

Leveraging Digital Platforms to Scale Affordable Life Insurance and Launch Community-Based Health Insurance

SCBF PUW 2023-10

Report Date: Oct 2025

Project Summary

Financial sector partner	Jamii.one	Project duration	June 2023 – June 2025
Grantee / TA provider	Consultants	Targeted outreach	113,902 (35% women)
Country of implementation	Ethiopia	Instrument type	Technical assistance grant
Product / Solution	Life and Health Insurance	Co-funding partner	Swiss Re Foundation
Targeted segment	Low-income Clients		

1. Executive Summary

In Ethiopia, most low-income families rely on informal community-based groups for social protection, yet insurance penetration remains below 1%. This project set out to reach 113,902 people with life or health insurance, launch Ethiopia's first hospital cash product, and build a scalable digital model. Jamii.one combined gender-inclusive agents, premium financing, actuarial support, and a digital platform to deliver insurance in urban and peri-urban areas. Although the initial anchor partner was unable to deliver as planned, the project onboarded two new insurers and sustained delivery. By the end of the project, 131,080 insurance policies had been processed; comprising 49,824 new policies (38%) and 81,132 renewals (62%), with 52.3% of all policies held by women. It is estimated that more than 3.4 million people were reached with financial literacy awareness through cascaded group training. SCBF's catalytic funding enabled the first life insurance payouts at scale to over 1,700 low-income families, providing vital financial relief during times of crisis and delivering a deeply stabilising, life-changing impact. It also catalyzed CHF 959,468 in private investment and helped unlock CHF 512,657 in public grant funding. Beyond financial leverage, the project laid the foundation for systemic change, and positioned inclusive insurance on Ethiopia's national agenda as one of its priorities.

2. Context

In Ethiopia, fewer than 1% of low-income people are covered by formal insurance. For the vast majority, financial protection against life events such as death or hospitalisation is managed through informal community-based groups (CBGs), most notably Iddirs (explained in more detail below). While these groups offer trusted support, their resources are limited, and members remain vulnerable to large, unexpected expenses that can undermine household stability and long-term financial resilience. Formal insurers, meanwhile, struggle to reach this low-income segment due to high distribution costs, lack of digital tools, and limited trust at the community level.

The Ethiopian insurance sector remains underdeveloped, with overall penetration at just 0.2% of GDP. Most providers rely on traditional, manual processes and face limited competition. Group-based insurance is virtually absent, and no standalone hospital cash products had been offered at scale prior to this project. However, growing mobile penetration and strong traditions of group-based social organisation present a unique opportunity for digital, last-mile insurance delivery.

Ethiopia's government has prioritised financial inclusion through its National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS), which emphasises digital innovation, access to risk mitigation tools, and rural reach. The regulatory environment is cautiously supportive: while the National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE) has not yet opened the market to international insurers, it is encouraging new models within the existing insurance framework, and has shown growing interest in inclusive insurance and sandbox experimentation. However, legal requirements for upfront annual premium payments and limited digital readiness among local insurers remain key constraints.

In this context, most low-income families are left to rely on informal safety nets – such as social networks, community contributions, or borrowing from family or loan sharks, to cope with shocks. These coping mechanisms

are fragile and unsustainable, frequently forcing families to sell off assets or withdraw children from school to cover emergency costs. No affordable health insurance options exist in the market, and commercial life insurance is priced far beyond the reach of this segment.

The target segment, Iddir, are community-based funeral savings group where members contribute a small fixed amount and receive a flat payout in the event of a member's death. Iddir serves as an indigenous insurance model rooted in reciprocity and trust. Drawing inspiration from this familiar structure, Jamii.one designed its inclusive insurance product with a flat premium available for all ages, mirroring the Iddir's transparent, equitable approach and leveraging its social legitimacy to facilitate uptake among low-income communities.

The potential market is significant. An estimated 40 million Ethiopians belong to Iddirs, and the combined need for health and life protection is immense. By aggregating and digitising the Iddir's data, Jamii.one addresses a core infrastructure gap that limits insurer access to this segment.

