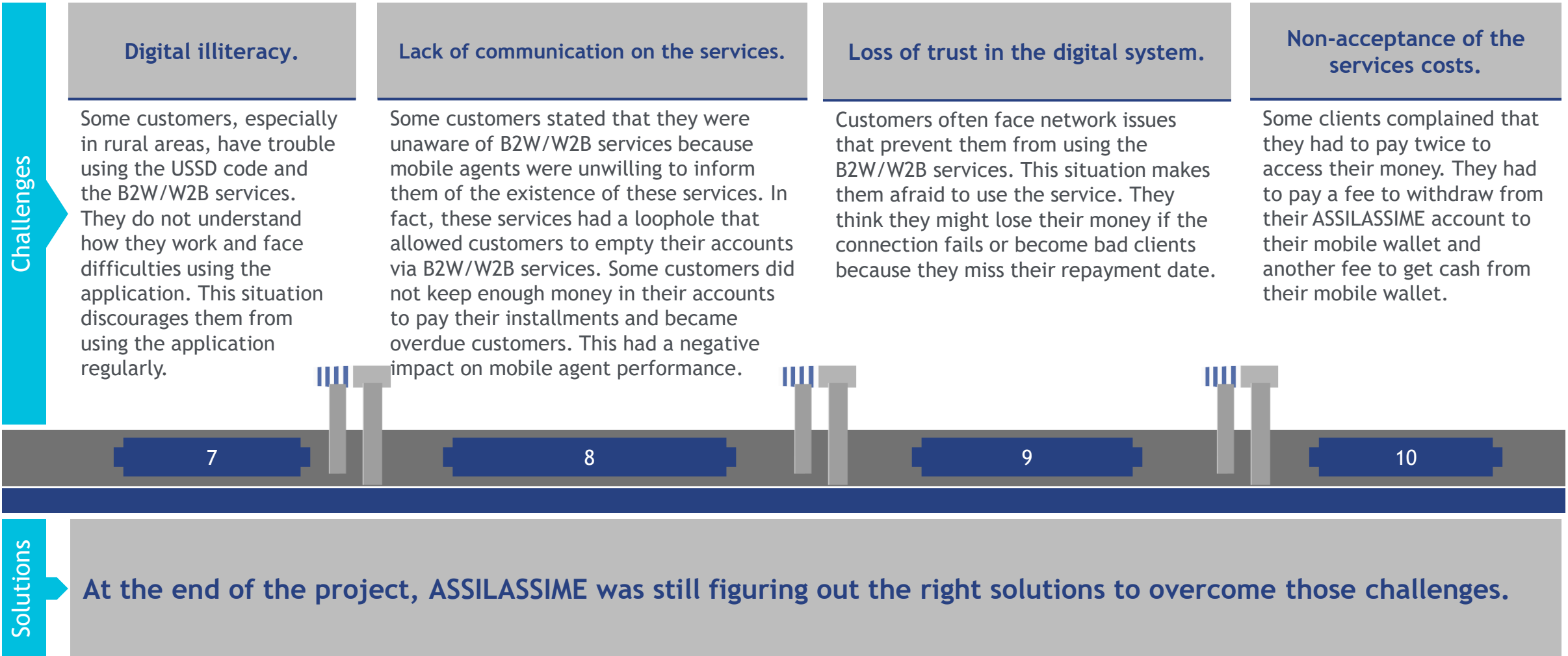
ASSILASSIME provided an option in the app that enabled the processing of deposit transactions offline. The transactions would be recorded and synchronized later when the agents reached the branch or when they could access the internet.

No solution was found during the project.

ASSILASSIME instructed its mobile agents to deposit the collected funds at the nearest BOA branch when they reached a certain limit during their daily field visits.

# Main challenges (3)

## Highlighting the issues with the digital adoption and use



# Lesson learned (1)



## Importance of the market study

Market research, customer feedback, and product customization are essential steps before launching any digitalization or innovation project. They can help create personalized experiences and excellent customer service, key factors for successful financial services development. Digitalization of financial services requires a deep understanding and fulfillment of customer needs.



## Scalability planning

Planning the scalability of the services is important for developing digital financial services such as B2W/W2B, SMS Banking services, and digitalized loan and saving processes. It helps to anticipate the needed infrastructure, systems, and processes to support the growth without major problems. Also, acquiring a technology adapted to the volume of the demand and flexible to integrate the market changes is a must.



## Skills transfer

The beneficiary institution can use external resources to train their internal teams on the skills they use for the project. It is strategic to allocate core internal teams for this purpose.