SCBF/Swiss Re Foundation funding was crucial to de-risking innovation in a low-margin, untested segment. It enabled Jamii.one to build key digital infrastructure, test actuarially sound products, onboard and train local agents, and support insurance partners with claims and product flows. With investment capital for tech ventures in Ethiopia extremely limited, SCBF/Swiss Re Foundation's catalytic funding was essential to build the platform, design the product, establish key partnerships, and ultimately unlock further investment to scale the solution.

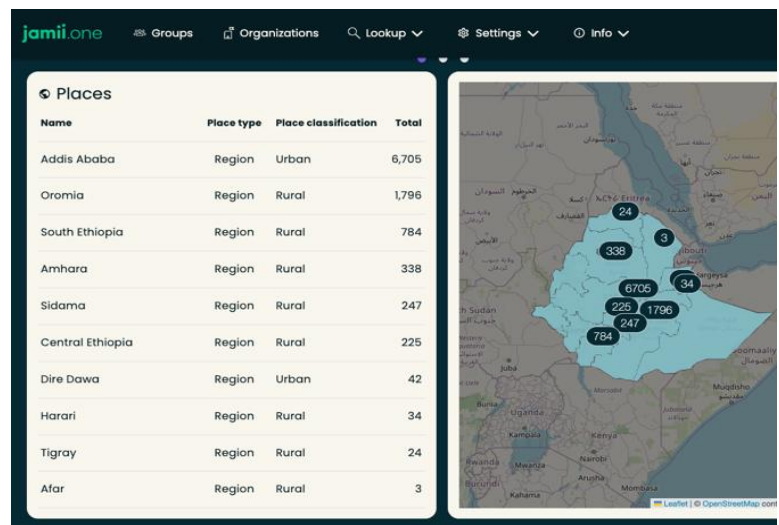
3. Partnership model

The project was implemented through a multi-stakeholder model bringing together a Danish tech-social enterprise Jamii.one, Ethiopian financial institutions, and global insurance experts. **Jamii.one**, an InsurTech specialising in last-mile distribution through community-based groups (CBGs), served as lead implementer. Jamii.one designed and maintained the digital platform, built and managed the agent network, and led product development, onboarding, and claims operations across Ethiopia.

The original underwriting partner will be referred to as Original Insurance Partner (OIP) . It is one of Ethiopia's oldest private insurers. OIP supported delivery of both the life and hospital cash products; however, the partnership was terminated in March 2025 due to loss on the product as well as operational and governance challenges. In response, Jamii.one partnered with **Ethiopian Insurance Company (EIC)** and **Awash Insurance**, two of the country's most established insurers in April 2025. Their entry ensured business continuity, brought digital engagement capacity, and supported the successful relaunch of life and health products.

To improve affordability, the project partnered with **Aggar Microfinance Institution**, one of Ethiopia's oldest MFIs. Aggar enabled premium financing to help customers comply with the Ethiopian requirement for annual upfront insurance payment by offering short-term loans repayable in instalments.

In addition to funding, SCBF facilitated access to world-class insurance expertise, which became instrumental to the project's success. The **SCBF experts** effectively formed a type of third project partner, supporting product design, actuarial modelling, and strategic advice. Key contributors included Michal Matul and Josh Soutter (AXA), Dominik Wehgartner (Allianz), Bode Olajumoke (Swiss Re), and Bert Opdebeeck, Erik Jarrin Peters and Gideon Ataire (Microinsurance Master).



Map from Jamii.one Insights illustrating the regional distribution of groups.

4. Intervention approach

The project aimed to offer affordable, group-based microinsurance tailored to the needs of low-income Ethiopians. It initially launched a flat-priced life insurance product in partnership with OIP. Coverage of 100,000 ETB was priced at 529 ETB per year, increased to 1,130 ETB in July 2024. The pricing adjustments were necessary to ensure product sustainability and alignment with actuarial viability.

Between September 2023 and May 2024, Jamii.one and SCBF experts co-developed a hospital cash product with a strong gender-inclusive design launched by OIP in July 2024. Uniquely among comparable products in the Ethiopian market, it includes coverage for hospitalisation related to childbirth. The product offers a lump-sum payout of 5,000 ETB for hospital stays of two nights or more, up to four claims per year.

In April 2025, OIP unexpectedly and unilaterally discontinued the life insurance product, forcing a rapid pivot. Jamii.one successfully launched the life insurance product with Awash Insurance by June 2025 and secured partnership with EIC (to be launched), ensuring continuity of service and demonstrating market adaptability. The life insurance product with Awash was offered at 1,375 ETB per year, with tiered coverage levels based on the policyholder's age.

Products were distributed through a trained network of local agents operating in Addis Ababa and 20 towns across Ethiopia. Agents conducted in-person marketing, supported CBG onboarding, and facilitated claims. A custom-built digital platform supported end-to-end service delivery, including group registration, enrolment tracking, policy renewals, and digital claims processing.

SCBF/Swiss Re Foundation's funding supported critical aspects of the project, including upgrades to the digital platform, actuarial modelling, strengthening of the sales organisation, targeted marketing, and training on gender inclusion and sales techniques.

Gender inclusion was a strategic design principle. In addition to covering maternity-related hospitalisation, the project deployed women-led marketing strategies, trained agents in gender sensitivity, and implemented gendered tracking of sales and renewal. Financial education was embedded in all onboarding and renewal meetings, where agents used standardised tools to explain risk pooling, insurance principles, and claims processes in simple, relatable terms.

5. Results, outcomes and impact

Key KPIs	Achieved results 31 July 2025
Total number of unique clients reached	131,080
- Number of women	70,160 / 53.5%
Total number of people trained in financial literacy	94,320 (estimate)
- Number of women trained in financial literacy	32,540 (estimate)
Total number of people reached with financial literacy awareness	3,447,240 (estimate)
- Number of women reached with financial literacy awareness	1,189,298 (estimate)
Total claims paid / claims ratio	1,703 claims paid life / 190% claims ratio

- **Beneficiaries Reached:** 131,080 customers were reached comprising 49,824 new policies (38%) and 81,132 renewals (62%), 129,038 with life insurance and 124 with health insurance, 70,160 women.
- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** 190% payout rate.
- **Impact Measurement:** A total of 1,674,223 CHF was paid out to 1,703 families, averaging 778 CHF per family. During the project, Jamii.one initiated development of an Impact Management and Monitoring System to track long-term outcomes. In the interim, qualitative follow-up showed that payouts were used for transformative purposes primarily acquiring income-generating assets as well as paying school fees and settling debts demonstrating the stabilising, life-changing impact of life insurance.
- **Training Impact:** Over 94,320 low-income clients were directly trained in financial literacy, including 32,540 women as well as 51 staff. Financial literacy training was delivered through in-person sessions led by trained

field agents, using simplified, standardised tools to explain key insurance concepts, rights and claims processes. These sessions took place during community meetings. This was achieved through a total 2,898 awareness raising session attended by leaders of an avg. 26 Iddirs. From our data of over 20K groups we know the estimate group size to be 46 members. Effectively, an estimated 3.4 million people, including 1.2 million women, were reached with financial literacy awareness through group leaders who were trained and tasked with cascading the training to their communities.