## Continuous market knowledge

When engaged in digital transformation, it is essential to stay updated with technological changes, industry developments, and customer needs. Regular feedback from clients and data analysis can help improve and adjust strategies for long-term growth.

# Lesson learned (2)



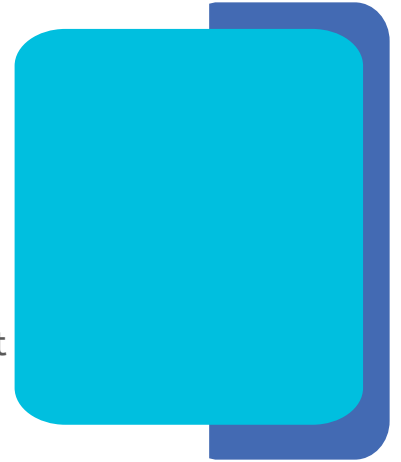
## Proper partnerships agreements

Collaborating and partnering with other businesses can benefit B2W and W2B development. It can allow the sharing of resources and expertise to create innovative solutions. However, each partner's specifications, responsibilities, and benefits should be clear before starting.



## Financial education improves loan management

Providing loans and financial services combined with financial education training, increases the ability of low-income populations to improve their loan management and make better financial decisions.



## Digital channels for financial education

Digital financial education can help to reach large numbers of people through digital platforms. Literacy and digital skills are crucial for using financial services.



## Loan group benefit

Group loans help to reduce the repayment default risk, as members motivate each other and foster discipline and timeliness in their payment schedules.



# Key takeaways

## Importance of market research and continuous improvement.

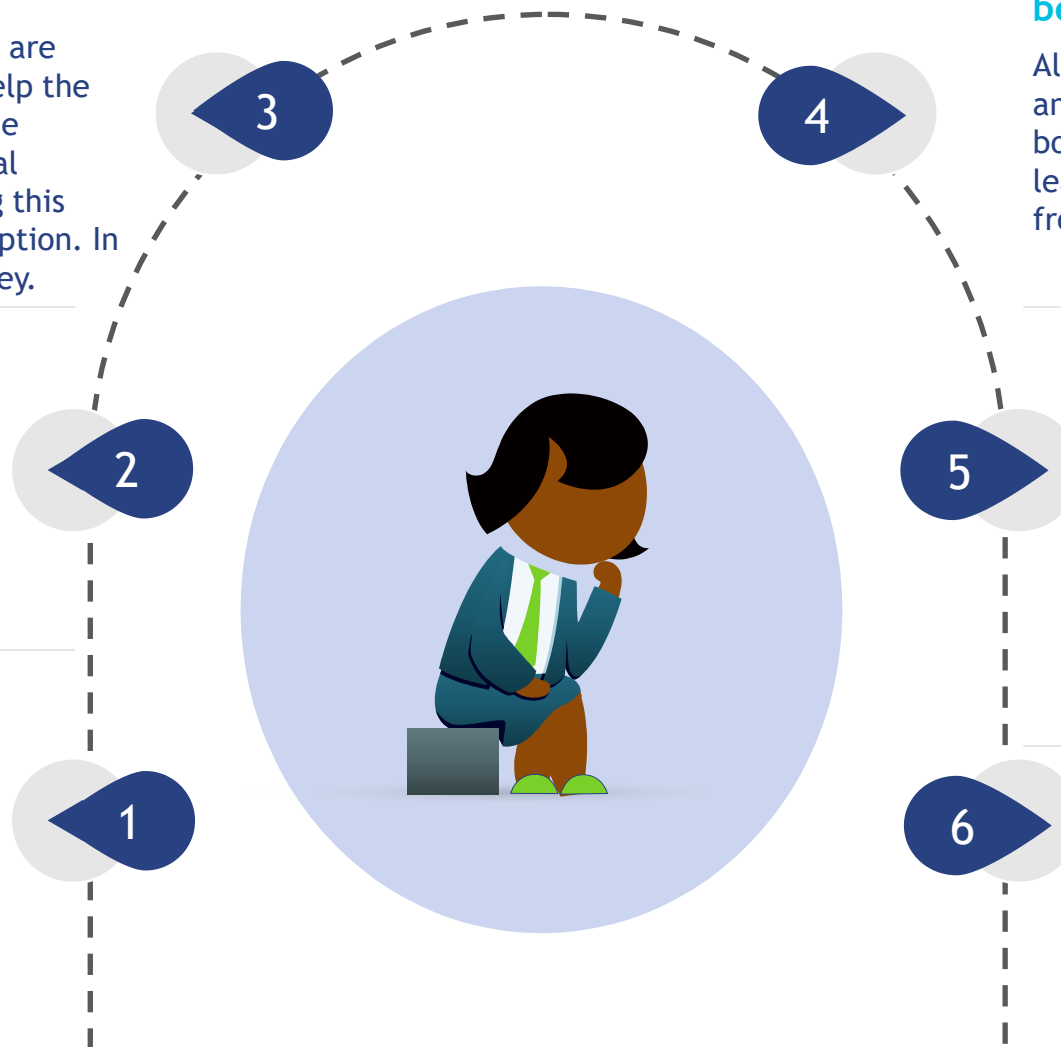
Market research and institutional assessment are essential before launching a project. They help the institution accurately identify and address the clients' needs, especially regarding the digital transformation of financial services. Skipping this step could negatively impact the service adoption. In addition, continuous improvement remains key.