- **Comparison with Targets:** 131,080 people had purchased life or health insurance (new and renewing) by end of project, compared with a target of 113,902 with 52% being women compared with 35% as the original target.
- **Client Feedback:** See Appendix 1
- **Investment Mobilization:** The SCBF/Swiss Re Foundation grant served as a powerful catalyst directly supporting the mobilisation of CHF 1.47 million, CHF 959,468 in private investment and CHF 512,657 in public grant funding, to further scale Jamii.one's reach in Ethiopia, advance the digital platform and add more products to the service offering.
- **Market Demonstration Effect:** The project has had a significant effect on the Ethiopian insurance sector. In 2023, insurance was neither widely discussed by the public nor prioritised by regulators, as a pillar of financial inclusion. This changed rapidly as the Jamii.one-OIP partnership brought insurance to over 100,000 people in just two years. The visibility and uptake of the project helped catalyse broader sectoral shifts and alongside the launch of Bima Lab Ethiopia, the creation of a UNDP insurance accelerator, and the National Bank of Ethiopia's decision to separate insurance from joint regulation with banks. In 2025, Jamii.one's leadership was formally recognised when the Vice Governor of the National Bank and UNDP awarded Jamii.one for insurance innovation. The planned health insurance product was launched briefly but subsequently discontinued in 2025 due to the breakdown of the initial insurer partnership.
- **Key Results:** When the project began, OIP's client base stood at approximately 100,000, primarily serving high-income individuals, corporate clients, expats, and NGO staff. Within two years, the project doubled this number, bringing insurance to the general Ethiopian population for the first time at scale. Public awareness of insurance also increased significantly, with Jamii.one's outreach and education activities making insurance a visible and relevant topic among low-income communities. These insurance products were not embedded; each policyholder made an active, informed decision to purchase insurance – demonstrating a level of trust and understanding rare in this context, which is precisely why the initiative captured widespread public attention and brought insurance into the national conversation. Life insurance payouts proved transformational: in every case reviewed, the financial support had a direct, stabilizing impact on the affected family. Internally, the project created economic opportunities for young people in a country facing high youth unemployment. Jamii.one trained and deployed 20 young staff, many of whom grew into high-performing roles, forming a delivery team uniquely adapted to last-mile service provision in Ethiopia. Finally, the project underscored the value of a mission-driven aggregator model: when the original product was withdrawn, Jamii.one remained engaged, safeguarded trust, ensured claims were paid, and invested in transitioning groups to a new product. Not for short-term gain, but to preserve trust in insurance and lay the groundwork for long-term market development.

6. Way ahead: Future scaling and sustainability plans

Following the SCBF/Swiss Re Foundation-supported phase, Jamii.one is now entering a new stage of expansion and consolidation. In Ethiopia, the tech venture is broadening its geographical focus from central Addis Ababa to the rapidly growing Shaggar region, supported by local government partnerships and three dedicated teams reaching 12 surrounding towns. It is also strengthening its cross-country reach through continued investment in regional agent teams operating in rural and peri-urban areas. Learning from the risk of depending on a single insurer, it is solidifying its relationship with Awash Insurance, activating the partnership with Ethiopian Insurance Corporation (EIC), and onboarding additional partners and products; including telemedicine (live) and income-generating loans (pending the availability of capital for a revolving fund, which is currently scarce in Ethiopia). Beyond Ethiopia, it has launched a pilot with Britam Insurance in Kenya and aims to explore a third market within the next 12 months. To sustain momentum and reach profitability following the collapse of the OIP partnership, it is seeking an additional €500,000 in equity investment by January 2026. A bridge securing its operations till January has been secured through existing investors.

7. Lessons learnt and recommendations

What worked well was leveraging community-based groups (CBGs) as trusted, scalable distribution channels. The combination of in-person agents and Jamii.one's digital platform enabled a seamless user journey from onboarding to claims, reaching thousands of low-income families previously excluded from formal insurance. Gender-intentional design and marketing drove strong uptake among women, while embedded financial education at every sales and renewal touchpoint helped create understanding of insurance for first-time users.

The project demonstrated that low-income households are willing to pay for insurance when it is simple, relevant, and delivered through trusted local structures. This held true across urban and rural contexts, with all policies voluntarily purchased; not embedded, bundled, or subsidised.

What did not work as planned was the reliance on a single insurer, OIP, who unilaterally withdrew from the life product just before scale. This revealed weaknesses in both OIP's governance and the sector's broader regulatory context. The original product was loss-making, as expected in early-stage market development, but OIP's prolonged leadership gaps and limited regulatory tolerance for losses led to premature discontinuation.

Attempts to onboard two new insurers in 2023-24 were blocked. With no international competition, local insurers have little incentive to take innovation risks or improve service delivery. Regulatory reform and sector education will be key to enabling scale.

Jamii.one is now leading sector-wide awareness efforts, co-hosting a national insurance forum with the National Bank of Ethiopia, UNDP, FSD Ethiopia, and the Danish Embassy to catalyse collaboration, regulatory updates, and shared understanding around inclusive insurance.

Pioneering inclusive insurance requires challenging the status quo and working toward systemic transformation. Work that requires time, trust, and sustained effort. This is precisely where catalytic funding from SCBF/Swiss Re Foundation has proven invaluable. By de-risking early-stage innovation, SCBF enabled Jamii.one to build, test, and scale a new insurance delivery model, which in turn attracted private investment and national recognition. The milestone of reaching over 100,000 insured, endorsement by the National Bank of Ethiopia, and bringing insurance to the national agenda underscores the far-reaching impact a well-placed grant can have beyond its direct financial contribution – with even greater systemic outcomes still to come.

Client feedback

Client feedback 1: Tsion

Tsion was just 22 and studying in college when her world turned upside down. Her mother, Mrs. Ababo Balcha, a strong woman and one of the founders of the Mekakelegnaw Lemlem Iddir, passed away. Their family was small, just Tsion and her two siblings, and they had always depended on their mother's pension to get by. With her gone, Tsion feared she'd have to drop out of school.

But years before, her mother had made a wise decision. She had signed up for a life insurance policy through her Iddir. When she passed, the policy paid out 100,000 Birr. That money became a lifeline. It helped Tsion and her siblings cover their basic needs and gave Tsion the chance to stay in school.

Now, Tsion is close to finishing her degree and dreams of starting her own business. Her story has inspired others, many of her friends are now urging their families to consider insurance, realising how powerful that safety net can be.

"The insurance payout I received made a tremendous difference in my life. It enabled me to complete my degree in Marketing Management, and today I can proudly say that a bright future lies ahead. I'm deeply grateful to Jamii for introducing such a meaningful initiative to our community." Tsion.



Client feedback 2: Zewdnesh Legesse

For 55 years, Zewdnesh Legesse and her husband Mulugeta shared a life stitched together with love, resilience, and hard work. Mulugeta was a weaver and tailor, known in their neighbourhood not just for his craft, but for his quiet strength. He was the family's anchor, the provider, the protector.

When he passed away, Zewdnesh's world shattered. Suddenly, she was alone, left to care for their three children, one of whom battled a chronic illness. With no steady income, she did what she could, baking injera and washing clothes for neighbours. But 100 Birr a day barely kept the lights on, let alone covered school fees or medicine.



Then came a moment she never expected. The local Iddir reached out with news: Mulugeta had bought insurance through his local Iddir. Zewdnesh could hardly believe it. The payout, 100,000 Birr, felt like a miracle. It wasn't just money. It was hope.

With it, she paid for her children's education and stabilised their home. The family reopened Mulugeta's weaving business, honouring his legacy with every thread. Zewdnesh, grew her injera baking business, starting to supply hotels and earning enough to breathe again.

Together, they didn't just survive. They rebuilt. They rose. And today, their story is a quiet testament to love, foresight, and the power of community.

Client feedback 3: Teklu Tefera & community members in Bishoftu



Master Technician Teklu Tefera had seen many things in his lifetime: machines fixed, homes rebuilt, communities lifted. But when Jamii One and Nib Insurance came to his Iddir with talk of life insurance, he wasn't convinced. As General Secretary of the St. Raphael and Tulu Dimtu Development and Relief Iddir, Teklu had always been cautious. He wondered, "Can they really deliver what they promise? Can grieving families truly receive such large payouts?"

Then came the moment that changed everything.

A beloved member of the Iddir passed away, and the family was left in mourning. But instead of despair, something unexpected happened. Nib Insurance, paid out 100,000 Birr. Teklu watched as the promise turned into reality.

One of the beneficiaries, Mrs. Yeshi Dinku, used the money to buy a Bajaj three wheelers for her son. It wasn't just a vehicle; it was a lifeline. Her son now had a job, and the family had a steady income. The house that once felt heavy with grief began to fill with hope.

And it didn't stop there.

Families began using their payouts to send children to school, expand their farms, and start small businesses. The ripple effect was undeniable. Scepticism gave way to trust. Trust grew into belief. And belief brought new members to the Iddir, eager to protect their loved ones and invest in their futures.

Teklu now speaks with pride about the change he's witnessed. What once seemed impossible has become a new chapter for his community. One written with dignity, resilience, and the quiet power of preparation.

"What Jamii One has done for our Iddir, we have not been able to do since our founding. After seeing the results, many people are joining to benefit from the life insurance." Teklu.