## Digitalization helps expand outreach.

Digitalizing processes and products facilitates proximity between the institution and the clients. This makes it possible to reach a greater number of low-income populations.

## Financial education empowers the poor.

Financial education modules help clients improve their understanding of financial services, regain control of their financial decisions, and plan their finances better to avoid numerous uncertainties.



## Peer influence helps shape financial behaviour.

Allowing customers to learn how to manage credit and develop discipline within the group benefits both ASSILASSIME and its customers. Customers learn more from their peers and benefit more easily from their advice and lessons learned.

## Digitalization can improve the reputation and positioning of the institution.

Digitalizing the savings and loan processes and products helps increase the clients' confidence in the institution. The convenience and level of security (especially towards physical risks) encourage clients to remain faithful to the institution and carry positive testimonies.

## Keeping continuous learning.

Refresher training courses are necessary to help clients build their financial culture and help them stick to their improvement objectives.

# MSC's recommendations for performance improvement

Components	Details
<b>Innovative loans</b>	ASSILASSIME could leverage historical data from its clients and develop digital loans accessible by self-service for them.
<b>Services promotion</b>	Many beneficiaries struggle with B2W and W2B processes due to low digital literacy. ASSILASSIME needs to train them on these processes and provide digital content in local languages, such as videos and audios. For example, ASSILASSIME can use TV screens in its branches to show the content. ASSILASSIME also needs to promote its services more on local radios and in group meetings.
<b>B2W/W2B service cost</b>	Some customers said B2W/W2B services are too expensive for them. They must pay fees for B2W and W2B services and cash withdrawals at any T-money and Flooz agent. Explaining to clients why they must pay for the services and what fees they must pay is necessary to avoid frustrations.
<b>Communication</b>	There is a growing lack of communication on the new services, especially in rural regions. Promoting these services in community groups and providing detailed explanations to the clients will be important. Image-based communication materials to use during regular roadshows could also be used. ASSILASSIME should also enforce the mobile agents' work in the field by using occasional client mystery shopping, impromptu field check-ins, etc. They should also address network issues that could prevent successful B2W/W2B transactions to avoid client trust breaches.
<b>Client identification during meeting groups</b>	When collecting money during group meetings, it is hard for agents to link the financial information in the group's book to the contribution of each member in the core banking system. It is time-consuming. Enabling NFC cards could help to easily identify individuals and clear doubts, making collections more effective.
<b>Liquidity management for mobile agents</b>	It is essential to plan and develop a liquidity management plan for mobile agents in the field to help increase their security and improve their productivity. Enabling mobile money services and super agent partners (liquidity cash points) is necessary.
<b>Field collection process optimization</b>	Despite the digitalized process, mobile agents still spend a lot of time in the field at group meetings due to the double verification they carry out (verification of groups and their members' booklets and online registration of the deposits). It could be more efficient to cancel the physical book controls. Also, adding a printing step at the end of the process could replace the old controls.

# SCBF's members and partners

## SCBF has co-funded projects in 50 countries

Financial inclusion leads to greater economic empowerment and directly impacts many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as gender equality, good health, and climate action. Since the SDGs launched in 2016, SCBF's financial inclusion projects globally have contributed to 12 of the 17 SDGs.

### 211

Projects funded

### 22 M CHF

Grant funding invested in projects by SCBF and strategic partners


### 150

Financial sector partners supported

### 71


Technical assistance providers

Strategic Partners



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

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### Members (2011 - 2023)































































Source: SCBF



